

By email: [REDACTED]

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

I am Senior Station Officer Leigh Allan of the Shepparton Fire Brigade and part of the Country Fire Authority. I have been both a volunteer and Career member for nearly 17 years and during this time I have received a number of awards and very proud receiver of the National Emergency Medal.

I have been a junior & senior coach in sports and was heavily involved with my kids primary school. In which part I was part of the school council, parents & friends as well as doing and planning local projects for the school. Most recently was the set-up of an outdoor vegetable garden for all age groups. I am currently involved with the 000 ball committee to allow emergency service personal the opportunity to relax in a social environment for a sit down meal. The committee was established again due to the increasing work load on all services and a better way to interact outside of our very demanding jobs. We are a community service and to continue to put back into the community we have gone out to local business and had generous donations provide so that we can give back to the community. Last year we raised \$6300 dollars for the Zaidee foundation and this year we hope to get neat \$10,000 for local business "GV Connect".

Why do we do this? First of all, it is to wind down; but mainly to continue to provide a service for the community of Greater Shepparton. I am very driven to assist those in need and my job allows me to do this, but are the community getting the best from our current service?

Therefore I am writing this submission of the proposed reform of the fire service for the following reason:

Being an officer of the station during my shift it is up to me to decide on what vehicles we take to an incident. This will always depend on the type of call and the location of the call. Here in Shepparton we have an Aerial appliance that covers the whole state of Victoria; however it is strategically placed in Shepparton to cover the high risk infrastructures of not only Shepparton but Numurkah, Cobram, Wangaratta, Wodonga, Echuca, Strathmerton and many other places. Shepparton also has a Heavy Hazmat that cover exactly the same as listed for the Aerial appliance but several months ago the Hazmat went up to Mildura to support NSW in a chemical spill on a major Highway. My point here is that these appliances are specialist vehicles that require a high level of training. To provide you an example of how increased numbers of fully qualified personal on the hazmat works at an incident is as follows:

- Minimum manning for the Heavy Hazmat in Shepparton is 2. Two people at a minimum to drive and operate the appliance. This is nowhere near enough to operate a heavy Hazmat, however these two people have undergone a number of different Hazmat training courses as well as an advanced Hazmat 2 course. They have also had to undergo an assessment on the Heavy Hazmat as well as a Monitor Hazard Atmospheres course. This course allows members to use a variety of detection equipment to ensure the safety of crews and the community. For a major incident the serge capacity for Hazmat is low, Volunteer members that have completed the hazmat course (not Hazmat 2) may not have worn a Gas suit for some time therefore putting themselves and others at risk. This is due to lack of opportunity and training for them.

The addition of extra money that the government has allocated for the volunteers will greatly benefit these members. The problem that this creates is that the standard of training varies. By requesting additional personal from the proposed FRV, the Incident Controller knows that these members are fully qualified and at a known level of competency. This will allow the Incident Controller to plan and start the process a lot quicker to ensure the safety of the community but also crews attending the incident.

Knowing that when you attend a fire or an incident in an integrated area. The proposed FRV support truck has a minimum of **four** personal that have completed a recruit course, sat both a Leading Firefighter and Station Officer assessment and are trained in a number of areas. Currently volunteer brigades cannot guarantee who will attend the incident. They are not able to ensure that they have two qualified Breathing Apparatus operators on the vehicle, a driver and in some cases don't have a crew leader qualified person in the truck. Also that their response times can vary from 4 minutes to 10 minutes compared to Career staff of **90 seconds**. It is unfair in today's society to ask Volunteer to drop everything from work, holidays or looking after young ones to get to the station and turnout a truck in 4 minutes for Shepparton and Mooropna, 8 minutes for Tallygaroopna and Shepparton East. Due to time restraints to get the truck out the door, my experience in nearly 17 years in the CFA is that as soon as there is a crew (between 2-5) the truck takes off in volunteer stations. This means that the skill mix can vary and may not have the appropriate skills for the incident. It will turn out with who gets to the station first! There have been times when a truck radio's out that they have turned out however when I have passed the station in a career truck they are still sitting in the station. I can only assume they were waiting for more members. But why give a turnout message when the crew is not right or completed? How does this serve the community? It happens to meet the time requirements set out by the CFA and what these stats do not indicate is the crew levels or skill mix.

All integrated stations have had a huge increase in population and Shepparton is no different. The way that Shepparton is zoned for fire coverage is very inconstant with the growth of Shepparton and surrounds. The river stops us from attending fire less than 2 kms away as a primary brigade, which means the next brigade has four minutes to respond and we have 90 seconds. The review of these boundaries will greatly assist the community and ensure that they get a fast response with a complete crew of highly trained firefighters. Whether it be a fire, car accident or an incident. This is not to go against the great work of the volunteers in the brigades however doesn't the community deserve the quickest and highly trained crews as soon as possible?

I am the training officer at the Shepparton Fire Brigade and the 2nd lieutenant and I arrange the training for the Brigade. Training that is conducted on a Monday night and there to assist the skills and acquisition of new skill to volunteer members. Ben and I have been doing this together for two years now and we have a great rapport with each other. We are always trying to come up with new ways to keep the training numbers up. Some examples of this are a joint training exercise that I co-ordinated with Ambulance Victoria, Shepparton Search & Rescue and CFA Shepparton. Its aim was to train together as if it was a real job and for each agency to understand the policy and procedures each agency has to follow. The night was very successful and promoted in the Shepparton newspaper. So where am I going with this? If the career staff go over to FRV then training at Shepparton Fire Station will not change. Ben and I will still keep trying to come up with ideas to train, we will still do joint agency training and nothing will change for volunteers at the Shepparton Fire Station. They will not change for the supporting brigades either and in fact I believe that more money has been allocated to CFA if we go over to the new system.

I hear a lot from different people on how this will change things and that they will leave the CFA. Can I put this to you? Some time ago the CFA said to all volunteers that they would have to demonstrate their skills to meet the organisations requirement to have minimum skills. To ensure the safety of all CFA members the training department requested that brigade and their members would have to demonstrate some or all of the national standard training package skills. This was to cover themselves and the CFA in case of an accident during training or a fire and allow correct compensation. This was met with great resistance and members of brigades resigned and left the CFA. Why? You will have to ask them, but CFA was obliged to ensure the safety of their members. It was also to provide a consistent approach to training, but this met a lot of resistance because members have been doing this job for a long time and why should I have to show you. I can say this because my father in-law did that. He said that he'd been doing it this way for many years and he didn't have to do what the CFA was asking. I'll resign before doing that. My point is that he did not understand the benefits that the CFA was doing for all members. They were ensuring that each member was covered if something went wrong and it was a requirement for CFA to meet the standards set as a Registered Training Organisation. This event was going to affect our serge capacity and leave the community unsafe.

Well history shows that people did not approve the change that CFA requested but once the dust had settled they could see the benefit of change. This proposal to change to FRV for career staff is similar. People are being scared into rejecting change and mostly misinformed. When I have spoken to people in the street and explained the changes to my understanding they say that's not how they read it. Read! The facts are being left out and CFA statistics won't lie. They will show the response times in all integrated areas and as I mentioned before it won't show the crew mix. This is so vital to the safety of crews at incidents and the community.

By having all Career firefighters in once service will not affect the volunteers ability to turnout or affect there serge capacity as mentioned. I would like to know how this will change the process that we currently follow. If we get a grass and scrub fire in Kialla, then the same brigades will be paged and the Kialla captain will still be the incident controller. Career staff like now work under the incident of the primary brigade. If they make tankers 15 then Shepparton staff usually will stay to protect the Shepparton Community and the Volunteers will turn out the tanker. Nothing changes. Group officers and Deputy Group officers will work with the operations officers just the same way as we do it know. If anything it is going to give volunteers more options to hold higher positions in the operations side of things for these events. On behalf of our 1st Lieutenant at a meeting with a local member, he said that nothing will change for the brigade. So the leader of the brigade for the volunteers is happy that it will be business as usual. Why aren't people hearing this? Because the fire service has become a political football and media publications are only publishing information that is blatantly untrue. But we all don't know about the unknown, what will this change mean? How will this affect me? What the community need to know is that when they call 000, they will still get a red fire truck.

This reform will greatly assist the proposed FRV in being able to standardise the fire service. There is a big difference between MFB stations, outer metro CFA station and rural integrated CFA stations. An example of this is our Breathing Apparatus (BA) sets. Two years ago whilst working in Mildura a couple of BA got damaged due to wear and tear. We sent these back as per the procedures and we were told that these sets were no longer being serviced and no replacement set would be sent up. Now in Mildura the freight always took a couple of days and the Officer in Charge requested replacement sets. What was sent was old sets that they used in Geelong, sets that were completely different to those we had on station. So the staff and volunteers had to run two different BA sets to any jobs. How can we run an organisation like that? Standardising our

equipment is not only effective and safe but also cost affective. CFA and MFB run different helmets, hose, trucks and lets not think of Parks, Prisons and other fire agencies.

Recently the new recruits coming out of the training college are now being trained the same way for both services. From there they differ and training is then targeted for each agency. With this change, training will be the same for all paid employees and will only enhance the skills that they provide to the people of Victoria. Doing the same specialist training courses and equipment will greatly benefit the community and also assist in dealing with incidents anywhere in the state. Training for CFA volunteers will also improve with the increase in training and money allocated by the Andrews Government. If we play politics, why did the previous government cut funding to the CFA and use Fire Service Levy money to attack paid staff? But let's move on and fix this now.

The current environment in the CFA is very toxic. Both career staff and volunteers are sick of being in the middle of this long drawn out dispute and the current government has seen this and trying to make a right. Personally I have been sworn at, abused and feel very fatigued by all this. My mental state is challenged every day and to be continually attacked in social media is disgusting. I and many at the Shepparton Fire Brigade pride ourselves on serving the community to the best of our ability. But I am nearly at the end; this ongoing battle has drained not only me but many at our station. Now I talk of myself and staff here at Shepparton, but let's not forget the volunteers. They like me are over this continual game of chess being played out. They want to serve the community as well and the volunteers at Shepparton are tired as well. Supporting brigades are, the public is and my family is. Can you please explain why I got abused filling up my car after work by a member of the public. The names I was called were abusive, but it was my kids sitting in the car with the window down that I felt for. They asked me when we left why that man was swearing at me. All I could say was that he was having a bad day. I will always serve the community but some things that volunteer members have said to me and my crew won't be forgotten. They are talking through emotion and frustration but I have always been professional and always will.

Due to the past few years, I have arranged a mental Health session for the Shepparton Fire Station through CFA because that's where we are at. I have staff guys that have family disputes with relatives that are CFA volunteers and members being called names when doing inspections on protected premises. This has to stop before we lose any good people to suicide. That's how serious this situation is and I wish politicians could see the damage that is being done. An example of this is a meeting that was held with a political member and they, after being made aware of the seriousness of the situation, then continues to push the party line and deliver a pamphlet to the community to scare them and say untruths. This pamphlet got delivered to the Fire Station and caused heightened emotions that this was a personal attack on them. My wife won't even say what my career is now and my son have been teased because of my job. **THIS HAS TO STOP!**

I am reluctant to highlight deficiencies in the current structure of volunteer members; however I believe that I need to, to support the proposed new FRV structure.

An incident back on the 22nd January, 2014, I was an officer working at the Mildura fire station when we received a call at 01:01:19 to a fire at the rear of a Foodtown supermarket. I have listed the response times for the incident and highlighted the colour for **staff** and **volunteer** response.

Staff from Mildura Fire Station were on scene four minutes after the page message with a crew of 4. Mildura Tanker then followed with a crew of two (volunteers) and arrived 7 minutes after the initial page. Now that is fair considering the time of night, however I would like to point out that the tanker is capable of transporting 4. Now this is where the concerning point is and one that in my opinion prevented us from saving the building. The time it took other volunteer brigades to turnout and arrive at the biggest fire Mildura has seen for some time is concerning. The next available pumper took 29 minutes to arrive and it was the furthest from the fire. **29 minutes** for the next pumper to arrive. The next Pumper for this major fire was 32 minutes from the paging time. The worst of all and I have never seen this in all my time as a member of the CFA, one Brigade turned up **5 hours 38 minutes** after the initial call. This was after the Operations Officer personally called up members from that brigade to see if they could bring the truck down. On the first arriving volunteer pumper the pump operator was not able to get water out of the truck which delayed further firefighting until they were able to get water into the truck and onto the structure fire. This took over 5 minutes before water operations were right to go and allow me to put crews closer to the fire.

Under the new proposed FRV system, I would have had 8 members from FRV on scene within 4 minutes. There would have been 2x Pumpers which would have significantly reduced damage to the building. This was a million dollar fire that would have greatly benefitted to the new proposed FRV and increased the safety of the crews working in and around the fire due to the level of training that they have had to go through.

Brigade	Brigade Advised	Appliance	Responding	Onscene	Time to on scene after pager message
Mildura	01:01:19	Pumper	01:03:02	01:05	4 minutes
	01:01:19	Tanker	01:08:29	01:10	7 minutes
	01:01:19	Hazmat	01:16:43	01:20	15 minutes
		Car			
Merbein	01:01:45	Pumper	01:20	01:33	32 minutes
Irymple	01:05:43	Pumper	06:43	06:52	5hrs 38 minutes
Red Cliffs	01:11:56	Pumper	01:18	01:40	29 minutes
Wentworth		Pumper			

My understanding is that volunteers will receive more funding for training, brigade support and improved Health & Safety. With further funding for station building programs this allows the volunteers also become a volunteer service only and enshrined in law. I respect what volunteers do and the commitment that they provide the community, however it is becoming harder in urban and rural areas for volunteers to respond like they did 10 years ago. CFA statistics show that brigades fail to meet the standards across the state. The ability to respond in suitable time is getting harder for brigades and the community deserves the most efficient service that Victoria can provide.

Therefore I support the reform and hope that this committee understands the impact that this has had on both CFA staff and CFA volunteer members. The welfare of these members should be a priority and provide the right information out to the public, not political cat and mouse. If this is not resolved soon then it will be hard for everyone to keep the energy up and be safe on the fire ground. This reform will allow the CFA to act and control the organisation how they have been asking for some time and the FRV will allow paid staff the opportunity to have consistent training, standard equipment and negotiate like any employee would with an employer.

I am happy to discuss any of this submission with the committee.

Yours Sincerely

Leigh Matthew Allan

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