



Andrew Aitken [REDACTED]

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
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Subject Submission to the Fire Services
Reform Committee

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Submission to the Fire Services Reform Committee.pdf

Please find attached my submission to the fire services reform committee .

Regards

Andrew Aitken

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Submission to the Fire Services Reform Committee

Thursday the 6th of July 2017

My name is Andrew Aitken and I have been a professional MFB fire fighter for 17.5 years, a volunteer fire fighter with the Buninyong CFA prior to that for approximately 11 years and a volunteer with the Alice Springs Bush Fire Brigade for two years in the late 90's. I am currently stationed at the Deer Park fire station (FS43).

To ensure the safety of all Victorians - including me as a fire fighter, I ask that the committee please show support for the proposed fire services reform.

In the emergency response area of the Deer Park fire station we support Caroline Springs CFA members both professional and volunteer. I am fortunate in that I enjoy the minimum of 7 on the fire ground that the MFB requires but have seen firsthand the lack of training and skills of the volunteers that the professional fire fighters from Caroline Springs deal with. At no fault of their own the volunteers currently do not have access to the same level of opportunities for training that the professional MFB and CFA staff get. Again due to no fault of their own Victorian volunteer fire fighters cannot be relied upon to either respond or have the multitude of skills required to tackle the diversity and increasing numbers of emergency responses that we get in more the densely populated and high risk areas of Victoria. Victorian volunteer fire fighters have jobs and families that understandably affect their ability to respond. These issues not only risk the lives of the public but that of the volunteer and professional fire fighting staff. By agreeing to the proposed fire service changes the CFA can move forward and concentrate on up skilling the volunteer fire fighters of Victoria while the professional staff working under the proposed Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) banner can respond and work in a safe and reliable work place.

Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of all Victorians. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our fire fighters and stop the

ever increasing and unrealistic demands being placed on Victorian volunteer fire fighters. These increasing demands are due to the enormous urban growth we are experiencing in Victoria. It is time to move forward and adopt a better system.

In the past few months I have spoken to a number of friends and shop owners who are volunteer fire fighters in the Ballarat area about the proposed changes. They have told me of their frustration at the way we all have been treated, as some have put it 'as political footballs' and that they are sick of it and want a resolution. Through the discussions we have had, we all come to the same conclusion that the proposed changes will be a positive for us all. Volunteers will get the support and respect they deserve and the public in urbanised areas will get the rapid emergency response they require and deserve. By returning the CFA to a volunteer only based organisation they, the CFA, will be able to better concentrate on the needs specific to volunteers, areas such as training, management, safety, etc. Subsequently the proposed FRV will focus on my workplace and the areas of training, management, safety etc. that I require in my workplace. My Wife and two young boys expect me to be safe at work and to come home at the end of each shift.

In response to advertising material distributed by certain political parties and media organisations claiming that the reforms will 'rip' or 'tear' apart the CFA, I feel these claims are dangerous, misleading and plainly incorrect. As you would be aware the CFA started out as a volunteer only organisation and has progressed, through necessity, to what we have today, a mix of volunteer and professional staff. This model has become messy, confusing and hard to manage in respect to what is best for both volunteers and professionals. Having a volunteer only CFA as well as the proposed FRV will fix this. To many Victorians, who are not acutely aware of what the fire services reforms are offering, the distribution of these claims makes them fearful that their local volunteer brigade will be adversely affected. As you are aware this is plainly incorrect. Volunteer fire fighters will be better off under the proposed reforms. This is not a union takeover of the volunteers. It is reform that will allow all fire fighters, professional and volunteer, to have an

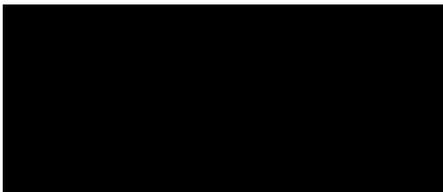
organisation to call their own and that will cater best to their specific needs.

I hope also that the proposal regarding presumptive legislation can also be considered positively as it is fair and just for both professional and volunteer fire fighters in Victoria and is long overdue.

All Victorian, professional and volunteer fire fighters, deserve modern fire services that meet the needs of our growing communities.

If needed I can be contacted on the below number or email address to discuss my submission further.

Regards



Andrew Aitken
Leading Fire Fighter Deer Park Fire Station

