

Patron: The Honourable Alex Chernov AC QC, Governor of Victoria

Cardinia
Fire Brigades Group



Ref: Group Fire Service Reform Submission_060717

6th July 2017

Fire Service Bill Select Committee
LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Fire Services Bill Select Committee,

RE: Victoria Fire Service Reform Submission

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Cardinia Group of Fire Brigades, which is situated in Melbourne's south-east growth corridor 55 kms from Melbourne's Central Business district and is considered one of Melbourne's largest growth areas.

Cardinia Group covers Cardinia Shire which has a population of approx. 99,000 and is made up of the following CFA brigades, **Bayles, Beaconsfield, Bunyip, Cockatoo, Gembrook, Heath Hill, Koo Wee Rup, Lang Lang, Maryknoll, Nar Nar Goon, Officer, Pakenham, Pakenham Upper, Tynong, Toomuc and Upper Beaconsfield**. We are situated in CFA South East region and make up 22% of brigades in District 8.

There are a number of facts we wish to highlight our brigades have achieved in the fiscal year 2016 / 2017.

1. Cardinia Group brigades protected a population of 99,192 people which is set to increase to 180,308 by 2036. (source *Cardinia Shire*)
2. They attended 2,610 incidents which include Structure Fires, Alarms, Rescues, MVA's, Hazmat and Grass & Scrub fires. (source *FIRS*)
3. All brigades each week train on a regular basis totalling approx. 384 hours dedicated to skills maintenance and or additional skills acquisition.
4. We have 2 specialist brigades providing Road Accident Rescue and Gas Support.

All of this was done with the majority of volunteers and 1 integrated CFA brigade at Pakenham with 4 career staff supporting each brigade to code 1 (emergency) turnouts. This arrangement has been working reasonably well and we believe it is providing a good balance between the unchanging urban / rural interface risk to the north of the Princess Hwy, and the fast growing urban risk to the south of the Princess Fwy.

All of our members either live or work in the communities that they protect and are a valuable source of local knowledge in times of crisis. This highlights the important dedicated work that our volunteers do every day, week, month and year always on call 24/7. It also highlights the surge capacity that volunteers can offer when needed for Strike Team deployments or additional BA crews at a large industrial fire.

In response to the call for submissions in relation to the proposed Fire Service Reform, we would like to offer the following for consideration into the future of Victorian Fire Services;



Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria:

Decrease in the Standards of Fire Cover - CFA Volunteer brigades in urban areas are currently measured against an 8 min response time and most CFA brigades are meeting their standards of fire cover. Under the Fire Services Reforms, we believe that a 10 min response time is going to be adopted which will extend the reach of FRV further than currently publicised. If this occurs, then there will be a reduction in fire service delivery in some parts of our communities.

Radial Search - Most of the area north of the Princess Hwy in our Group area is of undulating terrain. It is unclear to us in the Group how the MFB / FRV radial search response system (10 min from each FRV station) is going to provide a more timely response when traveling uphill to a fire north of the Princess Hwy. There would be a local CFA volunteer fire brigade which could be traveling downhill to a fire in these locations (e.g. Pakenham Upper) which would arrive more quickly than FRV appliances. This appears to be reducing the level of fire service delivery in some areas.

Delays in Escalated Responses to Going Structure Fires - It is likely that FRV will set up the GARS system to respond additional FRV appliances and firefighters to going structure fires and not utilize local CFA brigades as this is the system currently used by the MFB. As a result, there is likely to be delays with responding additional FRV resources into communities like Pakenham as FRV resources would need to be dispatched from Hallam and Cranbourne. This seems contradicting to me when there are trained structure firefighters available in our volunteer CFA brigades that are available and would arrive on scene before the more distant FRV resources.

Loss of CFA Surge Capacity - Many of the 35 CFA Integrated brigades destined to move across to FRV will lose their Pumper and Tanker appliances. In many situations this will mean that there is no Tanker for the remaining CFA Volunteers at some of the 35 brigades to train with, or respond to fire calls over the fire danger period. Apart from this having an immediate effect on the strength and depth of CFA surge capacity, there will also be a longer term effect associated with the ongoing viability of these CFA Volunteer brigades who do not have a fire fighting appliance to respond in.

Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery:

Extension of FRV Response Area – We are concerned that FRV will implement a 10 min radial search response zone at each of the former 35 integrated CFA stations which will extend their response area further into CFA Volunteer brigade areas. This is easily achieved via the 10 min Emergency Medical Response boundaries that are already in place. Many more CFA Volunteer brigades will lose parts of their fire response areas. In our Group, this means that both the Officer and Toomuc brigades will completely lose their response areas and be significantly impacted by the proposed Fire Services Reforms. As soon as this happens, volunteer engagement and participation at these brigades will begin to rapidly decline, because the need for them to respond will be replaced by the neighbouring FRV station thus devaluing the training and contributions from those members. If there are an additional 2 CFA Volunteer brigades affected for each of the 35 integrated CFA stations then there are potentially an extra 70 CFA Brigades that will be effected by the Fire Services Reforms. In terms of CFA surge capacity, this means that there are potentially 105 CFA volunteer brigades / tankers that will be facing the challenge of declining Volunteer engagement, participation and membership.

Training & Assessing - With the move of all CFA Instructors to FRV and the impending signing of an EBA with their collective bargaining agents, there is no guarantee that CFA Volunteers will retain access to the same level of outside of business hours courses and training due to overtime limitations. Under the current arrangements this has not been major issue and we are very concerned that under the new reforms / EBA that it will be. If volunteers can't attend training courses in times that are suitable to them, then volunteer participation and engagement will be reduced.

Loss of CFA Surge Capacity - The Fire Services Reform will result in at least 35 CFA Volunteer brigades not having a primary fire response area. Therefore the ability for these Volunteer brigades to respond to fire calls is very limited as the co-located FRV brigade will still support their neighbouring CFA brigades (as they do today). We can't see how these 35 CFA Volunteer brigades will be able to keep members interested. We fear that these CFA Volunteer brigades will lose their skills and members quite



quickly and there will be a significant loss in CFA surge capacity when we experience the next serious bushfire season.

Short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision:

Reduction in CFA Funding – We are concerned that the majority of the current CFA Fire Services levy will go towards funding the huge costs involved with implementing the Fire Services Reforms and increasing the number of career firefighters, station upgrades and appliances. This will significantly reduce the funding available to the CFA for stations, appliances, training and equipment. This reduced CFA funding will only result in older facilities and appliances for CFA Volunteer brigades and mean that brigades will have to conduct additional community fund raising to fill the gap. This will place an additional financial burden on the community.

Fire Services Levy Increases- The additional career firefighter labour costs and the need for building alterations to support minimum manning requirements at many of the 35 integrated CFA brigades moving over to FRV will need to be paid for somehow. Our concern is that there will be no choice but to significantly increase the Fire Services levy post the next state election to cover these ongoing costs. This will place an additional cost burden on the community that is not warranted.

Replacing Vehicles and Stations – The introduction of FRV will require a fleet of appliances which will come from the existing CFA Fleet of Pumper and Tankers in the proposed 35 integrated stations. This will leave a large majority of Volunteer brigades that are part of those integrated stations with no fire fighting vehicle. Some of the fire fighting vehicles in these volunteer brigades need to be funded and replaced immediately. If you were to just look at replacement Tankers, the cost would be in excess of 15 million dollars (the cost of a CFA Medium tanker is approx. \$450K multiplied by 35 brigades = \$15,750,000)

In our District, there are 9 integrated stations and the general view is at least 6 of those have indicated they wish to have their own station away from the FRV Station. The average cost to build a station could be upwards of 2 million so to equate that out would be an additional 12 million dollars just in District 08.

Underlying policy rationale:

Career Staff Stations - Why do we need to have 7x24hr coverage with career firefighters in geographical areas that do not have a high number of call outs? CFA volunteer brigades who are training regularly, have an adequate day time response, and are supported by neighbouring FRV or CFA volunteer stations should be allowed to continue until such time as they experience a substantial change in their response and prevention capability. This model is working in Cardinia Group so why change it?

Fire Doesn't Wait – This current public campaign claims that to successfully defend your property, you need 7 professional fire fighters across 2 professional crews in 8 minutes.

Currently in Cardinia the majority of properties in urban areas get 5 paid fire fighters supported by up to 3 volunteer brigades with 12 qualified experienced volunteer fire fighters in an additional 3 Firefighting appliances. This is the integrated model that is currently working well and is very cost effective. To replace this model with even only 2 additional paid firefighters will increase the cost of providing a fire service dramatically.

We trust that the above mentioned will be considered by the Fire Service Bill Select Committee, and we hope that you will continue to support volunteers in playing an important and fulfilling role in the future of Victoria's Fire and Emergency Management.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Wenczel



Deputy Group Officer – Cardinia Group of Brigades

