

My name is Bernard Ward and I have been a professional MFB firefighter for almost 10 years. I am currently based at Carlton Fire Station. I am a Leading Fire Fighter with the following specialist qualifications; Heavy Rescue Operator, Urban Search and Rescue, Trench Rescue, Mechanical Loader Operator and Forklift Operator.

I write to express my support for the proposed fire services reform.

I've seen firsthand what happens when firefighters are dispatched and consequently reach an emergency in a timely way. The outcomes have been, I'm pleased to say, mostly positive. Lives have been saved and property damaged kept to a minimum. I can confidently respond to an emergency situation knowing the trained staff I work alongside and the trucks turned out to support me are only moments away. Moments from essential lifesaving services that you yourself may need one day. Should that day ever come...we'll be there!

Victoria's fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this outdated system 35 areas are wrongly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised and residential. Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong are just some of the 35 'country areas'. I have family in some of these so called 'Country' zones and it worries me to think that their lives and property will, not could, be directly affected because of outdated zoning.

Therefore, these areas need to be re-zoned and made part of the reform of the fire service.

A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career firefighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas.

All Victorian, professional and volunteer firefighters, deserve modern fire services that meet the needs of our growing community.

We all have the right to feel safe. To feel that when we call our emergency services members for help that they will be there quickly and in numbers that offer every chance of a positive outcome. Highly urbanised zones such as those mentioned above deserve that too.

Victorians need your help in order to ensure the safety of all Victorians including me as a firefighter. I ask you as a Victorian to please seriously consider your support for the proposed fire services reform. Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of your constituents, and all communities in our growing state.

Additionally, it will ensure the safety of me as a firefighter and my colleagues and stop the ever increasing and unrealistic demand being placed on volunteer firefighters because of the enormous urban growth resulting in increased emergency calls.

I also respectfully submit that you give consideration to my request to modernise the fire service along with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect fire service employees. I've seen firsthand the devastation of colleagues passing away due to cancer related illness' and/or undergoing cancer treatment. They should have been able to concentrate on recovery and family and not having to fight for their condition being rightfully seen as a work related illness. I know the worry my wife has about me becoming ill one day and the right for all our efforts to go into to recovery and not having to prove that my job related exposure to chemicals and toxins would without argument be the cause. Both these reforms need to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament before the commencement of the fire season. This is important to me and my colleagues. I hope it's important to you.

I would also be thrilled by the opportunity to meet with you in person to talk to you further about my personal experiences as a professional firefighter and why this reform is so important.

Kind regards,

Bernard Ward  
Carlton Fire Station  
Leading Firefighter  
Metropolitan Fire Brigade  
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