

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

My name is Damien Farrell and I have been a professional CFA Firefighter for 3 years. I am currently based at Cranbourne Fire Station. I write to express my support for the proposed fire services reform.

I want to share with you an insight from the perspective of a Career staff CFA Firefighter of how the fire service currently functions and what benefits the reform will bring for not only the people of Victoria, but for the safety of myself and my colleagues.

As a Firefighter I've witnessed how our current model works, it needs rapid improvement.

Before I go on, I want to express that this is not an attack on volunteer Firefighters, this is an insight and explanation as to how our current fire service model leaves the people of our community and Firefighters at risk.

I want to outline 1 experience out of the many I have had that highlights some of the holes in our current model and why we need to do something about it.

Early 2016 my shift was paged to a structure fire in one of our support areas of Narre Warren. In Less than 90 seconds our crew of 4 was on the truck on route to the job. On route we heard Narre Warren volunteer brigade turn out. This is great news for us, it means we will have 2 trucks on the fire ground and hopefully many hands. Upon arrival we witnessed Narre Warren Pumper on scene with a crew of 3 people. 1 person operating the pump and 2 people in breathing apparatus. The 2 branch holders wearing Breathing Apparatus were standing on the footpath flowing water onto the roof of the house which had visible flames coming through the roof tiles. My Station Officer approached them and asked one of them why no one was inside doing a primary search for possible people trapped in the building as rescue is always our primary role. The answer he received was "we only have external Breathing apparatus qualifications". 2 of Cranbourne pumper crew made entry into the burning building with no back up. If one or both of the crew became entrapped, we did not have sufficient breathing apparatus crew on the fire ground to send in a rescue crew because the Volunteers on scene didn't have the specific skills and qualifications needed to undertake urban firefighting.

This unfortunately is not an isolated incident in our area, and with call rates increasing due to the large population growth of the area, I fear this scenario is only going to get more frequent if action is not taken.

Again, what I have written above is not aimed at denigrating volunteers, it simply highlights the cold truth that Volunteer response is a maybe response.

When a volunteer brigade is paged you might get 1 truck, you might not. That truck could be 4 minutes, 8 minutes or 10 minutes+, it all depends on how long it takes those volunteer members to get from their work or home location to the fire station and then from the fire station to the incident. If a truck gets out the door you might get a crew of 5 people, 3 people or 1 person. The people on the truck might have the qualifications to go inside a burning building, or they might not, You just don't know until they get on scene.

In urbanised areas, a guaranteed 90 second response of 2 trucks with 7 crew that have all the relevant qualifications is vital to protect the lives and property of the public and ensure Firefighter safety.

Reported in the Age News Paper, the census revealed that Victoria's population grew by 146,600 people in 2016 alone. Many of these people moving to the south east suburbs which has been reported by various outlets as being the fastest growing area in Australia.

Victoria's fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this out-dated system, 35 areas are wrongly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised and residential. Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong are just some of the 35 'country areas'. As mentioned in an article in The Age newspaper on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2017, Cranbourne East was listed as one of the top 5 fastest growing suburbs in Australia; currently our only support for jobs in Cranbourne East is a "maybe" support from volunteers.

These highly urbanised areas need the modern fire Service that is being proposed. A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career Firefighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas.

All Victorian professional and volunteer Firefighters deserve a modern fire services that meets the needs of our growing communities.

To ensure the safety of all Victorians - including me as a Firefighter, I ask you to please consider your support for the proposed fire services reform.

Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of your constituents, and all communities in our growing state. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our Firefighters and stop the ever increasing and unrealistic demand being placed on volunteer Firefighters because of the enormous urban growth resulting in increased emergency calls.

Kind regards  
Damien Farrell