

**FIRE SERVICES BILL SELECT COMMITTEE SUBMISSION 2017****INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES  
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017**

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

Please find below a personal account of my experiences and how the lack of reform has and will affect me and my family over my 28 years as a career firefighter.

My name is Chris Day and I have been a professional MFB Firefighter for 28 years currently holding the rank of leading Firefighter, Fire Investigator, Urban Search and Rescue, Trench Rescue, Aerial Operator and am trained to operate all variations of appliances in the MFB. I have been stationed at various stations in Central Melbourne and the Western suburbs. I am currently stationed at Deer Park Fire Station.

Firstly I'd like to thank the select Committee members for allowing myself as a professional MFB Firefighter to make a contribution and I write to express my wholehearted support for the proposed Fire Service Reforms.

The lives of the public depend on us providing the best service and in order to do this we require the full support of our Government. 28 years ago I joined the MFB to serve the community of Melbourne, fully understanding that this would involve some sacrifices, shift work, family time, weekends but understanding that it was something worthwhile.

One of my reasons for supporting these reforms is because I am sick of the constant public vilification undermining firefighters. Both in the media and by successive governments on Firefighters, whose main concern is to serve the public and get home safe to our families. These attacks have involved at least 26 front pages of the Herald Sun, being dragged through the fair work commission where millions of dollars of public fire service levies were wasted in trying to reduce fire fighter safety, having politicians both state and federal attempting to denigrate Career Firefighters in the eyes of the public and being branded a thug a bully and a misogynist, none of which are remotely true.

I have worked alongside fellow firefighters who happen to be female, for my entire 28 year career, without any problem and with every confidence in their abilities; I have two daughters that I have encouraged to become firefighters (with no success). I had a roof collapse on me when my backup was a female firefighter; I have never doubted her ability to carry out her role, which she did exceptionally well.

I have never been on strike, or refused to respond to any emergency call or call for assistance yet the government continues to brand us as thugs and radical unionists. We are not willing to stop work because without our 90 second response time people like you and your families could die. Instead our strikes consist of typing internal emails in capital letters and not wearing dress shirts.

I have never seen any instances of bullying unless they have been coming from our upper management directed at the firefighting rank and file.

In fact our CEO sent an email threatening us with disciplinary action under an internal code of conduct. We were directed not to put in a submission to this select committee that disclosed any reference to what we face daily in our employ. While we often are faced with the burden of seeing terrible sights that we cannot un-see, these are things that we sometimes expect to face. I have treated children the same age as my own with 70% burns to their bodies and fighting for their lives. Imagine going home to your family and children carrying these visions, where on my arrival home the newspaper lays on the table displaying

another attack on professional firefighters – by your very own management, your government and the media.

Not to mention the abuse regularly spat at us by the general public. 28 years ago abuse from the public was non-existent! But it is now a common occurrence fuelled by the constant vilification of firefighters. This escalates the dangers already present on scene. Some members of the public abuse us for not responding fast enough and feel free to film us providing CPR in an attempt to save a person's life.

While incidents on the job have the potential to cause PTSD, we are not prepared to handle further insults. This constant vilification and bullying has seriously affected the morale of both myself and my co-workers, to the point where we all have concerns for one another's wellbeing. This alone is enough for me to fully support these proposed changes. These attacks have been nothing short of disgraceful, however, at the same time enlightening to know the lengths and lows some will go to for either a vote or to protect their turf.

**This behaviour must end; firefighters and our families have had enough.**

**The Victorian community has had enough.**

**It is time to repair the damage done and focus our energy on the future.**

There are many reasons for these changes to be pushed through, many of which involve the safety of all firefighters CFA, MFB and Volunteers. We are a service where firefighters are being sent into extremely dangerous and confronting situations and need to have full confidence and trust in the chain of command. Sadly interference by successive Governments in the direction and running of Victoria's emergency services have led to the firefighters having no faith or trust in our management.

Surprisingly to anyone outside these organisations these continued attempts to demean both CFA & MFB career firefighter's worth have brought the men and women at the coalface closer together and more united than ever before. In these areas we face the typical urban problems of drugs and violence at potentially every call, as well as the normal fire, explosion and chemical exposure. Emergency Medical Response "EMR" now makes up almost half of all our work, as does consoling grieving relatives. Those of us that work in areas covered by both CFA & MFB work well together and rely on each other for backup in these situations.

It is in these environments, knowing that you have immediate backup allows you to carry out your job. I turnout on a 3 crew truck to a house fire immediately getting to work, with one firefighter operating the pump, one disconnecting the power, gas and assessing the scene and a third firefighter (me) getting a hose line and entering the building to conduct a search. We do this knowing that 4 more firefighters will arrive in moments. This highlights the importance of a having 7 firefighters on the fire ground.

We cannot do this whilst worrying if our backup will arrive at all, let alone in time should something go wrong. I am still at a loss as to why 7 firefighters on the fire ground (a well-established world best practice) which I have been protected by for many years, is not considered necessary for my fellow firefighters in the next suburb, just because they are CFA.

This lack of care for their safety then affects my safety, as when the career CFA truck is busy with their ever increasing workload. This occurs in a suburb that includes 3 prisons, many major hazard facilities, high rise buildings and an ever increasing residential population. We are left to rely on an unknown volunteer response time and crew number, where the skill sets and qualifications of those turning out is not guaranteed. Such as the ability to wear a BA, climb a ladder, hook up to a hydrant or operate a pump. In 2016 Caroline Springs career staff was deployed to a bushfire for days leaving the station unmanned due to lack of qualified drivers.

More urban areas create more of a challenge in ensuring that there are enough suitably trained volunteers in both BA and EMR to cope with the urban workload. This is not a criticism of volunteers as acquiring and

maintaining currency in these skills is very time consuming, let alone working, commuting and then having to be available 24 hours a day.

Under the reforms all high risk urban environments will receive a streamlined and highly structured initial response under one response system. A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career Firefighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas. Furthermore there is absolutely nothing in these reforms that will stop volunteers responding to emergencies as they do now. Deer Park regularly responds into CFA district 14 with both Integrated and 100% Volunteer stations.

Further risks we face include communications difficulties, lack of EMR response in highly urbanised areas and inappropriate response.

**Communication difficulties** - Radio difficulties are a daily occurrence in region 14, where reception is atrocious, with all crews possibly missing crucial information relayed on the way to a job.

**Lack of EMR response** - Caroline springs, Burnside, Taylors Hill, Tarneit and Werribee are just some of the areas that, unknowingly, are not receiving the same level of response that their neighbours, possibly across the road do, EMR because of these same outdated boundaries.

**Inappropriate response** - The CFA response model does not recognise many of the various types of appliances and other resources inside the MFB boundaries and therefore won't select them to respond to an emergency, even though they may be the closest to the incident. This was evident at a recent fire in Tarneit where a car drove into a childcare centre (luckily unoccupied at the time) where an aerial appliance was responded from Geelong while one was in station at Footscray. At the same fire, the incident controllers were asking for suitably BA qualified volunteers to be dispatched, when 11 fully BA trained firefighters from three MFB stations in close proximity were available and were not dispatched. In the event that the childcare centre was occupied, the outcome would have been catastrophic. This is but a small example as to why the system is in dire need of reform.

These issues occur because of an invisible boundary that was set 60 years ago, when firefighters still lived at the fire stations and more than 33 years before the fire investigation unit was even created. Yet these boundaries have remained, as though Melbourne hasn't grown at all. **The Communities of Metropolitan Melbourne deserve better!**

In 1950 when the CFA and MFB boundaries were last revised, Melbourne's population alone was 1.3 million. Between 2015 and 2016 the figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed the population of Melbourne climbed to 4.64 million, the fastest growth in the nation. This rapid growth has occurred without any changes to Metropolitan Melbourne's boundaries.

The introduction of fire service reforms will introduce an independent Fire District Review Panel which will remove the protectionist behaviour when it comes to boundary review. The panel will use actual Triple 000 data, projected population figures and urban development when determining the necessity for a professional response. High growth and high risk areas can be critically analysed by prioritising community.

All Victorian, professional and volunteer Firefighters, deserve a modern fire service that meet the needs of our growing communities and fully protects its protectors. The proposed fire service reforms are vital for the safety of all Victorians including me as a Firefighter.

The reforms will also address the ever increasing and unrealistic demands being placed on volunteer Firefighters, because of the enormous urban growth resulting in increased emergency calls. A 'failed to respond' or a 'delayed' response is simply unacceptable in high risk urban environments. The current protectionist, obstructionist and turf war mentality shown by a vocal minority serves no purpose and is hindering any improvement in service delivery by Victoria's emergency services.

I am relieved that I am going to be covered for cancer related illness. As I have attended thousands of calls including Coode Island, one of the worst where I was vomiting on scene from what was later revealed to be Benzene fumes. Since that day many of us who attended have the niggling worry about a ticking time bomb inside us.

I fully support Volunteers and in the small country town Bacchus Marsh where I live, we are fully covered by volunteers who do a great job and deserve to be covered for the same cancers as the rest of Australia's Firefighters. Luckily Bacchus Marsh is still a rural town where enough volunteers live and work that they are able to respond a full crew in a timely manner, as the town is ever expanding I would prefer fulltime firefighters who are out the door in 90 seconds to protect my family, but understand the financial constraints that prevent this. I have spoken to firefighters from my local brigade who understand that these reforms will have no impact on the way they operate. They are pleased that they will in fact receive funding for training and equipment and will be covered by the presumptive cancer legislation.

There are many more reasons for these Reforms to go through; these are just some of mine.

Regards,

Chris Day

Leading Firefighter

MFB

