

**Kirra Vanzetti**

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**From:** Phil Cuthbert [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 4 July 2017 10:55 PM  
**To:** LCSC  
**Subject:** Fire Reforms in Victoria

To whom it may concern,

My name is Philip Cuthbert and I am a Station Officer in the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. My role in this position is to be the O.I.C of a Fire Station, be responsible for the daily running of the station including all administration, training of the Fire fighting staff with drills, both theoretical and practical and of course, attend calls for emergencies, make rapid impact assessments and determine a course of action to combat the emergency. I have been employed by the M.F.B for over twenty seven years and have held the prior mentioned rank for a period of thirteen years. In addition to my usual Fire Fighting duties, I am also an Urban Search & Rescue / Trench Collapse Operator, a High Angle Rescue Technician and a Road Rescue Operator. I am also a Brigade Fitness Leader offering Health and Fitness advice to my colleagues.

I am also privileged enough to have received a Chief Officers Commendation in 2004 for the 2003 Arthur's Seat Chair Lift Rescue, The Australian Fire Service Medal in 2006 and most recently the award for service during the Black Saturday Fires.

As you can see, I have a lengthy history with the Brigade, and after all these years, I am still passionate about what I do, so I find it somewhat bewildering that the discussions on Fire Fighting reform in this State have gone on for long. As I'm sure you are aware, the borders for our two Fire Services were laid down in the fifties, where the outer reaches of the Metropolitan Brigade were at the time, semi rural and the borders more than adequate. But here we are now some sixty years on, and nothing has changed. Change was suggested in the seventies and every decade thereafter, yet for some reason, the status quo remains. It seems over the years, it has been an argument that is just too difficult, an argument that politicians don't want to enter into as it may cost them votes, an argument that can be swept under the rug, despite reviews from committees and advice from Royal Commissions that state in black and white that Fire Service reform in the Victoria is badly needed.

Now, the subject has been brought to the forefront once more and in a fashion that seems cannot be ignored this time. The Government of the day is pushing hard for the changes that are needed, and the opposition is rejecting the proposals for change with arguments that I as a professional Fire Fighter, cannot understand. What is required here is a bi-partisan approach for the betterment of the safety of Victorians, and a cessation of ridiculous political games.

I work in an inner city location, but live on the fringe of the current fire borders in Melbourne's outer east. There are areas close to me that still rely on a volunteer service, areas that include infrastructure like Knox Hospital. This large capacity medical facility receives a full time and volunteer response, and the problem for the O.I.C of the full time service, is he is not exactly sure if the volunteer appliance will arrive in a timely fashion and if it does, what are the qualification of the people crewing it. Let me point out at this time, this is not me trying to belittle the volunteers, they are doing the very best they can and I commend them for that, but what was appropriate last century is not now. This area that is the City of Knox, is a highly populated suburban area with huge amounts of industry and one of the states biggest shopping complexes, yet has to rely on a largely volunteer based fire response, as does Bayswater, as does Mooroolbark, as does Rowville and Dandenong, and the list goes on. I have had personal experience in my years turning out with C.F.A Volunteer Brigades, heard them book on scene at a Fire Call and cancel M.F.B response. Due to our close proximity to the call, we continued on to the fire scene only to find one person standing there with his ute and a radio and no fire truck in sight. It's sad to say in the past there have been instances of border protection and for lack of a better term, hairy chest beating by some volunteer brigades, I have also responded with other volunteer brigades that are a delight to work with and are doing what they are doing for all the right reasons, which is the protection of life, property and the environment for all Victorians, and that should also be the focus of all politicians. The reality is that reform to our states fire service, will not alter what the volunteer brigades do. They will still respond to calls and their assistance will be valuable and welcomed, but with the addition of more full time Fire Stations, these areas that require it will have a more rapid response with a consistent level of training across all members ensuring greater fire ground safety for all. It is naive to think that the State can run without volunteer brigades, they are essential, but as the State has grown in population and infrastructure, the fire system and how it functions across the State has not.

This current dispute has been going on for some time now, and I can assure you that it has taken its toll on myself and my colleagues, as I'm sure it has on some of the volunteer fire fighters. It is time for action, it is time for hard decisions and it is time for all politicians to stand up and do what is right for all Victorians. It's time to take the advice given over decades, listen to the experts and implement the reforms that will make Victoria a safer place for all to live in.

I thank you for your time,

Regards,

Station Officer Phil Cuthbert A.F.S.M  
Metropolitan Fire Brigade



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