

5/7/2017

Laurence Brown


Dear Secretary

My name is Laurence Brown and I have been a professional CFA firefighter since 2016 and also have been a volunteer firefighter for 13 years. I am currently based at South Warrandyte fire station.

I write to express my support for the proposed fire services reform.

I have recently been employed as a career firefighter. Previously I volunteered as a firefighter in both my hometowns of Pakenham Upper and Millgrove.

I've seen first hand what happens when we respond to local community emergencies. As a career firefighter we respond with a skills mix on our appliance that is able to provide emergency response to structure fires, grass and scrub fires, motor vehicle accidents, emergency medical response and many other incidents. Our crew have been trained to meet minimum requirements, these skills are regularly tested and maintained. We have the same skills mix 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

As a volunteer we too responded to the same mix of emergencies except for emergency medical response. The difference at our volunteer station was that the skills mix was not guaranteed and in most cases was only able to have a limited effect on an incident until further volunteer brigades arrived that also experienced the same skills mix vulnerability. This is no fault of the volunteers but instead the simple fact that volunteer stations rely on who is in the area at a given time and who is available to respond. The role all volunteers play is as professional as career staff but unfortunately the minimum skills required to respond on a volunteer appliance is far less than a career appliance.

Currently this raises concerns in my role, if I am required to enter a structure to perform rescue or fire suppression, I rely on the fact that I have back up should I require it inside. With out guaranteed additional crew arriving I am at risk that if I

require more crew to rescue casualties or I require assistance personally, if the additional volunteer crew do not have this skill set, I and the community are left vulnerable.

The role of a career firefighter is physically and mentally demanding. It requires us to be prepared at all times, to operate all equipment safely. We do not get to choose if to perform our role or not, it is expected of us to perform what we are trained in professionally and effectively every time.

Victoria's fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this outdated system, 35 areas are wrongly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised and residential. Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong are just some of the 35 'country areas'.

These areas need to be modernised as they are highly urbanised areas as part of the reform of the fire service. A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career firefighters on two fire appliances is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas.

This response does not take away from the support that volunteer CFA crew can provide. On their arrival they will be utilized at the scene to perform the roles that they are trained and competent in. This may mean internal fire attack or it may mean external. The extra resources will not be left unused. What it will mean with 2 career appliances on scene is that the community will get the required response they expect at every call and the safety of the career and volunteer firefighters will not be compromised.

All Victorian, professional and volunteer firefighters, deserve modern fire services that meet the needs of our growing communities. To ensure the safety of all Victorians - including me as a firefighter, I ask you to please seriously consider your support for the proposed fire services reform. Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of your constituents, and all communities in our growing state. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our firefighters and stop the ever increasing and unrealistic demand being placed on volunteer firefighters because of the enormous urban growth resulting in increased emergency calls. I also respectfully submit that you give consideration to my request to modernise the

fire service along with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect fire service employees. Both need to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament before the commencement of the fire season. This is important to my colleagues and I.

I would also welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person to talk to you further about my personal experiences as a professional firefighter and volunteer firefighter to discuss why this reform is so important.

Kind regards,

Laurence Brown
Firefighter
Country Fire Authority
South Warrandyte Station.