

Prue Purdey

From: Matthew Kent [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 30 June 2017 4:56 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Submission SUPPORTING Fire Service Reform

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

My name is Matthew Kent and I have been a professional CFA firefighter for four years. I am currently based at South Morang fire station.

I write to express my support for the proposed fire services reform.

I came to the CFA after ten years as a professional firefighter in another state. As far as service delivery to the community goes I also travelled 50 years back in time.

In my previous Fire Service the job was simple; there was an emergency and we went to help, end of story.

In Victoria the service provided to the community is dependent on too many variables, all or which that are now in the committees' control.

In the CFA I am constantly at the station listening to emergencies go on in my surrounding area, watching the clock as first called brigades fail to respond, watching the clock as second called brigades fail to respond and then hearing a third brigade respond, only to arrive on the scene with only two members and lacking specific PPE, skills, training or equipment to control the incident safely and effectively.

As a Leading Firefighter it is very hard for me to explain to the new members why we are not going to these calls. The current system is failing the highly trained, passionate, professional firefighters that joined this job for a rewarding career and to give back to their community.

More importantly, this out-dated system is failing the Victorian community that relies on them in their time of need.

I live seven minutes' drive from my fire station. If there is a bin fire Monday to Friday during business hours in front of my house my truck will be responded.

If I am on night shift and my house burns down with my family trapped inside on a weekend, or outside of business hours, multiple other CFA volunteer brigades will be responded first, and will have to fail before my station is notified. This is not just poor service delivery, this is ridiculous and if more of the general public were aware that this is what their fire service levy pays for there would be community outrage.

I am often asked if going to horrific scenes and witnessing tragedy affects me, and sometimes it does, but what affects me far worse is sitting on my hands in the station listening to a call that four teenagers are trapped in the wreckage of their car six minutes from where me, my crew, my truck and all the specialist equipment are located and not being responded to help because two other volunteer only brigades in the area have done a deal with each other to keep 'the staff' out of their areas.

Yesterday 29/06/2017 my station, and one other were responded to support a volunteer brigade at a gas leak.

My crew arrived on scene first despite travelling the greatest distance, the other support brigade failed to respond at all and the primary brigade arrived ten minutes later with one person on the truck.

Two members of my crew donned breathing apparatus and investigated the leak. The third member was operating the pump and the fourth was Incident Controller.

The CFA records will show that three brigades in at least three trucks were responded, and that would have been acceptable IF three trucks did actually turn up with a minimum of four fully trained crew competent in structural firefighting and wearing breathing apparatus per truck, Instead we received one firefighter with unknown skills and qualifications. That's it.

What would have happened if something went wrong? Who was coming to help us? What would my wife and children be told if there was an explosion and I was left to die inside a burning house because there was literally no one else there to come and get me.

I do not and never will begrudge volunteers that are unable to respond. It is just a fact of life these days, especially in outer metropolitan areas where houses prices and the cost of living is continually rising. People are working longer hours than ever before and just cannot be available to volunteer their time as often as they did in the past, when this Fire Service model was first created. Volunteers are fantastic people for what they do for all Victorians and Victoria needs them, but the system that uses them as a stop gap in areas that used to be farmland that are now home to hundreds of thousands of people, major roads, industry, schools, hospitals etc.

Victoria has changed and grown and our fire service has been left behind which is putting mine and all Victorians' safety at risk.

Victoria's fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this out-dated system, 35 areas are wrongly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised and residential. Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, South Morang, Boronia and Geelong are just some of the 35 'country areas'.

These areas need to be modernised as they are highly urbanised areas as part of the reform of the fire service. A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career firefighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas.

All Victorian, professional and volunteer firefighters, deserve modern fire services that meet the needs of our growing communities.

To ensure the safety of all Victorians - including me as a firefighter, I ask you to please seriously consider your support for the proposed fire services reform.

Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of your constituents, and all communities in our growing state. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our firefighters and stop the ever increasing and unrealistic demand being placed on volunteer firefighters because of the enormous urban growth resulting in increased emergency calls.

I also respectfully submit that you give consideration to my request to modernise the fire service along with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect fire service employees. Both are needed to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament before the commencement of the fire season. This is important to me and my colleagues.

Thank you for taking the time to read my email. And please remember this is not a power grab, cash grab, take over, veto or any of the other slurs that have been thrown around in the media. This is just firefighters wanting to get back to what they are good at and passionate about and that is protecting their communities.



Matt Kent Leading Firefighter

South Morang Fire Station, 875 Plenty Road South Morang Vic 3752



This email is for official use only. The information in this communication is privileged and confidential, intended only for the use of the individual or entity named. If you are not the intended recipient, any dissemination, copying or use of the information is strictly prohibited. Any personal information in this email must be handled in accordance with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) and applicable laws. If you have received this transmission in error please inform us by return email and then delete it immediately from your system.