

**Matthew Ebbage**

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire Service Bill Select Committee
Submission - Matthew Ebbage

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

Dear Committee.

My name is Matthew Ebbage and I am a member of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. based at Thomastown Fire Station I currently hold the rank of Leading Firefighter and have been a firefighter for 8 years.

I am sure you will see a number of submissions that more eloquently speak to the need for fire service reform and the need to modernize a service that is in many ways stuck in the 1950's, but for me, the most important people requiring this change are the communities which we serve.

1. In the modern society in which we live, if someone calls for assistance from the fire brigade, they should be guaranteed a response. Unfortunately, under the current situation, there is no obligation for CFA volunteers to respond, and if the call needs to go to a second or third brigade, the time it takes to get "on scene" can be critical. This is not a criticism of volunteers, but a reflection on the reality of life.

2. As a firefighter on the border of the Metropolitan Fire District I have seen too many times the lack of a viable response (insufficient firefighters or insufficiently trained firefighters) from volunteer brigades, who often downgrade a professional response in order to maintain their control of firecalls and their response area. This puts the public at risk, and it is unacceptable.

3. Having a professional fire service that can grow with population and infrastructure is vital. Currently there are many high risk industrial areas that do not have sufficient fire coverage from professional firefighters with sufficient specialist training (Hazmat, Aerial appliances etc.) to

handle the risk profile associated with these areas.

4. Similarly, in residential area, having a 90 second response from professional firefighters can only be beneficial to the community. An example of this is the EMR program that ensures heart attack victims get a response from appropriately trained (with continual skills maintenance) firefighters, along with the Ambulance Victoria assets.

I personally have been involved with three “saves” having performed CPR and defibrillated patients. Having then gone on to meet these people and their families after they recover is one of the most satisfying moments in my life. Due to the inability of volunteer brigades to respond as quickly as professional firefighters, the chance of survival in these circumstances cannot be replicated.

5. This 90 second response is also critical when fighting fires. The goal of being “on scene” in 7.7 minutes is also critical when it comes to containing a house fire to the room of origin and preventing a flashover. A flashover is a situation where the contents of a room and the products of combustion (smoke and toxic gases) reach the temperature of instantaneous combustion, causing greater risk to both occupants and firefighters. There is also a greater loss of property and infrastructure the longer there is in any delay in firefighting operations. This again is not a criticism of volunteers, but the reality of life for people that work, have families and other commitments.

6. Having one professional fire service that trains, operates and works in a coordinated and standardized manner can only improve firefighters and benefit the community. The fact that there will be approximately 3000 professional firefighters in one organization will provide the ability to deploy a similar surge capacity if required for both significant and long duration events.

7. The State Government has promised \$100 million dollars to the CFA in the event that this legislation is passed will only benefit volunteer firefighters, their training and equipment. This will ensure that communities that don't have a professional response (due to location, population or risk) still get the best response the state can afford.

In conclusion, I must commend this legislation for the benefit it provides to community safety.

While it may not be perfect in everyone's eyes, it does provide a platform for well overdue reform of a sector that has been mired in the past by those with vested interests, a desire to empire build or for self-adulation.

With kind regards,

Matthew Ebbage

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