



[Redacted]

07/07/2017 05:04 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire Submission

Submission as attached.

Kind Regards



[Redacted] **Leading Firefighter D Shift**
Morwell Fire Station – [Redacted]
[Redacted]

Protecting lives and property



cfa.vic.gov.au

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Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

I would like my NAME and ADDRESS submission to remain confidential.

I am a Leading Firefighter with the CFA. I have been employed by the Country Fire Authority for 12 years and I have held my current rank for six years.

Like all Career Fire Fighters, I am qualified in fighting Bushfires, Structure Fires, and managing chemical spills and car accidents. I also have specialist qualifications in Rope Rescue and Confined Space Rescue, Emergency Medical Responder and as a Ground Observer.

I hold the following qualifications:

- Bachelor of Environmental Science (Integrated Catchment Management)
- Diploma of Natural Resource Management
- Certificate 2 and 3 in Public Safety (Fire and Emergency Operations)

I live in Trafalgar South and I am appointed to Morwell Fire Station, which is located in Gippsland.

I have also been a volunteer fire fighter with the CFA at Lilydale Fire Brigade which is a busy urban brigade and at Currawa Fire Brigade, which is quiet rural brigade near Shepparton. I volunteered from 1997 until 2007 when I resigned as a volunteer fire fighter.

I support the fire services reform and modernisation.

The impact on fire service delivery to Victoria:

I've seen firsthand what happens when volunteers do not respond. We attend approximately 750 calls per year at Morwell. I have gone into burning building on my own to search for missing people and to extinguish fires. We receive on average, less than 0.5 Morwell volunteers to structure fires within Morwell. This means that basically no volunteers from Morwell respond to support us when we are performing the most dangerous jobs. Quite often when someone does turn up they do not have the competencies to wear Breathing Apparatus to enter a burning building or operate the truck. That places an incredible burden on the Incident Controller of deciding to wait for support or to risk sending me in not knowing what happens to me once I am out of sight. If something does go wrong, I am on my own. Having seven Career Firefighters on the fire ground gives us enough trained personnel to do the jobs we need safely. This is a large cause of stress not just to myself and my work mates, but also to our families. I no longer tell my wife about the majority of the fires and incidents that I go to, in order to reduce the worries that she has about the dangerous work that we do.

We have also recently extended our support into Moe due to the Moe Fire Brigade frequently not being able to respond to fires and accidents with enough trained crew. This is not the fault of the volunteers they have to manage the other demands on their time such as work and family. The current system is not working and it was not designed to work with such a high call rate. No other volunteer emergency service is expected to support this work rate, so why do we expect CFA volunteers to do so.

For the Career Firefighters that I know, it has become so common to not have support or the right type of support at structure fires from volunteers that it has largely just become normal practice. As such, few people now complete CFA Safe reports about the lack of support. The staff know that nothing will change and nothing will be done about it.

Towns that have a commercial hub, housing estates, and industrial zones are classified as Medium Urban by the CFA. The local CFA volunteer brigade has up to four minutes to respond out the door and needs to be on scene, within their brigade boundaries, within eight minutes of initial notification of an emergency. Rural brigades have longer. Career Firefighters have up to 90 seconds to respond and be on scene within eight minutes within their brigades' area. If an urban volunteer brigade does not respond within six minutes another brigade is responded from the next town. The same process repeats until someone does respond, even if it is in their own car with no fire fighting equipment.

The final decision on what level of protection a town requires must be removed from the emergency service providing the services. The public are lead to believe that everything is going well, when the reality can often be far from it. The CFA often says, "Volunteers will always respond", while technically this is true, what it neglects to mention is that those that do respond may have to come from several towns over or may not have the training to do what is required when they arrive. Or the only person that may turn up is in their own car and not a fire truck. The lack of transparency in how and how effectively fire services are provided does nothing but endanger the public and the personnel performing the work.

For example: Moe Fire Brigade regularly struggles to get a fire truck out to building fires, or if it does it is not within the required four minutes, or it does not have the crew and skills required. Up until the creation and boundary realignment of District 27 Moe was within District 9. The Operations Manager and Operations Officer for District 9 were very pro-Volunteer, but also had an anti-Career Staff attitude, and did not want Career Firefighters coming into District 9. As a result Morwell was often quite far down the response tables (the order in which Brigades are called), despite being only 11 minutes away from the centre of Moe. Moe was, and still is, regularly failing to respond. However, to ensure that Moe did not get either staff or staff support the District changed Moe's response category from Medium Urban to Low Urban. This gave Moe longer to get out of the station before the next brigade was called and also covered up the Fail To Respond rate. This risks the lives of the community just to avoid having career staff support into Moe. I have heard over the radio at least three house fires where Moe did not get out the door or took excessively long periods to get one person out of the station, while career staff waited at Morwell. This happens in several other locations around the state.

Having the independent body looking at response data will only help the community and save lives.

The effect on volunteer engagement and participation:

I believe that volunteer engagement will only be improved and that surge capacity will increase due to these changes. This will happen by the volunteers being able to focus on the things that they would like to as an organisation, without the perceived or real interference from the Career Firefighters and their employment requirements.

Volunteers and the CFA have over many years said that the Career Firefighters/UFU are holding up the delivery of equipment or training. These hold ups are for a variety of reasons including OHS and workplace employment issues to name just a few. However, once the volunteers are Career Firefighters are separated into different organisations this will remove any of those excuses or problems

Kind Regards

