

Damien Smeaton



Dear Fire Services Select Committee 2017,

I am a professional Firefighter with the MFB and have been employed since March 2009. I currently hold the rank of Leading Firefighter and am based at the Sunshine Fire Station. I have gained several qualifications whilst moving through the rank system within the MFB. I am a qualified Heavy/Road Rescue technician, Ship Board Firefighter, and qualified to drive Pumpers, Pumper Tankers and Water Tankers. I achieved my Cert IV in Training and Assessing through the MFB and use these skills to educate businesses throughout Victoria in Fire safety.

I live with my family in Drysdale and in the 8 years we have lived in the Bellarine community I have witnessed significant urbanisation of the area. Having permanent fire staff based at Ocean Grove is re-assuring, and I know that one guaranteed appliance would be on scene at my residence in a reasonable timeframe. However, the next permanently staffed appliance is located in Geelong and the extra distance would mean that the Firefighters from Ocean Grove might be placed in danger without a back-up crew on-scene for an extended period of time. There are several Volunteer Brigades throughout the Bellarine and they perform an excellent community service. However, depending on the circumstances that individual volunteers face, the growing community is not guaranteed a fire emergency response outside of the permanent CFA staffed stations.

When at work, MFB appliances on the fringe of the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD) regularly respond to emergencies with both permanent and volunteer CFA firefighters. There are a couple of issues that I am faced with regularly with the combined response:

- If the CFA appliance is already committed to an incident the turnout system still recognises this appliance as being available and will notify the Officer In Charge (OIC) of the next call.
- The OIC is then required to make a decision to either respond to the new call or turnout another appliance for the new incident. This creates a stressful situation for the CFA OIC and may cause a delayed response.
- Whilst this scenario is playing out I am on the MFB appliance going to the incident and for a period of time, sometime several minutes, I am not sure which CFA appliance will arrive on scene.

- If a volunteer appliance is dispatched, I am uncertain of the number of firefighters on the appliance, how far they are from being on-scene, and what their qualifications may be.

The above points raise the stress levels in the initial stages of turning out as I am wondering what the response times will be from the CFA permanent staff and the volunteer fire brigades.

The western MFD/CFA interface has become very industrial and urbanised and there are many areas with notable risks. These risks include prisons, hospitals, major road infrastructure, sizable factories/warehouses, manufacturing premises, shopping centres, rail infrastructure, and veterinary/quarantine complexes. The fire services reform will enable this interface to be reviewed and where response times are inadequate and the skills and numbers of firefighters cannot be guaranteed then suitable changes can be made. With the fire services in the current form these types of changes are unable to take place.

Finally, the impact of the ongoing industrial disputation has taken many tolls on my professional and personal career. Being used as a political football by both State and Federal politicians and being demonised through the media has been difficult at times. Having friends wanting to debate the state of play whilst at a social event and family being confused by the media reports has been unsettling. The biggest disappointment was when my wife refused to tell people that I am a Firefighter because she doesn't want to deal with the subsequent conversation. I am proud to be a Firefighter and want my family to be proud of my career and community service.

The fire services reform will be a great starting point to bring about the necessary change to the great profession of Firefighting.

Yours sincerely,

Damien Smeaton