

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
07/07/2017 10:30 AM

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

Dear Select Committee

Please find attached my submission regarding the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 to the Select Committee.

I seek that my name and contact details be considered confidential, however all other parts of my submission are open to the Select Committee for their use in relation to the proposed reforms of the Fire Service.

Regards



[REDACTED] **Station Officer SBR**  
Wangaratta Fire Station – [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

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Submission 2017.docx

\*My name and contact details in this submission are to be treated as confidential. All other parts of my submission can and are intended for the select committee and its use in consideration of the proposed Fire Services Reform Bill 2017.

06 July 2017

[consultation@dpc.vic.gov.au](mailto:consultation@dpc.vic.gov.au)

Dear Committee Members

**RE: Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017.**

My name is [REDACTED]. Currently I am employed with the Country Fire Authority as a Station Officer. I started my career with CFA in August 2007 as a Recruit Firefighter at Fiskville training college. Since then I have been appointed to stations at Shepparton, Wodonga and Wangaratta where I have progressed from Level 1 Firefighter, to Qualified Firefighter, Leading Firefighter, Station Officer and in the next few weeks I have been advised that I will be promoted to Senior Station Officer. Next month I will also bring up 10 years' service as a professional career firefighter.

My time at Wangaratta over the last 2 years has also seen me performing the role of Operations Officer on an acting basis when required for backfill of other Operations Officers at District 23, as well at times performing the role of Officer in Charge at Wangaratta Fire Station, the only integrated station in District 23.

To get to this stage of my career I have had to complete many, many continuation modules, training courses, both internal and by external providers that have ranged from 1 day through to 3 weeks each in duration, assessments to become a Leading Firefighter (only after 4 years operational experience) which enabled me to be endorsed as a Level 1 incident controller, Station Officer development course and assessment (around 9 months in duration), Specialised Technical Rescue Training, countless practical hot fire and theory sessions on a huge range of fire and emergency related topics. My training still continues today as I work towards obtaining and refining more skills to enable me to continue to and improve the service I can give as a Firefighter to the Victorian community.

I am also a CFA Volunteer in a Brigade which is located in North East Victoria within 40km of Wodonga. I joined as a CFA Volunteer in January 2004 after the fires that took hold around the North East and as a way of doing my bit for my small local community in which I lived and still live today. I have held many positions in my Volunteer capacity including Firefighter, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, Group Delegate and currently hold the 4<sup>th</sup> Lieutenant Officer position at the Brigade.

Interestingly after being voted in by the brigade as a Volunteer Lieutenant after only 6 months in the brigade in 2004 and just completing minimum skills, my probationary period as a CFA member and with very limited experience with a grand total of attending **only 2 Emergency Events** in that period, I was endorsed as a Level 1 Incident Controller. This

scenario can still occur today in CFA. If I knew then what I now know, I would never have accepted such a critical role with legislated powers under the CFA ACT that I knew nothing about, how to invoke or ramifications for not adhering to when representing CFA in the community.

Today I try to mentor other new members to give them the ability and skills they need to perform whatever role they have with CFA, so that they are not in the same position I was in. Unfortunately between my family, work and other life commitments, I cannot give the time to Volunteer that I once could and as such I fear the above scenario can and may happen again.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the Fire Services in Victoria for the following reasons.

Victoria has changed greatly over the last 50 or so years with population and infrastructure growing rapidly. Our current Fire Service has one service in Melbourne (MFB) that has a set standard of preparation, response and recovery to emergency events that it has responsibility as a control agency. This includes a set number of firefighting appliances (Pumpers, Aerial Firefighting Vehicles, etc.) and firefighters with a particular skill set being able to be responded to any emergency event that they are confronted with.

Outside of Melbourne there is no set standard for response to the same type of emergency events that can occur in major regional cities and towns located in the Country Area of Victoria which is serviced by CFA. Each CFA integrated station is slightly different and can have different response of members and vehicles depending on personal opinions. For example Wangaratta has a B response to Life risk alarmed premises like the Hospital, which is a 2 Brigade response when initially paged. This consists of the Wangaratta Brigade and the South Wangaratta Brigade (only 1 pumper dispatched to these events in District 23).

Wodonga, the next closest Integrated Brigade around 68km away in District 24 has a C response (3 brigades, Wodonga, Wodonga West and Baranduda – all with urban pumpers) to their Life risk buildings such as the Wodonga Hospital. This is different again in areas like Geelong and Bendigo. So you can have 1 pumper for one area, 3 for another and so on depending on the District, however the life risk is the same. This should in my opinion be a constant at all these major life risks in major towns and regional cities.

This scenario can put enormous pressure on me as an Incident Controller at Emergency Events that I have been paged to attend. At my current station of Wangaratta, other than the 4 career members including myself on shift, I have no guarantee that I will have any volunteer member from either Wangaratta or surrounding Brigades respond to any of the Emergency Events that we are required to attend, let alone another structural firefighting vehicle like a Pumper. Too often I get informed via radio that a supporting Brigade has failed to respond in the allocated time allowed for the reported emergency. On top of this as we are an integrated station at Wangaratta, I am not informed if our Wangaratta Volunteers have not responded in the allocated time as the system counts that Wangaratta has responded and does not separate from Career and Volunteer response. In no way are my comments here intended to offend or take away from the valuable contribution these Volunteer members make to not only CFA, but the broader community in their role as firefighters when they are able to do so.

Of course this can and at times does hamper my ability to control situations to the best of my ability; however it more importantly has the potential to affect our community in a far greater way. I ask why we should have one system in Melbourne with all the bells and whistles and another in Country Victoria that has the same type of risk, but a lower level of protection for firefighters and the community. Safety of all firefighters and the community all over Victoria should be a priority and this proposed reform will enhance this.

I look forward to the day that I go to work and if a worst case scenario of a house fire or structure fire in a hospital or nursing home comes in, or any other emergency, I know that I have the resources on hand to deal with the situation, no matter my work location in the State of Victoria. At this point in time I have to adjust to local arrangements of the particular station I am working at on any given day across country Victoria in regards to response arrangements. I simply have to rely on local members at these stations being able to inform me of who and what is coming or not to provide support at emergency events. Once again these reforms will enable a standard response approach across our state.

Over a long period of time we have all seen and heard from certain media outlets, associations and political parties, including Federal Government intervention, how any new agreement for CFA Career Firefighters or as is the case now proposed reform of the Fire Services, will cause CFA to lose its Surge Capacity. There have been many untruths told by these people as to what will happen if any of this proposed legislation is passed. It has been said that the CFA is being "torn apart" and volunteers are not being respected. It is constantly stated by a certain political party and association that 60000 volunteers are affected by these proposed changes and that they all disagree with them. Let me be clear, as a proud volunteer of 13 plus years' service in CFA this could not be further from the truth. I see it having no effect at all at my Brigade or any others for that matter other than CFA being provided with more funding to improve buildings and provide more vehicles and training. I will not leave as a volunteer because of these proposed reforms; however I will continue to volunteer when I can to assist my Brigade and community. It is easy to throw the 60000 CFA volunteers number around by certain people to create fear in our community and build political standing. Please don't include me in this figure as I am here to stay.

These proposed reforms will also finally give all Firefighters peace of mind and protection in relation to Presumptive rights and Compensation in the unfortunate event that they are diagnosed with certain types of cancer that have been linked to firefighting duties. This is massive for all firefighters and the current Government must be applauded for introducing this measure. As I am a higher risk of getting these types of cancer simply as a result of doing the job I love as opposed to the general community and their type of work, it gives me comfort that if one day I need help it will be there and I will have one less thing to worry about.

Under these proposed reforms our wonderful CFA Volunteers will continue to be valued and respected. I do not see nor fear any restriction on me (other than my own available time) responding to Emergency Events as a CFA Volunteer now or into the future, in fact I see this as an opportunity to enhance CFA and its ability to perform as a Volunteer organisation for many years to come and enhance the service to our major regional towns and cities throughout Victoria, via Fire Rescue Victoria.

I urge you to consider voting in a positive manner to support these proposed reforms to Victoria's Fire Service. This is very important to me as the ongoing dispute has created a massive strain on me personally at work and on my family at home, not to mention the public members in my small community that have steadily asked me and my wife what this is all about as they have been lead to believe that CFA is going to be taken over by the UFU and that they won't have a fire Brigade close by. I believe it is time to move forward, stop the scare campaigns being run and bring our Fire Service up to best practice so that we can all continue to provide the best service to the people who need it the most, the Victorian community.

Regards

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