



"SWIFT, Mick" [REDACTED]

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
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Subject Select Committee Submission

1 attachment



FRV submission to Select Committee.docx

Attached is a submission to the VFR select committee.

Regards,

Mick

Mick Swift
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Northern District
Metropolitan Fire Brigade

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Fire Rescue Victoria submission to Select Committee

From: Mr Michael Swift



Fire Service

I have been employed as a MFB firefighter for 37 years. I began my career in the fire services as a recruit firefighter and currently hold the rank of Assistant Chief Fire Officer. I have achieved the rank of ACFO after completing numerous promotion courses, attending external leadership programs and completing tertiary qualifications in business management. At all times in my career I have always had emergency response responsibilities included in my position description.

Motivation

I have been motivated to write this submission as I see the fire service reform as a community safety issue first and foremost. Access to the appropriate level of services is also vital for the ongoing safety and sustainability of communities.

Firefighter safety is another factor in my decision to make a submission. Firefighters are exposed to a range of risks to their health and safety in their everyday work. This risk exposure would be somewhat mitigated if there is a state wide urban fire and rescue service.

In providing my submission I do not wish to denigrate volunteers in any way as I believe that the volunteers make a significant contribution to Victorian fire services. I have worked side by side with volunteers in combatting grass and scrub fires in the peri urban areas of Victoria. Volunteers cannot be expected to be available 24/7 to respond to the wide range and ever increasing complexity of emergencies that occur in a heavily urbanised area.

Changes to the Greater Metropolitan Area and Regional Cities

Since the early days of my career in the fire services the urban sprawl of Melbourne has extended the well beyond the Metropolitan boundary that was laid down in the 1958 Act. The fire services did not and do not have an effective mechanism to extend the Metropolitan Fire District as the 1970s outer rural areas of Melbourne were subdivided and became suburbs. The Greater Metropolitan Area (GMA) of Melbourne now covers areas that were considered to be in the "country". What was rural and peri urban has now become heavily urbanised. The change of land use, from rural to urban, requires a change in the fire service delivery model. The fire service delivery model must have a process to identify when a fire station's classification changes from rural to urban.

With the increase in the footprint and huge growth in population of what is considered the greater metropolitan area of Melbourne there is a corresponding

need for communities in these areas to have access to the full range of services. These services include an appropriate of fire service. Due to the need to have a full suite of fire prevention and emergency response resources fire services in urban areas need to have access to paid staff and appropriate urban firefighting resources.

Impact of the extension of the GMA

The ever extending footprint of the GMA delivers with it a high level of complexity. The higher level of complexity is due to the need to for the communities in recently urbanised areas to have access to effective transport, medical, education, housing, commercial, business and retail infrastructure and services. Fire services must have the capacity and capability to answer the challenges presented by the complexity of heavily urbanised environments. Fire services in urban environments must have 24/7 365 access to staff who hold the skills, knowledge to efficiently, effectively and safely prevent and respond to emergencies in highly complex urban environment.

Response to fires and incidents within the complex urban areas must be pre-planned, reliable and timely to mitigate the life and property threat to community members. Effecting management of emergencies requires a whole of fire service approach. The strength of a fire service is built on a platform of being able to quickly call on additional resources. Even a single house fire will require a minimum of two appliances and at least 7 crew to effectively and safely conduct search, rescue and extinguishment operations.

Recent high rise fires in Melbourne, other states in Australia and around the world demonstrate how quickly fires can take hold and spread through a building. These large fires reveal the potential life and property risk residents, workers, students in buildings vulnerable to fire face. An appropriate weight of attack in a compressed timeframe is required to mitigate the life and property risk.

As areas become urbanised it becomes more difficult to traverse from one point to another. Open roads with little traffic management systems and devices become highly controlled. Response to emergencies in these highly controlled roads impacts on volunteers' ability to drive to a fire station and respond in a fire appliance to emergencies. It is unreasonable to establish an emergency response model based on remote notification, travel to a fire station and then respond in urbanised areas. The time frames required to respond will be extended to a point that impacts of the capability to mitigate the life and property risk presented by the fire.

The Expansion of the Firefighter's Role

When I first joined the fire service I was expected to respond to fires and car accidents. The contemporary firefighter must now be trained to and capable of responding to a wider range of emergencies. The emergencies that an urban firefighter will respond to include structure fires, grass and bushfires HAZMAT incidents, trench rescue, marine incidents, Urban Search and Rescue, Hostile acts, rescue from waterways and Emergency Medical Response (EMR). Firefighters are also involved in community engagement and fire prevention activities.

Sadly urban fire fighters will have to respond to terrorists inspired events. The type of event may not yet occur but the objective will be known. The objective will be to inflict mass casualties, impact of the state's response capability and achieve a high level of media coverage. The urban fire services must be structured to ensure that there is a coordinated and well-resourced response to any terrorist event; there must be the ability to cover any gaps in service. A single Victorian fire and rescue will assist in ensuring that there is an effective response to a terrorist event.

The Fire Service Model for Victoria

My view of the urban fire service model that best meets Victorian communities' needs is based on a urban fire service for the state. The urban fire service will provide the state with a known urban firefighting and rescue capability. The response to urban and rural events, including bushfire, will be enhanced through the availability of paid staff. State wide fire prevention and community engagement will feature in the Victorian Fire and Rescue Service model. No matter what the emergency or communities that are impacted the state urban firefighting and rescue will deliver a coordinated response. The coordinated response will be through well trained staff who have access to state-wide resources.