

Honourable members of the select committee.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission. My name is Matt Jones and I hold the rank of Station Officer (SO) within Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB). I have been employed by MFB since 2000, and it is my professional opinion that in my time at the organisation the most pressing, yet least regarded issue, has been the need for fire service reform.

Before taking the role of SO I spent the last 9 years of my career as a Leading Firefighter at Croydon Fire Station. Croydon Fire Station is one of the furthest east stations in the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD) and as such shares a border with a number of CFA Volunteer Brigades.

In my time responding to calls with the local CFA Brigades, I found the Volunteers to be dedicated, hard working and cheerful and I always enjoyed a good relationship with them. I have never had an issue with the Volunteers and I applaud their commitment and dedication to the service they provide.

What I have always had a problem with, and continue to do so today, is the idea that a heavily urbanised area is totally reliant upon the availability of these community minded people. As population has grown, the call volume has increased and through no fault of their own, it's becoming increasingly difficult for Volunteers in these areas to meet the needs of their community.

I have had countless experiences of responding into CFA areas where the local brigades have responded late, responded with only one or two crew, responded with crews who are inadequately qualified and even worse have failed to respond at all. I

stress once again that this is in no way a failure of these Volunteers; it is a failure of the system that permits it to happen.

I will give you a number of examples to highlight my concerns: I attended a fire call to a reported house fire in Wonga Park. MFB crews responded from Croydon Fire Station, and while we left the station within the required 90 second time frame it still took us over 10 minutes to arrive on scene as we had so far to travel. We completed our investigation and found that there was no fire, and it was only as we were about to leave the scene that a single CFA appliance arrived, a good half an hour after the time of the call. Given that in today's conditions a single room will "flash over" (the point at which a room becomes totally engulfed in flames) in a matter of minutes, the potential for a disastrous outcome is huge with such delayed response times from the closest brigades. Wonga Park is a heavily populated suburb with many multi-million dollar houses.

On another occasion MFB crews from Croydon were dispatched to a reported fire alarm operating at Chirnside Park shopping centre. Two MFB appliances were despatched from Croydon Fire Station. Both MFB appliances were on scene for a number of minutes and investigating the call before a CFA appliance arrived on scene. The responding brigade had two firefighters on it as no other members had presented at the station to attend the call. On this occasion, I was the officer in charge, but as the call was in CFA area it was the responsibility of the Firefighter from the CFA brigade to send "wordback" (situation report for call history). He had to ask me to do it for him as he didn't know how to and he had nobody left on his appliance to relay the message on.

In my opinion, this was a wholly inappropriate fire service response for a suburban shopping centre. Not only was the area inadequately serviced by their local brigades, but also due to the need to respond two MFB appliances, Croydon was also left without both of its appliances to respond in their own area if necessary.

One final scenario for this submission that concerns me deeply was the attendance of MFB crews at a factory fire in Kilsyth. MFB appliances were responded to a factory issuing smoke, and once again I was the officer in charge. We were first on scene and could see smoke issuing from the factory. I instructed 4 of my firefighters to don breathing apparatus (BA) and make entry to the factory to try to locate/extinguish the fire. While they were inside, an appliance from the local brigade arrived. When I asked for two of their firefighters to standby in BA as a rapid intervention team (RIT) in the event of the need to rescue/recover the crews already performing an internal search, I was dismayed to be informed that the appliance had no personnel on board qualified to wear BA. A second appliance arrived on scene and it too had no BA qualified personnel on board.

As an Officer, the health and wellbeing of my firefighters is of paramount importance to me, and while we accept that the job comes with inherent risk, MFB has procedures in place to mitigate as much as possible the risks and create safer conditions for us. This situation placed me in a position where my crews were performing a dangerous task and were without any backup at all should anything go wrong. This is a wholly unacceptable situation. I've never had any problem with Volunteer Firefighters and I respect their diligence, but at a call they are an unknown quantity. I know with Career Firefighters the standards to which they are trained and what I can expect from them at a fire call.

I strongly believe that the key point of Fire Service Reform is to reasonably assess an area's Fire Service response based on certain key criteria. Every area should have some kind of trigger point where a change to its Fire Service is considered. The decision should be based on things like: population growth, risk factors, emergency call rates and ability of CFA Brigades to meet their Service Delivery Standards. It's completely inappropriate and unfair on many areas that their Fire Service response is entirely dictated by what is now out dated and arbitrary borders.

It's a critical time for our growing state, and you as committee members are poised to make a crucial decision. Do we move our Fire Service to a progressive new model that allows for change and growth, or do we stick with an out dated system that doesn't cater at all to said growth.

I thank you once again for your time and trust you will make the best decision for Victoria, a decision that will be based on facts and not emotion or political rhetoric. If you wish to discuss my submission with me I can be contacted on 0423 007 272.

Yours faithfully

Matt Jones

MFB Station Officer