

To: Fire Services Bill Select Committee

RE: Fire Services Reform Submission

About me

I have over 27 years experience as a professional Firefighter, joining the MFB in January 1990. I have served 15 years as an Officer. My current position is Operations Commander, D Platoon, Central District.

Over my career, I have attended thousands of emergency calls including fires, road accident rescue, industrial incidents, hazardous incidents, medical emergencies, large Class 1 emergencies including the 2003/2004 bushfires in Sydney, the Black Saturday fires in Victoria, 2009 and I was the initial MFB Commander on scene at the Burke Street incident in Melbourne, January 20th, 2017.

Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB)

The metropolitan strategy released in 2002 known as "Melbourne 2030" suggested that 600,000 new dwellings would be required around metropolitan Melbourne with 284,000 of these to be located in growth areas. At the same time, the Government introduced the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution (GAIC) together with much improved local development contribution plans to help meet infrastructure needs generated by these developments.

Victoria's population is growing rapidly at the rate of around 100,000 people per year. We are anticipating a population of 10 million by 2051, with Melbourne itself to grow from 4.6 million to almost 8 million people. Victoria has also experienced the greatest regional population growth (123,100 people) in 2015-16 in Australia.

Emergency Services agencies must remain agile and evolve to meet the needs of these expanding communities. The establishment of Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), a little over 3 years ago, has seen vast improvements in capabilities and capacity of emergency service agencies working together to meet the challenges of protecting our communities, infrastructure, business economy and residential properties.

The main purpose of EMV has been to provide strong leadership across all emergency services and support agencies in Victoria with a focus on coordinated, co-operative response to all emergencies and hazards.

The communities we serve must be included in all aspects of emergency preparedness, response and recovery. They are entitled to the highest standards of service delivery. Sadly, these expectations are not being met by Victoria's current Fire Service arrangements and system of fire cover.

What does acceptable fire cover look like?

The 3 main areas required to achieve acceptable fire cover are:

1. Capacity to respond in a "time critical" manner and surge capacity to support other agencies, when and where required.
2. Adequate resources to achieve best practice outcomes, crewing and equipment.
3. Consistency in the capability, qualifications and skills of all responders to deal with all hazards and emergencies.

Example of unacceptable fire cover

I have lived in Mornington for 24 years. During this period, I have witnessed large urban growth and population increases: expansion of surrounding communities has required thousands of new residential dwellings, new schools, shopping centres, local business growth and improvements to infrastructure to service this growth such as the development of major road arterials such as Eastlink and Peninsula Link. During tourist high season, the population impacting the Mornington Peninsula can increase by 100,000.

The fire cover for Mornington is well below the required safe standards to meet the needs and expectations of the community. This is not a criticism of CFA personnel, it is simply stating fact that the current system does not adequately support them to provide the modern acceptable standard of fire cover required to service this community.

Comparison

	MFB	CFA (Mornington)
Response times	7.7 min	Service delivery standard: Class 2 Medium urban - 8 min
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum 7 fully trained firefighters, initial response • Capacity to increase resources rapidly, as required (personnel and equipment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 fully trained firefighters, initial response • Unpredictable number of volunteers, training and qualifications not guaranteed • Capacity to increase resources rapidly, as required, not guaranteed.
Consistency in capabilities and qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All officers and firefighters full trained and qualified in structural firefighting, including high-rise procedures • Fully qualified in breathing apparatus operations • Wildfire 1 & 2 qualified • Emergency medical response • Pump operation • Heavy rigid licenced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFA staff officer and one firefighter fully qualified (ONLY) • Volunteer level of qualification and skill vary. May not have qualifications or skills in some or many aspects required to conduct firefighting operations • Safety of operations for fire crews and community can not be guaranteed

The need for reform within Victoria’s fire services has never been greater. The current legislation and arrangements in relation to fire service delivery are based on data and statistics of communities that existed 60 years ago. Melbourne’s urban growth boundaries have shifted significantly and regional population growth is ever increasing. The fire services must take this opportunity to address the disparity in service delivery models and ensure a restructured, reformed and collaborative approach to fire and emergency management across the state of Victoria.

Sincerely,

Graeme O’Sullivan
4644 | Commander Operations | Central District | D Shift.