

To whom it may concern.

July 5th 2017

I am a current serving Station Officer with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, stationed at Number 2 Station in Batman Street West Melbourne. My role is emergency response within my designated turnout area, assigned with crew and equipment as directed by the Chief Fire Officer. I am approaching fifteen years service, am the recipient of the Fire Services Medal, Long and Good Service medallion, and Commendations for actions taken at the Recent Bourke Street incident.

I would like to respectfully make a submission in favour of the proposed fire services reforms, as the reforms in my opinion are a vital and necessary step forward in the progression of all fire service organisations in this state. I have lived in Melbourne since 1982, having moved from Western Victoria (Simpson), and have a thorough understanding of the fundamentals of Emergency response (in relation to fire/Rescue) from both a country and city perspective. To say the reforms are long overdue is an understatement, the reasons for which I will outline below.

The Urbanisation of outer lying suburbs, which once were considered "Country", has been staggering, in both size and pace, and has seen massive investment in infrastructure across domestic and industrial fields. Police stations, Ambulance stations, Fire stations and transport for that matter, which form a vital part of that developing infrastructure, have not kept pace with development, despite an increase in numbers of members across all emergency services. This is a reflection of the need for these services, which are still under pressure to meet the demands of increasing crime (in some areas), trauma, and fire/rescue related incidents. This is a staggering example of a lack of foresight and planning, but for the purpose of this reform, I will focus on Fire/Rescue.

The basis of all emergency response is swift response, especially in fire/rescue, where statistics show clearly, that containment or mitigation of incidents/fires within those early minutes, is critical in ensuring a positive outcome more often than not. More so now with the increased role in Emergency Medical Response by firefighters, where once again, early intervention is a critical component of saving lives. Why then should those areas which are not serviced by full time, professional, highly trained, and accountable personnel, be disadvantaged by having the impediment of the most critical factor in emergency response, that being time? I live in one of those areas on the Mornington Peninsula, so can I at least have an explanation of why my family are not deserving of the same coverage those in the leafy inner suburbs take for granted? That is not good enough as far as I am concerned, and as a taxpayer I demand better. It especially critical where it is obviously affordable, those areas in question being the ones now classed as Suburban. Surely this is a natural step in what we call progress. And progress is difficult, as it involves change, and for some, change is difficult to accept. But that's life in a modern society, and while we have to be sensitive to the thoughts of those reluctant to change, if the needs of the majority are what we are focussing on here, then the choice is obvious.

When it comes to the issue of which model delivers a superior response, it is laughable to think that where it is affordable, and infrastructure and population size require, that anything less than an immediate professional response to incidents is good enough. Why should there not be staff available to respond at the drop of a hat? The alternative model is just not good enough when it comes to response in these urbanised areas, how can it be when one has to wait up to 30 minutes or more for emergency staff to reach the scene of an incident in highly urbanised areas of Metropolitan Melbourne?. Even though the responders may have the best of intentions, it is manifestly inadequate in terms of providing a necessary, professional service. I acknowledge that we are not talking about real country districts, in which I grew up, where volunteer response is the only one available, and is vital as the lifeblood of the community. It is essential there, and is part of the soul of the community, and the bottom line is, it cannot be afforded everywhere. That is a given. But to then say reforms are not required in areas such as Cranbourne and Craigieburn for example, is unacceptable.

Finally, from a professional point of view, some of the most vital components in ensuring a positive outcome at most incidents, is knowing I have a full complement of crew members to direct, all fully trained in emergency response procedures, fully equipped, and arriving as I do, within seven minutes of turnout, ninety four percent of the time we respond. This is essential for my safety on the fire ground, but most importantly, the safety of the crews I direct, who rely on my direction to ensure their safety, and rely on the backup of arriving crews, who are equally trained and equipped, to support them in immediate need. I cannot understate the importance of this aspect of our procedural safety. Swift response in adequate numbers is the cornerstone here.

We are all accountable for our actions, and any member who has appeared in the Coroners Court will agree, that accountability is not taken lightly, as we are responsible to a higher authority. There is no escape clause, we cannot call on the good intent defense. We have procedures to follow, tried and tested over time, and all crew members are working from the same page, to coin a phrase. There is a concrete hierarchy, a rank structure, and we call it as we see it, responding the required equipment on a needs basis, not on where our allies are stationed, who we like or don't like. And the majority of Victorians deserve nothing less.

I would also ask you to consider the impact of the prolonged dispute on Family and work colleagues. The majority of professional firefighters are in favour of the reforms, and justly so. The drawn out industrial situation is doing no-one any favours, and all employees want to see is the return of harmonious relations between Management, the Union, Emergency services Victoria, and whichever Government is in power. The disruption to my family has been considerable, and I am sure we are not alone.

Finally I would ask you all to consider essentially what the need of the greater good is. Professional, timely emergency response, or taking what is essentially a regressive step in emergency response, lacking the courage to change?.

The needs of the many must outweigh the needs of the few.

Sincerely

Station Officer Peter Leonard

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