



Ben Griffiths [REDACTED]

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc Rini Krouskos <io3@ufuvic.asn.au>
bcc
Subject Fire Service Reform Submission

Please find attached my personal submission in relation to Fire Service Reform .

Kind regards

Ben Griffiths

Firefighter, C Shift, Traralgon

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Friday, 7 July 2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

I am Career Firefighter Benjamin Griffiths of the CFA, working out of Traralgon Fire Station. This has been my career workplace for the last 2 and a half years. I am recognised by the CFA as having over 25 years service as a firefighter, both in the volunteer and career ranks. During this time I have been privileged to lead the Dromana Volunteer Fire Brigade as their Captain and an Officer for 15 years. This brigade has seen annual responses of around 350 callouts during my time and has serviced a large geographical area with Road Accident Rescue response.

My specialist accreditations include Road and Technical Rescue operator, Urban Search and Rescue operator, Juvenile Fire and Awareness Practitioner, Structural and Wildfire Crew Leader amongst many other recognised fire ground qualifications that need to be attained to maintain proficiency as a career firefighter.

The CFA have seen fit to award me my 25 Year Clasp in recognition of long service, The National Medal and The National Emergency Service Medal for my role in the Black Saturday Fires. Additionally I have been recognised as a Life Member of Dromana Volunteer Fire Brigade.

After 40 years of living on the Mornington Peninsula I recently moved my family to the rural town of Mirboo North in Gippsland, allowing me to work at Traralgon Fire Station and maintain my family lifestyle. I fully intend on transferring my skills as a firefighter and rescue technician into this rural community and supporting the Mirboo North Volunteer CFA.

**I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of
the fire services for the following reason:**

- The current system of emergency response is based upon an over perceived availability within volunteer brigades and it is with blind luck that this response meets the needs of an emergency situation. Recognising the life risk to myself as a firefighter and that of my community members I need a guaranteed backup of at least 2 trucks and 7 firefighters, capable of serving the vital roles of an emergency situation, within 8 minutes.
- The employment of all career firefighters into one fire service will not affect volunteer turnout or surge capacity as it only relates to the 35 integrated stations, of which the current volunteers will be encouraged to remain active. An extremely long bow has been drawn by the VFBV in order to scare monger amongst rural communities in order to gain support for

their hierarchical driven agendas, which in my experience are often negligent of brigade needs, opinions and local requirements.

- The reform will see the standardisation of career training, specialist response, response standards and equipment utilised across the Victorian Communities served by career firefighters. This encourages greater organisation across operations and streamlines the response, vastly improving the chances of successful results in emergency operations.
- Volunteer support that is provided by operational firefighters will be maintained by FRV through ongoing arrangement with the CFA. As a previous brigade Captain I recognise this as an integral part of the management and checks and balances required to run a successful brigade.
- The ongoing damage that continuation of disputation within my workplace has created has been responsible for the loss of pride and coordination between Volunteer and Career firefighters that was once so strong.
Many mistruths and rumours have divided the 2 forces responsible for ensuring the safety of our communities and it needs to halt in order for our once strong working relationship in all arenas to return.
My personal and family reputation, developed over 25 years of long standing service to my community, is now questioned by many as my role as a career firefighter has developed. My underlying development of serving my community in times of need was fostered by my active volunteer role. Improving my development of this role within the career ranks I now feel ostracised by my former volunteer peers for my effort and personal sacrifice to this role.
- The reform of the fire service is beneficial to volunteers as it has included an unprecedented package to support volunteer recruitment and retention across the CFA. The warranted upgrades and improvements to training funding are long overdue and will see greater upskilling and equipment improvements to benefit all.

I would like to provide examples of experiences I have in relation to failures of the current structure.

I have personally experienced the fear a Captain of a volunteer brigade holds in relation to lack of response by my members when paged to an emergency. The lack of appropriate skill mix available to me when inappropriately trained members are all I have to work with in an emergency is frustrating and dangerous to not only the crew but those in our community requiring our services.

Constantly considering the perceived member response based upon time of day and day of the week meant that I regularly altered my own personal family and work life in order to remain available to response needs. This was due to knowing my community would be exposed by a lack of suitably qualified response when needed.

Road Accident Rescue events are time critical! The Golden Hour that we endeavour to work within is vital to the survivability of an entrapped person. Having this time eroded due to a slow and inappropriately qualified response due to member availability is a very poor excuse to provide

grieving and suffering members of my community. I have experienced this in my role as Captain of Dromana brigade and know that a better system of response is possible with fire service reforms.

The ongoing empire creation that has been allowed to develop under the current system provides some brigades with a self-imposed degree of importance above all other needs. The brigade response failings to their communities regularly are due to the inappropriate response of vehicles and brigades that are in a less advantageous position to provide support than others. This empire creation has seen personal egos take precedence over community safety. Local group structures within brigades are considered more important to some than the response based on proximity to the event. Some brigades I have experienced even go as far as avoiding the response of staff brigades in fear that they will be taken over when we arrive. Nothing could be further from the truth when community safety is at stake.

A brigade just North of my Location at Traralgon refuses to allow Traralgon staff to travel the 14 minutes to support them when other brigades to our South will accept the 40 minute travel time for their support.

Listening to radio traffic of our Northerly neighbour at a house fire recently I was appalled to hear that after 18 minutes they were still awaiting BA operators and the PPV fan to combat the fire. This fire also had 2 persons seriously burnt requiring immediate medical support. As a response to this event Traralgon staff automatically bring all of those requirements to the scene.

After 40 minutes we were requested in order to provide a Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC). This vital piece of technology allows an immediate accurate suppression of the fire, something that would have been a much greater asset in the initial response moments. Following this the Traralgon Volunteer response was required for BA support. Considering the moment, the TIC was sent with the minimal crew of volunteers who responded to the event. The Officer in Charge of the scene was advised by the Traralgon Volunteers of the support available to them with 7 career staff back at Traralgon monitoring their situation. I was informed that were receptive to our input and response but that current local arrangements don't allow for it.

Try explaining that to the 2 people who were burnt and had their house destroyed.

In situations where I have provided support to neighbouring brigades I have found that the blasé fair approach to safety and accreditations has made me wonder how lucky can this fire service be?

When responding to a house fire to Traralgon's East I asked a member on scene if they were accredited and could support me in BA? Their response was "...Kind of".

They had no accreditation but had done some training. Another member wearing a full faced beard was accredited and happily put himself forward to do the role. I informed him of the need to be clean shaven and he replied that it didn't matter. His safety was my main consideration and I did not allow him to perform that role. I was met with a disgruntled response from the member.

I once again saw the vital need for further training and an immediate improvement to the professionalism of these members through my supportive response.

I take my role as a professional firefighter seriously and realise from both sides of the service that we are in need of a much improved system that protects ourselves and communities in a much improved way.

My experiences are many and varied and I prefer to relate my own service to the number of fire calls responded to, rather than number of years in the CFA as many others tout. Currently this stands at 1264 officially recorded responses, not including my 5 years prior to 1996 when record keeping began in its current system. This conservatively could then be considered as 1500+ calls I've personally made to keep my community safe.

I appreciate your time and consideration on this matter and look forward to addressing any questions you may have in response to my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Benjamin Griffiths
Firefighter, C Shift, Traralgon

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