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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
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Subject Submission- Fire Services Reform
Committee

1 attachment



FSR SUBMISSION.pdf

Please find attached my submission for the Fire Services Reform Select Committee .

Please note, my name and identity is to remain CONFIDENTIAL.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Leading Firefighter
Metropolitan Fire Brigade

I believe that the time is now for the fire services in Victoria to be reformed.

The current fire service boundaries are out-dated and do not reflect the current, and future expansion of the City of Melbourne and regional Victoria. The examples of urban growth corridors throughout Victoria that are being covered solely by Volunteer Brigades, highlights the need for an updated fire service model, to ensure a guaranteed response with adequate response times, to time critical incidents. This will provide safety for the Victorian public, and for responding firefighters. Firefighters will be guaranteed of a back up appliance also responding, which is something that cannot be guaranteed under the current model.

In the area that I live, which is predominantly covered by Volunteer Brigades we have a number of locations that are considered high risk. Areas of high risk that fall into our predominantly Volunteer covered area, are a concern for myself, my family and other locals living in the area. As Volunteer Brigades are simply that, Volunteer, it cannot be guaranteed that they will be available to respond. With work commitments, family commitments etc. there is a high possibility that there may not be any Volunteers available to respond to calls which could potentially include, but are not limited to:

- high rise apartments
- hospital / medical centres
- numerous schools
- industry
- freeways / freeway interchanges
- boat ramps / waterways
- tafe / university
- shopping centres
- chair lift operations
- heavy industry (steel manufacture).
- chemical storage / facilities

These calls could be minor issues that can easily and quickly be resolved, or could potentially involve life-threatening situations that require a timely response, to ensure the best and safest possible outcome for all involved.

As areas of Victoria become busier and busier, the need for fire service reform to ensure adequate fire coverage becomes absolutely critical. It would be remiss to think that the current model adequately covers areas of growth. It would also be remiss to think the current model will absolutely guarantee a response in areas of solely Volunteer Brigades. It would only take that one

time where a Volunteer Brigade fails to respond, due to other commitments, where a life is lost, then people might realise. I don't want that to happen to my family, or anyone else's.

I have personally experienced situations where Volunteer brigades have either responded extremely slow to fire calls, or in some circumstances have not responded at all. This is by no means a smear on the valuable work that Volunteers do, it merely highlights the need to reform the fire services to ensure a guaranteed, timely response.

There is no doubt Volunteer Brigades do an absolutely amazing job given the constraints and time poor lives we live. They are an absolute integral part of the Victorian landscape and will be in years to come. The CFA will still exist under the new fire service model. The need for Volunteers will be the same as it was before the reform, the opportunity to Volunteer will still be available and still be encouraged. The CFA is not disappearing. The ability to Volunteer is not disappearing. Victoria needs it's Firefighting Volunteers, but equally it needs a modern, updated Fire Service to ensure adequate coverage in an ever expanding population.

I would also like to highlight the advantage of having '7 firefighters on the fire ground'. This is an absolute necessity to ensure the public of Victoria have a firefighting response that actually has the ability to tackle a fire safely and appropriately. Here I would like to give an example of how '7 firefighters on the fire ground' provides the greatest opportunity for the best, safest, and quickest successful outcome for all involved.

Example:

Typical House Fire- nil trapped, well alight

1 officer in charge-

- doing a 'size up', checking for the extension of the fire, gathering information, is everyone out of the house?, deciding how many more trucks/firefighters will be required, assessing possible asbestos exposures and other potentially hazardous exposures, keeping crews safe in their operations, calling on other services as required (Gas, Power, EPA, Police, Ambulance etc.), initiating incident management structure

1 pump operator-

- Parking appliance appropriately, engaging pumps, operating pumps, looking for a hydrant, running hose to the hydrant, connecting hose to truck, turning on hydrant to ensure unlimited water supply and therefore crew safety by not running out of water when in a burning structure, maintaining pumping operations to protect crews ensuring water supply

2 x firefighters in BA-

- Donning PPC (personal protective clothing) and BA (breathing apparatus), dragging a hose off the truck, making entry to the structure, entering the burning structure to perform a rescue/extinguish the fire, alternatively attack the fire externally or use hose lines to direct a stream of water to protect exposures (i.e. house/building next door)

2 x back up in BA-

- ready to relieve the crew that has entered the house, as a back up in case those firefighters get into difficulty/trapped (i.e. roof collapse, firefighter injury, flashover, backdraft etc.) or assist with a patient if a rescue is performed or, replacing the first crew if and when they run out of air in their BA cylinders and need to exit the structure to don a fresh BA.

1 x BA entry/pump operator assist/first aid-

- BA entry operations; will keep a record of those that have entered the structure, who is wearing BA, how long they have been working in BA (time in and time out), always maintaining 2 firefighters back up in BA: this is an OH&S type role and is absolutely essential in ensuring the safety of crews, and fireground accountability.

So from this fairly simple example of a typical house fire, it is easy to see how and why '7 firefighters on the fire ground' is absolutely necessary. Things to also consider when looking at the example is, what if there were people trapped inside the house, what if there is some uncommon/unusual dangers such as clandestine labs, aggressive residents etc?

I can recall a fire that I attended whilst manning a 'three-firefighter appliance' where upon arriving on scene, we were confronted with a weatherboard house, well alight in the back of half the house. All occupants had evacuated so our get to work focussed mainly on the protection of houses either side of the house concerned (protecting exposures) and extinguishment of the fire. The driver (pump operator) engaged the pumps and went looking for a hydrant, while I donned my BA and took a hose reel off the appliance, and used it to protect the house next door that was exposed to the fire. Our OIC (officer in charge) confirmed everyone had evacuated, performed a size up, checked how far the fire had advanced, called on extra appliances as required, donned a BA, and also manned a second hose reel, to protect the house on the other side which was also exposed. All this before we had even thought about extinguishing the fire. Once our pump operator had established his continuous water supply (from a street hydrant), he also manned a hose line in an attempt to assist in protecting the exposures. We now had a pump operator engaged in a task that took him away from his duty of pump operations, which can be extremely dangerous if the pump operations require an emergency adjustment i.e. hydrant main line ruptures, a hose bursts, pump breaks down, emergency shut off is required etc.

As I was able to knock down the fire on my side somewhat, I moved forward towards the front door, in an attempt to enter the structure, and cut off the spread of the fire to the front of the house. This became pointless as the fire I had previously knocked down earlier, grew again, so I had retreat to again protect the neighbouring house. We maintained this firefighting attack of protecting exposures, until a second appliance arrived on scene, thus giving us '7 firefighters on the fire ground'. It was only at this point we were able to direct a hose line into the structure to actually begin extinguishing the fire.

It was not until after the fire that we learned that the resident of the house had stored a lot of artwork (that he had been working on for the previous 10 years) in the front lounge of the house. This artwork was absolutely destroyed, along with the house itself. Upon returning to station we all commented that we felt like we actually watched the house burn down, and that just one extra firefighter (thus making 4 firefighters on our appliance) would have made a significant difference in the job. It would have meant the third hose line could have been directed immediately into the fire, containing it to the back half of the house, thus saving half of the structure, and the residents precious artwork. Thank goodness it was just art work, and not a person trapped.

Another major advantage of Fire Service Reform proposal is the ending of the industrial dispute between Career Firefighters and their employer(s). (CFA, MFB). This long, protracted industrial dispute has put a huge strain on the relationship between the firefighters and their management, a strain that I believe has caused irreparable damage. Personally, I cannot see Career Firefighters ever working harmoniously again with their current management structure. The negative sentiment and distrust is entrenched. Fire Service Reform also brings the opportunity to move past this current situation, and boost morale in Career Firefighters significantly.

On a personal level, this long, arduous protracted dispute has caused stress for my colleagues, and myself but most importantly to my family. Unfairly, my wife has had to endure this dispute, constantly being subjected to relentless media reports about my integrity as a firefighter. There is no doubt the media has played a major role in the bitterness of this industrial dispute, inciting anger amongst Firefighters, telling mistruths and clearly running a negative campaign against career Firefighters (and for my mind, their families).

In summary, the proposed Fire Services Reform is absolutely necessary. It will ensure the best fire coverage possible for Victoria, with the guarantee of timely response to any 'alarm of fire'. Volunteers will still be required and encouraged to Volunteer with the CFA, just as they always have. It will see an end to a protracted industrial dispute that has seen irreparable damage caused by a calculated and succinct media campaign against Career Firefighters.

Yours sincerely, [REDACTED]
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