

The Hon. Gordon Rich-Phillips MLC
Chair - Fire Services Bill Select Committee
Department of the Legislative Council

RE: Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 Submission (CONFIDENTIAL).

Dear Chairperson and committee members,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the select committee for the opportunity to contribute towards the inquiry into the restructuring of Victoria's fire services. The following submission aims to address the committee's terms of reference, namely the:

- impact on fire service delivery across Victoria
- effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery
- short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision
- underlying policy rationale

As a firefighter serving within the great state of Victoria, it is my firm belief that we are in dire need of fire service reform. When the original fire service boundaries were drawn up Melbourne, and indeed Victoria, was a very different place. In 1960 the population of Victoria was [~2,857,000](#). The most recent census has Victoria's population at [~6,244,200](#). This is an increase of 218.55%, with no corresponding change to the structure of Victoria's fire services.

When the CFA was formed in 1945, Melbourne was not the sprawling city that it is today. The population of Geelong, for example, was only [88,000 in 1956](#). In 2017 it has more than doubled to [190,000](#). Geelong is not the only area incorrectly classified as 'country' that has experienced such strong growth. Areas such as Frankston, Dandenong, Melton and Boronia have experienced similar levels of growth. This growth in population, along with the associated growth in industry and infrastructure, means that there is a logical increased fire risk in these areas.

It is therefore unreasonable that these heavily urbanised areas do not get the same level of response to an incident as those within the Metropolitan Fire District. Residents of these growing outer suburbs actually pay a [greater contribution of the Fire Services Levy](#), but are not receiving the same level of coverage as their metropolitan counterparts.

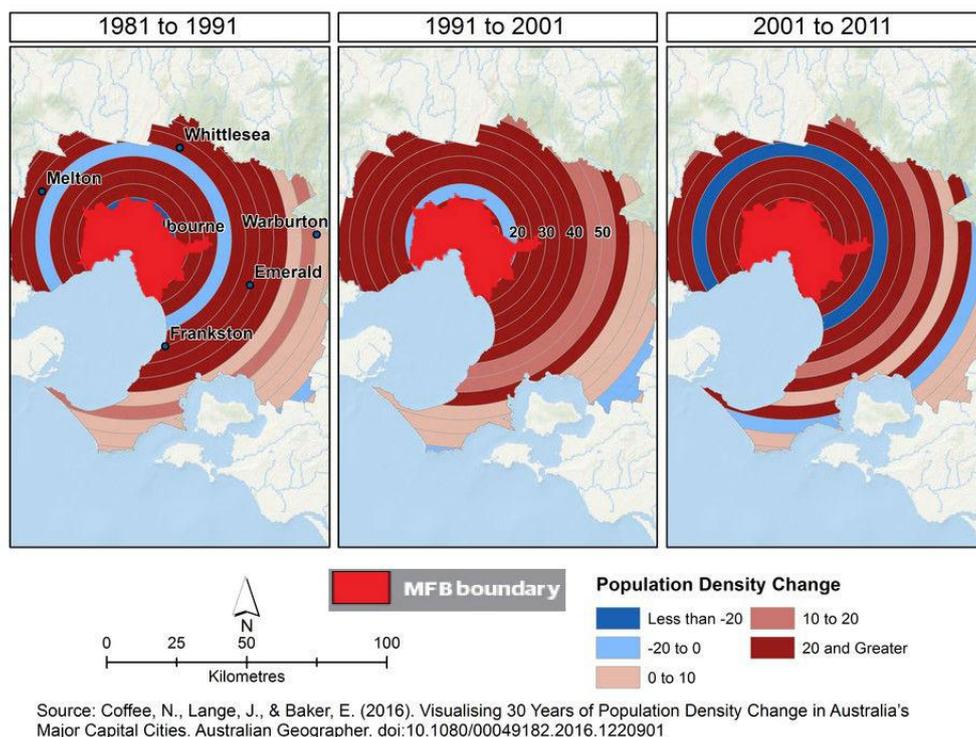


Figure 1 – Urban sprawl over the last 30+ years

In the Metropolitan Fire District, we are lucky to employ a system where at least two fire appliances with a minimum of 7 crew are immediately dispatched upon notification of an incident (with exceptions for Emergency Medical Response and a few other incident types). Response times from station to scene are usually within 7 minutes of notification. Outside the Metropolitan Fire District, the number and types of appliances dispatched can depend on the availability of volunteers.

As often happens, a professional CFA crew may be dispatched alongside one or more volunteer brigades. However, due to the nature of volunteerism, the volunteer brigade may be unable to commit to crewing an appliance due to personal or professional obligations. As a result, professional CFA firefighters can be left without support during the earliest, and most critical, phase of fireground operations.

In my experience of combatting structural fires, having suitably qualified backup that arrive on scene in a timely fashion is the sole contributing factor to saving lives and property. Firefighting is a physically arduous and mentally taxing endeavour. Having a second, professionally trained crew arrive in Breathing Apparatus (BA) and ready to conduct internal fire fighting operations ensures that we are able to mount an aggressive attack on the fire, enhance our rescue capabilities, and minimise danger to ourselves and others.

I have been able to witness the benefits of this type of response first hand during my time as a firefighter. On December 2016, Pumper 4 (Brunswick Fire Station) was first on scene to a reported house fire in Coburg. There was a fire in the kitchen that had extended into the roof-space. However, our first priority was the care and evacuation

of an elderly injured lady, who had slipped while attempting to evacuate. Because we had a second team on-scene, within minutes, my team was able to extricate and provide first aid to the patient, while the second crew from Pumper 12 (Preston Fire Station) was able to climb into the roof-space and attack the fire.

Because all career firefighters are BA qualified, and a second appliance was immediately dispatched, we were able to simultaneously perform the rescue undertake fire fighting operations. If a second appliance hadn't arrived so quickly, the outcome may have been much worse. Likewise, if a second appliance had arrived but lacked BA qualified firefighters (as many volunteer brigades do), then we may have lost the house, with fire extension possibly endangering the surrounding properties.

This situation is just one of many that I have experienced where the Metropolitan Fire Brigade's dual appliance dispatch has saved life and property. MFB firefighters are fortunate to work in the Metropolitan Fire District because we are guaranteed quick and effective support. It stands to reason that professional CFA firefighters, who provide the same high level of community service, should have the same working conditions and level of support when conducting firefighting operations in the urbanised outer suburbs of Melbourne.

By amalgamating professional firefighters from MFB and CFA into Victorian Fire Rescue, we can ensure that all professional firefighters are operating under the same doctrine and best practice. This can end the bitter dispute that has been plaguing these great organisations, and reduce stress to our firefighters, families and the community by removing professional CFA firefighters from the toxic industrial climate they have been a part of. Most importantly, this reform will help to mitigate the unacceptable risk to both community and firefighters that the current out-dated structure allows for.

I would like to thank the committee for taking the time to read my submission. Please feel free to contact me if you would like any further information, or if you wish to publish this confidential submission.

Yours Sincerely,

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