

30/7/17

To whom it may concern,

**INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION
AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT**

(REFORM) BILL 2017

- My name is Katherine Dunell, I am a Leading Fire fighter and have been with the MFB for 11 years.
- I live in Geelong and for the last 3 years have worked at the North Laverton Fire Station (FS49). This is situated on the current antiquated MFB/CFA border. We have many major hazard facilities in our area, primarily chemical manufacture and storage, but we also have factories and businesses, residential areas, schools, nursing homes and a very busy freeway and roads network.
- We respond primarily with MFB appliances from Spotswood, Altona, Laverton, Sunshine and Deer Park, but also with CFA appliances from Point Cook, Hoppers Crossing, Truganina, Caroline Springs and Werribee.
- I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:

Today, Victoria's population is booming - the state is home to more than 6 million people. Melbourne has seen massive development over the past century. When Victoria's fire service boundaries were established in the 1890s our population was smaller and concentrated around Melbourne. It is now home to heavily urbanized growth corridors and sprawling suburbs - which continue to grow. I see this first hand at my work location where the urban sprawl into Hoppers Crossing, Truganina and Ravenhall continues daily at pace.

Victoria's antiquated fire service boundaries don't meet the needs of our state today - in fact, they put lives and property at risk.

Today, there are 35 highly urbanized areas that are still wrongly zoned as 'country Victoria' under these antiquated fire boundaries - these areas require a rapid urban fire response.

As a resident of Geelong, Victoria's 2nd biggest city and growing, I feel strongly that we require immediate reform to modernise the fire services. Geelong is incorrectly zoned as "country". I pay my fire services levy and believe that it should be spent on our fire services. The heavily urbanised areas of Victoria should have a modern fire service with an 8 minute response time and 7 professional firefighters on two fire trucks - this is the minimum standard needed for emergency response to maximise

the potential to save lives and minimise damage to property. Fire crews must respond in 8 minutes because after that, a fire reaches the flashover point – the point of “no return” where the property and people inside are at a very real risk.

But this rapid response under 8 minutes is only guaranteed in Melbourne’s metropolitan fire district. In this zone, specially trained professional career firefighters are in fire stations that have been strategically located to be able to respond within 8 minutes. Why don’t I get this response just because I live in Geelong? The same can be asked by people who live in, Ballarat, Melton, Sunbury, Greenvale, Craigieburn, Hoppers Crossing, Point Cook, Rosebud, Ocean Grove, Warnambool, Portland, Pakenham, Cranbourne, Traralgon, Morwell, Springvale, Dandenong, Hallam, Boronia, South Warrandyte, Eltham, South Morang.....

Being that I work in the Metropolitan Fire District, in my direct response area I will receive at least one other primary fire appliance to a Fire Call, that means that as I approach a fire I can mentally commit myself whole heartedly knowing that backup is right behind me in case it’s needed. As the bordering stands this currently isn’t the case for “Country” areas, to which I also respond into.

Regardless of the amazing job CFA volunteer brigades do, the fact remains that they cannot be available 24/7 365, as they shouldn’t, they are community members with jobs and families. With our outer Metropolitan growth rapidly expanding (1800 per week settling in Melbourne according to CENSUS 2016), particularly in the West, the volume of calls is increasing as is the need for a professional modern fire service who can respond to this growing demand.

I have personally been to calls in Point Cook, Hoppers Crossing and Truganina called on only after the volunteer backup has not responded (4 minutes). This alone puts the community at a huge risk as well as the fire fighters attending the call as a lot can happen in 4 minutes.

I have been to dozens of calls in Truganina (outside of our response area) and only ever seen the volunteer CFA Truganina Brigade turnout alongside us once, that is not a criticism of them, it is a failure of the current system. It is a massive failure to the residents and workers who occupy that space.

With operational staff under one banner, covering these outer metropolitan areas, the people that live there will be guaranteed 2 fire appliances with minimum 7 fire fighters (2 teams of 2 wearing breathing apparatus, 2 pump operators and 1 incident controller). They will receive the fire coverage that they deserve and the volunteer response will not be altered, they will still be responded which is also great for us should we need additional support.

Bringing the 2 professional fire services under one banner will eventually standardize everything with the exception of speciality equipment and can help to ensure a better level of training for all professional fire fighters.

The ongoing dispute where firefighters have been used as a political football has taken a huge toll mentally on me and my colleagues. We simply wish to go to work and serve our community; this can be difficult with the constant barrage of hate we receive from certain media outlets, members of parliament and the volunteer associations.

There are times when our job can have inherent risks, sometimes unavoidable but most can often these risks can be mitigated. In this case, this legislation can be a mitigating factor to dangers I will face in my daily work life.

The passing of this legislation would be a positive result for all Victorians.

Yours sincerely,

Leading Fire Fighter Katherine Dunell

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