

Attn: Assistant Clerk Committees.

Re: Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive rights compensation and Fire services legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

Date: 6 July 2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

My name is Ian Russell Crosbie and I am a Leading Firefighter within CFA at Ballarat City Fire Station and I have been a career firefighter since January 2001. I am qualified in all current disciplines available with the exception of road accident rescue, I have my Certificate IV in training and I am a High Risk work Assessor for Workcover.

I reside in Buninyong, which has become, basically a dormitory suburb of Ballarat. Prior to 2001, when I joined as a career member, I was an active member at Buninyong CFA (which began in 1989) where I held senior positions, including Foreman, 1st Lieutenant and Captain within the brigade and I also held the office of Group Secretary/Treasurer for 3 terms.

My rationale for being supportive of the proposed reform is as follows. Major centres outside Melbourne metro area (such as Ballarat, Bendigo etc.) have evolved in a comparatively short time into major cities with population growths which have nearly doubled in the past 30 or so years. Yet these population centres are still serviced by only one professional and guaranteed fire service response. In no way am I slighting or denigrating the role of volunteers, however times and life pressures have changed, as well as the economic pressures which in the past may have allowed employers to give some leeway for emergency response.

Up until 1983 there were two permanently staffed stations in Ballarat employing 7 Firefighters, 1 of these, was in essence "000" as a watchroom operator. The population according to the sign as you entered the township back in 1983 said population 68500, last census I believe that it is in the area of 104000 and yet we have only, in the last week or so gone to 9 personnel per shift to staff potentially 6 appliances and have a technical rescue, or specialist response capacity that stretches to the South Australian border.

My understanding is that this response will not change, so therefore will have no effect on how volunteers are supported. In fact the introduction of minimum staffing per appliance with requirements for a defined skills matrix will potentially have the opposite effect and increase available support. One of my main concerns has been the politicising of what is merely ratifying a workplace EBA. Instead my colleagues and I have had to endure unparalleled attacks on our profession, ethics, moral character and honesty which I believe in any other workplace would be tantamount to bullying and harassment.

The campaign that has been ran from people purporting to be part of "one CFA" has been nothing short of disgusting and has been based on nothing more than propaganda, emotive tugging of peoples' heartstrings and outright falsehoods. The people of Victoria are intelligent enough to realise that volunteers are, and will always be, the backbone of providing cost effective and appropriate combat to major incidents. This includes fire, flood, natural disaster and whatever other emergency one could dream up.

Conversely Metropolitan Melbourne has also burgeoned with growth and annexed many “country areas” in the process. This is also very much a case of playing catch up. With MFESB boundaries not changing much since their inception, recognition of the “urban sprawl” is lacking behind too. The “Country Area of Victoria,” in many parts at least, is not so country any more, and needs to be recognised under the proper classification with the associated upgrade in response needs.

In consideration of the proposed amendments the committee needs to be very careful to not subscribe to the diatribe that says that supporting of volunteer response will change. What the Reform means to these highly urbanised communities is a guaranteed response to an emergency call 24/7 with numbers that maximise the effectiveness of the response. With the Fire Services levy now imposed on every rateholder in the state, we are now effectively entering a user/pay system of fire service delivery. As a rateholder I would like to think that if I call 000 then the best service my money can buy will turn up to help me in a time of need. This Reform will ensure that service (without detriment to, or slighting of) the communities that are served very well and effectively by a totally volunteer service. As legislators you may also need to consider that when this model is no longer suitable for a given community that a framework exists to sensitively guide these areas down the proposed model that you are about to begin discussing.

I wish the committee members all the very best in their deliberations and I thank you for the time to consider my submission.

Yours Sincerely

Leading Firefighter Ian Crosbie 25535.