

Brad Trewavis

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27 June 2017

Fire Services Bill Select Committee

Dear Fire Services Bill Committee,

Re: Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill.

I am writing this submission to support the Firefighters Presumptive Rights and Fire Service Amendment (Reform) Bill.

I am currently a Station Officer with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) stationed at Cranbourne Fire Station. I have been with CFA for approx. 15 years. I joined as a Volunteer in the community I live, Monbulk in 2003. This led me to gaining a position as a career Firefighter in 2006. I have been a member of Monbulk, Traralgon, Boronia, Dandenong South Warrandyte, and Cranbourne fire brigades in this time.

Significant fires I have responded to during my time as a Firefighter include; 2006 Gippsland fires, 2008 Hazelwood mine fire, 2009 Black Saturday and 2014 Hazelwood mine fire. Along with these I have responded to over 1600 emergency incidents.

The fire service delivery model in Victoria has remained largely unchanged since the formation of the CFA after the 1939 bushfires. The Metropolitan Fire District is serviced by a full time professional fire service while the country area of Victoria has been protected by a mostly Volunteer fire service with the support of career Firefighters as the need had arisen.

During this time the population of Victoria has grown substantially and areas that were described as country are now heavily urbanised. Areas such as Dandenong, Springvale, South Morang and Cranbourne. Cranbourne fire station provides emergency service coverage for the suburbs of Cranbourne, Clyde, Hampton Park, Narre Warren and Lyndhurst. These suburbs are within the City of Casey, one of the fastest growing areas of Australia with a population of 297,034.

Under the current fire service delivery model, these areas are considered country and the communities do not enjoy the same level of fire protection as the metropolitan fire district. In the metropolitan fire district two fire appliances are responded to a fire with a minimum of seven fully qualified Firefighters. In the county area that Cranbourne covers, one fire appliance with four fully qualified Firefighters responds supported by a second volunteer appliance. This second appliance is not guaranteed to respond and there are an unknown number of qualified Firefighters.

This means for me as the incident controller, I need to make a decision whether I can commit my crew to searching for trapped occupants. There is no guarantee that I will have a backup crew who are qualified or even arrive at the fire.

On many occasions the volunteer support brigade has failed to respond, and I must choose between sending my crew into a going structure fire with no back up or not searching for trapped people and only doing an external fire fight. This is a decision I shouldn't have to make.

These comments are not to degrade Volunteers, who provide a dedicated service to their local community, rather to highlight that a system of fire coverage that hasn't changed for over 60 years is no longer providing the public with the level of safety they demand.

While it is highlighted that the current fire service delivery model is inadequate for the highly urbanised areas of Melbourne and regional cities, the Volunteers who provide service to their local rural communities will continue to provide this same service after the proposed fire service reforms are put in place. In the community I live in, Monbulk in the Dandenong Ranges the local CFA brigade will continue to provide the same service into the future, with no impacts from the proposed reform. In fact it has been announced there will be an increase in funding to provide more training opportunities for CFA Volunteers.

I would like to reinforce to the committee my support for the proposed Firefighter presumptive rights compensation and fire services legislation amendment bill and thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission.

Yours sincerely

Brad Trewavis