



Mark Bruechert [REDACTED]

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Submission to the Fire Services
Reform Select Committee

1 attachment



DRAFT EXAMPLE OF A SUBMISSION STRUCTURE.docx

Please find attached for your perusal, my submission regarding the Fire Services Review.

With thanks,

Station Officer Mark Bruechert,

CFA Rosebud Fire Station



By email: LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

1. I am Station Officer Mark Alexander Bruechert, currently stationed at Rosebud Fire Station, Victoria.
2. I am employed by the Country Fire Authority, commencing from February of 1988. Prior to this date, I was an active volunteer member of the CFA, serving in Regions 2 and 10.
3. For the period between January 1983 and January 1988, I was employed as a career firefighter/Station Officer in the Latrobe Valley, by the State Electricity Commission Fire Rescue Service, in their Morwell, Yallourn, Loy Yang and training divisions.
4. Volunteer member of CFA since January 1980.
5. Served 3 times as the Volunteer CFA Group Communications Officer in Eureka Group (Ballarat – 2 years), Fortuna Group (Bendigo-2 years) and Peninsula Group (Mornington Peninsula-4 years).

Certificate 4 of Firefighting Operations (AFC Level 3, also Certs 2 and 3)
 Hazmat qualified; Staging Area Manager;
 All modules and assessments passed up to and including Senior Station Officer.

Previously I gave approximately 10 years' service with Coast Guard Flotilla 5.

2. I live in Rosebud, Victoria **and work in** Rosebud at Rosebud Fire Station.

3. I also volunteer in my community (See above Volunteer CFA member service) also Southern Peninsula Amateur Radio Club (Rosebud), Dragon City Marshals Inc (Bendigo), various other community and charitable organisations.

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

I believe initial calls to fire and emergencies should be met with an immediate response by a minimum of 7 firefighters. I stress this is the absolute minimum number needed to handle initial stages of incidents and fires. Given that a standard Heavy Pumper requires a Driver/Pump operator, Officer in Charge (who will, upon arrival, become the Incident Controller for all emergencies under the control of fire services), 2 firefighters to don and wear breathing apparatus into situations so requiring. The next appliance on scene would ideally arrive WITH the first appliance, and those 3 firefighters would immediately be needed to; Assist the first pump's Pump Operator (locating a water supply, laying

hose and connecting to pumps), establishing further sectors as required by the IC, assisting and backing up the first 2 BA wearers.

These tasks will vary according to the nature and severity of the incident, but you can see how 7 firefighters are immediately required. In many cases, further appliances and crews are needed to supplement the first crews. If not needed, the IC can issue a "Stop" message to return unwanted appliances and crews, but this call can often not be made until a full assessment of the incident has been made by the IC and crews.

Providing for this minimum manning of 7 firefighters dispatched is a safer, more reliable method than is currently used by CFA integrated stations, with considerable reliance currently placed on volunteer members to respond when paged.

Regardless of how well-trained and well-intentioned those members might be, there is never any guarantee that sufficient firefighters will respond.

This places a great deal of stress and worry on the shoulders of Incident Controllers, who already have enough to consider with managing the incident or incidents themselves.

Sadly, highlighting of this particular issue by career staff is often viewed by the public (and some volunteers), as an attack on the integrity and abilities of volunteers.

But this is not the case. Our volunteers do an outstanding job within the confines of their own personal situations.

The time and effort they contribute to ensuring public safety and community protection is laudable. Never the less, this factor alone does NOT guarantee their availability for every call out.

Employing greater numbers of career firefighters is the only way to guarantee response effectiveness in larger urbanised areas.

Emotional arguments and bitter infighting will not improve the situation one iota.

The community needs to be assured that when they live in a metropolitan or heavily urbanised region and they dial 000 for Fire Brigade, the response will be fast, effective and guaranteed.

At the same time, doing so will not have any effect on current volunteers.

At my current fire station (Rosebud), our volunteer members co-respond with staff and do an outstanding job. Their fundraising efforts alone have seen the design, purchase and commissioning of a light pumper unit, with which they give sterling service to the local and surrounding communities. I am certain other integrated brigades receive similar support from their respective volunteer complements.

Re: Non-integrated volunteer brigades;

Our smaller urban areas and rural districts, where provision of paid staff is impractical and economically untenable, rely on well-trained, well-equipped volunteer emergency services. Many countries around the world do not have this luxury, but Australia, in particular the state of Victoria, are most fortunate in this regard.

Having a strong volunteer service provides Victorians with extra protection during peak periods. CFA's "surge capacity" has been much-vaunted, and rightly so, too. The addition of further paid firefighters will have no impact upon that surge capacity.

Plans to second CFA ops staff to FRV make good sense. Maintaining a solid link with our volunteer colleagues is a good way to foster relationships and build stronger operational ties. We will still be working together as circumstances dictate. Volunteer support will be maintained with operational firefighters, Ops Officers's Ops Managers etc being employed by FRV but continuing their roles through an arrangement with CFA.

As earlier stated, the recommended reform areas are around the 35 integrated stations' primary response areas – so there will be no effect on other volunteer brigades or bushfire response capabilities.

These 35 areas are now highly urbanised, with high residential and other risks. A number of them have grown rapidly from semi-rural and rural communities, to become highly-populated, urbanised, industrialised and trafficked regions.

They have, for all intents and purposes, outgrown their reliance on volunteer emergency services.

Yet many of them lie in areas where necessary zoning changes have not taken place.

We know that a number of public enquiries have been conducted, and all have recommended the boundaries be altered to reflect changing needs, yet this has NEVER happened.

How, in these days of increased risk awareness and safety promotions, has this been allowed to remain unchallenged and unaltered?

On a closer inspection, it is not just regional change that is needed.

Currently, MFB, CFA, other agencies as well as by extension, the general public, suffer due to inefficiencies in fire service practice. Non-standard equipment, fittings, hose couplings, procedures, vehicles, lighting, protective equipment, terminologies, rank structures, etc. etc., all contribute to the slowing of operations and the retardation of progress in areas of public safety. Combining MFB and CFA career staff into one universal service would allow for rationalisation of much equipment and facilities.

This must surely translate into monetary savings of a not insubstantial amount.

Specialist response equipment and vehicles could also be better placed and utilised, than is currently practiced.

The reform will assist by standardising career training/specialist response/response standards and equipment etc. In fact, the number of benefits, many known, some still unknown, far outweigh any perceived disadvantages.

- The current disputation has had an incalculable negative effect in our workplace. It has dominated discussion and caused ongoing grief and suffering for career staff. Constant exposure to the negative views expressed in social media outlets, news and media services and by the general public (many of whom pass comment based upon emotion rather than informed, objective reasoning), has had a grinding-down effect on our health and our operational effectiveness. We need public assistance and co-operation to do our jobs, but performing in the glare of negative public sentiment makes our jobs harder and is totally soul-destroying. And it goes without saying, that these awful effects have flowed on to, and have badly affected, our families and friends.

I cannot understand claims made in the media and on social platforms, that volunteers will be badly affected by any moves to rationalise boundaries and improve services. The reform will actually benefit volunteers as it has included a package to assist with volunteer recruitment and retention across the CFA. We have also been told it includes funding for volunteer station upgrades and ongoing modernisation of vehicle fleets.

Example from my experience, demonstrating failure in the current structure:

At 0409 hours on the 29th June, 2017, my shift was alerted to a reported structure fire in the nearby township of Rye. We responded within the required 90 seconds, arriving on scene approximately 5 minutes later. In transit we were advised via radio by Vicfire that multiple calls had been received. Upon arrival we were presented with a residential unit fully involved in fire. Ours was the first appliance to arrive, and we immediately initiated an initial size-up and an aggressive external attack, with 2 career firefighters in breathing apparatus manning 2 x 38mm hoselines. I instructed one of my firefighters to switch her attack to stop the impingement of flames onto the next property, which she did, narrowly avoiding damage to that premise. I urgently needed to get a fire attack happening at the rear of the premise, but entry into the house was not possible due to the extensive spread of fire and failing roof members. A short time after, the local brigade arrived and their OIC asked me what else was required. I told him I needed rear access, asking how many BA wearers he could supply. He answered "None". I then requested Vicfire respond a further volunteer brigade, but on their arrival they could supply only 1 qualified BA wearer. I then had my own brigade's volunteers paged to respond with BA wearers, but the initial page call was accidentally sent to the members' "Administrative" circuit and only several responded to our station. A radio call by one of these members alerted me to the situation, so I then requested Vicfire page a second time, this time making sure they sent the call out to Rosebud volunteers' "Emergency" circuit. All these actions and movements took time, a situation which could have been averted had we been able to respond 2 appliances and crews upon receipt of call. I later asked the local brigade's OIC where his crew members were, and why he could only respond a few firefighters into his own CBD. He advised me some of his members had earlier attended a social function where, having consumed alcohol, they had made themselves unavailable for callouts. I will state at this point, their sense of responsibility is admirable. They have private lives and should be able to go out and enjoy themselves. But herein lies one of the weaknesses with our system. So having sufficient numbers of trained, on-duty firefighters at nearby Rosebud would have covered the local brigade in times when members were otherwise unavailable. Again, these comments are not criticisms of the volunteer members. They simply highlight weaknesses in the system.

I could raise many similar incidences witnessed in my 30 years of CFA career service, but that is not the point of this statement. I merely offer a single recent example as a way of illustrating a situation which occurs over and over again.

Thank you for reading my submission, I remain yours faithfully,

Mark Alexander Bruechert
 Station Officer 14087
 CFA Rosebud Fire Station
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