

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Mark Sharrock [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 4 July 2017 10:40 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Submission to Parliament Select Committee

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

RE: INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PERSUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

My name is Mark Sharrock and I am a Leading Firefighter at a Wangaratta Fire Station, which is a Country Fire Authority (CFA) fire station. I have been a professional firefighter for nearly 12 years and prior to that I was a volunteer firefighter with the CFA for 13 years.

I live in the City of Wodonga where I volunteer for various groups such as the 3rd Wodonga Scout Group, Wodonga Diamonds Soccer Club and School Committee. I take a very active part in my community; after all it is the place I raise my children. My families support for this reform is not simply a matter of political or industrial positioning but a genuine concern for the communities in which we are so devoutly committed. Recent comments made by elected Members of Parliament that have tried to infer otherwise have been quite hurtful and disappointing to say the least.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire service for many reasons. As I have 12 years of professional service I have been exposed to many challenging and rewarding experiences. I have seen some change over those 12 years however this has been limited and not always for the better. The need for reform has been required for many years to create a modern and more efficient fire services for which the community of Victoria deserves.

I am proud to serve my community and have the upmost respect for those volunteers that serve the community for the betterment of their own communities; however the current system is broken. Many volunteers are unable to respond like they use to years ago. Employers were happy to let their employees leave the workplace to go to a fire call but that has changed dramatically. Employers need to run a business and have many pressures on themselves to survive and as a result they can't afford to have these volunteers respond to calls like they once did.

The organisation that is CFA, I once was proud to be a part of, has changed over the years as I have seen decisions or lack thereof, from CFA management that has held back the organisation to move forward and change for the better. I like many Firefighters get very frustrated at the lack of leadership and logic. Many items get sweep under the carpet and instead of learning from mistakes the pat on the back for a job well done continues. One such example was when I was a Crew Leader as part of a Ground Observer team of a wildfire that had started in the Lake Rowan area in December of 2014. My team was tasked to map and assess the fires forward rate of spread ASAP. Upon arrival on scene there were no other resources on this fire. The District 23 Incident Control Centre (ICC) had taken control of this fire from VicFire and had not deployed resource in the early stages of the event. The Communications plan was sketchy to say the least and the ICC was non responsive to radio and phone calls. It took 61 mins for the first resources to arrive on scene. With the implementation of Fire Service Reform we would see more accountability for actions/inactions and see more effective and efficient Fire Services.

I find it a bit ironic that the CFA expects employers to have their employees, who are volunteer firefighters; leave the workplace to attend fire calls but the CFA will not allow any of their employees, who are volunteer firefighters; leave their workplace to attend fire calls. An example of this is that the District 23 Headquarters employs various training and administration staff that are also volunteers of the Wangaratta Fire Brigade for which I work. These CFA employees are not allowed to respond to fire calls as a volunteer during their working hours with the CFA.

The average volunteer also has many more pressures on them with trying to get the right work, family life balance which in turn restricts them more often at turning out to fire calls. Many volunteers don't have the spare time to commit to this cause and many simply are getting too old to be able to respond with adequate skills and competence. The younger generations tend to move away from the smaller communities to study or obtain work and as a result the volunteer workforce is decreasing and turnout times are extended to unacceptable levels and more often many Brigades don't respond at all.

A structure fire we had in Wangaratta in May 2016 had no pumper (structure fire appliance) support at all (as there is none nearby that could have travelled the distance in time required) Only support is Tanker (grass fire appliance) support. The main Brigade is South Wangaratta that failed to respond in time so Oxley was responded. Very few members of Oxley have the ability or qualifications to assist with an aggressive internal structure fire. The South Wangaratta Brigade Captain even apologised to us that his Brigade failed to respond yet again. They did eventually but by this time they were not needed. South Wangaratta was given Breathing Apparatus and the training so they could be helpful to us and the community yet they over and over fail to respond.

They also have complained about responding to alarmed premises as they do often result in false alarms. These alarms are alarmed because they are our biggest life risks such as hospitals and nursing homes. This was why South Wangaratta was given the Breathing Apparatus in the first place. CFA management have supporting the Volunteers and they are now no longer paged to such premises. Hence the community of Wangaratta to the largest life risks in the town have a response only from Wangaratta integrated brigade. This simply is not good enough. Why are the people of Wangaratta put at risk because of the deficiencies of an out-dated CFA system?

And this year a fire in a large industrial factory required pumper support. Benalla failed to respond (nearest volunteer pumper brigade) so the only option was staff from Wodonga, 70 kms away. We are required to wait (the community is required to wait) at least 40 mins for Pumper support.

Yet there is no guarantee that the volunteers will respond. The only way of guaranteeing a response is paid employed fire fighters.

Basically what is being proposed by the Government for our area is:

The volunteers get what they were asking for. An organisation free of enterprise agreements that they don't agree with. Fully volunteer CFA.

The professional fire-fighters that will be employed by FRV will guarantee a certain level of service delivery to the community of Victoria.

FRV will be co-located with CFA volunteers in Wangaratta NO CHANGE to existing arrangements NO reduction in surge capacity that VFBV argued.

More funding for CFA to address the recruitment and lack of cultural diversity within our volunteer ranks.

Increase funding to CFA that will enable such things as an additional Pumper for Wangaratta CFA to address some sort falls as detailed above.

Yours Sincerely,

Mark Sharrock



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