

**Kirra Vanzetti**

---

**From:** MITCHELL, Glenn [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, 30 June 2017 3:57 AM  
**To:** LCSC  
**Subject:** Submission regarding the Fire Services Reforms

Ladies and gents,

I am a Leading Firefighter with the MFB, stationed at Fire Station 22 (Ringwood) and along with my core role as a Firefighter, I am a Teleboom operator, Urban Search and Rescue Technician and Trench Rescue Technician. I am also an Army Reservist Major specialising in Logistics and Operations Management with experience working on operations in Australia (response to the 2009 Victorian Fires), East Timor, the UAE and Afghanistan.

This email contains a number of noteworthy points on why the fire service reforms are required, and will hopefully place weight on having appropriately qualified personnel who are held to account for their actions protecting life and property in metropolitan areas.

**Point 1 – Misleading information to the comms centre putting lives at risk in order to better their stats.**

The following is an extract from an email I sent to my hierarchy and OH&S personnel on 5th December 2016:

*"On the evening of 4th December 2016 at 1810h, TB22 (the appliance I was on) was turned out with PT26 for Firecall 3188,"reported smoke issuing from unit 20/36 Elmhurst Rd Bayswater". Two volunteer appliances were also turned out as it fell within their Turnout area. TB22 approached the scene from Canterbury Rd (in an easterly direction), turning right onto Bayswater Rd (southerly direction). Upon turning right into Elmhurst Rd (westerly direction) at 1818h, I observed the second Bayswater appliance (BAYST1) proceeding north along Bayswater Rd towards Elmhurst Rd. As we pulled into Elmhurst Rd, I overheard BAYST1 booking "on scene", even though they were currently behind us and yet to turn into Elmhurst Rd. The incident was towards the western end of Elmhurst Rd, over 1 minute away from Bayswater Rd (BAYST1's location at the time). TB22 booked "on scene" at 1819h upon physically arriving at the address of the incident as per our SOPs, with BAYST1 following closely behind.*

*This is not an isolated occasion, with many volunteer appliances in the eastern suburbs and elsewhere booking "on scene" prior to physically arriving on scene so as to better their turnout stats, however at the potential cost of decreased community safety. This is something we as professional Firefighters are unable to approach the volunteers in question about directly, as they would likely perceive this as bullying and complete a CFA Safe, adding to outlandish claims of bullying and an Anti-volunteer attitudes amongst professional Firefighters.*

*It is disappointing for us to see Volunteers purposely making false and misleading radio communications, particularly when this information could be looked at in some detail at a Coroner's Court in the event there was a fatality at the incident, or worst still, a crew already on scene may direct certain actions of Firefighters with the understanding that there are back up crews on scene. The only reason I can see for them to give such misleading communications is to better their station's turnout times.*

*I hope that this information may provide you with an insight into another occasion where Firefighters have made false radio communications."*

As mentioned, this is not an isolated occurrence, and where MFB and Career CFA personnel are held to account in service delivery, the volunteers are not. The reason why volunteer Firefighters often book 'on scene' prior to arrival is so their SDS (Service Delivery Standards) can be met. In this one case, they conveniently booked on scene just under 8 minutes (the required on scene time for a station like theirs). MFB trucks are GPS tracked and hierarchy have visibility on where appliances are when they communicate messages such as 'on scene', however CFA trucks are not, which allows them to get away with such ploys. What is most troublesome about CFA volunteer Brigades

doing this is that the other appliance on scene could hear of the second truck arriving (volunteers) and commit firefighters inside the burning building to effect a rescue, putting their lives at risk.

The proposed restructure would seek to have a greater number of career appliances covering these outer metropolitan areas who will be held to account and would not have to lie about their turnout times as they would be reaching these targets a vast majority of the time.

### **Point 2 – Individual response to incidents.**

There have been a few occasions over the years where I have responded to a Firecall, only to have a well-meaning CFA Volunteer arrive on scene in their personal car with nothing but their turnout uniform (no BA, no breaking gear, no ladders, no fire extinguishers etc), as it was quicker for them to do that than to get to the station and respond in the truck where they would have all the gear they require to deal with the incident safely. Whilst I have not experienced it first hand, I have heard from many individuals of CFA volunteers in urban areas responding in their personal car with a CFA radio, and responding to VicFire indicating for the oncoming appliances to stop, without having the appropriate equipment on hand to ensure that the incident is safe prior to making that decision. This is not best practice and is not what an urban response requires. An urban response requires suitably qualified groups of individuals to respond in a designated appliance with all the gear required to protect life and property, not an individual with a uniform and good will self-responding without proper regards for OH&S and community safety.

### **Point 3 – Assignment Rules based on personal preferences and not on what is best for the community.**

Each MFB Station and CFA Integrated Station is provided with their turnout area by their hierarchy with due consideration as to the reasonable area that they could cover. Further to this, the hierarchy select which appliances will deploy to a Firecall in each particular area taking into consideration which appliances can respond more expeditiously. What this gives the community is the quickest responding appliances to their premise and thus a greater chance of saving life and property. This is not the same for the CFA Volunteer Brigades who are able to select who responds into their area to assist with a Firecall. Where this system fails, is that individual Brigades will put personal grudges ahead of what is best for the community. An example of this is with the Lilydale Volunteer Fire Brigade(outer Eastern Melbourne). The hierarchy at the Lilydale Volunteer Fire Brigade had a falling out with Chirnside Park Volunteer Fire Brigade which resulted in Lilydale changing their assignment rules so that Chirnside Park was not responded into their area. Instead, they selected Montrose Volunteer Fire Brigade to respond (a further 6 minutes down the road). This puts the community at risk, by refusing the nearest supporting Brigade from responding and has the potential to cost lives. A future FRV area covering metropolitan Melbourne and larger regional towns who have dictated to them responses based on what was best for the community, not based on who gets on with who.

Another similar issue up until recently has involved the Boronia CFA Station (Integrated) and Bayswater Volunteer Fire Brigade, whereby Bayswater changed their SDS to stop Boronia responding into their area, despite Boronia's response into Bayswater's area providing the community with a guaranteed response and an EMR capability. This has recently been eased, with Boronia career staff being able to respond into Bayswater's area for EMR calls as Bayswater does not have this capability. On a side note, as it currently stands, there is not a single area of Bayswater that cannot be reached by either Boronia (career CFA), Ringwood (MFB) or Croydon (MFB) within 8 minutes normal road conditions (this is obviously quicker with lights and sirens). Thus, there is no real reason as to why Bayswater's turnout area could not be covered solely by current career stations, yet it remains as a legacy from the last time reforms were conducted, and prior to Bayswater becoming an industrial hub of the Eastern suburbs.

### **Point 4 – Some CFA Volunteer Fire Brigades do often meet community standards – whilst disobeying regulations.**

Bayswater Volunteer Fire Brigade is one volunteer Brigade that consistently meets its SDS. This is largely due in part to having very highly dedicated volunteers who have a roster to ensure the station is manned 24/7. This is despite disobeying CFA direction that volunteers are not to sleep in CFA Brigades (there is nothing covering them in the OH&S Act and volunteer stations are not designed for this purpose). I have not been within the station myself as there has been no requirement, however Boronia's A Platoon Firefighters had to go there to refill BA cylinders. Whilst in the station, they opened up an incorrect door and found beds set up (very much against CFA regulations). This would not be an isolated occurrence, with a number of other CFA Brigades having similar setups to ensure a

more rapid response. These stations such as Bayswater are not zoned for living, and whilst they are allowed kitchenette style cooking to prepare toast and other snacks after a Firecall, they are not zoned like career CFA Stations and MFB Stations to be lived in 24/7.

**Point 5 – Some Volunteers despite all efforts are unable to respond at times, leaving the community in Metropolitan areas with a delayed or no response.**

There are numerous occasions whereby a Volunteer Brigade fails to respond within an urban area. This could be for a number of reasons (working, prior family commitments, not within the area, no-one qualified to drive is available, call does not seem exciting or significant enough). What career Fire Stations provide is a 24/7 guaranteed response (essential in Metropolitan areas to protect life and property) no exceptions. Where one career truck is occupied at another call, the Firecall will go to the next closest appliance, often with other trucks moving up to cover the station's turnout area. What you do not see from career fire services is a no response.

The following are just some occasions where PT26 (Croydon's Pumper Tanker – MFB) have responded into CFA areas and there has been a non-response from other appliances (CFA Volunteer Brigade trucks):

- Call 03911 on 09 Jun 2016 – Boronia career staff and The Basin Volunteer Fire Brigade were responded to a car accident with 2 persons trapped and one 78 year old unconscious and not breathing. The incident was located a couple of hundred metres from The Basin Volunteer Fire Brigade Station and the call came through at 1201 h (by pager to CFA volunteers). Whilst Boronia career staff and PT26 (MFB Croydon) responded immediately, at 1207 h The Basin Volunteer Fire Brigade had still not responded and at 1208 h Boronia requested an alternate appliance. The Basin eventually responded at 1209 h, with a second truck from The Basin turning out at 1224 h (23 minutes after the call was made). This is not uncommon to find CFA Brigades unable to respond in metropolitan Melbourne due to volunteers having competing priorities. It was fortunate that career Firefighters from Boronia were able to respond and get there to provide assistance to the two individuals who were involved in the crash and required medical attention.
- Call 10692 on 15 Dec 2016 –Boronia career staff and a number of CFA Volunteer Firefighters responded to a fire at a Pharmaceutical Factory in a CFA area. The call came through at 0436 h (by pager to CFA volunteers). Whilst a number of trucks (career staff and one volunteer truck) responded, at 0443 h (7 minutes later), The Basin Volunteer Fire Brigade had failed to respond and Boronia's career staff requested an alternate appliance to attend. PT26 (MFB Croydon) was responded as they would provide a guaranteed response (albeit delayed in this case due to the delay in finding out The Basin was unable to respond).

There are many other times that The Basin and other volunteer Brigades located within Metropolitan Melbourne have failed to respond, putting both life and property at risk. What all metropolitan areas require is a dedicated fire service that will respond within 90 seconds 24/7 with sufficiently qualified personnel to conduct work safely. It is the service the community expects and deserves.

**Point 6 – Ownership of areas and the threat of them being lost.**

It is also worth noting that shortly after the State Government's announcement into the Fire Services reforms, a senior member from The Basin Volunteer Fire Brigade sent an email to all members saying that they all must try and do better to meet SDS (get to the station, onto a truck and to the incident quicker), otherwise there was a risk they could lose their turf to a future FRV as part of the redrawing of boundaries. What this highlights is not an uncommon occurrence, whereby volunteers take ownership of an area and put so much of their spare time into being a volunteer Firefighter that they will do anything to not lose their shed (a large part of their social life and identity), despite the community being denied the best service possible.

**Point 7 – Accountability and level of service – different standards for different people.**

It is quite widely known that the tiniest indiscretion from an MFB or career CFA firefighter will lead to disciplinary action being undertaken, including their sacking. And rightly so, if what they have done puts the organisations reputation at risk, or even worse, puts life and property at risk. What is known less is that the CFA volunteers are held to a different level of account. Following Black Saturday, both the MFB and CFA have been working closely to try and align Joint Standard Operating Procedures (JSOPs). This has been fraught with issues as aligning the two

organisations, as they are today, proved to be quite difficult. Case in point being the attempted standardisation of driving. A big sticking point with the creation of the driving JSOPs involved the agreed BAC limits. Where the MFB and CFA career firefighters have to have a BAC of 0.00, the CFA volunteers were permitted some alcohol in their system and were not willing to change their procedures to force volunteers responding to Firecalls to be free of alcohol. As it currently stands, MFB and CFA career firefighters know when they are rostered on, and ensure that they have no alcohol in their system when they are working as firefighters. Volunteers are permitted to have alcohol in their system when responding as a firefighter, which means they could be having a can or two of alcohol at a BBQ when their pager goes off, and get behind the wheel of their car, race to the fire station, get dressed, jump behind the wheel of a truck and respond to the Firecall with alcohol in their system.

A few years ago, one of the Lieutenants at Lilydale Volunteer Fire Brigade had his pager go off whilst he had been socialising. He stopped what he was doing, got into his car, raced to the station to get in the truck, jumped behind the wheel of the truck and responded to the Firecall under the influence. On the way to the Firecall, he was involved in a small accident with a car and proceeded to the incident regardless. Upon return to the fire station, he was met by police who were investigating the recent crash involving the fire truck and then after testing, discovered the firefighter had alcohol in his system. If this had been an MFB or CFA career firefighter, they would have been severely disciplined or sacked, however as he was a volunteer, his punishment was that he was unable to be the Captain of the Brigade for a set number of years. A mere slap on the wrist for something that could have cost lives.

Career firefighters are held to account for their actions and have to hold a higher standard in line with community expectations. And this is what the urban community (and likely all of Victoria) expect.

#### **Point 8 – Volunteers chasing the big job and forgetting the bigger picture – potential misuse of the surge capacity.**

I reside in the Yarra Valley, an area that was hit by the Black Saturday Bushfires and which still bears the scars today. The community get anxious on high fire danger days as there is always the risk that a fire will once again devastate the area. During one such day last summer, I was made aware by some volunteers in my town (Healesville) that they were going to be part of a Strike Team which was standing by the trucks to quickly and efficiently put a fire in the area out before it gets worse and causes loss of life and property. Hearing this is such a huge relief for a landowner in the Yarra Valley, particularly when I myself am working and cannot be at home to help protect my family and property. On this day, things were relatively quiet in the Yarra Valley (I must point out that things can change rapidly on high fire risk days), however other areas of the state were not faring as well, with a significant fire in progress north of metropolitan Melbourne. Upon hearing this, the Yarra Valley Strike Team proceeded an hour's drive away to help their fellow Firefighters at the known fire (a very noble thought), instead of protecting their assigned area. It was not long before a fire started to the north of Wandin (in the Yarra Valley). With the allocated Strike Team no longer in the area, the fire took hold and spread rapidly in a southerly direction. It took another Strike Team from elsewhere and additional assets to finally bring the fire under control, when the designated Strike Team could have achieved this quicker and with less damage to property if it had just stayed and looked after their allocated area. This occurrence is again not uncommon, with many volunteers taking up the call to assist others, however forgetting the role they have been designated to play. This can wreak havoc on the areas they were meant to look after, with greater loss of life and property.

The surge capacity, which is mentioned quite a bit as the reason why the CFA cannot be split into its different roles, is often comprising of those more senior, experienced and qualified individuals from the respective Brigade (often from urban areas). When a Strike Team deploys elsewhere, it takes critical appliances from the metropolitan area as well as critical firefighters who are trained in structure firefighting and internal search and rescue. What this means for those residents in these metropolitan area is that they are not guaranteed that those appliances and personnel who remain are appropriate to assist with the type of incidents found within a metropolitan area, which has the potential to risk life and property. A restructure should seek to have metropolitan Melbourne and large regional centres covered by the FRV, with the CFA looking after the 'Country' areas. What some fear is that by changing the boundaries and having career firefighters in areas that warrant that level of coverage, those volunteers at Brigades that fall within the FRV area will leave and take with it the surge capacity.

It is worth noting that outside of the MFB, I am an Australian Defence Force Logistics and Operations management specialist. I have looked into the viability of the following CFA model for those Brigades which may fall within a future FRV area and its measure in increasing Victoria's surge capacity. My proposal seeks to take the positives from

the Defence Reserve capability of pooling like-minded personnel from regional centres and metropolitan cities to create capability for Australia, and plug it into a future CFA construct that my forecasts indicate would actually increase volunteer numbers and not reduce it like is being reported by many. Granted the volunteers would not be doing the same as they are now, with FRV covering those area's firefighting requirements. It would however free them up to focus on their surge capability. As an ADF Officer, I am often tasked with solving complex problems involving manning and capability and instead of merely pointing out flaws in other's plans, seek to look at alternative changes that would seek to enhance service delivery.

The proposal seeks to create CFA Training Brigades, much like an Army Reserve unit, dotted around urban areas of Victoria which would likely fall within a future FRV area. These Training Brigades would seek to pool resources from neighbouring existing CFA Brigades in areas covered by FRV and do away with the current requirement to have volunteers reside or work within 4 minutes of the station in order to meet current Service Delivery Standards and therefore volunteer as a firefighter. This will open up the ability for someone who resides or works outside of this 4 minute window to volunteer as a firefighter. For example, a Training Brigade at Bayswater (Eastern suburbs of Melbourne) could pool resources from current Brigades at Boronia, Mooroolbark, Lilydale, Chirnside Park, Wonga Park, South Warrandyte, Warrandyte, Montrose and The Basin (with these Brigade's day to day fire fighting being undertaken by a smaller number of FRV Firefighters at strategic locations to cover these areas completely) and allow those willing to drive the distance (say from Blackburn, Box Hill or as far away as Collingwood or Hawthorn) to parade at Bayswater on a Tuesday evening and Sunday morning (much like the volunteers currently do) and train in the CFA's specialty capability of Bushfire firefighting. There are many citizens who reside in the current Metropolitan Fire District and who would love to be able to volunteer as a firefighter, and such a construct would allow for these individuals to give back to the greater Victorian community through volunteering in one of these Training Brigades. By focusing on the core capability of the CFA, and not on every aspect of firefighting as is currently done, the future urban CFA would have an even greater Bushfire firefighting capability that if effectively managed and overseen by suitably trained and knowledgeable individuals, would create a better trained and better equipped surge capacity for all Victorians and a potential capability to deploy interstate or overseas.

When a day is anticipated to be of a high fire danger rating, as designated by the CFA Chief Officer, available personnel from the Training Brigade could place their name on a Strike Team list and muster at the Training Brigade (in this case at Bayswater) on the morning of a high fire danger period and take their place on a Strike Team truck. This would also ensure a planned response will include an even spread of skill levels so as to provide a greater response capability, better harnessing strengths and mitigating weaknesses of individuals to create effective teams. When/if a fire requires Victoria's surge capacity, these Training Brigades could deploy these Strike Teams within 90 seconds to anywhere in Victoria in order to support the firefighting efforts of those rural/country CFA Brigades, whilst also acknowledging that those urban areas they are deploying from are being provided with sufficient protection from allocated FRV firefighters. It will also ensure that a roster could be managed amongst all the available volunteers to ensure an even spread of individuals throughout the campaign, and not a mass surge at the start, petering out to a small dedicated group with no other commitments as is often the case today (the Hazelwood Mine Fire is a perfect example of this).

I hope you will look closely at the construct of a future CFA and FRV which seeks to bring out the core strengths of each organisation whilst ensuring the community is provided the fire service they deserve.

**Glenn Mitchell | Leading Fire Fighter | Ringwood Fire Station A Platoon**  
**Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board**  
 272 Maroondah Hwy, Ringwood, VIC, 3134.



*The MFB is committed to minimising its impact on the environment.  
 Please consider the environment before printing this e-mail.*

\*\*\*\*\*  
**WARNING**  
*This email and any attachment may contain confidential information. If you are not the intended recipient you are not authorised to copy or disclose all or any part of it without the prior written consent of the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board.*  
 \*\*\*\*\*