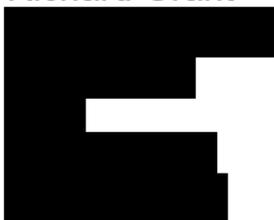


Richard Grant



To
Fire Service Bill Select Committee

My name is Richard Grant and I am a Commander in the Metropolitan Fire Brigade(MFB), I have in been a firefighter for 38 years. I am also a resident of Mount Eliza on the Mornington Peninsula and our home and family been under the protection of the Country Fire Authority(CFA) for over 30 years.

When I joined the MFB in 1979 we wore woolen tunics, our trucks were manual and the status of firefighters was often measured by how much smoke they could tolerate. Men over 28 years of age were too old to join and of course no women. Mobile phones and computers were the stuff of futuristic Science Fiction.

Since that time we have seen enormous advances in the fire services in terms of uniform, equipment, operating procedures and our culture. We have modern appliances, uniforms are state of the art. We operate under the Australian Incident Management System (AIMS), which lays out the number of firefighters required to safely and efficiently deal with the task at hand. It is adaptable and scalable so as to cope with small domestic incidents up to week long campaigns of state and national significance. The preservation of life, property and the environment are at the forefront of everything we do. The health and safety of all our firefighters, career and volunteer is paramount.

Melbourne and regional centres that the vast majority of Victorians reside in have expanded in terms of area and population and are largely unrecognizable from that day in 1979. To cope with this, major infrastructure has of course been built. Vast tracts of formerly rural land has been developed to create new suburbs into which people

and industry have poured all of which has powered the economic growth of the state to be equal of any developed country in the world.

We now have modern communications, new roads and rail are continuously underway, we shop online and social media is the means by which the x and y generations interact with each other and the outside world. Our children almost all finish high school and a vast number go on to further education. Our lifestyle and environment has evolved driven by necessity and technology and its not going to slow down.

Almost without exception, nothing in terms of the way we work and live is the same as in January 1979, yet the distribution of fire services in 1979 had already been in place for over 20 years.

In other areas of government change is generally done in a gradual and considered fashion to reflect the need for higher levels service delivery as population and risk profile changed. Due to the fractured way in which the fire services came into being this has always been seen as too difficult due to the territorial origins of the brigades. This was particularly so in the outer metropolitan brigades which started as rural brigades drawing their volunteers from those people working and living in the local area. The problem arises today when the volunteers needed to support these brigades are by necessity, increasingly working remote from their area of residence and are through no fault of theirs unable to respond to fire calls within the local area.

The recent dispute and the proposals for resolution has been put up as an attack on the volunteers that have served the state selflessly for over 100 years. This should not be seen as an attack or criticism of volunteers or their brigades. It is all about the safety of the community and health and wellbeing of the firefighters both career and volunteer. Where the risk profile dictates a particular level of service delivery, the community has a right to expect that level of

service regardless of which side of the municipal boundary they live. Under the present antiquated system no such guarantee exists. Response from urban volunteer stations is often haphazard and inconsistent. On some occasions the number of responders can be excess to requirement, which is a poor use of resources while on other occasions there will be inadequate, delayed or no response at all. All of this is not the fault of the volunteers, simply a result of modern life in a large city. High work demands in terms of time at work and distance travelled means response cannot be assured within the timeframes required.

All of these issues will be talked about at great length during this committee process and while the proposed reforms may not be to everybody's liking they are to everybody's benefit. There has been an unhealthy wedge driven through the fire services of Victoria and it cannot be allowed to continue. This is not just my view but was a key recommendation of the recent Fire services review. Previous reviews and the bushfire Royal Commission made similar observations.

I would implore the committee to recommend that these reforms be passed and be implemented without further delay. Then we firefighters both career and volunteer can get on with what we are here to do, which is protect the community in which we live and work from the effects of fire, hazardous incidents and other emergencies.

Richard Grant