

Assistant Clerk Committees
Department of the Legislative Council
Fire Services Bill Select Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

30 June 2017

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

SUBMISSION

My name is [REDACTED]. I am presently a Senior Station Officer at the Traralgon Fire Station, with the Country Fire Authority. I am in my thirty ninth year as an operational employee with CFA and I have held the following ranks throughout my career.

- Recruit Fire-fighter
- Senior Fire-fighter (By Examination)
- Station Officer
- Fire Officer 2
- Operations Officer
- Senior Station Officer

My qualifications are consummate with all other similar ranking colleagues. Specialist qualifications include:

- Technical Rescue Trench
- On and Off-Road Driving Instructor
- Juvenile Fire Awareness and Intervention Practitioner
- High Risk Work Assessor
- Aerial Appliance Assessor
- Emergency Medical Response Operator

I have been awarded the National Medal along with its second clasp, and I am due for my thirty-five-year service award.

Prior to my employment with CFA, I was a Volunteer Fire-fighter with Ararat Fire Brigade for five years.

Tarragon Fire Station is one of 35 CFA Integrated Fire Station's and has responded to over 700 fire calls this financial year.

Over the many years as a professional Fire fighter I have developed long and lasting friendships with some of our Volunteers and respect their opinions and abilities. This submission in no way detracts from my opinion of Volunteers who are delivering a timely and skilled response for their communities.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire service for the following reasons.

As a professional Fire Officer, I am aware that a successful firefight is highly dependent on time and space. We aim, in our Brigade area, to confine a fire to its room of origin by being on the road within ninety seconds. As part of this expectation we also need backup to allow us to operate in a safe manner on the fire ground with reserve Breathing Apparatus Operators in place in case of entrapment or extended operations of the first entering crews. Crew allocation to a typical level one structure fire scenario would be -

- Incident Controller
- B/A Operators x2
- Pump Operator
- Assistant to the Pump Operator

Safe operations in this scenario would include backup B/A Operators. As can be seen, two additional Fire-fighters would provide the safety margin that needs to be in place.

In terms of Volunteer response in Integrated Brigade areas, this is at best, a hit and miss affair. Volunteers now have greater demands on their time, be it work, family or other commitments that unlike yesteryear does not guarantee a suitable response around the clock. Even if there is a reasonable response, there is no guarantee the responders have the required skills to do the job.

After almost forty-five years' experience with CFA, I recognise the time has come to overhaul the way we deliver services to our communities. Long gone are the times when you could expect ten well trained Volunteers to each and every turnout.

After researching the documents and attending briefings in relation to the reforms I am satisfied that there would (or should not be) any net reduction in Volunteer numbers, hence no diminished surge capacity. It should be noted that the reforms are only applicable to the presently classified Integrated Brigade areas. Volunteer members of these Brigades would become a separate entity concentrating their skills on wildfire response.

There is a substantial injection of funding to go to CFA for training, recruitment and retention, and Fire Station upgrades that will assist during and after the reforms.

Management and Operational support will be provided to Volunteers, no differently to what happens now with field Officers i.e., Operations Officers and Operations Managers being available to CFA albeit provided by FRV. In terms of service delivery from these Officers, nothing will change.

The previous four years have been tough going in terms of successfully trying to negotiate an EBA. This has been largely due to an unfavourable media, elements of the Volunteer component of CFA, Politicisation of the Fire Service. The damage this has done has been enormous for Fire-fighters, their families and work colleagues, manifesting itself in depressive illness and a general lack of interest in life. This has primarily applied to CFA Professional Operational personnel. The obvious conclusion is that separate negotiations need to be had with the MFB to finalise their EBA.

By combining the Professional Operational personnel of both services there then becomes a simpler process to renew EBA's when required.

I wish to conclude by giving examples of inadequate response from the Volunteer component at my Brigade. When on duty, I and my shift are responsible for fires and incidents within the power industry four power stations and the Bass Link Terminal Station. There have been times when reports of fires and alarms within this critical infrastructure have resulted in a response from the Traralgon on duty staff, with support from Morwell staff, and the industrial fire crew on site at one of the Power Stations only. This also has on occasions been the case with the Loy Yang open cut coal mine supplying two of the power stations. The lack of Volunteer response not only from our Brigade, but other supporting Volunteer Brigades has the potential to halt Victoria's power production.

On Sunday 18th June 2017, my shift was paged to a two-story structure fire only just outside our primary response area and well within our support area. On arrival, the structure (Barn) was well alight. There was a mixed fire load within the barn including gas cylinders, hay, papers, a new power boat and a quantity of petrol. The Volunteer response from Traralgon Brigade amounted to three people, fortunately for me these members were qualified in Breathing Apparatus and were utilised working alongside my shift. The fact remains there is not a guaranteed response apart from the on-duty staff. Even with the three members that responded the need to alternate Breathing Apparatus wearers was a reality with some members doing up to three stints in Breathing Apparatus. It is worth noting that the Primary Brigade responsible for this area does not have B/A operators.

I wish to highlight the responses for our Breathing Apparatus Support Appliance at Traralgon. This appliance can operate with Districts 9, 10, 11 and 27. This Appliance can travel up to 150km too 200km. On numerous occasions the Brigade is paged to support a Brigade, only to have no response from our Volunteers. The on-duty staff at Traralgon then must respond the vehicle and then the Duty Officer must instigate a recall of staff.

There is no mandated requirement for off duty staff to be available, it is only by good luck that someone may be available to cover the skills deficiency created by the responding crew. This in turn can put unreasonable strain on individuals and families.

I forward this submission in the hope that meaningful reform can take place. As a fire service, we need to grow and mature into an organisation geared to meet the demands of the twenty first century. At present, we are endeavouring to make a 1950's model relevant in 2017. I ask that you consider this in the light of improved service delivery to our communities.

[REDACTED]