

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

1. I am a Senior Station Officer, employed by Country Fire Authority, and have been a career firefighter for 29 years, and before that, a volunteer firefighter for 10 years.
2. I live in Mornington and my substantive position is at Mornington Fire Station, however, at the present time I am working out of Frankston as a relieving officer. During the course of my career, I have worked at most CFA locations throughout Victoria.
3. I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:
 - I believe it is important to have a guaranteed response of two appliances, and at least 7 firefighters dispatched to all emergency calls. I have experienced first hand the difficulties of managing an emergency situation with less than the “international standard” of 7 on the fireground.
 - Apart from the increased efficiency of a firefight and the increased safety of all emergency personnel, the safety and protection of the community will also be increased and enhanced.
 - I am at a loss as to how employing all career firefighters in one fire service will impact on how volunteers serve their communities. Country Fire Authority will be a truly volunteer organisation – still protecting the country area of Victoria. The current administration of CFA have guaranteed there will be no immediate effect on how volunteers respond, whether they are from an integrated station or purely volunteer station.
 - This fire services reform is needed because of the urban, commercial and industrial growth that has occurred around the greater Melbourne area, and also in our larger regional centres. This growth has pushed into areas that were once classed as rural or urban interface – these areas have now become highly “urbanised” , and have increased risk associated with them. As mentioned previously, volunteers from CFA will still have a vital role in protecting communities from all forms of emergencies including bushfire response.
 - There will be many advantages of having one fire service for Victoria. The reform will assist with standardisation of training, specialist response, response standards and equipment to name but a few. There will also be advantages in the way this reform is to be managed – instead of two separate administrations there will be one overarching management structure.

4. Having once been a volunteer, I have also witnessed first hand the commitment and dedication of our volunteer firefighters. I can understand that it is becoming increasingly difficult for all volunteers to devote time to their brigade. I have always stressed to the volunteers at my station that “your family comes first, then your job, and if you have any time left over, that is for fire brigade”.

5. It is for this reason, as well as those mentioned previously, that the highly “urbanised” areas around the current integrated stations should become a part of one fire service for Victoria.

Yours sincerely,

John Townsend

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