

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Gordon Guest-Smith [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 6 July 2017 2:24 PM
To: LCSC
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: fire service reform submission

6 July 2017

Attention:
Parliamentary Committee in to Fire Service Reform

Email: LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au
[REDACTED]

Submission Re: Fire Service Reforms

To whom it may concern,

I have worked as a career Firefighter for the last six years. I was trained at Fiskville, then posted to Belmont in Geelong before transferring to Corio for four years and have been stationed at Wangaratta for the last year. I love my job, I look forward to going to work most shifts and I have nothing but appreciation for the fact that I am capable of helping others in their time need whilst working with a motivated team.

Wangaratta has submitted a letter which we as a collective address some points we want to get across however I have a few others that I'd like to mention here.

Having worked at Corio where we had staff support at most jobs I always knew that when we had a call we would have crews there to back us up at all times. Be it to get water when no hydrants were available, to rotate crews in large jobs for fatigue management or to allow a standby crew to perform a rescue. Now I am based in Wangaratta and I have seen the other side of the organisation where we are totally reliant on volunteer support to assist us in all manner of jobs both simple and technical.

I am a proactive person and work hard to maintain my skills in a range of areas and specialist roles in which I am qualified; it would be great if volunteers were trained to the same level as career staff which is what you will hear from many volunteers throughout Victoria. The simple truth though is that they are not and even if they stepped out of the training centre or station where they receive their training with an equivalent competency, maintaining those skills when you may come to the station once a week and turnout to a job every now and again is a whole other ball game. If I find it a challenge and I am working at the station it is not realistic to expect this from volunteers. Every single volunteer who has become a staff member will tell you that same story regardless of how proficient they believed themselves to be as a volunteer.

Are volunteers critical to protect life and property in Victoria? Yes. If there was a bottomless budget that answer would change to 'No', for the simple fact that volunteers are unreliable and not

required to turn out. If my house is involved in a fire or my wife in a car accident I don't care what badge is on a truck, I only want the best trained and fastest responding emergency services possible. Right now I know that that is not the case due to outdated response areas and 'turf' protection from many brigades more intent on increasing their ego's rather than the community safety.

We are an underutilised resource when it comes to emergency response in Victoria. We are able to provide 'surge capacity' when required but are not used due to cost but also because the volunteers do not want us on 'their turf'. The irony is that they don't want us there until it's too late and a situation they could have been resolved much sooner becomes protracted at the expense of those affected. A recent example was the steep angle rescue of a paraglider in Bright where the SES were on scene for 1-2 hours before calling the tech rescue crews at Wangaratta. Whether this was due to a lack of appreciation of the situation or because they want to 'keep the job' to themselves is unknown but the result was the same for the person affected, poor service delivery.

I have sat many times listening to the radio where we could respond and often be the first appliance on scene but due to that fact that thirty years ago the local Everton CFA Captain decided he didn't want staff to cross into his 'patch' we are not responded. The fact that I have listened to tin shed brigades with no rescue gear or barely level 1 first aid responding to MVA's with possible persons trapped is ludicrous. We could get there quickly and with our hydraulic gear potentially save lives. Again as a result of turf protection and outdated response areas we sit in station knowing that the most the local brigade will do is get a hose line out and a dry chemical extinguisher and await SES to perform the extrication. SES again are not required to turn out and rely on the 'good will' of its members. I don't want to leave the lives of my family or anyone in the community to chance and goodwill. People in the country are paying a fire service levy as well and they deserve to get the service that they pay for.

How many house fires in rural Victoria have been contained to the room of origin rather than burn to the ground? Not many I dare say. Eight minutes is a very long time when a fire is developing in a structure fire. That is how long volunteers have to respond in order to 'tick' the box in their response statistics and there are many cases where they cannot achieve that. South Wangaratta for example continues to fail in their response and we rely on them for our BA back up. What hurts more is the fact that South Wangaratta have been very vocal in their rejection of our EBA and now FRV. If you are against more staff and a reliable response then you are against me returning home safely to my family and are against increasing the chances that we may pull yours out safely in the event of an incident.

Eight minutes for volunteers versus ninety seconds for staff response. How could you possibly argue that even if FRV was going to impact volunteers by displacing them (which I do not believe to be the case) that that is a negative for community safety? If volunteers leave because staff are getting to jobs before they do then they are in the role for the wrong reasons and I for one will be glad to see the back of them.

I understand that there is a lot of sentiment and history attached to the CFA and the reforms will protect that and give the volunteers what they wanted all along. 'Hands off CFA' is the result they wanted. I fail to see what it is they are resisting other than the knee jerk 'anti UFU' party line that is spoon fed to them by the Liberal Party driven VFBV.

I am sick and tired of having the safety of my crews and that of the community compromised by ignorant turf protecting volunteers who play on public sentiment to drive their ego based agendas. The points I have made are in response to the 'takeover' attitude that pervades our volunteer brigades and media, the reality is the reforms will not impact upon them. You cannot keep your cake and eat it too.

I urge the committee to approve the reforms, they are required in the country as much as the outer metro areas. We need to move this organisation forward as right now it is broken and without this change it will remain so or degenerate further.

Yours sincerely,

Gordon.

Gordon Guest-Smith Leading Firefighter A Platoon
Wangaratta Fire Station – 26-30 Handley Street Wangaratta Vic 3677



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.