

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

I write to express my support for the long overdue reforms to Victoria's fire services.

My name is Shane Cummins and I work as a Leading Firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. I work at the Eastern Hill fire station and have been employed for since 2011. I have seen and experienced first hand just how essential it is to have an appropriately trained, ready-to-respond fire service in what is currently Melbourne's metropolitan fire district. The fact that in 2017, such a large portion of Melbourne's sprawling metropolis and Victoria's ever expanding regional cities fall outside of this district I find of genuine concern.

I wish to draw your attention to three considerations I believe should be at the forefront of the decisions made by this committee:

Medical Emergencies

In the six years I've worked as a firefighter, I've responded to numerous medical emergencies including cardiac arrests, drug overdoses, car, bus, tram and train accidents in which occupants have been injured and/or trapped. These incidents are time critical. A delay of mere minutes can and does literally cost lives. This system has been in place since 2001 and in a 2015 media release (www.mfb.vic.gov.au/News/MFB-firefighters-attending-increasing-number-of-medical-calls.html), then Chief Fire Officer Peter Rau stated "had saved more than 200 lives" I find it extremely difficult to explain to my uncles and aunties in Bendigo, and my cousins and nephews in Montmorency that should any of these events occur where they live, fewer emergency responders would be sent and they'd potentially wait longer for them to arrive on scene when compared to other parts of Melbourne. I find it unconscionable that in 2017 we base Victoria's level of emergency response on boundaries, systems and structures that were drawn up more than 60 years ago.

Structure fires

Responding to fires that occur in houses, apartments, workplaces, schools and hospitals is the core function of fire services. A well established system of ensuring the safety of both the occupants of these buildings, and the firefighters who attend is to send a minimum of seven firefighters. Unlike inner Melbourne, this response is not guaranteed in areas like Geelong, Bendigo, Frankston, Shepparton, Dandenong, and Point Cook. These densely populated areas contain among other things high rise developments, major hospitals, universities, and large shopping centres. These regions and their residents are deserving of the exact same coverage that exists in inner Melbourne. Last month a well publicised fire took hold of the Grenfell residential tower in England. This fire took place in west London, crews were on scene within 6 minutes, more than 500 people live in the tower, 80 of which lost their lives. The fire accelerated rapidly due largely to the combustible cladding on the building's facade. This material has been found to be present on a number of buildings throughout Melbourne and Victoria. I believe it is incumbent on this committee to consider the ramifications of a compromised emergency response to any incident that takes place in the densely populated regions of the state.

Surge Capacity

I have read with interest the threats from some that this restructure will have a detrimental effect on the state's fire service's surge capacity when responding to significant events. I find this argument offensive both as a professional firefighter and the nephew of a volunteer firefighter. When events such as Black Saturday, the Hazelwood coal mine fire, even the 'asthma storm' of November 21, 2016 occur the furthest thing from the mind of emergency responders is organisational structures or the alignment of the fire services. Rather our prime focus is the protection of life and property to the best of our training and ability. I personally have responded to events alongside responders from Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police, the SES, and CFA both career and volunteer. I did so without hesitation and will no doubt do so many more times throughout my career. I'm filled with admiration for the thousands of people who volunteer as part of Victoria's fire response, the selflessness of their actions I find commendable. The implication that due to the proposed restructure, these same volunteers would decide en masse not to make themselves available to support their communities during a time of crisis I not only hope but unwaveringly believe to be a misrepresentation of their intent.

Finally, there has been some consternation within the ranks of career firefighters that making a submission to this committee be seen as a breach of the Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees. Specifically Clause 3.5 of the Code that states "When making a comment in a private capacity, public sector employees [must] ensure their comments are not related to any government activity that they are involved in or connected with as a public sector employee...". I've been assured that I make this submission under the protection of parliamentary privilege and request that my views remain the confidential property of this committee. I do not wish to denigrate or cast aspersions on anyone associated with the Victorian fire services and firmly believe that this moment presents us all with an opportunity to create a far more capable and robust fire service that will benefit the people and state of Victoria.

I am more than willing to be contacted for any clarification or queries relating to this submission.

Regards,

Shane Cummins 