

I, Jarrad Gregory Richard Jeffs of [REDACTED] hereby make the following submission to the Parliamentary inquiry into the Proposed Fire Service Reforms that are to be voted on by the Victorian Legislative Council. The opinions expressed herein are mine and mine alone.

I am of the opinion that the Fire Service Reforms will be an overwhelmingly beneficial change for the State of Victoria, its people and the community as a whole. I acknowledge that with any change there will be winners and losers, I myself have many unanswered questions on a micro-scale that I think may see me worse off in some regards. Most of my concerns lie with my promotion, career development and training opportunities that may be delayed, altered or superseded. However my belief that the overarching structures of Fire service reform will be best practice capable of delivering the most appropriate fire service response regardless of imaginary boundaries - I am willing to suffer some personal sacrifice to achieve an outcome of benefit for the Victorian Community.

## **My Background**

I have been a firefighter in many guises now for over 20 years. I started my fire service association undertaking work experience at RAAF East Sale as a cadet working with RAAF Fire and Rescue crews. Weeks of work experience then morphed into joining the CFA as a Volunteer Firefighter at Noble Park (Urban) Fire Brigade in 1995 as a 17 year old. My ultimate career goal at that time was to join the RAAF as an Aviation Firefighter. Prior to being accepted by the RAAF as a firefighter trainee, I worked with the Department of Sustainability and Environment (now DEWLP) as a seasonal employee in the role of "Project Firefighter"

In August of 1998 I joined the RAAF Fire Service, and was posted to RAAF East Sale following my graduation. I was posted to RAAF Williamstown in 2000 (NSW) Australia's main Fighter base. In 2003 I was posted to RAAF Richmond the Heavy Lift aircraft base from where I discharged to take up employment with the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB).

My time in the RAAF was punctuated with Operational Active Service in East Timor, as well as completing specialist confined space, Breathing Apparatus (BA) Maintenance, and Advanced Fire Fighting Course, which qualified me to act up to the next rank. Despite discharging in 2003, I returned to the RAAF as a reservist in 2006, a role I played until 2012.

Whilst the notion of using the RAAF as a "stepping stone" into a civilian fire service was never part of my initial career plan, my personal circumstances necessitated the return to Melbourne for family reasons. In making my decision to return home there were only two employers I considered actively attempting to seek employment with. Victoria Police and the MFB were my only two employers for reasons I will expand upon later.

Since 2003 I have been employed continuously, on a full time basis with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. I currently hold the rank of Station Officer since being promoted after successfully completing Station Officer Course 47 on the 1st of July 2011. I have qualified as a Heavy Rescue Operator, Hazardous Materials Technician, specialist Long-Duration BA operator and as a Driving Instructor. Between the 1st of July 2012 and the start of 2015 I worked in the Driver Training and Accident Investigation Department, which I became the Officer In Charge of in October 2012.

Interspersed throughout my professional fire service career I have volunteered my skills, knowledge and expertise with Volunteer Fire Brigades. As mentioned previously, prior to becoming a Professional Firefighter, I was a volunteer with Noble Park CFA - A busy brigade with circa 600+ calls a year at the time. I was unceremoniously excluded from Noble Park in April 1998 and didn't volunteer again until 2001 when I was posted with the RAAF to Williamstown. I joined the Soldiers Point Rural Fire Service (NSW) where I was active in a truly rural fire brigade that had circa 40 to 50 calls per annum. Upon posting to Richmond I transferred to Hawkesbury RFS Headquarters unit from where I resigned upon my subsequent discharge from the RAAF.

Upon returning to Victoria I have been a member of the Kangaroo Flat CFA and Epping CFA - both vastly different in their atmosphere, demographic and roles they play for their communities and wider Victoria. As I will discuss further these two brigades are perfect examples of those that represent what is good in CFA and what is wrong in CFA.

### **Reasons for Fire Service Reform**

**Response** - The Metropolitan Fire Brigade has exemplary levels of service and performance when compared to contemporary fire services in Australia, I know from my studies that in 2007 (yes albeit a decade ago) the MFB response data when compared to that of other Professional Fire services Australia wide, was either the best or second best in Australia. Only the ACT was comparable to the MFB when Key Performance Indicators were examined. Whilst the MFB response times were slightly behind the ACT at the time, other KPI's such as containment to the room of origin, fatalities per 100,000 population and dwellings fitted with smoke alarms the MFB were Australian best practice.

CFA data was not near the same level of the MFB due in large part because of its constitution. At the time many areas of outer metropolitan growth were still served by fully volunteer brigades and the CFA KPI's suffered as a result.

The CFA and MFB boundaries have not changed significantly since the 1950's and have not changed since my employment at all. With an ever expanding metropolitan area of Melbourne it is incredulous to suggest that places such as Dandenong, Springvale, Frankston, Hallam, Narre Warren and Pakenham are not part of Melbourne - They are connected by the same water authorities, power retailers, are serviced by major freeways direct to Melbourne, they are even part of the Metropolitan Train Network - but the very fact they are part of the Country Fire Authority is symptomatic of an organisation or system that has failed to move with the modern demands of our communities. I can continue to name areas where this is the case but for the sake of brevity I have chosen to omit them.

In the aftermath of Black Saturday the age old question was again raised, should the CFA and the MFB be merged into the one organisation to better respond to emergencies? Many examples were given during the subsequent Royal Commission of Professional Firefighters from the MFB being deliberately excluded from foreground operations for little to no reason. The answer reached was that the Emergency Management Commissioner would be the overall responsible authority for the

control of Fire Services during bushfire emergencies. This resulted in a period of closer operation between the two organisations under the moniker of interoperability.

My personal experience where the system has failed our end customer the Victorian people, was when I was stationed at MFB Station 48, Taylors Lakes. In the summer of 2011 we experienced an inordinate number of house fires started by faulty evaporative air conditioners. The majority of these fires were in the neighbourhood of Hillside, which is covered by the CFA. There is a "satellite station" of Caroline Springs located in the Hillside area, however on every occasion we were at least first on scene to these fires which occurred during regular working hours. Often en-route to the call we would drive past Hillside CFA station who were still waiting for a driver to arrive.

My operational tactics were regularly curtailed until the arrival of the next appliance which was most often MFB 41 station (St. Albans) or the Professional crew of CFA Caroline Springs, all this despite Hillside being significantly closer geographically. I believe that at least four homes were not beyond salvation if the next supporting crew was available in a more timely manner.

I accept that it is simply not financially feasible to have a professional firefighting crew for every single town in Victoria, however the CFA model of purely volunteer brigades in small to medium country towns and hamlets is appropriate to either the risks, the population, or the incidence of emergencies (call rate). Volunteers can usually manage to deal with low numbers of incidents or the risks of service delivery failure can be accepted because the overall risk to the public is very low. This is simply unacceptable in outer suburban Melbourne, or our major regional centres.

Metropolitan Melbourne has grown considerably in the time since I commenced my career with the MFB, It has changed even more since my time with the CFA as a volunteer. I can not accept that a person living in Narre Warren or Berwick does not get the same or very similar level of protection that someone in Brunswick or Malvern. Now many espousing the volunteer response model will argue that they can respond just as quickly with the same level of skilled crew. I know from personal experience this is plainly not true. Even from my time as a volunteer at Noble Park or as the Station Officer at 48 Station, I know the volunteer model has one massive flaw - and that is the ready availability of appropriately trained personnel (especially drivers) during regular working hours (0700 to 1800 hours). I personally remember Noble Park failing to turn out on at least three occasions because they had no driver and often responding with one other person on a multitude of other occasions.

Whilst no one can argue with the importance that volunteers play in emergency response there are real and present demands on those volunteers that are endemic to all of us - pressures of modern life, the need for income to run the household, meet bills, fulfil their employment obligations, spend quality time with family. In areas of Metropolitan Melbourne and Geelong those demands are so great people's time to donate to the CFA has dwindled. Where high call rates exist and continue to increase the appropriate option is to staff those locations with professionals. Professionals have the time to dedicate to emergency response simply because it is their wage earning duty to respond and those financial burdens are not incurred through missed wages.

**Culture** - The major divide that has made it absolutely necessary to divide the professional firefighters from the Volunteers is culture, the cultures of the two types of personnel are stark and will not change in the foreseeable future. The environment created by these two cultures being forced to coexist in the one organisation is antagonistic, regressive and counter-productive. These cultural differences are brought about by two simple catalysts - money and control.

If we accept that professional staff are absolutely necessary for the CFA to meet its obligations to Victorians (real and expected), and we accept that professional staff are located in the busiest areas and those with highest risk profiles, then it is more than reasonable to expect that the staffing numbers of these areas must be maintained at all times. It would also be reasonable to expect that new equipment of the highest calibre is deployed to these stations first, and in some instances exclusively. In a service of finite resources (real and financial) there is little point in giving the best equipment to locations that will rarely use it whilst leaving the most active units to soldier on with equipment that should have been passed on.

So in accepting those tenants, it must be noted that there is a real sense of jealousy in the volunteer culture over such issues as overtime, trucks and equipment, rest and recline provisions and territorial claims. I have seen brigade members in larger CFA Brigades in the urban/rural interface become vehemently anti-professional because they believe that, professional staff chew up large slices of budget just in overtime. I myself have been subjected to taunts and insults at Epping CFA over the issue of overtime despite being an MFB Firefighter and having no effect on CFA budgets. At Epping CFA it was a widely held belief that the delay in their receipt of a new medium Rescue appliance was because of the overtime bill from nearby South Morang fire station. Further evidence of organisation wide attitudes amongst volunteers can be found attached to the end of this document.

Jealousy over trucks and equipment brought about either because of overtime or intrinsic organisation demands are nothing like the envy and thirst for power and control by many within volunteer ranks. The most bitter of disputes and conflict within the CFA controlled areas of Metropolitan Melbourne are not brought about by material things, they come about because of power plays over personal fiefdoms and the privilege of responding to certain emergencies. Many games have been played to deliberately exclude career professional staff from responding and I have personally witnessed this in my time at Noble Park and the short time I was at Epping. The notion that the public should be getting the closest and most appropriate fire service response falls down when Volunteers call for specific brigades or appliances not on a needs basis, but to fulfil other ends.

**Minimum Standards of training including selection.** The demographic of Volunteer brigades can be wide and varied and there is no structured and documented selection process to ensure that a prospective volunteer is an appropriate person for the role. As a direct result there are a number of unsuitable and less-than-suitable persons within the volunteer ranks. Whilst no fire service will be without their own issues of discipline and professional standards, the Volunteer firefighters are rarely held to account due to the fact the labour they provide is free of charge. The same can not be said of their Professional counterparts, not only do professional firefighters compete vigorously during the recruitment process, with military grade fitness assessments and

service specific aptitude tests - but at the successful conclusion of a selection process their ordeal only just begins.

The Firefighter trainee then undertakes an 18 week recruit firefighter course. The intensive 18 week course prepares firefighters for the very basics of their new role, however they are given a wide range of skill sets that allows them to perform every function needed on a modern fireground. This is a deliberate and necessary requirement as their role in CFA is to “support” volunteers - despite what many volunteers may think - this means filling the gaps that volunteers may have in their response at any particular moment, for example many brigades are struggling to find enough BA wearers to respond during the working hours of the day, they may be able to get a truck with two or three crew, but on arrival to well developed structure fires they may have no BA wearers. These facts are overlooked when CFA service delivery standards for fully volunteer brigades are examined.

A regular statement orated by volunteers is that they are trained to the same standards, the pure fact of the matter is they are not. Whilst there may be the exception to this rule for a select number of individuals in CFA Volunteer ranks, not every member has the same level of training as a newly graduated professional recruit. Professional recruits have a full suite of BA, search and rescue skills whereas the volunteer may acquire these over a much longer time frame if at all. some volunteers may be trained to wear breathing apparatus but not to enter a fire involved structure - a change in training methods since my time at Noble Park - a lesson that I learned about the hard way after I needed BA wearers at a fire in Hillside circa 2012 and a number of fires since then. This issue of training and skills is even more pronounced when you combine pump operation and driving skills with the full suite of BA qualifications.

**Myth of Surge Capacity** - An often cited reason for not proceeding with the split of Professional Firefighters from their Volunteer counterparts is the alleged affect on the CFAs ability to rapidly mobilise large numbers of firefighters during periods of peak demand - referred to as “surge capacity”

The number of firefighters available for surge capacity is cited in the range of 80 to 40 thousand, with 60 thousand the most widely accepted figure. However of that alleged 60 thousand over half of them are non-operational members, persons either too young (Junior members), too old (retired members), or otherwise incapable of performing operational roles. Another major group of this non-operational component is the Ladies Auxiliary which provide logistical support at a brigade level.

So of a real number of less than 30 thousand, how many volunteers are there that are regular responders? how many are fit and capable of deploying away from their brigade on an extended basis in a modern world with all the pressures of modern life? The real answer depends on exactly when, where and to a degree what they will be doing. At the Hazelwood mine fire, a fire that ran for an extended period of time (months) the bulk of the work especially after the first fortnight was carried by professional firefighters.

**My experience, in the current environment and what the reform will mean for me.**

Whilst I am employed by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and work in my current location of Northcote or South Melbourne, the status quo is unlikely to affect me. However the very moment I am moved to cover a shortage of personnel the situation changes. I will wait longer for the next responding truck if it is from a volunteer station, I do not know the level of training those that arrive on said truck will possess, I will have to wait if the personnel on that truck don't collectively possess the minimum skill set of at least one professional firefighter. My deployment to an outer district MFB Station or on step-up to backfill a CFA station whilst not all that common at the moment is a real possibility - a real possibility that my MFB counterparts working at outer stations face regularly, and not a possibility for my CFA Counterparts but an inevitability. I seek and support change for their sakes, for the sake of the homeowner in a new housing estate, I seek it for the people who find themselves caught up in an emergency in areas of Melbourne's outer suburbs that are metropolitan in all but emergency response. I don't care that my next promotion opportunity may be delayed, altered or curtailed by an influx of CFA Senior Station Officers, the change will benefit those who are our raison d'être - the Victorian Public. Maybe if Volunteers are focussed on that they will not oppose these changes and accept their role has, and will change over time as Melbourne and regional centres continue to grow and expand - because at the moment and all I have seen in the past from highly urbanised CFA Brigades with regards to the reform is about how many fires and emergencies they will or won't go to. That is an unacceptable reason to prevent or stifle reform.

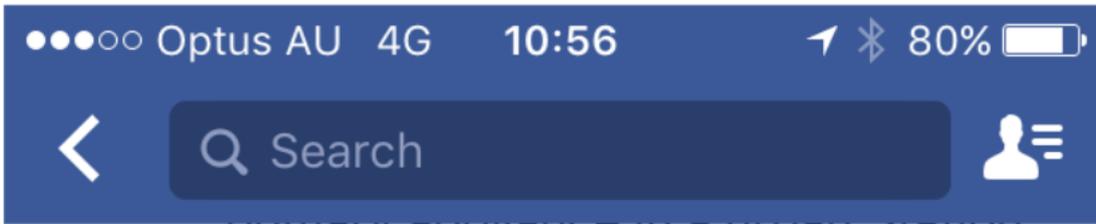
I firmly believe that CFA Professional Firefighters should be entitled to a workplace where they are free from conflict, deliberate exclusion based on their employment status, envy and jealousy from those who are less qualified and less trained on average. I do not wish to condemn my professional colleagues to work in an organisation where they are seen as servants by those who fail to understand the semantics of a word in a charter. Interoperability has failed the very moment that money comes into the equation, something that will not be abrogated by years of hard work and relationship building. The only thing that will provide an appropriate circuit breaker for the current CFA professional Firefighters is to have a clear and distinct separation through separate organisational commands.

Good Volunteers who undertake their duties for the right reasons will not walk away from their roles in emergency response for campaign fires, their responses will continue to be measured in keeping with their life demands. For those that do walk away from volunteering the question needs to be asked, were they really doing it for the right reasons in the first place? and if not were their reasons conducive to good, timely, and measured emergency response?

It must be said that brigades such as Kangaroo Flat or the NSWRFs brigade of Soldiers Point were generally well managed and didn't have such issues with professional staff as their exposure to them was generally very limited. Brigades such as these typify what Rural or Country Fire services should be - focussed on their own activities, not envious of other emergency responders and existing to serve their small communities, not the desires of the few to play firefighter or becoming the important chief-about-town. My reasons for being excluded from Noble Park was largely due to an inherent dislike the Captain Harold Baptist had for professional firefighters, on a regular basis I was the subject of taunts, jokes, ridicule and exclusions from types of training. I was

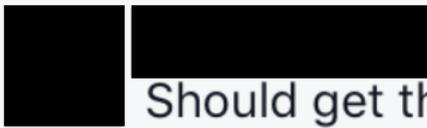
seen largely as an outsider of Noble Park not only because I hadn't come from junior ranks (running team) but because I wanted to make firefighting my career. The final straw came when I was deployed away as part of my job with the Department of Sustainability and Environment (now DEWLP) and was not available for the brigade running team during the State Championships.

Attached with my submission are opinions expressed by volunteers through social media, it is my assertion and solid belief that these opinions are not isolated but in fact widespread amongst those brigades that have the "most to lose". Whilst I have heard the same opinions being shared in brigades such as Noble Park and Epping it is hard to provide verifiable proof of such discussions. Such opinions are symptomatic of a sick and detrimental culture unfit for the provision of vital emergency services.



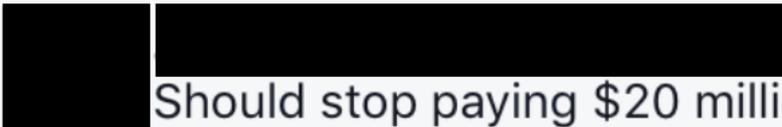
primary appliance in a urban station that's old enough to have club rego but it's not good enough to be put in a training ground for a UFU firefighter to train with 😡😡😡

Yesterday at 20:12 · Like · Reply



Should get the VFBV to push for modern gear

2 hours ago · Like · Reply



Should stop paying \$20 million a year in overtime to 850 firefighters? That's 25 Type 4 Heavy Scania Pumpers each year, with rescue equipment. Or 80 Medium Tankers. Whose got the money when staff get one fridge per shift, a theatre style lounge and aren't allowed to do trivial firefighting duties like repair hose so contractors have to be paid to do it?

4 minutes ago · Like · Reply



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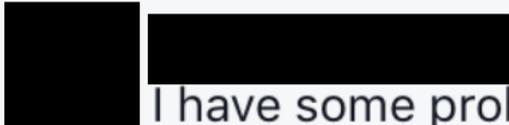


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agreement would already be in force and be binding the CFA.

Yesterday at 19:56 · Like · 2 · Reply



I have some problems with their pay increases and certain entitlements, like the one where if they have to shift to another location they don't pay "stamp duty", why not? I have too! They work 4 on 4 off , ( and a lot have second jobs and get payed cash) I don't I work 6 on 1 off, they get 9 weeks annual leave, I get 4, I get public holidays, they don't but they get penalty rates! Look at all the other leave days they want , what about the one they want where if they have a crash in their private car the CFA pays for any damage whether they are in the wrong or not !!!! who is paying for all this? You watch the fire service level go through the roof !!!

Yesterday at 20:09 · Like · Reply

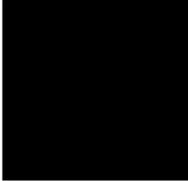
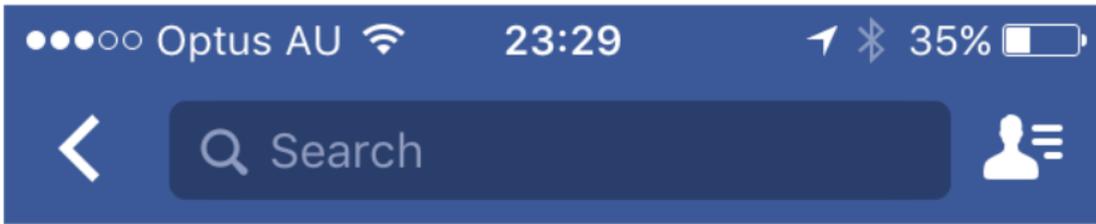


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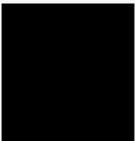
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The CFA is the service division of volunteer fire brigades. Its main role is to ensure that all the services equipment resources required by Volunteers are delivered in timely and responsible manner. Read the background and the charter. CFA paid officers are not our bosses they are our servants like any public servant. We respect their roles and support them. They are not the pawns of any union or political party but are being coerced as such.

13 hours ago · Like ·  2



Who are your "bosses" then?

13 hours ago · Like



do you only answer to yourself?

13 hours ago · Like



The people of Victoria

