

6 July 2017

**FIRE SERVICES BILL SELECT COMMITTEE 2017**

My name is Stephen Hill of Mill Park, Victoria. I am a Professional Firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB) with 30 years service. I am stationed at Bundoora Fire Station that borders CFA territory, I hold the rank of Leading Firefighter.

I write in support of the Fire Services Reform. It is my opinion that creating a new organisation known as Fire Rescue Victoria will be a reform that is well overdue. An organisation that combines the career firefighters from both MFB and CFA is a commonsense approach to managing the ever increasing population growth of Melbourne's outer suburbs and Victoria's provincial cities.

I reside in Mill Park, adjacent the Plenty River Gorge, just 20km from Spring Street, Melbourne. This area is deemed to be under the auspices of the CFA. 60 years ago when the MFB/CFA borders were established this area was countryside. Today Melbourne outer suburbia extends a further 10km past Mill Park. Rapid population growth is expected to continue, doubling by 2050. It's time our fire services were brought into the 21st century and reflected the ever expanding needs of the community it serves.

As a professional firefighter with over 30 years service with the MFB I can attest to the poor morale arising from protracted industrial disputes, political interference and constant media attacks and feel deeply for my career colleagues in the CFA who have to endure this and more.

I have genuine respect for those who volunteer their services in the CFA, they play an integral role in the fire services delivered to our State but I am constantly frustrated by an 'us versus them' culture where people make decisions based on self interest and of protecting their turf rather than what is in the best interests of the community they serve. An example of this occurred at a house fire in Greensborough recently, although MFB Greensborough Fire Station was just 5 minutes away it was not called upon because the fire was in CFA territory. Instead CFA dispatched pumpers from Plenty, Eltham, Diamond Creek and South Morang. It is fortunate that the occupants managed to escape uninjured, the house however was destroyed by fire. A quicker response by dispatching an available MFB pumper at Greensborough could have mitigated the damage.

Instances like this are unfortunately not rare. However the new fire service model will address such issues. Greensborough fire station and all other MFB stations, will become a part of Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV). Eltham & South Morang will also become FRV along with all other staffed CFA Stations. Thus helping to break down the current 'us versus them' mindset. A newly created Commissioner overlooking FRV and having EMV ensure all services work together as one will prevent such problems reoccurring.

\$100 million in extra funds for CFA training of volunteers, support and new station facilities is a much needed improvement for our unpaid counterparts. This injection of funds will help alleviate the concerns from volunteers unable to get the basic training they need. It should also help show that the Fire Services Reform is not only about improving the management of our expanding urban population growth but that it will also develop the skills and enhance the safety of the firefighters in our rural communities.

During my career I have been confronted by an abundance of fire/chemical incidents and welcome the presumptive rights to cancer compensation that will be afforded to firefighters both career and volunteer.

It is my solemn request that the politicisation of the fire services must end, it's time to look at the big picture. It's time to do what is in the best interests of the fire services as a whole and our ever expanding community.

Regards,

Stephen Hill

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