



**Andy Christensen**

[Redacted]

07/07/2017 12:47 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF  
cc  
bcc  
Subject Submission of Andrew Christensen to  
Fire Services Select Committee

1 attachment



Andrew Christensen Sub.docx

Please find attached my Submission to the Fire Services Reform Select Committee.  
Regards,

Andrew Christensen

Andrew Christensen  


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

To the Members of the Select Committee,

My name is Andrew Christensen, I am an MFB firefighter currently stationed at Oakleigh Fire Station. I thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on what is a very important issue.

As a firefighter, I am more interested in public safety than politics, so it is in the interests of safety I write this submission in support of the proposed fire services reform. My support for the reform is based on the following realities:

**Victoria's Antiquated Boundaries**

Victoria's fire service boundaries are outdated and have not changed significantly in 60 years. In 1960 Victoria had a population of around 2.8 million, this had grown dramatically in the years since and with over 1800 people a week now settling in Melbourne, the state population has ballooned to approximately 6.2 million.

Areas such as Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong that were once quiet rural areas on the city's fringes have become highly urbanised, bona fide city suburbs. Unfortunately under the current fire services model, these areas potentially receive a second rate service compared to those suburbs closer to the CBD.

The Chair and Commissioners of the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission believed there was a need for periodic review of the metropolitan fire district boundary, and included this among its recommendations. The boundaries drawn decades ago were not designed to deal with modern day Victoria.

**Seven on the Fireground is Safest for Everyone**

For optimum service delivery and to ensure both public and firefighter safety, the minimum response during an emergency fire incident should be at least two fire appliances with a minimum of seven fully qualified crew arriving on scene in less than eight minutes. This ensures any necessary rescues are performed; exposures protected and allows extinguishment to begin. This is the current standard of delivery in MFB areas and it saves lives and property. The proposed fire service reform will have a positive impact on fire service delivery by ensuring these outer urban areas, currently zoned as 'country areas', receive the same standard of fire protection.

**Unreasonable Expectation on Volunteers**

In a fire emergency situation, there is no denying that minutes matter. CFA volunteers do an excellent job and are an essential part of Victoria's fire services. It is impossible and unreasonable however, for volunteer fire brigades to consistently meet this optimum fire protection standard in the aforementioned outer urban areas. Most volunteer firefighters have day jobs, families and other

commitments which makes it physically impossible for them to drop what they are doing, get to the station under normal driving conditions, get their gear sorted and respond to an incident to be on scene consistently in less than eight minutes.

Sometimes volunteer brigades may not have the necessary number of crew respond when paged. Other times they might not have a driver, or not have enough breathing apparatus qualified firefighters respond to safely enter a hazardous environment. I say this not to have a go at volunteer firefighters but to illustrate that they are some of the inherent and undeniable characteristics of volunteer firefighting.

Consistent, timely response is not always possible and this has an impact on service delivery and safety. The CFA's own data illustrates the failure of many volunteer brigades to consistently reach this service benchmark.

### **Impact on Volunteers and Surge Capacity**

The proposed fire service reform will have no detrimental impact on CFA volunteers or their ability to provide the outstanding service they currently provide to the community. CFA's 1,220 volunteer brigades will continue to serve and protect their communities just as they always have.

CFA volunteer brigades will continue to operate under the leadership of CFA's Chief Officer and will remain integral to Victoria's response to fires and other emergencies, particularly in campaign and surge events.

Individual brigades will continue to have assignment areas. In areas where FRV will be designated as the first responders, volunteer surge capacity and back-up responses will be preserved. Tailored support will be provided for volunteers at the 35 integrated stations where career firefighters will transfer to FRV.

There has been a great deal of political spin doctoring regarding the reform and its impact on surge capacity. I became a firefighter because I want to help people and protect the community, regardless of whether the organisation I serve under remains the same or adapts over time. I believe this is the same for the vast majority of volunteers; they do what they do because it is of benefit to the community. If these reforms have no negative impact on their ability to help the community, why would there be any significant reduction in volunteer numbers? This is just scaremongering.

Volunteers will turn out when duty calls and their community needs them, and as such, surge capacity during a major fire emergency will not be affected.

### **Presumptive Cancer Legislation**

Along with my support for fire services reform, I also welcome the introduction of presumptive cancer legislation laws to protect all hard working fire service employees from the scientifically proven dangers of the job.

### **Conclusion**

I have only been a firefighter for a number of years, this entire time my colleagues and I have been exposed to unrelenting attacks on our profession and our integrity from certain sections of politics and the media. This has undoubtedly had a detrimental impact on moral.

Despite this negativity, I am extremely optimistic about my chosen career moving forward. I am optimistic because I know the importance of the service we provide to the community. I know the quality of the people I get to work with every shift, I know they have the community's best interests at

heart. The same can be said for the proposed fire services reform, it has a community benefit focus. It will provide a structure that allows all firefighters, both professional and volunteer, to do what they do best, serve and protect the Victorian community.

I thank you again for the opportunity to be heard.

Sincerely,

Firefighter Andrew Christensen *LL.B; Cert II & Cert III in Public Safety (Firefighting Operations)*