



07/07/2017

Assistant Clerk Committees  
Department of the Legislative Council  
Fire Service Bill Select Committee  
Parliament House Spring Street  
East Melbourne Vic 3002

Attn; Assistant Clerk Committees:

My name is [REDACTED]. I would like only my name and contact details to be private and confidential so that my submission can still be considered by the Fire Service Bill Select Committee.

I am a professional Firefighter. I have had an involvement with the fire services in Victoria since 1995. I started as a volunteer firefighter with the Montrose CFA (a suburb east of Melbourne bordering the MFB border) at 15 years of age. I became a professional firefighter with the MFB at 25 years of age in 2006 and am still so, holding the rank of Leading Firefighter. Along my firefighting journey I was employed as a seasonal project firefighter with NRE during the summers of 99/00 and 00/01 (this role would be now recognised as a forest firefighter with DEWLP). I also transferred CFA brigades in my role as a volunteer to Bonnie Doon CFA around 2008 as I planned to and subsequently moved there. Due to unforeseen circumstances, I had to return to Melbourne to live in mid-2011. I am still a member of the Bonnie Doon CFA, albeit inactive.

I believe I have a valuable insight and 'boots on the ground' perspective to Fire and Rescue in Victoria. A small summary of my experience is as follows; I have fought multi-storey structure fires from the CBD of Melbourne to bushfires in the High Country of Victoria and countless other types of fires everywhere between. I have attended numerous EMR (Emergency Medical Response) calls such as a 3-day old child in cardiac arrest born to recent poor English speaking migrants living in a Fitzroy Flat and someone choking on their Australia Day lunch. I have assisted Rural Ambulance triage road crash victims on a country dirt road with the nearest backup ambulance 60+ minutes away. I became a Heavy Rescue operator with the MFB around 2009 attending the types of emergencies that come with road crashes and other ways people can find themselves in harm's way. I have presented fire safety messages to Prep and Grade 6 children as well as road safety messages to year 11

students. All of these are in a structured officially recognised manner. I also initiated a fire safety display for deaf children incorporated in the Friday Display which is a weekly Government Gazetted event held at Eastern Hill Fire Station. This initiative was a collaboration with other MFB departments and received recognition at the annual Fire Awareness awards.

My qualifications obtained with the MFB include certificates in Public Safety (firefighting operations), Urban Search and Rescue, Trench Rescue, Heavy Vehicle driving instruction, Training and assessment and Road Rescue. I have had wildfire firefighting training with the MFB, CFA and NRE.

I am proud of my experience, qualifications and achievements but I feel it is necessary to note them in this context as it is important for me to leave you in no doubt that my perspective and opinions are informed and are drawn from real, diverse, accountable experience that spans from preventative activities to response situations across agencies, across the state. I am passionate about fire and rescue services in Victoria.

I think Fire Service reform in Victoria is long overdue. I believe the reforms before the Victorian Parliament are good reforms. I believe they put the focus on to the most important priority and purpose of having a fire service- the community of Victoria.

I have lamented personally whether I would ever see reform in my career or life time. In recent times fire services have been politicised more than I have ever seen and the reputation of professional firefighters dragged through the mud by political movements and media outlets. This has been terrible to live through and totally disgusting to witness. I believe these reforms would set about ending this turmoil and returning the fire services and public perception of them towards what's most important: Protecting the life and property of Victorians. This is a once in a generation opportunity to send the Fire Services of Victoria in to the future in a modern manner that respects the people who make the services up.

Boundaries and patches have been an unfortunate part of fire services for too long. I know citizens are not too worried at all by who arrives to assist them in an emergency. Emblems on the side of appliances matter little. They want the fastest available option to arrive as fast as possible. It's a reasonable expectation that the truck carries sufficient firefighters suitably qualified to do the job required. For too long the determination of which area receives 24/7 coverage for fire and rescue emergencies has been influenced by people that I don't think have the communities best interest at heart. Turf wars seem to have trumped qualified informed independent decision making. Examples of this can be found in Melbourne's outer suburbs. Numerous outer suburbs have grown enormously since current MFB and CFA acts were written and enacted decades ago. Fire service boundaries but more importantly levels of fire cover have not grown in a manner that I think reflects Melbourne's and Victoria's population growth. It has been a more adhoc approach hardly independent of anyone who's intent on protecting their patch and this is where I think areas of the community are missing

out on the fire service they deserve and pay for. This reform sets out a process that can independently review what parts of the state receive a professional guaranteed response based on factors like population density and industry growth and volunteers struggling to cope with call rates.

A greater standard of interoperability and increased consistency of service delivery would be achieved by these reforms. From administration and training to the appliances and gear we use would be further standardised and end some duplicity that comes from having professionals from two services serving the state. There also would be increased opportunity for professional firefighters to work in diverse environments that otherwise wouldn't have been possible working from a single service. This is a good thing as the community get a further enhanced professional firefighter. What's more I see nothing in these reforms that stops or hinders either a veteran or aspiring volunteer from attending their local CFA and contributing what they're able to. That is a noble way to contribute to the community. These reforms give autonomy to CFA volunteers to remain the custodians of the CFA as an iconic volunteer based organisation. That's what CFA volunteers appeared to strive for in recent political campaigns and media releases.

As is the case today there are numerous firefighters on shift 24/7. This will continue into the future and it's reasonable to expect that the need for further professional firefighters may rise in line with a growing population across the state. I don't believe the cost of running a professional Fire Rescue Victoria will have any significant increase in cost. The firefighters are already employed. They would just work for the same organisation. In fact, lengthy processes like enterprise bargaining agreements would be reduced and that would surely save time and money.

I believe having presumptive (cancer rights) legislation as part of the Fire Services reforms is an essential component of the reforms. The reforms go a long way to addressing inadequate response times in parts of suburban Melbourne and regional cities that, through no fault of the volunteer, have become an all too often case of not meeting response times or not being able to respond. What has become expected of a volunteer has grown as some country areas are now bustling urban places and have resulted in fire call volume increasing. All this has the potential for more fires and for them to be larger in size if response is slower. Bigger and more frequent fires mean more smoke and toxins for firefighters to be exposed to. The best way to avoid calling on presumptive (cancer) legislation is to not be exposed in the first place. To confine a fire to its item, room, structure etc. of origin. This is best achieved by a guaranteed response of seven professional firefighters in addition to how ever many suitably qualified and experienced volunteers may be able to respond. Unfortunately, it's a reality in mid-2017 that some parts of this state are not afforded the same level of fire protection that a neighboring suburb or town may have.

Bringing together professional firefighters in Victoria is long overdue. I hope firefighters don't need to wait much longer to having these reforms passed through parliament so we can get on with our jobs and have real ownership of the fire services structure which I think will have lasting positive effects on fire service culture. That is also a positive consequence of fire service reform in Victoria.

Creating an environment where professional and volunteer firefighters can thrive without interference, either perceived, real or imagined, would not only be a positive outcome for all firefighters but most importantly the Victorians who are served by these firefighters. Firefighters are problem solvers by nature. Any obstruction to this reform because of small semantic issues is not seeing the forest for the trees. We as professional firefighters and the fine volunteers that I know, are capable of adjusting to the change and moving forward in a positive manner. Firefighting has been at the centre of much discussion recently and these reforms will enable Victorian Firefighters to better look after the safety of Victorians.

Thank you for taking the time to reading my submission.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.