

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Steve Alcock [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 5 July 2017 10:26 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Fire Service Reform Submission

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

1. My Name is Stephen Alcock.

I am a career Firefighter,, holding the substantive position of Senior Station officer at Corio Fire Brigade, located in District 7.

Within my local response area we have 4 government licensed Major Hazard Facilities (MHF's), in which we respond to frequently through each year. They are:

- Viva Refinery
- Lyondell Basel
- Terminals
- Elgas LPG Plant

We also have within our assigned area a number of major life risks and major infrastructure such as:

- Geelong Grammar School
- Barwon Health Services, McKellar Centre
- Port of Geelong
- High pressure gas line from Viva to Elgas, which transports un-odourised LPG through residential housing areas and is approximately 3km long and can only be closed at each end.
- Corio Village Shopping Centre
- Bell Post Hill Shopping Centre
- Midway wood chipping
- MC Herds Abattoir
- Grain Corp

- I have been a member of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) for 26 years. Firstly being a volunteer with Ballan Fire Brigade for 10 years before being recruited as a career fire-fighter where I am still currently serving, 16 years and counting.

- Qualifications:

Completed a 16 week recruit course.

Passed the Leading Firefighter and Station Officer assessments both theory and practical, substantive Senior Station Officer (8 years)

Completed all modules to Level 3 Operations Officer

Road Rescue Operator

Incremented Supervisor and Operator- Ladder Platform 38m & 42m, Teleboom, Hazmat, BA Support and Tanker

Level 2 Operations Officer (IMT)

Endorsed Divisional Commander, Strike team leader

USAR Cat 2 Technician and Instructor

High Angle rescue Operator

Confined Space Rescue Technician

Chief Officer Endorsed Fire Investigator (Structural/Vehicle)
 Trainee Fire Investigator Bushfire
 Qualified Chemical, Biological and Radiation Detection Technician.
 Hazmat Supervisor, Technician.
 Qualified Ground Observer.

Awards:

National Medal
 National Emergency Medal (Black Saturday Fires)
 25 year service award

2. **I live in Buninyong and work in Corio**
3. **I also volunteered in my community** for 10 years as a Firefighter and held positions of Second Lieutenant and First Lieutenant.
4. **I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:**

Areas like Corio are no longer 'Country Areas' of Victoria. Urban growth and industry have taken over the once grass lands of Geelong. It is imperative that this is recognised and as a minimum two fire appliances with a minimum of seven firefighters are dispatched within 8 minutes to every call:

Breaking down the basic requirements for house fire-

1 x Incident Controller

1 x Pump Operator

2 x Breathing Apparatus Operators (First Attack)

2 x Backup Breathing Apparatus Operators

1 x Spare Fire-fighter to help get water for the pump operator as water maybe 100 meters away from the truck and given that the truck holds 2000 litres and the B.A Operators are using 495 Litres per minute that is 4 minutes of operational water fire-fighters have until we can get it from a hydrant.

In total that is 7 Fire-fighters for our safety and the community.

- This standard of response as a minimum means a lot for the firefighters and the community. Safety is a big aspect, and Corio being a predominately low Socio Economical area with second and third generations of families living in housing commission houses, high frequency of hoarding, family violence issues and high crime rate, seven on the fireground allows us to perform our job while being able to secure our appliances and look out for one another. We have one of the highest house fire rates in Victoria, and given the age of the buildings Asbestos is a frequent danger. Unfortunately due to the sheer number of calls we attend, we struggle to get our local volunteers on the fire ground when we need them, so it is important that the reform recognises this and supports the minimum response of seven career firefighters to every call.

The message that has been lost with all the political jousting is "We need to provide a service to the community". This service looks different in every community with in Victoria. However the bottom line is there are recognised integrated stations in Victoria. They were integrated due to the local Volunteers being overwhelmed by the number of calls, or a lack of membership. This hasn't changed and we need to ensure that every career staff appliance that responds to a fire has a second appliance on the road at the same time to support them.

How employing all career firefighters in one fire service will not affect volunteer turnout or surge capacity.

By employing all career firefighters into one service it will streamline the training in a common approach for all. All new recruits would be trained the same way under the one training module and they would then proceed with future training the same way, which could then flow onto Leading Firefighter Assessments and Officer Progression and training. Under the current system MFB and CFA career staff seem to partake very different training strategies, especially when it comes to Leading Firefighter and Station Officer Assessments. Also it would not affect volunteer surge capacity because the CFA would stay a volunteer based organisation and they would still cover their assigned areas of fire coverage and would still be called upon to large scale incidents as they are now. All we are really looking at doing is joining two career forces into one under one badge and the CFA stays as it is with the volunteers going on to cover their towns and in larger areas be supported by the career staff as it is now.

That volunteer support will be maintained with operational firefighters (OO's OMs etc being employed by FRV but continuing their roles through an arrangement with CFA)

That the reform areas are around the 35 integrated stations primary response areas that are no longer rural. They are major urban areas requiring urban response – no effect on other volunteer brigades or bushfire response.

The reform will assist with standardisation of career training/specialist Response/response standards and equipment.

As I noted earlier by being under one service all career firefighters from Recruit through to Senior Station Officer will have received the same Training and sat the same assessments.

Why it is better to have all career staff being employed by one fire service
It would be better to have all career firefighters employed by one service as you could then have one payroll and all uniforms would be the same cutting associated costs and greater buying power.

The reform will benefit volunteers as it has included a package to assist with volunteer recruitment and retention across the CFA; and includes funding for volunteer station upgrades etc.

5. Below are examples from my experiences which demonstrate the failures of the current structure:

While responding to calls to support neighbouring volunteer brigades, I am constantly face with situations where they are constantly putting themselves in danger. A recent example saw a volunteer captain down grade an appliance with a gas detector, responding to a sulphur smell in a workplace. The local appliance had no detection gear, so to test the atmosphere they used their nose!!! Having no regard for their safety or that of the community they serve.

One other time Corio Teleboom responded to support a neighbouring brigade to a Pub fire. The two local brigades failed to respond so a second appliance responded from Corio and got on scene before any local appliances did, leaving Corio fire brigade district without appropriate appliances in the area. Unfortunately there are hundreds of examples like these, but the aim is to support reform, not demonise the volunteers, but clearly the current system is broken and needs fixing.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Alcock Operations Officer (Acting) / Fire Investigator (Structural/Vehicle)
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