

To: The Parliamentary Committee into Fire Service Reform

My name is Jacob Beard, I am a current full time firefighter holding the rank of Qualified Firefighter within the MFB. I have been employed with the MFB for the previous five years and have been stationed at both inner city and outer suburban fire stations. Whilst I have only been in the job for five years I feel that I have experienced a lot in that time and it is for that reason that I am writing this submission to support fire services reform.

My first point is that I live in an area that for many years has been classified outside of the Metropolitan Fire district. As a result it is classed as "country" even though it is densely urbanised and because of this it is serviced by a volunteer fire brigade. Do not take this to mean that I am attacking the volunteer service in any way, it is just that the urban development in this region has far outpaced and exceeded the level of fire protection that is provided at the moment. Within this area we have numerous industrial estates as well as a major hospital and I feel that the rate payers and constituents in this area deserve a full time fire service. It is time to move with the times and modernise. I am not saying that volunteers are not a valuable source of fire protection however I think that a model that has not been revised or updated since the 1960's is not providing the expanding Melbourne community with the protection and service it deserves.

I could write to you with examples of why I feel reform is needed in residential areas such as mine due to inadequate response levels with the service that is currently provided, however I do not want to be seen or heard as being negative. It is obvious to me that the service that is provided at the moment is being provided to the best of the ability by those that are providing it. It is not them that are failing, it is the system. To me it is so simple... how can a model that was designed in the 1960's for 1960's Melbourne still be considered to be appropriate in the levels of service it provides to a city that has expanded and developed over the past half century. A lot has changed in Melbourne over the past fifty years, however the fire service has not.

As a firefighter this reform obviously is something that I hold a strong interest in. Over the past 3 years it is something that has been affecting not only me but the people around me also. To be used so blatantly as political footballs has had a deep impact on a lot of personal relationships and on a lot of friends and colleagues also. Examples of the profound effect that this dispute has had and the misinformation that has been published can be seen in the following

- In the fire service we have lost work mates that have taken their own lives
- Whilst on shift I have been personally abused whilst at a call as a direct result of misinformation printed for the public
- A member of my family has been confronted and abused at a function after a member of the public realised they had a family member in the job. The person believing what they

read in the newspaper took it upon themselves to make my family member fully aware of what they thought of me and my job

- A distinct drop in moral on station as we continually feel under attack from a campaign of misinformation provided purely and simply to diminish our standing in the public eye

This needs to stop. To me it is simple. It is modernising a fifty year old model that was put in place but has since been well and truly left behind by urbanisation and development. The new reform will still have strong role for volunteers as the state could not survive without them. It will allow us as firefighters to provide a better response and service for our growing population. The use of the fire services for political gain also has to stop. We need to be able to do our jobs to the best of our ability and this reform will allow us to do this moving forward. It is a simple decision to make and in my eyes is black and white. Allow this reform to move forward and let us evolve to provide the state of Victoria with the fire service that it both deserves and needs. I thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Yours Sincerely

Jacob Beard

Qualified Firefighter

Metropolitan Fire Brigade

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