



steven baklien [REDACTED]

07/07/2017 05:30 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Submission to inquiry into firefighters
presumptive rights compensation and
fire service legislation
amendmet(reform) bill 2017

To
Assistant Clerk Committees
Department of legislative council
Fire Service Select committee
Parliament house
Spring Street
East Melbourne 3002

Dear sir, please accept my attached submission to this inquiry,

Sincerely,
Steve Baklien

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Fire services reform committee submission.docx

Assistant Clerk Committees
Department of the Legislative Council
Fire Service Bill Select Committee
Parliament House, Sprint Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002

**INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS PRESUMITIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION
AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017**

Dear Committee members,

My name is Steve Baklien. I am currently employed as a Leading Fire fighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, stationed at Richmond fire station. I have been with the MFB for 18 years and in that time I have been stationed at a number of fire stations including South Melbourne, Box Hill, Nunawading, Highett and Malvern. I have also worked as an instructor at south eastern training ground (SETG), VEMTC Burnley and VEMTC Craigieburn. I currently hold specialist qualifications in High Angle Rescue (HART), Urban Search and Rescue (USAR), Trench Rescue and Confined Space Rescue both as an instructor and technician.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services. I believe it is necessary and important that the committee hears the opinions of current firefighters. As customary should the committee wish to publish any part of this submission I respectfully request that my contact details are removed. The following items are my personal experiences and observations:

One of the consistent questions I hear from various people though out the community is "Why is the CFA still servicing places like Springvale and Dandenong aren't they metropolitan Melbourne?" Even after explaining that these are urban brigades and that there are staffed stations located strategically, the majority still cannot understand why there are two different organisations servicing the same area. This confusion is quite understandable in an age of streamlining and integration. I also find a great deal of concern from people when they ask about the fire services levy. The community has an increasing expectation of equitable treatment and high service delivery, so it is quite difficult to justify to a person why the FSL on their property in the CFA area is almost double that of a similar property in the MFB area just one street away.

Below is a sign that appears in CFA areas. It makes plain that if you live in a high risk area you may not get a response in the event of a bush fire. Since Black Saturday people who live in these areas understand and accept that this is one of the risks associated with living there. But this sign is not located in one of these high risk areas. It is located in Vermont a long established suburb almost 8 kilometres inside the urban boundaries. I doubt very much a sign such as this would be acceptable on Spring Street nor should it be in a highly urbanised area such as were this one is located.



For the majority of my career I have worked in the central areas of Melbourne. From time to time I have been rostered to stations near the MFB/CFA boundaries. One of the primary concerns that myself and my colleagues' have when stationed at these boundary stations is when responding into CFA areas, what level of support will be available? On numerous occasion over the years I have noted an inconsistent level of response in these areas. Within the MFB when myself and my colleagues respond to an alarm of fire, the number of appliances, their capabilities and the number of crew are a given. This is also true of areas with CFA career staff stations, which provides a great level of confidence when dealing with an incident.

This is not always the case when responding into a non -staff CFA area, that is to say it is not always a lack of resources although I am quite certain this will be detailed many times in many other submissions. But on a number of occasions I have responded to incidents in CFA areas and had multiple CFA volunteer appliances continue to arrive on scene long after the incident declared either under control or a false alarm. These occasions occurred on weekends so it is easy to surmise the volunteer brigades happen to be in station possibly training or some other brigade activity. In my opinion this not only ties up resources needlessly, but unnecessarily increases the risk to other road users.

The times that there appears to be a lack of response is almost always during business hours, obviously when the majority of volunteers are at work. This inconsistency of response I believe is not the fault of the individual volunteers, as they are performing a difficult, dangerous and often thank-less task, the same as I do, but is systemic of a structure that has not adapted to a growing population with increased demands and expectations. By bringing the greater part of metropolitan Melbourne and other major urban centres under FRV I believe a lot of these inconsistencies will be resolved, providing both confidence to myself and my colleagues as well as meaningful, necessary and rewarding use of the volunteer's valuable time.

Much has been made of these reforms destroying the CFA I find this rather hard to understand as, when the reforms that have been presented to me are carried out the CFA will remain the same in both name and structure with an increase in independence and support, whilst for the MFB will be cease to exist. I joined the MFB in 1998 as one of 30 successful applicants out of 3000 who applied. We joined a proud organisation with more than a century of service to the community with traditions and history borne of professionalism and dedication. The bill will essentially make the MFB disappear and FRV come into being. So for a proud member of the MFB who was entrusted with the stewardship of its customs and traditions to support the changes is not an easy thing. However to end the conflict and move forward to protect one of the most fire prone states in the world myself and my colleagues who support this bill are willing to make these sacrifices, to have a positive future.

It is common knowledge that the current dispute has been going on for quite a number of years. It has had a detrimental effect both on myself and my colleagues due to continuous derogatory media coverage and misinformation. What started out as an industrial dispute between CFA career staff and CFA management, has through the interference of other entities dragged the MFB firefighters into a dispute that has soured relations between volunteer and career staff, destroyed friendships and undermined public confidence in their fire services. If you had told me in 2010 that a person claiming to be a 30 year CFA volunteer

would approach me whilst I was attending a car accident in Bridge Road Richmond and begin verbally abusing me about this dispute I wouldn't have believed it , sadly this did happen and from all accounts it is not an isolated incident. To say this dispute has been disheartening professionally, personally and emotionally is putting it mildly. It is my hope that the transition to Fire Rescue Victoria will be the circuit breaker that allows all sides to come together, resolve their differences, and allow myself and my colleagues to get on with the job of protecting all Victorians.

Yours Sincerely,

Steve Baklien

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