



[REDACTED]
07/07/2017 06:12 AM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Submission regarding the Fire
Services Reform

1 attachment



Fire Service Reform submission.rtf

Hello,

I wish to submit the attached document for consideration by the Fire Services Bill Select Committee.

I would like my name and contact details to remain confidential, which is why they are not in the attached document.

My contact details are:

[REDACTED]

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

To: The Secretary,
Legislative Council Select Committee
(Fire Services Bill)

A Submission regarding the proposed fire services reform in Victoria.

I am an operational firefighter currently employed by the MFESB, located at Pascoe Vale fire station (Station no. 6) and holding the rank of Leading Firefighter.

I have been operational on the front line of fire service delivery for approximately five and a half years. During this time, I have also been stationed at locations that have a response area overlapping those of the CFA and have worked with both full time and volunteer CFA firefighters. I have also worked with CFA volunteers during deployments to areas such as Moyston, Stawell and Hazelwood.

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

1. Changes in population/demographics:

In the many years since the boundaries between the urban (MFB) and rural (CFA) response areas were last defined, larger regional centres and outlying areas of Melbourne have become greatly more urbanised. These areas are currently partially or fully served by volunteers, but have no practical differences with many suburbs of Melbourne that are served by full time career firefighters, in stations that are manned around the clock.

On occasion, volunteer brigades can have difficulty in responding in a timely manner. This is through no failing on their commitment or skills, but due to the nature of volunteering; jobs, other commitments, being out of the area etc.

All large, highly urbanised areas deserve the same timely response as those solely served by full time fire stations. I have personally been to multiple incidents where a matter of a few minutes would have likely made the difference between the partial property damage experienced, and complete property loss.

Response times and consistency matters!

2. Safety for employed firefighters.

In urban fire situations it is important that crews first arriving know that more firefighters with the required skills (eg breathing apparatus proficient) are already on the way. This gives the first crew the confidence to enter burning buildings to perform search and rescue, as there will shortly be additional people for backup in the event of a problem in the highly dangerous environment of a fire. This also allows the first crew to aggressively attack the fire by conducting internal fire fighting, greatly reducing the chance of the fire spreading quickly to other parts of a structure, or nearby structures.

Having a guaranteed response of at least 7 fully qualified firefighters is important!

3. Culture of animosity:

The latest round of EBA bargaining has seen a rise in number and viciousness of attacks on professional firefighters by some volunteers, particularly on social media. It has felt like every week, I would see and sometimes personally experience people in my profession called bullies, thugs, scum, puppets, cowards and liars.

My partner could also no doubt tell you how often I have come home and felt I needed to talk though some of the nasty and untrue things being said about my profession in the paper.

It has led to me becoming fairly disheartened about my job, which I love. All I want is to

concentrate on doing the best I can at helping the community, but I am subjected to frequent discussion regarding the current status of negotiation, what has been misrepresented (or just outright lied about) in the media and online, and how I am supposedly denigrating and attempting to get rid of volunteers by wanting the community to have appropriate fire service coverage.

All these things take a toll. It will be decades, if at all possible, for the poor relations between full time and volunteer firefighters caused in the last couple of years to be undone.

Due to this long and bitter dispute, I feel it is in the best interests of all for full time employed and volunteer firefighters to be in separate organisations.

4. Ending the industrial strife.

During my over 5 years as a firefighter, a large proportion of this time has been spent in EBA “negotiation” or industrial action. I use the word negotiation in quotation marks as from my perspective, the Management of the MFB and CFA have seemed more interested in waging a war of attrition than negotiating in good faith.

Particularly with the CFA EBA and the recent changes to the federal fair work legislation regarding volunteers, I have almost zero faith in any workable outcome being achieved with the current situation. I feel that the proposed changes to the fire services in Victoria offer a good long term way forward with respect to full time employed firefighters and workplace agreements.

It is past time to find a workable solution to the workplace negotiations.

In summary, I endorse the proposed reforms to the fire services in Victoria.

Thank you for your consideration,