

Dear inquiry Committee,

**Re: Inquiry into the Fire Services legislation amendment.**

My name is Patrick Connell, I have been a fire fighter within the MFB for approximately 2 years. I currently reside in West Footscray but have spent most of my adult life in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, predominantly Coburg. I have worked at numerous northern and city stations during my time with the MFB.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed fire services reform for the following reasons:

As a fire fighter we are placed at various levels of risk at every job that we attend. Anything that can be done to mitigate risk should be explored. Legislative change is a key and over-arching way risk and dangers can be effectively reduced. As a fire fighter in the MFB region, I am ensured at least one other appliance other than my own at all fire calls. This is important, as without it, lives can be put in danger and/or compromised.

If I attend a house fire I currently attend with a Station Officer, who has responsibility for coordinating the response and a pump operator who sources water and ensures a water feed is secured as well as completing BA entry. Then there is myself. I have BA on and am ready to enter the building to complete a primary search for persons trapped, as well as identify the source of the fire and put it out. This is a high risk role and one that should not under any circumstances be completed alone. I require a charged hose line, breathing apparatus and a thermal imaging camera among other things to effectively do my job. For obvious safety reasons I also expect a fellow fire fighter. His or her role would be to assist with the thermal imaging camera as I make my way through the structure with my hose line, as well as support in a search and help manipulate a charged hose line around the structure. Thick smoke ensures vision is virtually nil (imagine placing your hand 5 cm from your nose and not being able to see it). As a MFB fire fighter in inner Melbourne I can be assured of this, however as the bordering stands, this isn't the case for 'country' areas, which I may also have to respond to. These 'country' areas are in fact highly built up suburban and often commercial and industrial city zones, which have changed due to urban sprawl and population changes.

CFA volunteers do a selfless and amazing job, however, Melbourne and major regional areas have changed. Areas once paddocks or bushland, are now an outer suburban metropolis. Houses are predominantly made of materials that burn faster than houses built 40, 50 or 60 years ago and turn out times are crucial to ensure lives and property are saved.

In 1921 the population of Melbourne was approximately 1.1million, today it is conservatively estimated at in excess of 4.6million. This is attributed to population

density but more so urban sprawl and the development of previously non-existent outer suburbs. These huge growth corridors are dependent on antiquated fire protection and these residents deserve a service which can ensure a minimum turn out with a minimum skill base, just as inner Melbourne does.

With operational staff all under one service, and protecting outer Metropolitan Melbourne as well as major regional centres, people living in these suburban city areas, will be guaranteed 2 fire appliances with a minimum of 7 fire fighters able and willing to don breathing apparatus and complete a search for a missing child, believed to be sleeping in an upstairs room.

The reform focusses on the urban growth areas of Victoria, specifically 35 integrated stations. This does not impact volunteers outside of these areas and does not stop any CFA volunteer services from turning out or responding to fire calls.

I fully support the reforms that have been proposed and look forward to the inquiry passing legislation that will ensure the greater safety of my fellow fire fighters as well as the Victorian community.

Yours Sincerely

Fire Fighter Patrick Connell

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