



[Redacted]

06/07/2017 10:07 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire service reform submission

Please find attached my submission for the fire services reform.

The attached submission is not confidential but is provided as the only copy for the Select committee.

Regards,

[Redacted]



[Redacted signature block]

Protecting lives and property



This email is for official use only. The information in this communication is privileged and confidential, intended only for the use of the individual or entity named. If you are not the intended recipient, any dissemination, copying or use of the information is strictly prohibited. Any personal information in this email must be handled in accordance with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) and applicable laws. If you have received this transmission in error please inform us by return email and then



delete it immediately from your system. Submission to Select Committee in relation to Firefighters.pdf

My background.

I am a volunteer firefighter at a Rural fire brigade outside the outer metropolitan area and a career fire fighter (Senior Station Officer) at one of the busiest CFA stations (Dandenong).

I am now 44 years of age and I have been a volunteer since age 11 as a Junior member of a rural brigade and then an Urban brigade before becoming an operational volunteer firefighter. Both my father and brother have been volunteers and employees of CFA and I believe I have an excellent understanding of CFA and CFA's culture across both urban and rural brigades in country and outer metropolitan Melbourne.

As a volunteer I was one of the highest skilled members of the brigade and was awarded a number of volunteer firefighter of the year awards. Following the completion of a career firefighter recruit course, I was astounded at just how little I knew about fire fighting and emergency response. Career firefighter training delves into so much more detail compared to the training delivered at volunteers. It has been a passion of mine to pass the knowledge and experiences I gain as a career firefighter onto the volunteers, as I quickly became aware that as a volunteer I didn't know just how much I didn't know.

a. impact on fire service delivery across Victoria

The impact on fire service delivery should these reforms take effect would not degrade service delivery.

Surge Capacity

The "surge capacity" term used so frequently as being under attack is simply to strike fear into the uninformed. Surge capacity, as in CFA's ability to deploy many firefighters at short notice to large fires is in decline anyway, but not because of any reforms, simply because of a shift in society. People volunteer less across the entire volunteer sector (St John Ambulance, Live Saving, Lions clubs, children's sporting clubs, not just emergency services). Volunteers cannot leave employment as readily and cannot remain away from home or employment as long as they could a decade ago. These changes are not new and to provide surge capacity for the future CFA must look at other models. It is not the reforms which will effect surge capacity, it is a lack of change in a dying model that will cripple the surge capacity.

One model is that these reforms are endorsed and it opens the ability for CFA to tap into the community through out all FRV areas, this includes the current Metropolitan Melbourne of around 4 million people who are currently under utilised.

The current surge capacity model is built on over resourcing fire stations, then taking the only available members out of that area to fight a fire further afield. Many of these stations are becoming busier in their day to day responses and then depleting the crews to provide the surge capacity, or they cannot provide the surge capacity due to the day to day work load requirements.

A more sustainable model is to provide, for example a factory of 20 Tankers, and train volunteers, resource them and deploy this capacity without depleting local emergency response for this largely

seasonal requirement. Not unlike Forest Fire Management with “seasonal firefighters” which has been working for a considerable number of years.

The provision of increased fire and emergency response as the population grows and roads become busier is a logical step forward and consistent with every other organisation. For example, Ambulance Victoria have ‘volunteer’ ambulance officers and as the work load increased this moves to a full time model.

It is interesting to note that this model includes where a volunteer ambulance officer attends a patient, and then later a career paramedic arrives, patient care is formally handed over to the career paramedic with a higher level of training and qualification. This is completely the opposite in CFA. If this was a fire, a volunteer member with less than one years experience and only the basic bushfire minimum skills (No driving, no pump operations, no structural fire fighting, no thermal camera, no building structures, no command and control qualifications etc.), would remain in control despite a career firefighter being on scene with 20years experience, 10 years as a Senior Station Officer, completion of training courses including formal promotional assessments and a formal interview to obtain a leadership position.

A volunteer Captain is voted in to this position on popularity alone, there is no formal assessment or operational skills requirement other than ‘minimum skills’. Brigade Captains in some cases are even voted in simply because no one else wants the position.

Consider if you are having a cardiac arrest, do you want the highest trained and qualified paramedic or a person with Level 2 first aid to be control of your welfare ? Volunteer paramedics have a higher level of training than L2 first aid, however volunteer firefighters are only required to have the ‘entry level’ or basic minimum skills and it makes sense to apply the same analogy to the fire services. Career firefighter and volunteer training is not the same and until CFA enforce mandatory skills assessments for fireground management roles it should be the most qualified and competent person in the incident command/control role.

I have attended many strike teams as crew, crew leader and strike team leader and I would certainly prefer to take an all career staff strike team compared to an all volunteer strike team. Whilst not degrading volunteers, career staff are accountable and more accustomed to following direction. I would prefer to be crewed with a person who has less experience but can follow instruction and is competent in all aspects of driving, pump operation and firefighting tactics. During strike teams using the volunteer ‘surge capacity’, I have had to deal with mixed crews from only having one driver, no BA wearers, and physically unfit volunteers which all provides for an unsafe work environment. Only having one driver is impossible to manage fatigue and ensure crew safety compared to an all career crew, all members are required to drive and operate a tanker allowing for role rotations and effective welfare management.

I have even had a volunteer member attend for strike team duties with his arm in a plaster cast. As a career member, I am actually powerless to stop incompetent, unfit members from participating. There is no support from CFA management to enforce basic physical fitness or competency requirements.

There are some very good and competent volunteers, but definitely the majority of my experience in strike teams is very mixed crews.

Day to Day service delivery

As communities develop and become busier so does the workload for all emergency response. The expectation for busy urban communities is a faster and more reliable emergency response. As the road networks become busier with more traffic, traffic lights and congested roads, volunteers are unable to attend the station as quickly as they were in the past. This is no fault of the volunteers or the volunteer system, it is simply a fact of the developing world. A method to ensure an effective service delivery is the provision of a career based response model. With the development of modern building designs and the higher importance on environmental effects houses are being constructed in a more heat/cooling efficient manner, this is leading to less ventilation during a fire and a greater risk to the occupants in the event of a fire. This increases the need for not only a faster fire response model but also the need to ensure qualified and competent Breathing Apparatus and structural firefighters are dispatched.

Volunteer firefighters would still attend the station, respond to the appliances as required but do not have the pressure of having to provide a time critical response or the required minimum number of structural firefighters.

Dispatch of 7

The dispatch of 7 career firefighters has been widely publicised and widely misrepresented. The dispatch of 7 career firefighters is not to take work away from volunteer firefighters, it is to provide workplace safety. I have been to countless fires and incidents where the volunteer response failed to provide adequately skilled firefighters, and to provide a safe work environment resulting in more property loss. Firefighting is inherently high risk work, and entering into a burning building without a backup capability enroute is not a safe workplace practice. A volunteer response is impossible to guarantee an appropriate skills capability. I have attended building fires where there is only one pump operator who is also the only qualified Breathing Apparatus wearer, this results in external firefighting tactics and more property loss because I could not send only one BA wearer into a building fire and no one to safely operate the pump.

b. effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

There has always been some animosity between volunteers and career firefighters and this should not be considered new just because of the reforms. Although in recent times (last 12 months) the separation has moved to an unprecedented level.

Volunteer firefighters will and should always be a part of Victoria's emergency response, however there comes a point when the workload or skills required simply cannot be maintained in a voluntary capacity.

Hazardous Materials response and technical rescue are complex situations requiring a high degree of skill and knowledge and whilst many volunteers have the required level it should not be considered normal that all volunteers have the required level. Every emergency in recent times is 'multi agency' with VicPol, AV, CFA, MFB, SES, FFM, DELWP and this culture is now the normal business arrangements in Victorian Emergency Management. Unfortunately the volunteer culture is still so isolated and a 'must do' and 'can do' attitude and often a complete lack of understanding of other agencies and resources.

I recently attended a Technical rescue event where CFA were one of the support agencies, and after a one hour travel I arrived to find that the local brigade Captain had not been involved in the Emergency Management Team meetings and seemingly had no knowledge of what it even involved. This is a common occurrence where CFA volunteers are simply unaware of modern day emergency management structures and operating principles.

Resource allocation

CFA management has a culture of providing volunteers with what they want, just to make the issue go away, despite CFA having strategic plans to the contrary.

Such examples include, the 'cascading' of Rescue vehicles to prevent those vehicles which do bulk of the work becoming worn out. A volunteer brigade campaigned and were provided a brand new rescue outside the strategic build/replacement program. This has led to considerable repair and maintenance costs to a busier vehicle, just to keep volunteers happy.

Individuals in the upper CFA management promised a Transporter (hook lift truck) to a brigade to build a hazmat capability, outside of the strategic hazmat plan. This required CFA to apply for additional funding for a Technical Rescue transporter, simply because one Deputy Chief "gave away" another portfolio's resource.

CFA continues to provide to the vocal minority rather than to any planned or strategic values for service delivery.

CFA continue to under resource particular areas claiming funding as the main issue, and are apparently comfortable with the fact that a control agency has no capacity to provide it's legislated responsibilities. One example is the provision of Trench Rescue in the west of the state. Ballarat raised the issue and the answer was to simply remove the limited capability from Ballarat. Rather than provide the capability, CFA requested that the MFB provide the trench rescue capability for the country area of Victoria. MFB did not have sufficient trench rescue operators at that time, so they simply initiated training courses to increase their capability. These MFB training courses utilised the newly finished CFA Trench Rescue training material.

The fire service reform would bolster the service delivery for all of Victoria, if it were to ensure technical rescue was managed and delivered by FRV, and released CFA from it's obligation which it has failed in providing an adequate technical rescue capability for the state.

Leaving CFA to manage bushfires on private land and small township fires should not be seen as a bad thing and allows CFA to continue doing what it has done in the past.

Adherence to Policy

The volunteer culture is that they cannot be sacked, and they cannot do without us, and this has led to CFA being held to ransom.

The complete disregard for the law was highlighted during the VFBV sanctioned rallies though Melbourne in 2016 by driving through red traffic lights blatantly contravening the Road Rules. CFA simply will not investigate or hold volunteers to account for breaches of policy or even law.

A CFA Brigade (Lara) recently used a defibrillator on a patient, completely against the training and Ambulance Victoria advice, however they were still portrayed as heroes. The medical advice and training is quite clear that a Defibrillator must not be attached to a patient who has a pulse, however the brigade publicised that they did.

A CFA brigade (Woodend) retrieved a patient from the roof of a house using completely dangerous systems of work (by today's standard) and failed to understand that there were safer systems available. 30+ years ago it may have been acceptable, but like any and all industries safer systems have evolved.

The following is an email quote from CFA's Publication manager in relation to my concerns over the media article "[We understand that career firefighters take their own safety very seriously – as they should – but some vols would see things differently.](#)"

This highlights that CFA culture, training and knowledge although not all, many brigades are still operating with a mind set from decades ago.

c. short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision

Funding arrangements

CFA has a considerable operating budget. CFA will put volunteers and volunteering ahead of anyone and anything else including community safety.

CFA continually waste funds by inefficient allocation and a culture of "give it to everyone to keep them happy". Such as structural protective clothing, at approximately \$2000 per ensemble. This structural ensemble is provided for the protection against "flash over" during internal structural firefighting.

CFA provide this PPC to volunteers who do not have a Breathing Apparatus qualification and members who are not trained or equipped to enter a building on fire. Making this expensive PPC a uniform at a significant cost. This cost is not a once off, the PPC requires annual inspection and laundering.

This expensive ensemble is also provided to members who have a beard and plan to have a beard for the foreseeable future, who cannot wear Breathing apparatus because of the beard.

This structural PPC is not provided for warmth, as there are 'cold weather' jackets available.

Every district in CFA has its own ordering systems and processes, as a single organisation CFA still does not use bulk purchasing in all areas and chooses to use a system of multiple handing for stores items.

Until CFA can enforce its own strategic plan rather than let everyone do their own thing there will be considerable wasting of funds.

A single career fire agency will save costs on tendering of appliances and equipment which is typically more expensive than bushfire equipment.

Summary

The reform of the fire services in Victoria is long overdue. All the issues raised have been boiling away for many years, they are not new. CFA's inability to adapt with social and economic change has been a downfall including CFA's culture of a bushfire brigade and putting volunteers ahead of anything and everyone has lead to these reforms. Those members who say nothing is broken (although broken is a strong term), clearly are not aware of the ever changing society and needs of the emergency services to remain modern. There was nothing wrong with the Model T ford, but nobody drives them today as a commuter vehicle. Why?, because we prefer a safer mode of transport.

The integrated model could have worked, had CFA not tried to make the 30year old culture work in todays workplace. The work practices of any and every industry change, improve and evolve.

The CFA volunteers have spoken loud and clear, via their representative body that they wanted no Union (and therefore career firefighter) involvement, this is what the reform will deliver.