

From: Nick Seeger
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Fire Services Reform Submission by Nicholas Seeger
Date: Friday, 7 July 2017 2:58:18 PM

To whom it may concern,

My name is Nicholas Seeger and I am a Qualified Firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and have been an employee since 2013. I am also a former Project Firefighter with the former Department of Sustainability and Environment (now DELWP). I thank you for this opportunity to have my voice heard, and am grateful to yourselves for taking the time to thoroughly consider these very important and in my opinion much needed reforms.

I have worked all across the state in my current and previous employment from Eastern Hill Fire Station in the heart of the city to Horsham and Toolangi. I have been part of an MFB strike-team that was sent to assist the DELWP and CFA crews fight an out of control bushfire in Halls Gap as well as part of the initial response to the coal mine fire in Hazelwood. In all of my experiences, we have worked well with volunteer brigades and have found the amount of local knowledge and willingness to work a really strong attribute. Volunteers have been a vital part of the response to the large scale events and preplanned projects such as back burning that I have been a part of; and they will always need to be going forward.

I support the reform in its proposed form because of the fact that Victoria is the fastest growing capital city in Australia. Melbourne is sprawling and housing and properties in the suburbs are becoming more and more dense. In the City of Casey where I live now, we have seen the population almost double in the last ten years from approx.. 236,000 to over 411,000. It is expected to reach well over 500,000 in the next couple of years. In Lilydale where I grew up, the council gave the green light to subdivide 500 blocks in 2014 meaning we are seeing four or more units occupying the same amount of land that would have previously only seen one house. Everyday 300 newcomers call Melbourne home. Melbourne has surged from 3.5 million to almost 5 million since the 2008 census and is expected to be 8 million by the year 2050. With this kind of growth it is imperative we evolve our fire services to meet the future needs of our growing population.

The bulk of our population's growth is happening on the urban fringe where 22,700 housing lots sold last year alone. We are already seeing a strain on our volunteers during normal working hours and that job load will only increase exponentially. Added on top of that is the critical role of a firefighter to drill to maintain efficiency and efficacy of skills and the reliance of these booming communities places volunteers and the community at risk.

Professional firefighters are on shift a minimum of 48 hours a week, spending that time drilling, checking keys, attending schools and checking local hydrants and high risk buildings amongst other things. Volunteers that hold a fulltime occupation can at best be expected to attend their station and drill for a maximum of 10-15 hours a month. This being the case, professional firefighters are able to drill for a wider range of scenarios. Because of this, it is very difficult to expect the same level of training and efficiency at tasks specific to firefighting.

Professional firefighters currently attend over 65% of all fire calls received in Victoria, with less

than 3000 employees. Whilst there are a little over 35,000 volunteer firefighters that attend less than 35%. Every time a truck arrives on scene, you want to be assured that the most highly trained firefighters, that have the ability to operate every piece of equipment on the truck are there to do the job they are there for. That they have the ability to wear a breathing apparatus and conduct an internal search and keep themselves and their crew members safe. As it stands, of the 35,000 volunteer firefighters, approximately only 8000 hold a ticket to wear a breathing apparatus; and from what I understand there are 3 different levels of training of which only 1 allows the operator to conduct an internal search and rescue.

These reforms would mean that professional crews will be assured that on scene are the minimum required number of crew with the relevant training and ability, thus providing peace of mind and the minimum level safety, should the situation require.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to express my views with you. Over the past few years, as this saga has gone on it has been very unifying within the job but externally quite isolating. Feeling like we are unwelcome in our own home towns, as union members seeing the signage, petitioning and local sentiment all the way to some members receiving threats for simply wearing a union t-shirt. We have had over 20 front pages on the Herald Sun and members such as Brad Battin making blatantly false and antagonistic public remarks directed at our members. It is cathartic to feel as though we are having our voices heard in a forum that is fair and balanced and not just leaving it up to the union to fight on our behalf.

Regards,
Qualified Firefighter Nicholas Seeger
Eastern Hill Fire Station

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