



Damien Ahchow

07/07/2017 03:20 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Submission for the fire services reform
select committee

1 attachment



submission1.docx

Please find attached my submission for the fire services reform select committee.

Regards

Damien Ahchow



KEY THEMES TO COVER: •

- Who you are, what you do, where you work, what is your classification/rank? Outline your role within the fire services. Please include any qualifications including specialist qualifications and any awards. •
- Why you support fire services reform – some ideas include: o
 - o You live/work in a highly urbanised residential area that requires a modern urban fire service. This can include knowledge of population growth and increased urbanisation of your local area. o
 - o Outline any notable risks in your area, i.e. hospitals, nursing homes, industrial sites that require a modern urban fire service or a specialist/timely response. o
 - o Examples you have where response has been inadequate. o
 - o Whether you are a CFA volunteer and why you support the reform as a volunteer and why there will be no negative impact on you as a volunteer. o
 - o The impact of the ongoing industrial disputation on you and your colleagues and your desire to see it end. •
- Attach any documentation you have to support your submission (still make a submission even if you do not have supporting documentation)

I am Damien Ahchow; I am an Acting Station Officer for the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, in the Hazmat Unit. I hold the Certificate II and III in Public Safety (Firefighting and Emergency Operations). In my current role I train all aspects of hazardous materials response to MFB firefighters and officers, hazmat technicians, rescue technicians, and Ambulance Victoria paramedics. I was a volunteer firefighter with the Country Fire Authority from September 2003 until July 2011, when I joined the MFB. I was awarded the National Emergency Medal in 2012 for my contribution to the Black Saturday Fires in 2009. I served the first 6 years as a volunteer at Pearcedale Rural Fire Brigade, and I was awarded Firefighter of the year for the year 2007 for my dedication and passion for the CFA.

For much of the time that I was a volunteer at Pearcedale I was a student at university or high school which made me available during the day to respond to fire calls. There were many times when I would be the only firefighter to arrive at the fire station and due to my age, I didn't have a heavy vehicle driver's licence, and I would regularly have to radio in that we didn't have a driver to respond to the emergency. It was always very disappointing to miss a call and to fail to serve the community as we were charged to do.

I also served at Rowville Urban Fire Brigade from 2009 until 2011 when I resigned as a volunteer. At the time Rowville was a volunteer only brigade; and the volunteers trained and worked very hard to maintain their increasing call demand. During my time as a volunteer at Rowville, we had a meeting informing us that due to the number of calls we were attending, and other pre-emptive planning considerations we would be becoming an integrated fire station with professional firefighters to reduce the requirement on volunteer's time. I welcomed the move, as I was a shift worker, and I liked knowing that at any time during the day or night, when my partner was home alone, there would be highly trained firefighters responding to many emergencies in our area that would keep her safe.

I was horrified when many members began to complain about this move, as none of their complaints related to public or community safety. All of their complaints came back to their need to catch the truck or be in charge of a job. One member asked the question why we needed staff when we are trained to the same level. As a professional firefighter with 2 years less experience than I had as a volunteer I can say that statement is a complete untruth. I learned significantly more in my first 3 years from a Recruit to Qualified Firefighter than in my entire time as a volunteer.

I would like to ask that every member present think about what the fire service of the future should look like for the state of Victoria. Many areas like Rowville are no longer the country locations that they were when the fire boundaries were drawn up. The risks have changed in that time; time from smouldering fire to flash over has dropped dramatically due to the materials that are now more common within our homes. This bills should be viewed as an opportunity to protect Victorians against future disasters, not as volunteers against staff firefighters.

Thank you for your time in reading this submission.

Yours sincerely

A/SO Damien Ahchow

MFB Registered number [REDACTED]