

From: Glenn
To: consultation@dpc.vic.gov.au; LCSC
Subject: Fire Service Review Legislation
Date: Friday, 7 July 2017 4:54:27 PM

I wish to make my submission in support of the proposed legislation.

My Fire Service Background

- [if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->My father is a volunteer.
- [if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->I joined CFA when I turned 11 years old.
- [if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->At 16 years of age, I joined the senior members and started to attend fires and emergencies. I have volunteered at Newstead, Franklinford, Ballarat City, Berwick and Warragul fire brigades, a mix of urban/rural and integrated and volunteer only fire stations
- [if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->At 24 years old I became a career firefighter which I have been for 17.5 years and hold the rank/qualification of Leading firefighter. I have served at Frankston, Dandenong, Warrnambool and Ballarat City Fire Stations.
- [if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->I have also worked on a casual basis/part-time basis for CFA in a Regional Office in the role of administration support and operational support in 1995 and 1996.
- [if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->I have completed an Advanced Certificate in Fire Technology and a Certificate IV in Fire Technology.
- [if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->I have worked at the CFA training College Fiskville working as a state specialist response Instructor. My instructional duties included teaching and assessing volunteers and staff in Road Accident Rescue, Atmospheric monitoring, Hazardous materials, low angle rope access, steep angle Rope Rescue, High Angle Rope Rescue and Confined Space rescue.

I have built strong working relationships with volunteers and staff during my 31 years with CFA in my varied roles. It disappoints me greatly to see the fire services in such desperate need of reform.

Relationships

I have brigades and friends in brigades that will no longer speak to me purely because I am a staff member. Stations that I once enjoyed dropping into I now avoid.

I have for many years proudly worn my uniform in public. Now I am very hesitant about doing so unless I am on duty. I have been made feel uncomfortable with comments people have made. I have also had a person make nasty statements about staff firefighters when they have mistakenly thought I was a volunteer. I was also verbally abused on one occasion by a group of volunteers.

I love my job and love going to work, however the constant media attacks of the last

couple of years are taking their toll. I have just purchased a caravan and now plan to take a large portion of my long service leave to escape the negativity and lies being put forth as fact. CFA has become a topic of conversation wherever I go. People want to tell me their ill-informed opinions. I struggle to understand why this has been national news, in Darwin, Queensland and NSW where I have family members. Many family members had formed negative opinions of the CFA dispute and I have been forced to defend my colleagues and occupation.

Common Misleading Statements

- [if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->60,000 volunteers versus 1000 staff firefighters. The implication that staff are only a small portion of the organization, yet there is failure to acknowledge that the staff work in 35 of the busiest stations and undertake a lions share of the operational response to fires and emergencies.
- [if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->Years of service cannot be directly related to experience. Many CFA brigades attend less than 10 calls a year. Years of service in a small brigade is not the same as years of service in a brigade attending several hundred or more calls per annum.
- [if !supportLists]-->• <!--[endif]-->I believe the reduction in surge capacity argument is a scare tactic to sway public opinion against change. In my many conversations with volunteers, I have not had one say they will leave CFA if the legislation changes. I actually see a benefit to surge capacity in the long term with reduced daily demands placed on volunteers due to better support arrangements and thus they will be available when required for the large summer fire events.

I have never seen peoples attitudes towards the fire service and morale this bad ever, public, staff or volunteer.

I believe this proposed legislation is the light at the end of the tunnel for a change in direction and an opportunity to rebuild not just the fire services but also the communities faith in them.

With the proposed legislation changes, CFA can return to its roots and return to a volunteer only organization and focus on supporting volunteers to provide their important service. The Volunteer CFA will be able to be autonomous with only one main industrial body that represents the volunteers to work with.

FRV will give the staff a new organization to become part of and help to shape into a modern and contemporary fire service. With morale at its lowest ever and distrust between management and employees, a new fire service is needed to start afresh with everyone being involved in building the new organization and an opportunity to build the best possible fire service for the people of victoria.

At the current point, massive amounts of time, energy and money are being spent in negotiations and counter negotiations on the future of CFA and MFB at the detriment of the public's confidence in their fire service. It is also a distraction to the staff and taking its toll due to the uncertainty of our careers and future.

With the volunteer association (VFVB) investing so much time, effort and money into fighting CFA and the staff industrial agreements through publicity and/or legal action, the real issues of equipment, training and support for the volunteers cannot be focused on and met.

I believe failure to support the legislation changes will see the toxic environment continue to escalate and I am greatly concerned for the future.

I am hopeful in a few years with the proposed changes implemented this becomes a chapter in the fire services history that people can look back at and never wish to repeat. Failure to implement this legislation and separate the fire services will continue to see competing needs played against each other (rural CFA v's Urban CFA, Volunteer V's Staff, Political interference continue).

Fire Review Board

The implementation of a board to review the fire service boundaries and service delivery data is fantastic. The independent board will remove a lot of debate and focus on the communities needs. I believe if this had been implemented in the past, many of our current problems would not exist.

It should not be acceptable that individual fire brigades get to choose which brigades support them to fire calls. This system is open to abuse as there is no requirement to ensure the most appropriate fire appliances for the risk are responded.

Currently Federal legislation deems any clause that may affect a volunteer is illegal in our EBAs. The following is an example of how clauses that benefit the community and staff can be held up through negative publicity and scare-mongering to the detriment of the community.

The SES has been dragged into the fire service dispute through misinformation and a scare campaign with SES volunteers now scared that staff fire fighters will take road accident rescue from them. This could not be further from the truth.

Currently a staff fire truck at motor vehicle accident cannot extricate anyone from a vehicle without an ambulance officer determining that the patient's injuries are time critical. Then and only then can the staff firefighters attempt to remove the patient from a vehicle using what ever tools the have available to them. Patients must be critically ill and dying before we are allowed to attempt to remove them from a wreck.

The provisions of a negotiated EBA was to provide staff firefighters training and minimal rescue tools to allow them to make access into vehicles for paramedics to reach patients for treatment. It was also going to allow firefighters to commence a rescue or possibly free victims of car accidents as quick as possible before a heavy rescue arrives on scene.

This EBA clause is not to take away the SES or CFA volunteer response to road accident rescue, it just gives the staff firefighters on scene the ability to start a rescue whilst waiting for a rescue. It will also provide additional trained rescue operators at accident scenes. This will save lives. With staff fire trucks due on scene at emergencies within 8 minutes, they will be able to start this life saving work whilst they wait for the rescue to arrive that is required on scene in 20 minutes for an urban area or major highway and 40 minutes in a rural area. A lot can be achieved in these critical minutes saved.

I am road accident rescue qualified and worked for several years on a heavy rescue vehicle at Dandenong fire station. I cannot begin to tell you the frustration of being at a motor vehicle accident without the power to help someone trapped inside a vehicle and having to wait, often for an extended period of time for a heavy rescue to arrive before a rescue can commence.

If the paramedics are of the belief that a patient is time critical and I am requested to start extrication, I am hamstrung with minimal equipment often utilizing socket sets, bolt cutters and limited hydraulic tools to perform the rescue. It is like having one hand tied behind my back as I work.

Many times once I have extricated a patient before a rescue arrives or started extrication, I have had complaints made against me for performing a role that the volunteer rescue providers SES/CFA provide.

It torments me having to wait or not being able to help motor vehicle accident victims. It upsets me and makes me angry when I follow the antiquated rules and get criticised for using my qualifications and skills to help save people lives by the volunteers because I didn't wait so they could cut the car up to remove the patient. This is not the service or mentality that should be tolerated in the 21st century.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Regards,

Glenn Bullen
Leading Firefighter CFA
Ballarat City Fire Station

