

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

I am a Leading Firefighter for the Country Fire Authority currently stationed at Geelong City. I have been employed with the CFA for 15 years, and have also been a volunteer for 22 years where I held a number of leadership positions. During my time as a firefighter I have worked at a number of different locations around the state and have experienced some of Victoria's major disasters including the 2002 north East fires and the 2009 black Saturday fires as well as deployments into New South Wales. The response to these incidents, along with all of the calls I have attend as a career and volunteer firefighter, have given me a wealth of experience and knowledge to assist me in protecting the community. In addition to this I have achieved a variety of other skills and qualifications that include but are not limited to the following:

- Wildfire and structural firefighter
- Road Rescue operator
- Confined Space Rescue operator
- High Angle Rope Rescue operator
- Urban Search and Rescue Cat 2 operator
- 42m Ladder Platform operator
- Driver Educator
- Trainer and Assessor

I have also achieved the following at my time with the CFA:

- National Emergency Medal (2009 Fires)
- National Medal
- 20 Year Service Medal
- Life Membership of my volunteer brigade

I am Writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:

To provide the most efficient, reliable and skilled service delivery to the community in their moment of need. It is vitally important that a guaranteed response of two trucks with minimum of 7 firefighters be dispatched to ensure the safety of those firefighters and the members of the community on or around the fireground.

An example where this lack of response occurred due to the failure of the primary brigade occurred on Thursday 25/05/2017 at 14.13 hrs when Geelong City was paged to support Geelong West Brigade to a structure (unit) fire. Geelong City responded a pumper and the ladder platform with a total crew of 5. The information received on dispatch indicated that there was smoke issuing and the occupant was unaccounted for. The Geelong City crews arrived within 4 minutes and noted that the unit was well alight. At 15.20hrs the dispatch centre advised that Geelong West had failed to respond and another brigade (Corio) and Geelong Rescue was then dispatched. The initial crews conducted an internal search for the missing occupant and also proceeded to extinguish the fire.

The issue surrounding this incident is that with only 5 firefighters on the fireground the safety of those firefighters was compromised as there was no backup breathing apparatus (BA) team if it was required and that the internal search of the unit for the occupant was compromised as there was only one BA crew (2 firefighters).

The failure of the Geelong West Brigade to respond any firefighting appliance to this incident had an effect on the speed and efficiency at which this fire could be controlled. Not only did the lack of response impact on the safety of the firefighters and members of the public around the incident it also committed Geelong ladder platform and Geelong Rescue, which restricted the ability of those appliances to be used for their specialist functions and reduced the amount of available vehicles to maintain fire coverage in the Geelong and Corio areas.

Further to this submission, by employing all career firefighters in one fire service it will assist with the standardisation of career training, specialist response, response standards and equipment used. This will ensure that career firefighters are able to work in any part of the state where career firefighters are located.

The role and response of volunteers will not change with the introduction of Fire Rescue Victoria and the surge capacity required for major fires will still be present. This reform also provides the inclusion of the presumptive rights compensation and a package to assist with volunteer recruitment and retention across the CFA and benefits the role which volunteers can serve their community through additional equipment and infrastructure funding.

In closing I would like to thank the committee for evaluating the proposed bill and hope that the importance of the communities, and firefighters safety is paramount, to provide a high level of emergency response that we all may require.

If you have any further questions please contact me on [REDACTED]

Regards,

Mathew Geerings