



James Mears [REDACTED]
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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Submission for Fire Services Reform

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

My name is James Mears

I am a Leading Firefighter with the CFA, currently stationed at Dandenong. I live in Lysterfield where the Fire service is provided by volunteers. I have been a career firefighter nearly 10 years and have served as a volunteer for approximately 6 years at Rowville fire brigade. Apart from being a Leading Firefighter I am trained in and currently practise the following specialist areas – Rope Rescue, Road Accident Rescue, Hazmat Detection, Ground Observer, Ladder Platform (42m), and EMR. I have been to many incidents across the state to put my specialist training to use including the Hazelwood Mine fire (hazmat detection), 2010/2011 floods (ground observer), countless EMR incidents, many fire using the Ladder Platform and multiple motor vehicle accidents to name a few. My experience has been wide and varied across the state.

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

- Firefighters are at greater risk of certain cancers than the general public due to the nature of fire fighting. For this reason presumptive rights compensation is vital for firefighters both volunteer and career to feel their families will be compensated if they contract one of the specified cancers.
- To provide the best and fastest emergency response for the community I live in and the community I serve. Utilising radial search to locate the closest fire appliance to respond to the emergencies, instead of using out dated boundaries drawn up by individuals. This takes away any personal preference that may be shown to neighbouring brigades that aren't close. The community gets the closest truck be it volunteer or career.
- Victoria is growing and has been for a long time. With this growth urban boundaries have expanded, and so too has the need for an increased response from firefighters. All too often volunteers have failed to respond to emergency incidents, this is no fault of their own but the ever increasing pressures family

and work commitments. By having at least 7 career firefighters responded to the fire ground guarantees the community an appropriately trained fire crew are able to tackle emergency situations safely and effectively. Currently the community is not guaranteed appropriately trained firefighters, they get who-ever is able to respond. You could get someone with years of experience, or a new member with minimal experience. This is unacceptable and needs to be changed.

- Victoria's fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this out-dated system, 35 areas are wrongly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised and residential. Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong are just some of the 35 'country areas'. The people who live in these communities often don't realise their fire coverage is from the Country Fire Authority, as they wrongly assume it is the Metropolitan Fire Brigade who cover them as they live in Metropolitan Melbourne not the country.
- Reform will assist with standardisation of career training/specialist response/response standards and equipment. Currently two fire brigades working in the neighbouring suburb (Dandenong and Mulgrave) don't even communicate with the same radios. They have one of each radio on each truck. Standardised training and standardised trucks means better operability and more efficient emergency management.
- Having all career staff employed by the one fire service enhances training and communications. It will stop the doubling up of operational and administrative areas as both career fire fighters are under the one organisation.
- Volunteer surge capacity is not affected. Volunteers are still and still will be a vital part of the Victorian fire season. Career firefighters currently support the volunteers, reform will only enhance the support given to them, and ultimately the Victorian community benefits. Volunteer support will still be provided by Operations Officers and Operations Managers, the only difference is they will be employed by FRV back to CFA.
- The primary response areas around the 35 integrated CFA stations is where the reform takes place. There is no impact on other volunteer brigades or bushfire response.
- The reform will benefit volunteers as it includes a package to assist with volunteer recruitment and retention across the CFA; and includes funding for volunteer station upgrades to help them serve the Victorian community.
- The current disputation has had a huge impact on morale at volunteer and intergrated fire stations. This can't continue, reform of the fire service will bring

about change and lift morale while re instating CFA as a volunteer only fire service

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission. If you have any further questions or seek clarification on any of the information above please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

James Mears



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