

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

**RE: INQUIRY INTO THE FIRE FIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS
COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017.**

It is requested that this submission be treated as strictly confidential.

I write to express my support for the long overdue reforms to Victoria's fire services.

My name is Glenn Ferguson, I am a Leading Fire fighter with the MFB and have been a full-time fire fighter since August 2010. I am currently stationed at South Melbourne fire station on C platoon and have worked at this station for approximately 5 years.

I live in Mornington, where fire cover is provided by an integrated CFA fire service model. I have lived on the Mornington Peninsula for all of my life and have seen the large population growth and urbanisation taking place. I find it unbelievable that despite all of this growth and projected future growth that the fire service boundaries have not significantly changed since the 1960's. That means that those people, my family and myself included, who live in these highly urbanised areas do not get the same fire coverage that is provided in the inner to middle suburbs of Melbourne. I believe that the communities in areas such as Frankston, Geelong, Mornington and Dandenong, to name a few, already pay for and thus deserve to have not only a full-time fire service, but an updated one where there are two appliances with a minimum of seven fire fighters responding out the door within 90 seconds and are on scene within 8 minutes. I have seen first-hand the enormous difference a few minutes can have in an emergency situation such as minimising the growth and development of a structure fire or the improved outcomes of immediate CPR and defibrillation in a cardiac medical event (a service career fire fighters provide in their Emergency Medical Response program).

In this reform there are only 35 CFA integrated stations which will be impacted. The impact of this reform will be there is an enhanced career fire fighter response. This can only be a positive thing for the communities they protect and will enhance the safety of all fire fighters responding and on scene at incidents.

These high growth and urbanised areas currently covered by the CFA integrated stations under this reform will bring them into line with the current MFB

response of 2 fire trucks, responding out the door within 90 seconds and on scene within 8 minutes with seven fire fighters. Currently, that is the case for the 1 CFA staff appliance being responded in these areas, however a lot of the time there is no guaranteed back up as they are relying on volunteers.

Volunteers have between 4-6 minutes from receiving the emergency call to get to the station, and then a further 8-10 minutes to get on scene. In this day and age with people being a lot busier with work and family commitments there is no guarantee that at the time the emergency call for help comes in that there are any volunteers actually available to respond. The Victorian population deserve a more modernised fire coverage and the Victorian population and the safety of fire fighters responding to the emergency call should not have to rely on whether or not volunteers are available every second of the day in these built up, urbanised and high risk areas.

I cannot see how this fire service reform can have anything but a positive impact on volunteers and the community. My understanding is that there are approximately 1220 volunteer brigades, and the vast majority of CFA volunteers will be unaffected by these reforms. There are 35 integrated CFA stations which will be impacted, in that there will be an enhanced career staff response. This can only be a good thing for the communities they protect, and for the safety of all fire fighters. Volunteers at these stations will still have the ability to respond to incidents, just as before, as part of a joint response.

Furthermore, the Government have committed to substantial funding for the CFA for training, recruitment and retention of volunteers as well as funding to improve and upgrade facilities. This again is a good thing for everyone.

The fact that the vast majority of volunteer brigades will be totally unaffected by the reforms makes me question the motives of anyone suggesting they would leave the CFA if these reforms came into effect. Those people would really need to sit down and question why they actually volunteer, is it for the safety and protection of the community?

These reforms bring our out dated fire service model up to date with a modern and fantastic fire service. This I believe is what is best for the community. If someone from the public call Triple 000 for help and request a fire truck, they do not care what the fire truck looks like, who the people in it are or what badge is on the side of the door, all they want is for a fire truck to be on scene as fast

as possible and with the appropriate support and back up to help them in their time of need.

A number of reviews and inquiries have made it clear, particularly the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, that our fire fighters and the community are being let down by an out-dated fire service structure.

In addition, the fire service reform will introduce legislation providing fire fighters with presumptive rights to cancer compensation being made available to both career and volunteer fire fighters. This is very important to me after having seen many fire fighters pass away from cancers suspected of being fire related.

To conclude, I would like to convey to the committee the emotional toll this ongoing dispute has had on both my MFB and CFA colleagues as well as personally. What began as an EBA negotiation has turned into a public, politically driven agenda with little regard for the major issue at hand – what is best for the community and public safety. It is time to move ahead and support fire fighters in protecting the community they serve.

Yours Sincerely

Glenn Ferguson

MFB Leading Fire Fighter

