



Mark Collins [REDACTED]
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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire Services Reform Submission

Good afternoon .

Please find attached my submission to the Fire Services Reform Select Committee

Regards



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Protecting lives and property



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Mark Collins - Submission to Fire Services Reform Committee 2017.docx

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

- My name is Mark Collins and I am employed by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) as an Operations Officer. I have been employed by the CFA for 22 years with a further 7 years as a Volunteer Firefighter coming through the ranks as a junior then senior member before this employment.
- My qualifications and endorsements include;
 - Diploma Firefighting Management (Supervision)
 - Diploma of Management
 - Certificate IV in Training and Assessment
 - Certificate IV in Firefighting (Operations)
 - Certificate III in Firefighting (Supervision)
 - Endorsed as Level 3 Operations Officer, Level 2 Incident Controller, Division Commander, Sector Commander, Strike Team Leader & Staging Area Manager.
 - Endorsed in Structural, Bushfire and Vehicle Fire Investigation and Endorsed Fire Investigation Team Leader.

- I have been awarded the following whilst serving CFA and the community
 - National Medal
 - CFA 20 year service medal

I live in Geelong and I am currently the Operations Officer responsible for Brigades within the Leigh Group and also the Geelong West Fire Brigade all of which are fully Volunteer brigades.

Current CFA legislation states words to the effect of "CFA is a volunteer service supported by career firefighters". This may have been the case back in 1958 when this legislation was drafted but it is clearly not the case now.

In the Geelong area career firefighters respond to and manage approximately 80% of the incidents that CFA are called to.

My observation over the past 22 years as a career firefighter is that volunteer availability is continuing to decline.

There are significant pressures on our community, we live in an era where we seem to be continually tied to our jobs, requirements seem greater on individuals and free time is not as readily available to most people.

In Rural areas some communities have declined due to changes in farming practices (larger machines and share farming mean smaller family run farms are disappearing) whilst other Regional Centres are booming due to decentralisation and outer urban growth.

This creates a scenario where we have larger call volume, greater complexities in relation to Emergency Management and often the same few available people doing the majority of the work - with an ever increasing workload (the same handful of people, regardless of the numbers on the brigade books)

Sadly, due to opportunistic point scoring by unscrupulous politicians, the fire services have become a political football and there is great potential for the need for fire service reform to be missed while the politicians play their games.

Coincidentally the damage that has been caused by these politicians has broken the unwritten rule of CFA being apolitical and polarised factions within the organisation, causing untold damage to working relationships. It really saddens me to say that CFA is badly broken, and in many places I doubt it can be fixed without changes in legislation.

In the urban areas of the State, we need to change the way in which we do business, we need to ensure that we have a guaranteed response and to minimise the time between when someone calls for help and the fire truck arrives. To put it into perspective, the difference between arriving pre and post flashover of a compartment (room fire) is literally the difference between life and death.

This is the difference between a 90 second response time and a six minute (or longer) response time.

We cannot expect Volunteer brigades to be providing levels of service delivery to major regional centres at the detriment to their own personal welfare and at the cost of service delivery to the community. These areas should be covered by career firefighters.

I mentioned earlier that the Catchment that I manage is of fully Volunteer brigades. These people are motivated intelligent and capable people. In their own right, there are some highly efficient and experienced people within this cohort, and for the majority of the people within my patch – the tin shed brigades, the creation of Fire Rescue Victoria will have absolutely no impact on them at all.

In relation to my Urban Brigade, the reform will allow for the continued ability for volunteers to respond within Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) areas as appropriate to provide the required service delivery based on risk.

The requirement to respond will be based on the actual needs of the community and not the outdated CFA response model. The legislation will ensure the required number of firefighters and their associated competencies are responded allowing volunteers to respond as their time and work requirements allow.

Further, this will improve the ability for CFA as an organisation to focus on actual areas of deficiency in relation to response, training and community engagement within identified brigade areas.

If the fire service reform is managed well:

- We have a great opportunity to have an enhanced fire service, with capability and capacity.
- Volunteer and Career Firefighters can continue to work side by side on the fireground
- Surge capacity – particularly for larger and long duration incidents should be maintained (and possibly enhanced, due to interoperability and less pressure on volunteer members to attend excessive call rates)
- Reduced response times will save lives.

The 1958 model of fire service deliver has in the past twenty years, been overrun by population growth and urban sprawl and it is time to stop holding the fire service together with bits of fencing wire and string with a she'll be right attitude – because it won't.

We have an opportunity to start again in 2017 with a fit for purpose fire service, a modern and contemporary service that is built to accommodate future growth and protect the community properly.

Its time for change!

Thank you for your time and I do encourage you to contact me should you seek clarification or require further information.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Collins

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