



Ben Nicholas [REDACTED]
06/07/2017 09:12 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire service review

To whom it may concern,
Please find the attached fire service reform submission .
Kind regards
Ben

Ben Nicholas Firefighter

Dandenong Fire Station – 120 - 122 Princes Highway, Dandenong 3175
[REDACTED]

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Fire Service Reform Submission.pdf

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

My name is Ben Nicholas and I am a Qualified Firefighter, having been employed by the CFA for nearly six years. I am currently stationed at Dandenong Fire Station after working previously at Frankston Fire Station for five years, and prior to this I worked briefly at Mornington Fire Station.

I am a qualified operator of the Type 4 Heavy Pumper, Type 3 Medium Pumper, Teleboom Aerial Appliance, Aerial Pumper, BA Van and Emergency Medical Response. I have received a Five Year Service award and also a Chief Officers Commendation.

I live in Mornington with my wife and two young sons after spending my formative years in North Eastern Victoria, where I grew up on a farm in a secluded part of the high country.

But enough about me and on to why I am writing this submission. I want to explain to you from my experiences why it is important, nay; *essential*, for our dated fire service to be brought into this century.

For example. While working at Frankston Fire Station, with a minimum manning of five on shift, it was commonplace for one of the trucks (the Teleboom) to be taken offline.

Why? Not enough staff.

This would occur because staff who were rostered on shift to

man this truck were often required to take the Breathing Apparatus Van (BA Van) to a neighbouring brigade so that their BA cylinders could be refilled during, or after, an operational incident.

This meant that the area of Frankston would be down to only one truck – that's just three firefighters! - to respond to emergencies because the crew would be performing a task in an area outside of Frankston.

With the proposed reforms to our Fire Service to include minimum response of seven firefighters and two trucks, this simple safety issue to the community and firefighters would no longer occur.

While working at Frankston we would respond to support calls to the surrounding areas in a truck with just two of us on board (supporting volunteer based brigades in the area). On numerous occasions I have been to multi car accidents where I've had to assist paramedics with first aid while also attending to my duties as a firefighter. With a guaranteed response of two trucks and seven people to the incident we can ensure that everybody is getting the care they deserve and our safety isn't being compromised by not being able to conduct all the safety duties necessary at a motor vehicle accident.

It is important to me to know as a firefighter that I have back up should I require it. If I respond to a house fire with possible persons trapped inside, I will do everything in my power to find that person and get them to safety. But who is looking after my safety? I know the crew I'm working with will do what they can, but without greater numbers it makes an already dangerous job even more so. And I want to get back to my family at the end of my shift.

So that's from a selfish point of view. But there is no doubt that these necessary reforms will make the community safer too.

More fire trucks responding, with guaranteed and up to date skills, is obviously going to make the community safer as well.

This dispute has caused not only me, but my whole family, a great deal of distress. There have been times when I have been reluctant to tell people what I did for work for fear of an argument or disagreement. So many people have been fed lies and misinformation through the media, an unnecessary wedge attempted to be driven between staff and volunteers. I, for one, understand that to provide a better and safer service to the community, the last thing we want to do is abolish the volunteer service.

Volunteers will still receive operational support from career staff as they do now. Where a call is in their area and they are first on scene they will be the Incident Controller as they are now. There will still be support for them from Operations Officers and Operations Managers. I do not see the surge capacity changing. Firefighters, volunteer and career, share something in common. We exist to help people in need. This is one of the main reasons I do the job, as I'm sure it is one of the main reasons people volunteer. To no longer volunteer and help people when they need assistance due to an organisational change that you may not agree with, suggests to me that these people aren't doing it for the right reasons.

Remember when I mentioned before that I grew up in a remote country town in north east Victoria? If it weren't for CFA volunteers, that town would have been wiped out by fire on many an occasion. But these fire service reforms will not affect those areas that have not changed and are still classified as country.

These reforms recognize that there are parts of the state that *have* changed in the 50 years since last there has been any amendment to the service. Grown and grown and grown as the population of the city of Melbourne has grown and its' borders

stretch further and further out. Areas like Dandenong, Frankston and even Mornington, where I reside with thousands of other people that wouldn't have lived here two decades ago, when the area was considered a holiday village. When a volunteer brigade would have been considered enough to service the area because the days rolled by with not a lot of incident.

I am asking, as a firefighter *and* a resident, for reforms to take place to keep myself, my family and the growing population of so many suburbs that were considered country when the CFA were established all those decades ago.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Nicholas

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