

Submission to the **FIRE SERVICES BILL SELECT COMMITTEE 2017** in relation to the **Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017**.

The following submission provides my personal opinions on issues related to the above fire services reform bill and in no way purports to represent the opinions of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade's (MFB) on those matters.

My name is Bryan Currie and I have been employed as a firefighter with the MFB since September 1983. I have carried out this role at numerous fire stations throughout the Metropolitan District (MD) of Melbourne and have also spent several years working in non-shift support roles in the Brigade's Alarm Assessment and Fire Safety Departments. In my 34 years with the MFB I have undertaken a range of specialist and promotional courses culminating in my present rank of Commander where I have worked in the area of Occupational Health & Safety overseeing the health and wellbeing of firefighters in the Brigade's North-Western Region. During that time I was instrumental in the creation of a computer based accountability system (FAST-card) allowing the Brigade to log the crewing details for its 47 fire stations but more importantly the allocation of those staff members on appliances and their attendance at every emergency call out. More recently I have been heavily involved in the introduction of AVL (Automatic Vehicle Location) technology to MFB fire appliances and the delivery of this information onto aerial mapping software. The implementation of FAST-card and AVL now means that the Brigade has full visibility of its human resources including their locations (both within and outside the MD) and is able to confidently manage them and ensure their safety throughout the various phases of planning, preparing and responding to emergencies. Following on from those achievements, I have now been transitioned onto a new project to deliver Mobile Data technology (ruggedized computers) onto the brigade's operational fleet further enhancing the safety and situational awareness of MFB crews responding to emergencies. In my time with the MFB I have experienced a wide range of emergency situations presenting challenges to both firefighters and effected communities and been responsible for the safety and well-being of all those involved.

Leveraging from the above experiences and accumulated skills I offer the following comments in relation to the proposed fire service reform bill;

## **Organisation Name Reflecting the Geographic Area Protected**

In my time with MFB I have developed great pride in the work that I do and the organisation that I represent, however it has always been a frustration of mine that the name of the body I work for does not include the geographical area it protects. On the occasions when I've interacted with people from areas outside of Victoria when asked who I work for and my reply is "...the Metropolitan Fire Brigade" the next most obvious question has been "where's that?". Only a small item I know, but a significant frustration for me that the 'brand' of my service provides little clarity of the area it's from. When you're interacting with a person wearing a NYFD logo on their shirt, you've got no doubt where they're from, the work that they do and the pride that they carry with them wearing that logo. The creation of Fire Rescue Victoria will finally address this deficiency for me and allow me to feel the same pride in my service that abovementioned New York Firefighter does.

## **Seven on the Fireground**

In my time on the front line and work in the area of OH&S, I can honestly say that the provision of seven (appropriately skilled and qualified) firefighters on the fireground is a critical element to delivering safety for firefighters. Fire crews work in teams in these inherently dangerous environments and seven firefighters must be readily available before personnel can be safely committed to internal search & rescue and firefighting activities. With two firefighters, donned in breathing apparatus protecting them from the hazardous conditions within, it is critical that reserve personnel are readily available outside the structure (also wearing breathing apparatus) to assist them inside should they become trapped, disoriented or find themselves low on air reserves. The safety of occupants is similarly impacted without seven appropriately trained and qualified firefighters on the fireground as it is not only the firefighters who are endangered when less than seven are provided but the occupants as well who may be totally reliant on firecrews rescuing them from the hazards within.

## **Metropolitan District Boundary Re-alignment**

This matter brings about a discussion related to "What is Melbourne's metropolitan region?" or stated another way "where's the transition between metropolitan and country where the inherent fire risks change from where protection provided by a fully staffed career fire service is more appropriate than a model based around service delivery by a volunteer-based staffing structure?" Stepping away from the various emotional arguments that have been raised on this issue, the reality is that Melbourne has grown significantly since the existing boundary was enacted.

No more evident is this growth than in the last decade which has seen significant increases in Melbourne's population together with an urban sprawl which has pushed the city's higher density to areas to well outside the existing MD boundary.

The proposed reform bill provides a timely opportunity to reassess the above boundary. It is my belief that a 'blue-sky' type approach should be taken, with the current boundary essentially being erased and a fresh assessment of Melbourne and its urban sprawl being carried out. The results of that assessment should drive the selection of the most appropriate fire service model (career or volunteer based firefighting staff) used to protect it. I am satisfied that this is essentially what the new bill delivers along with the creation of a committee to oversee and monitor Melbourne's growth into the future so that a mechanism is put in place to modify the boundary as the city's metropolitan region expands or contracts.

### **Information System Rationalisation**

Both the MFB and CFA operate and maintain their own Information and Technology (IT) Systems with both organisations having dedicated IT departments to oversee and support it. These systems are complex with mission critical (highly robust and available) components representing a significant investment to both services in terms of implementation and on-going maintenance and support. In the MFB's case the organisation runs a number of geographically separate but electronically connected data centres which carry the organisation's IT loads to support its operational activities. While I am not privy to the CFA's IT arrangements I can only assume that they (as a very similar sister fire service) have like systems in place supporting their own IT needs in the same way. When emergencies occur and firecrews are responding, these systems are pivotal to support them as well as providing senior staff with the tools to oversee and manage their welfare and deal with the community consequences of incidents.

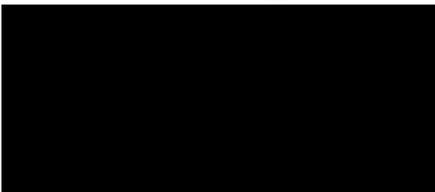
It makes little sense to me that two neighbouring fire service organisations running essentially identical career staff models to protect their communities both maintain and support their own dedicated but completely separate IT back end systems. The proposed reform bill provides a timely opportunity to rationalise these back end systems into a single robust (mission critical) operating platform. From my perspective the MFB has created a robust 'enterprise service' network delivering a mission critical environment which allows the organisation to develop new applications and technologies which can be connected directly into the existing architecture in a structured way.

As stated previously, the MFB already has a number of robust systems in place to manage the crewing information of its stations and appliances as well as AVL technology already on board its fleet providing invaluable location data for senior operational managers. These well tested functionalities are available now and can be shared to CFA appliances (especially those in the urban and regional centres where 3G/4G coverage is available) with relative ease providing similar benefits in firefighter safety, improved situational awareness and resource management for CFA staff as well as to MFB personnel should the new bill become a reality.

Mobile Data is likely to be implemented as a pilot trial onto a number of appliances in the very near future delivering for the first time incident information, route navigation, appliance dispatch group locations and appliance crew cards direct to responding firefighters in the appliances. As this technology becomes more mature it too could be shared with CFA appliances.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this important decision making process. It is my strong belief that the changes presented in the new bill are an important step to rationalising the way fire services are delivered by the two major fire service organisations in this state as well as significantly improving the operating environment, interoperability and safety for front line firefighters.

Yours sincerely,



Bryan Currie  
MFB Commander

4/7/17