



Alan Thistlethwaite

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject inquiry into the firefighters'
presumptive rights compensation and
fire services legislation amendment
(reform) bill reform.

1 attachment



fire service reform.docx

To whom it may concern,

Attached is my submission for the inquiry into the firefighters' presumptive rights compensation and fire services legislation amendment (reform) bill reform.

Regards

Alan

Sent from my iPad

Assistant Clerk Committees
 Department of the Legislative Council
 Fire Services Bill Select Committee
 Parliament House, Spring Street
 EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

I am Qualified Firefighter Alan Thistlethwaite, I am in the Country Fire Authority and currently stationed at Melton Fire Station. I joined the Country Fire Authority in 2011 and have been stationed at Point Cook, Greenvale and Melton, which I have only recently commenced. I wanted to become a Career Firefighter so that I could continue to serve the community, I have served in the Australian Army between 1995 and 2005.

I live in Bacchus Marsh and have volunteered as a Cub Scout leader when my children were involved in the scouting organisation. I am also an active lawn bowler and I am an umpire and coach. I am writing this submission to support the proposed reform of the fire services as I believe that it is the best outcome for the community. I will list some reasons below and use some personal experiences to demonstrate the importance is needed.

- **Two trucks with at least 7 firefighters dispatched** – is important because this ensures that the correct number of firefighters are on the foreground if something catastrophic was to occur, 7 firefighters with the correct qualifications. I will give an example of a fire where things could've potentially gone wrong. I was working at Greenvale Fire Station and Craigieburn were paged to a structure fire in Kalkallo. Craigieburn responded and en route they sighted a large column of smoke, as of yet the other brigades paged, Kalkallo and Wallan, hadn't responded, as a result Craigieburn's station officer requested that Greenvale be responded. Wallan fire brigade responded shortly afterwards and Kalkallo sometime later. Craigieburn had arrived on scene and begun immediately combating the fire, when Wallan arrived on scene. They had two members on their tanker with only one being a Breathing Apparatus operator who had a beard and wasn't operational. The drive from Greenvale to the structure fire was approximately 20 minutes as we arrived Kalkallo tanker were just ahead of us, they had 5 volunteers on the truck, none of which were Breathing Apparatus operators. On our arrival the Leading Firefighter from Craigieburn was near the entry of the building attempting to combat the fire, he was unable to fully commit to an internal firefight due no operational Breathing Apparatus operators on scene to support him. We arrived donned Breathing Apparatus and commenced an internal fire attack, it was quickly noted that the building wasn't structurally safe so we retreated. The important things to note are that initially the fire attack couldn't be internal due to only having three firefighters on Craigieburn pumper. If Craigieburn had four firefighters, as they do now they, could've begun an internal attack immediately. If that initial internal attack had of take place and as found the structure wasn't sound potentially the structure may have collapsed and two firefighters could've been trapped. If Craigieburn's Station Officer hadn't responded Greenvale Pumper there wouldn't have been any other Breathing Apparatus operators to rescue them. To make that clear there would have been four career firefighters, two Breathing Apparatus operators, one incident controller, one pump operator and 7 volunteer firefighters, only one with Breathing Apparatus qualifications. **7 firefighters dispatched** would guarantee that if I or any other career firefighter were trapped that there would be

suitably qualified firefighters waiting to rescue us. If there were volunteers firefighters on scene who were suitably trained then the other career appliance can be cancelled. If there is a catastrophic event it would take too long for another appliance to be responded and arrive on scene.

- **Volunteer surge capacity** – during the EBA negotiations and since the fire service review announcement I have heard a lot about volunteers leaving the Country Fire Authority. I have spoken to volunteers, the message that I have got is that they volunteer to serve their communities and will continue to do so, this will not change with the fire service reform. To say that they are leaving the Country Fire Authority in droves, as I've heard in the media, is an insult to the dedicated volunteers who serve their communities every day!
- **One career fire service** – as I've said I have been stationed at Point Cook, Greenvale and Melton these areas have experienced massive growth over the past 10 years. The residents would be surprised to know that they live in the 'country' and that they are covered by the Country Fire Authority, they live in an urbanised area and would expect the same fire coverage as someone in Deer Park. We need to move into the future and prepare for the continued growth of Victoria, to meet the needs of the increasing population. I will now give an example of how the reform will improve the service to Victorians. If Greenvale fire brigade received an emergency call and respond to a call in Greenvale, let's say a structure fire with the average duration of 2-3 hours, brigades would come from Craigieburn, Tullamarine and Somerton, this would leave the suburbs of Craigieburn, Roxburgh Park, Mickleham, Greenvale, West Meadow, Meadow Heights and Tullamarine just to name a few without fire coverage. The Melbourne Fire Brigade stations would have other fire appliances stepped up, other fire appliance moved to cover their area, this would begin within 10 minutes. The Country Fire Authority stations would revert to volunteer response, which there is no guaranteed response. I am in no way questioning volunteers commitment or ability, however just recognising that they have other commitments and may not be available. So if you look at this as a normal Victorian citizen someone who lives in Meadow Heights will have a guaranteed 90 second response regardless of any other event, if that same person moves to Greenvale they don't have the same guarantee. It just doesn't make sense these areas have a higher risk of emergency and should be protected based on the risk not a boundary established 60 years ago.

I could continue to write about how having one fire service for career staff is sensible and is better for the community, I think that my above points are suffice to demonstrate this. I would like to briefly talk about how this dispute has affected me and my relationships. When the dispute was in its early stages I read all the clauses in dispute and I couldn't believe some of the mistruths that were portrayed in the media. I was fairly actively involved on social media and I attempted to point out where people had gone wrong with normal discussion. I unfortunately found myself in a situation where I was getting angry with the comments of some people and also found that I was being bullied by people with a different views to me. I would go to work some days frustrated and angry that people I worked along side, volunteers, could believe that I would support something that wasn't in the best interest of the community. I have very good relationships with the volunteers I have regular contact with. I haven't posted on these sites as a result of the amount of stress it was causing me and affecting those relationships.

I was at the senate inquiry to give evidence on behalf of Greenvale Fire Brigade both volunteer and career staff. After I had given my evidence a volunteer was verbally and physically abusive to me, I will note I have placed a complaint in about the volunteer involved and the outcome was he was spoken to along with other issues. I wasn't really satisfied with this result but it was the best I'd

expected to happen. What shocked me the most of the whole incident was the fact that I saw the person involved in the local bakery afterwards and he came to speak to me in a friendly manner. I asked him, why we were suddenly friends and he stated, don't worry about what happened in the hall it's all a game. It was a game to him a bit of fun, I take this very seriously in my career.

I no longer read the paper or watch the news because of the way the media is trying to portray me as a greedy thug. All I'm only trying to do my best to protect the community and provide for my family. I ask you to please support this reform and allow both career and volunteer firefighters to be able to move on and continue to serve the Victorian community.

I thank you for allowing me to submit my thoughts and look forward to this being resolved and continuing to serve the Victorian community as a Fire Rescue Victoria firefighter. If you have any questions I can be contacted on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

Alan Thistlethwaite