

Parliamentary Review Committee: Fire Services Bill

Submission from

Arran Paul Dixon

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My name is Arran Dixon, for the past 13 years I have been a professional firefighter with the MFB and I write to you in support of the proposed changes to the fire services.

My main concern is the two tiered approach to fire service that Melbournians receive. I admire the dedication of volunteers but they are working under a system that was devised 60 years ago for rural towns and although changes have been made to keep up with urban growth the system as it stands, will always be second rate.

My house is in the response area of Werribee CFA, like many other volunteer brigades it has four minutes just to get to a station and respond to a fire call, other brigade's threshold is up to 10 minutes. That is simply not acceptable, in a highly urbanised area when compared to fulltime staff who are in the truck and out the door in 90 seconds. These delayed responses contribute to more established fires and as a result much greater loss of property and risk to life in Volunteer controlled areas. In every other state in Australia trigger points determined by risk and population would have moved this area and many others in outer Melbourne to a fulltime, professional service.

Secondly, volunteers do not provide Emergency Medical Response (EMR) which fulltime MFB and now most Fulltime CFA staff do. In my experience this is an invaluable service to Melbourne. Over 200 lives have been directly saved by this service. EMR training also makes fulltime staff much more valuable and useful at all incidents that we attend, and has been the catalyst for change in the way that fulltime firefighters treat patients at all incidents, having experience and skills sets that are transferable at all incidents involving injuries. In a MFB area if a truck is busy at a call another truck will move to cover its area ensuring EMR and all other response is maintained. If this occurs in CFA area EMR response is not available until the fulltime truck is available again.

As an officer in outlying stations of the MFD in Melbourne's west, I have worked with CFA volunteer crews and sadly on occasions have been let down by their availability and also their skills set. Two clear examples of this are, attending a car rollover in Point Cook prior to it being a fulltime station where basic procedures weren't followed endangering both a trapped driver and first responders, until the MFB crew ensured that all road accident rescue protocols were put in place. I have also seen volunteers respond to an incident that they were not trained to attend i.e. A Factory Fire in Laverton in wildfire uniform because they were not trained in structure fire but thought it would be fun to respond and have a look at a big fire. As a result of them responding it meant that an additional truck of professional firefighters were not responded, as the fire services controller at ESTA believed that the appropriate crews had been responded.

Officers in charge have valid concerns relating to availability and skills sets of responding volunteers which directly affects the OH & S of crews and regularly puts myself and other officers in charge of scenes in difficult positions. The job is dangerous enough without having to consider going outside of our guidelines, further risking crews' safety to possibly save community members lives, because of a lack of suitably trained or available backup.

The presumptive legislation for firefighters with cancer is a much needed protection, sadly in my 13 years of service I have attended many funerals for colleagues and know of many families struggling with sick family members, there is no replacing these great people but to relieve some financial strain from the people they leave behind would be a great step.

I strongly support the proposed reforms as they will provide much better protection for more Melbournians, remove inequality and provide better health and safety standards for firefighters who daily put others before themselves.

Sincerely

Arran Dixon

MFB Station Officer