

1 July 2017

Fire Services Bill
Select Committee

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Arthurnasi Georgostathis and I am a career firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB), I have been employed with the MFB for the last 14 years and 6 months and currently hold the rank of Station Officer. I hold specialist qualifications in; High Angle Rescue, Hazardous Materials, and I am an MFB On-shift Driving Instructor. I write to you in support of the proposed changes to the fire service here in Victoria, as proposed in the Fire Services Bill. I would like in my submission to focus on three key points, those being; boundary re-alignment, consistency of policy/procedure, and finally, surge capacity.

I have lived in Croydon for the last 13 years; this is a suburb in the Metropolitan Fire District and covered by the MFB. In 2015 my wife and I were looking to sell our home and purchase a property that more suited our growing family. We wanted to remain in the same area but with surging prices in Melbourne we were resigned to the fact that we would have to move further out to be able to afford a larger home. In the Outer Eastern part of Melbourne that meant the suburbs of Chirnside Park, Mooroolbark, Lilydale, Montrose, Bayswater, and Scoresby were the closest to our current location. All of these suburbs are NOT classed as being in the Metropolitan Fire District and are however, categorised as Country areas and therefore, covered by the CFA. All of the suburbs that I have named here are fairly densely populated suburban areas but are only covered by volunteers.

Having spent 4 years as a volunteer with Queensland Rural Fire Service (QFRS) I have nothing but the utmost admiration for volunteer firefighters however, volunteerism does come with some caveats. Volunteers whilst very freely giving of their time still need to pay the bills and work does take volunteers away from home and the areas covered by the service that they provide. The CFA as an organisation was set up to service country areas however, due to the heavy urbanisation of these outer suburban areas has had to blur the focus of the service that it provides because of the rigidity of the border of the Metropolitan Fire District. The final decision for my family was to knockdown and rebuild in Croydon because I was not prepared to go to work and provide 90 second response times to the residents in the area I serviced and to leave my family at home in a densely populated urban area covered by volunteers who with the best of intentions may or may not turnout depending on where they were located and what they were doing when their pager went off.

During my time with the MFB I have been stationed in outer urban locations such as Croydon, Ringwood, and Templestowe; and I have responded side by side with CFA crews both volunteer and career. Regardless of the career/volunteer status of the CFA crew, the CFA and the MFB have different training, different policies/procedures, different equipment from trucks to communications and a myriad of other differences in the way we do what we do. Whilst we are changing and interoperability is a large focus in what we do, particularly since Black Saturday, Victorians have two dramatically disparate organisations trying as hard as they can to achieve the same outcome and this simply can't be allowed to go on.

Finally, much has been made of 'surge capacity'. It is suggested that the changes proposed in this bill will actually somehow diminish the CFA's surge capacity during major campaigns. As mentioned, I was a volunteer with QFRS and from personal experience I can assure you that the changes outlined in this bill will dramatically 'improve' surge capacity for the CFA. Had I constantly been required to leave work to respond to fire calls, I know my employer at the time would have been very reluctant to continually release me from my duties. Because most day to day firefighting operations in Queensland are performed by career staff, during major conflagrations and firefighting campaigns my employer was more than happy, and felt it was the organisations civic duty, to release me and continue to pay my wages and those of my replacement whilst I added to the states 'surge capacity' during those events.

There are others that will write more succinct and evidence based submissions than mine however, as a firefighter approaching 15 years' service to the State of Victoria it is my heartfelt plea that the committee and both houses of Parliament see this bill for what it is; a logical next step for a rapidly growing State that cannot be taken soon enough. If any clarification is sought with regard to my submission, I would welcome any contact via the details below.

My kindest regards,

Arthurnasi Georgostathis

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