



Graeme Cooper [REDACTED]

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire Service Reform submission

Please see attached my submission for the fire service reform

Regards



Graeme Cooper Leading Firefighter & Fire Investigator - B Platoon
Ballarat City Fire Station – 1120 Sturt St, Ballarat, Vic 3350
[REDACTED]

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5th July 2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

My name is Graeme Cooper. I am a Leading Firefighter working at Ballarat City Fire Station. I have been a member of the CFA for just over 20 years now with the first ten years as a volunteer firefighter with Ararat Fire Brigade then became a career firefighter in 2006 working two years at Wodonga and then the last nine years at Ballarat City.

As well as carrying out all the usual roles as a firefighter I am:

- An incremented operator of all specialist appliances on station including the Ladder Platform, Hazmat truck and BA support.
- A qualified rope operator in steep angle and high angle rope rescue.
- I carry out the role of ground observer which is responsible for tracking grass and scrub fires and floods and feeding intelligence back into the incident management teams in relation to the emergency. We also conduct impact assessments after the emergency has moved through a community.
- I am a qualified fire investigator in both bushfire and structural fires investigating the cause and origin of fires and have been very active in this role for seven years.

From our location at Ballarat with all our specialist appliances stationed at Ballarat City we support the south west corner of the state including from outer Melbourne through to the South Australian border and down to the coast.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons. Ballarat continues to grow in size and in the 9 years that I have been stationed here I have seen massive changes in the city's population, industries, commercial, transportation and tourism sectors. Residential areas of the town are booming with massive growth to the west of the town. It shows in how busy the road networks have got around the whole community compared to when I first started at Ballarat. In the years that I have serviced this community there has been very little change in the fire service for the area. When I started at Ballarat City being the only staff station in the community, the manning of the station was six personal and the station had seven appliances not including the rope rescue. Nine years later our manning has increased up to nine and we now have eight appliances to respond not including the rope rescue. In my view these numbers do not add up if you compare the number of appliances compared to number of personal and then the

number of people in the community of Ballarat that we are protecting not including covering the south western corner of the state with the specialist appliances.

I see it very important that we can now get a guaranteed two trucks with at least 7 firefighters dispatched within 8 minutes. I have seen a major drop off in the ability for our surrounding brigades to service their areas. We are constantly responding into the surrounding areas day and night where we are supposed to be supporting the local brigades and we end up being the first appliance on scene. A majority of the time these appliances will turn up on scene with only two members and often these two members do not hold the qualifications such as breathing apparatus (BA) to assist with the firefight. This then leaves us with our initial crew of four (1x officer in charge, 1 x pump operator and 2 x BA for the fire fight) to battle the fire until further backup arrives.

It is understandable that these brigades are struggling due to the workloads and life styles that people now have. People are busy. Gone are the days where employers can afford to allow their workers to leave work to respond. If they can leave work they then have the issues of getting through the busy traffic and travel larger distances in the growing cities to get to the fire station.

I believe the fire service in large towns and major city in this modern day and age should supply a much better service to the community than what we currently have. We should be able to get a much better response to any emergency in our larger cities and towns with an almost guaranteed response to any incident. I fully support the fire service reform as I see this as providing the much needed service to our communities that we all deserve.

The past couple of years especially the last 12 months have been the worst time of my career in regard to the stress from the entire industrial dispute. It has destroyed many good friendships in the local brigades and has been completely unnecessary. I am very proud to be a firefighter but now I don't like to talk about my job in my community as I don't want the confrontation from all the questions, negativity and arguments about the CFA that we now get. I can't see things improving unless there are major changes and I hope for the health of all workers and our families and the State of Victoria that changes are implemented very soon.

I appreciate you taking the time to read my submission and I thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards

Graeme Cooper

Leading Firefighter

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