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Subject Fire Services Bill Select Committee
2017 - Submission

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Fire Services Bill Select Committee 2017 - Submission.pdf

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

Please accept my submission to the Fire Services Bill Select Committee.

*I request that the Select Committee have my submission considered, however please treat my name and identity as **confidential**.*

Thank you

Regards

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Assistant Clerk Committees
Department of the Legislative Council
Fire Service Bill Select Committee
Parliament House, Sprint Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002

07 July 2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

1. I John (Gary) Mann of 39 Albert Road, Lilydale provide this submission to the Fire Service Bill Select Committee as a public member, past CFA volunteer and as a current career firefighter serving the Victorian community.

*I request that the Select Committee have my submission considered,
however please treat my name and identity as **confidential**.*

2. I have been employed with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) for 19 years (since 1998), now serving as an Assistant Chief Fire Officer leading Central District operations within the North West Metro Region.
3. I have received the following awards;
 - National Emergency Medal ('Vic Fires 09' attending Marysville – Black Saturday)
 - National Medal (15 years' service)
 - Metropolitan Fire Brigade good conduct and service medal (15 years' service)
4. I have attained the following qualifications;
 - Graduate Diploma of Emergency Management
 - Advanced Diploma in Public Safety (Firefighting Management)
 - Nationally accredited Level 3 Incident Controller (AMSA)
 - State endorsed Regional Controller
5. My specialist qualifications include;
 - Technical rescue specialist (including road, rail, industrial, trench, tunnel, structural collapse)
 - Emergency Medical Responder
 - Strike Team Leader - Wildfire Level 3
6. I reside in Lilydale, a suburb of the Shire of Yarra Ranges. I have lived in this community for 30 years and have observed the urban growth in population and infrastructure in what used to be referred to as a small country town.

7. For 12 years (1991 to 2003) I served as a CFA volunteer in Lilydale with six of those years as an officer. In that time I attended the NSW bushfires (a 3 week campaign fire) in January 1994 and the Dandenong Ranges bushfire (where 3 lives were lost and 45 houses destroyed) in January 1997.
8. My CFA involvement has led me to a career with the MFB which I'm grateful for having the privilege to serve the community. I have worked throughout metropolitan Melbourne and the outer metropolitan boundary areas alongside many volunteer and career firefighters having developed longstanding friendships forged through a common purpose.
9. I am writing this submission in support of the proposed *Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017* for the following reasons:
10. Both career and volunteer firefighters deserve to be protected by legislation that will provide presumptive rights to cancer compensation. The evidence is overwhelming; firefighters are exposed to carcinogenetic products at fires and hazardous chemical incidents increasing their risk to cancer.
11. I have seen too many colleagues have their health effected or their lives 'cut short' without support to them and their families in what can only be described as 'heart breaking'. Victoria must catch-up to the rest of Australia's states (and many fire services around the world) to enact presumptive legislation as a moral responsibility.
12. In the last decade, eight reviews have been undertaken into Victoria's fire services. Each, including the *2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission* (where 173 lives were lost and over 2000 homes destroyed); have made it clear that the state's services are in desperate need of modernisation.
13. Victorian firefighters are operating under systems and structures that have not changed since the 1950s. As our population grows and our 'risk' environment changes, our existing fire services model is struggling to meet the contemporary needs of our communities we serve to protect.
14. Fire services must be able to adapt to Victoria's growth in outer metropolitan corridors and regional cities to combat the consequent emerging risks and hazards of these communities, otherwise lives and property will be at greater risk. For this reason I strongly support the implementation of an independent *Fire District Review Panel* to advise on the changing needs of a geographical community area.
15. The *Fire District Review Panel* (as I understand) will provide a modern risk management approach responsible as an independent panel to conduct future reviews of the boundary between fire services, based on population growth, urban development and the volume of emergency calls. This is long overdue.

16. Firefighting is a dangerous profession requiring the highest level of employed safety procedures and systems. Critical to a safe urban response by firefighters is a model that provides an 8 minute response time and 7 competently trained firefighters (having no skills gaps) on two fire trucks. This is the minimum standard currently employed by the MFB for structure fire response (as reported in the MFB Annual Report 2015-16 at a benchmark of 7.7 minutes at the 90th percentile). This maximises the potential to save lives and minimise damage to property and the environment.
17. The on-scene time of 8 minutes is critical to survivability of persons trapped inside a structure as beyond that time the compartmented area on fire is likely to reach total engulfment known as “flashover”. Equally the risk to firefighters increases exponentially each minute when trying to save lives and reduce property damage.
18. The critical requirement for a minimum of 7 firefighters is about having safe systems of work where backup crews must be on-scene before initial crews enter a burning structure. MFB procedures state that firefighters wearing compressed air breathing apparatus (CABA) must not over commit inside a structure unless a second crew is on-scene also wearing CABA providing back-up. The risk of structural collapse during a fire places firefighters at a significantly ‘high risk’ of harm or entrapment necessitating a back-up rescue crew.
19. Where persons are required to be rescued from a burning structure the mental stress and pressure on firefighters is immense where no back-up is available placing themselves at ‘high risk’ to undertake a rescue. Few could understand the emotional strain this decision places on firefighters.
20. The employment of 7 firefighters enables the first fire truck to establish:
 - an Officer-in-Charge to take control, implement safety and manage communications;
 - a pump operator of the truck to supply water through hose lines; and
 - two firefighters wearing CABA to undertake rescue and/or extinguish the fire.

The second truck assists with:

- a firefighter finding and providing water to the pump operator; and
 - two firefighters in CABA providing back-up to the rescue / fighting effort.
21. Some regions in Victoria have experienced substantial growth in the past 60 years. In conjunction with MFB the initial areas to be brought within Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) are those serviced by CFA’s 35 integrated stations. These are areas that due to population and increasing urban fire risk have necessitated stations with career staff operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

22. I have witnessed first-hand the great work of volunteers; however they cannot be expected to be constantly on call or trained to the same standard as career firefighters. I have observed on many occasions, volunteers being unable to respond to emergencies (particularly during the day) and having been a volunteer I'm acutely aware of the effect of work and life commitments. The consequences of this result in delayed response times and under crewing at the fire scene. There often does come a time where the fire service delivery model and standards being provided for a community must come under a review.
23. An independent review body to determine the service delivery model requirements is essential to appropriately address the risk environment of a growing community and its infrastructure. As stated a volunteer response is dependent on the availability of its members at the time of the call where there can be no guarantee of a primary or back-up response. A CFA volunteer response has a 6 minute delay value (excluding pager response) which means that those responding won't know if there is a failed response for at least 6 minutes. Once the failed response is known then a decision has to be determined as to whether to have another brigade paged to respond thereby starting a second 6 minute delay factor on the next brigade. This will add possibly a 12 minute plus response in addition to the extended travel of the next closest fire station.
24. The challenges of a developing urbanised risk environment through growth corridors transfers an unacceptable risk to career firefighters and the community by the current system with antiquated fire boundaries. For example, a house fire in the outer metropolitan suburbs on one side of the road will likely receive a different response yet have the same urban risks and hazards. This is to mean that in the MFB area, 7 MFB firefighters and 2 trucks will be dispatched, yet in the CFA area only 4 career firefighters will be dispatched (in some areas), or a complete volunteer response which cannot be guaranteed, or how many crew will respond. This is further complicated if CFA volunteers don't have the training competencies to safely enter a burning structure directly or as back-up.
25. The response of two career fire trucks with a minimum of 7 firefighters within an 8 minute period does not need to reduce a volunteer response. However, if volunteers are delayed or fail to respond then those career trucks will continue until such time as the volunteers sufficiently arrive on-scene. This will ensure that there are minimum numbers of firefighters on scene to safely operate, and provides support to volunteers.
26. Ultimately safe systems of work are vital in a time critical situation to protect firefighters and afford the community the best possible protection to prevent loss of life, reduce property loss, and mitigate the consequence of the event.

27. The implementation of FRV provides potential to standardise computer aided despatch (CAD) programming at Integrated Stations by dispatching not just brigades, but the correct individual trucks (general or specialist) to the right type of emergencies. To explain, CFA CAD response rules are based on a Brigade response and not by individual fire truck responses within that station. So, where a brigade's fire trucks are already committed to an emergency the CAD system on receipt of another emergency in or in support areas will default back to the same brigade leading to response delays and under resourcing. This prevents timely response of other trucks from other stations that are initially bypassed because CAD still assigns the already committed brigade.
28. During high fire danger periods surge capacity will be improved as coverage can be planned in advance with severe to extreme fire danger predictions. Through FRV there will be better access to career firefighting appliances to back fill the Integrated Stations increasing volunteer surge capacity around the state.
29. Over the last decade or so, significant public value advantages have been realised through the introduction of the Emergency Medical Response (EMR) role in career firefighter protected areas. Many lives have been saved by these firefighters dually responding with Ambulance Victoria paramedics to Priority '0' (zero) cases where patients are unconscious and non-breathing. Any future expansion of fire boundaries determined by the *Fire District Review Panel* will extend this vital service.
30. The Fire Services Reform will assist with standardisation of response, training, procurement and use of equipment. Training will particularly be enhanced through standardised training from recruits right through all promotional courses and including specialist courses.
31. The Fire Services Reform will see greater training and support for volunteers with additional Government funding to support and recruit volunteer firefighters. The Victorian Government have announced an investment of \$56.2 million to establish the CFA Support Fund. From this \$10 million will be provided to continue the successful Volunteer Sustainability Grants Program for volunteer brigade equipment and facility upgrades.
32. Career firefighters and senior CFA leadership support from Operations Officers and Operations Managers will maintain volunteer support just as it has always done, albeit through the support arrangements of FRV.
33. The Fire Services Reform has great potential to remove duplicated consultation arrangements which has historically caused delays in decisions and agreements, ie. as was experienced in the supply of modern protective firefighting clothing and equipment.

34. Supporting career and volunteer firefighters to operate independently in their respective service will improve the consultation process individually to meet their specific and desired needs without direct influence of each other.
35. The long standing industrial disputation has taken its toll on career firefighters and their families and as a senior leader of approximately 275 Central District firefighters it is my greatest belief that the Fire Services Reform introducing FRV working collaboratively with CFA will bring an end to this stressful time.

In conclusion Fire Services Reform will provide:

- significant response time improvements across Victoria;
- greater potential to save lives, reduce property and environmental damage;
- firefighters with safe systems of work compliant with procedures;
- better fire and rescue coverage in population growth corridors and regional cities;
- improved surge capacity for major emergencies and every day responses;
- greater support for volunteers through an improved service delivery model;
- support to volunteer and career firefighters to operate independently in their respective services by improved consultation to meet their specific and desired needs;
- improved public value by the extension of the Emergency Medical Response (EMR) role in career firefighter protected areas;
- an independent *Fire District Review Panel* to provide a modern risk management approach to determine fire service delivery standards into the future; and
- peace of mind to firefighters and their families by the introduction of *Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation*.

Change is very challenging and is not always easy for those involved, however with change comes opportunity. It's important we are all committed to get the best outcome for the Victorian community and I'm confident that this Fire Services Reform will support both CFA and FRV to work together to keep Victorians safe.

Thank you

Yours sincerely,

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