



Brendan Lawson [REDACTED]

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire Service reform - Submission

1 attachment



Committee Submission BL 07072017.pdf

To whom it may concern,

Please accept my submission to the Fire Service reform inquiry.

Regards,

Brendan

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

My name is Brendan Lawson and I am employed by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) as an Operations Officer. I have been employed by the CFA for 15.5 years with a further 7 years as a CFA volunteer Firefighter (VFF).

My qualifications and endorsements include:

- Certificate II in Fire Technology.
- Certificate III in Firefighting (Operations).
- Certificate III in Firefighting (Operations).
- Endorsed as Level 3 Operations Officer, Level 2 Incident Controller (Level 3 in training), Division Commander, Sector Commander, Strike Team Leader.

I have been awarded the following whilst serving CFA and the community:

- National Emergency Medal.
- National Medal.
- CFA - 20 year service medal.

I am a resident of Armstrong Creek (Geelong) however I was brought up in a small country town in North East Victoria, Tallangatta. I have a strong family background with CFA and look back fondly of my time as a both a Junior and Senior volunteer with Tallangatta Fire Brigade before moving to Melbourne for fire service related study and to chase the dream of becoming a career Firefighter with CFA.

I am the appointed Officer in Charge (OIC) of the Geelong City Fire Brigade. The Geelong City Fire Brigade is an integrated fire brigade that consists of 75 career Firefighters and 16 volunteer Firefighters. The Geelong City Fire Brigade responded to 2466 calls for 2016/17 financial year.

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

Currently CFA is sold to the public as volunteer service supported by career Firefighters however that is far from the reality in outer metropolitan Melbourne and our regional cities. This is the case at Geelong City, 75 career Firefighters respond to 2466 calls a year and are supported by a small core group of committed volunteers.

The Geelong of 2017 is not a country town nor is just a regional city; Geelong is the 2nd largest city in Victoria with a population of 260,000 however CFA is still working in a 1958 fire service frame work (CFA act 1958). This same frame work sees on one side of an outer metropolitan street (MFB area) with the response of 7 career Firefighters who are on scene in 8 minutes to the other side of the street in a (CFA area) where the response may at times vary from suburb to suburb. This reform will resolve these issues and provide our communities the emergency response they deserve.

The proposed reform will allow for CFA the continued ability for co-located CFA volunteers to respond within Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) areas ensuring CFA volunteers will continue to support their communities. The proposed FRV legislation will standardise the way in which the CFA career Firefighters and MFB respond to fires and emergencies to the benefit of the whole community.

Surge capacity of volunteers has been widely spoken about in recent times. My belief is that this will be unchanged, if not improved under the CFA/FRV co-located model. The extra burden that is placed on our volunteers with response and training will be streamlined to a level that will allow more time for work/life/family commitments which will in essence allow the role of a CFA volunteer to be more enticing to members of the community. CFA's ability to continue to respond to major fires and emergencies will be unchanged if not improved by this reform.

My role as an Operations Officer with CFA will see no change to the service my other colleagues and I provide. My role now and into the future is to provide leadership, supervision, support, advice and management to both career Firefighters and volunteers, this will not change just by changing my employer (FRV) and who is responsible for paying my salary.

Operations Officers undertake the role of a Rostered Duty Officer (RDO) and this will also continue to provide volunteers with a daily (24/7) service just as it does now. Again no change to the service, support and advice to volunteers.

The creation of FRV will enable the bringing together of resources, including personnel, across the FRV areas of Victoria. There will be clear financial benefits for the tax payer by having a greater human resource pool to move across the state to respond to fire and emergencies and to fill positions within fire stations, districts and regions.

Another key benefit of the proposed reform is the ability for CFA volunteers to become more autonomous in the decision making, setting of direction and priorities of their brigades. An increase in funding for volunteers in the areas of training, resources and capital expenditure will enable CFA to get on with improving a brigades autonomy.

Current CFA Operations Officers, Operations Managers and Instructors will be maintained in CFA by secondment arrangements from FRV. The services that CFA currently provide volunteers will be unchanged. This reform is only directly relevant to 35 of the 1180 Fire Brigades in CFA. These 35 Brigade areas will be transitioned to FRV however CFA volunteers within these brigades will be very much encouraged to be co-located; a concept I support. This will have no effect on the other 1145 Brigades in CFA. It is also worth noting that all of the 35 Brigade areas identified are either outer metropolitan Melbourne areas or large regional cities with substantial urban risk and growth predicted in the future.

Conclusion

I cannot find the words to describe the damage that has been caused by the last 4 years of the Fire Service being front page news day after day, my career Firefighters, volunteers and colleagues have endured enough. I ask the committee to support the proposed fire service reform and bring closure to this nasty period of our lives. This closure will provide a benefit to the whole community and allow FRV and CFA to get on with protecting all of Victoria.

Thank you for your time and I do encourage you to contact me should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Brendan Lawson