



[REDACTED]
07/07/2017 03:07 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire Services Reform Committee
submission

1 attachment



[REDACTED].docx

To Whom it may concern,

Please find attached my submission to the Parliamentary committee regarding fire services reform.

I would request confidentiality of my submission due to previous pressures.

[REDACTED]

Badger Creek Fire Brigade.

[REDACTED]

Fire Services Reform Bill 2017

[REDACTED]

Due to previous difficulties, confidentiality of this submission is requested

I would like to begin my submission by introducing myself to the Honorable members of the committee, my name is [REDACTED] and I have been a volunteer member of CFA since 1998, presently serving as an active firefighter holding the rank of Lieutenant in my brigade.

I, as have many others, have taken a keen interest in the Reforms proposed by this Bill, as it seeks to implement the most extensive overhaul and modernisation of Victoria's firefighting services since 1958, when the CFA and MFESB Acts were effected.

1. IMPACT ON FIRE SERVICE DELIVERY ACROSS VICTORIA

Under our present system, much of what is now the extended suburbs of Melbourne is still termed to be an area of "Country" for the purposes of fire service allocation and management, suburbs such as Werribee, Scoresby, Epping, Bayswater and many others are still deemed as "Country" areas under our present service model, despite the fact that they are deep within suburbia.

The reforms proposed in this Bill would see the removal of the rigid and inflexible defined boundaries that have existed more or less the same since 1958, and it must be noted that the majority of the present Melbourne Fire District remains as defined upon creation of the MFB in 1891, boundaries that do not reflect the enormous changes and evolutions in the growth of not only Greater Melbourne itself, but of the state as a whole.

The removal of the present rigidly defined boundaries, along with the abolishment of MFB and merger of it's firefighting staff along with CFA's present component of career firefighters into the single service to be known as Fire Rescue Victoria, will along with the independent review committee to monitor the standard of fire service delivery, create a much more fluid and adaptable 24/7 staff fire service, able to grow and evolve with the needs of the community it serves in not only Greater Melbourne, but also major regional centres throughout Victoria as requirements dictate, and with Greater Melbourne expanding at a rate far greater than previously predicted, the demands upon our fire services will only continue to rise, as for every 40,000 increase in population, we see roughly an increase of 800 calls to the fire services per annum, a growth which, under the current service model, is unsustainable into the future.

From a then returned to fully volunteer post Reform CFA, very little if anything will change operationally, no volunteer stations

will be disbanded, and many of the inner urban full volunteer stations will in fact enjoy increased operational support from the

newly formed Fire Rescue Victoria, lessening the presently extremely high demands upon fully volunteer station in those areas, where

at present, those brigades can fail to meet their response requirements as often as 80% of the time, and this is not

a slight against the dedicated volunteers that serve those stations, it is simply a reflection of the enormity of the changes that have

happened in Greater Melbourne since 1958, as no longer do volunteers work within 5 minutes travel of their stations anymore and also

many employers are loathe to allow valued employees to leave work to attend incidents as often as 3 or 4 times a day in the case of the

most called upon volunteer only brigades, creating a potentially negative impact on their workplace and it's morale.

For the outlying areas where there is no current presence of staff manned fire stations, there will be no operational changes at all, and the fully volunteer response in these areas will only be enhanced by a post Reform CFA's increased training budgets, equipment & infrastructure upgrade programmes, and continued access to all the training facilities it currently utilises, along with presently planned expansions and constructions of new facilities, all of which would amount to much higher levels of training for volunteer firefighters with the resultant enhancements to both firefighter and community safety as a result, ensuring a much more operationally effective CFA.

Another point often raised is the "surge capacity" that CFA volunteers can theoretically provide to large scale incidents, particularly the assertions that it is primarily derived from inner urban stations which is in total ignorance of the functioning of the dispatch and management systems employed, and in ignorance of the fact that the same issues that hinder the operational effectiveness of inner urban volunteer stations with day to day response, but only magnified further as even fewer employees are willing to allow an immediate and unplanned absence from the workplace for potentially 3 working days or more.

To further explain the above, when an incident is recognised as requiring escalation, such as seen in the last fire season, the initial escalations, or "surge" are drawn from local groups of brigades to the incident, which if then required, will extend to the groups immediately surrounding those already dispatched, an example being that if a fire requiring escalation breaks out in the Bairnsdale area as an

example, the immediate surge requirement will be drawn from brigade groups and districts in that area of Gippsland, the volunteers at Noble Park or Bayswater or Lilydale for example, are not a part of that surge, despite many claims to the contrary.

In summary on this point, the Reform will rectify many of the systemic and legislative problems inherent in our present service model, and the result of this will be enhancement of the safety of our growing community now and for decades into the future.

2. EFFECT ON VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN FIRE SERVICE DELIVERY.

The Reforms indicate that there would be generally positive impact upon both volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery, as with post reform CFA, volunteers will have a greater level of responsibility and accountability in the delivery of fire services to their communities, with enhanced training and infrastructure better able to support volunteer recruitment and retention, an area that many brigades struggle with somewhat at present.

Operationally there will be very little to no changes in the way that volunteers are dispatched to emergency calls, indeed with a shift from rigid defined response areas as presently utilised to a "radial search" as currently under consideration, many volunteers would find their level of participation in service delivery actually increase to some extent.

There is nothing in any of the proposed Reforms that would indicate volunteers would experience any changes to the level of participation that they currently have in community fire protection planning, community involvement, and other areas in which volunteers are presently engaged, and the visibility and engagement of volunteers in those roles is only likely to increase going forward.

3. CLOSING

The need for evolution of fire services to meet the growing needs of the community it serves is of paramount importance to both community and firefighter safety, both volunteer and career, while the present fire services model has served the community well for the past 60 years, it is now time to look

forward to the next 20,40,60 and even 100 years and implement nessecary reforms to ensure that the ongoing viability of our fire services, both volunteer and career are maintained.