

By email: LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au

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

I am Robert Gater

- Qualified Fire Fighter, B Platoon Rowville Fire Station
- Employed by Country Fire Authority.
- CFA Career Fire Fighter for 15 Years,
- CFA Volunteer Fire Fighter for 6 years.
- Heavy Rescue (Road Accident/Industrial/Trench)
- Hazmat Technician

I live in Tecoma and work in Rowville.

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

- Importance of having guaranteed backup - guaranteed that two trucks with at least 7 Fire Fighters will be dispatched within 8 minutes. This establishes a safe work site that is expected in any other industry.
- Having enough personal on the fire ground allows the job to be safely and quickly dealt with meaning a better community safety and protection.
- Employing all career Fire Fighters in one fire service will not affect volunteer turnout or surge capacity. In fact I believe it will see "summer crews" being created allowing some Volunteers to do what they like the most. I know of a few Volunteers who have taken their holidays specifically in the summer fire danger period to allow them to attend bush fires.
- Volunteer support will be maintained and most likely improved with operational F Fire Fighters (OO's OMs etc being employed by FRV but continuing their roles through an arrangement with CFA) as these officers will be able to concentrate directly on Volunteers only and not have Career staff in their catchment.
- With the reform areas localised around the 35 integrated stations primary response areas – It will have no effect on other volunteer brigades or bushfire response but instead provide a guaranteed response for the community.
- The 35 areas are now highly urbanised – high residential and other risks which was not the original focus of the Country Fire Authority. The Volunteer members were always originally there to help the community in times of need with emphasis on bush fire and not industrial responses.
- The reform will assist with standardisation of career training/specialist response/response standards and equipment offering better interoperability across the agencies.
- Having all career staff being employed by one fire service allows for the work place relations to be dealt with in a more business style with proper industrial checks and balances to occur with the appropriate parties –i.e. The Employer and the Employees instead of emotions fuelled on by an old sentimental image of yester year.

- Damage the disputation in the workplace has had on me has seen relationships forged over many years either at breaking point or dissolved and additionally the strain that has had on me and my family is way too much. My wife shouldn't have to explain why I should be paid to do my job because some politician has created a letterbox cards and smear campaigns that has put a distorted picture in her friend's minds of what my role is in CFA. I have been bailed up at weddings, on holiday's interstate by strangers. This is outrageous.
- The reform will benefit volunteers as it has included a package to assist with volunteer recruitment and retention across CFA; and includes funding for volunteer station upgrades. I believe that if the focus of CFA was to return to bush fires and focus on summer more so, then the Volunteer retention would increase as they would not need to commence training for the season until August each year. While still allowing a stream of Volunteers that want to do all year around fire calls as well.

- Below are some examples from my experiences which demonstrates the failures of the current structure:
 1. As Career staff Fire Fighters move around from station to station, we gain extra skills, see new industrial premises and experience different local factors pertaining to the socio economic level of that community. Unfortunately a thing that normally does not occur very often with Volunteers. Bringing my Rescue skills to Boronia from my previous station at Dandenong, I had experienced many Car accidents that had the rescue agency for that area responded which is Knox SES. The experiences had with joint co-operation with the SES at this and Frankston locations have made clear to me that the SES have generally low skills with respect to the technical elements involved with rescue and more emphasis on "having to use the tools" instead of properly assessing the event and looking at other possibilities of patient extraction. I understand that in the past at least, the SES have been funded by AAMI insurance and have had to "use the tools" in order to get their \$1000 payment. This perceived mentality continues to carry across even now with the focus on cutting vehicles up instead of appropriate action required. I have also seen on numerous occasions where the SES have had their response cancelled and continued to drive under emergency conditions (lights & siren) to the event when not required. I have even witnessed Police officers then have a go at the SES for doing just that. I have offered or have had my skills offered by my officer to the SES controller of several incidents when attending some extensively damaged car accidents before and then finding that the attending SES personnel had very little experience and let me run the entire extrication of the patients as they were not confident to do the task.

I remember one "rescue" that we attended while at Boronia, that as we were on scene several minutes before the SES, we had an initial look to see the patient's method of being trapped in the vehicle that was on its side. The patient was not "trapped" as such, merely held fast in their seat belt that with a small amount of

assistance to lift some weight of the belt, they were able to be released from the belt buckle and then helped out of the vehicle. While doing this, I could clearly here one of the Knox SES female crew members yelling out to us to stop as that was their job and we are not allowed to do that. At this point even their own SES controller had enough of their own members' attitude and pulled her aside to talk to her. This type of response is not what the community deserves, we need to enhance the ability of a rescue patient to be attended to in the most efficient way possible to get the urgent medical help they need in the "Golden hour" as indicated by the medical professionals in order to achieve the best outcome for them. I believe having all Career Fire Fighters trained and able to conduct any rescue from vehicles will make an increased capacity and better community response for all.

2. I have seen where the Captain of The Basin CFA brigade has complained to the operations manager and operations officer that he needs to be able to keep his 80 members interested and keen to learn by allowing them to go to the fire calls and that he didn't want us there as this would inhibit those Volunteer members from going to the call and therefore they would end up leaving. I have also heard similar claims from Upwey brigade, Keysborough brigade, Scoresby brigade, South Morang brigade (before integration), Rowville brigade (before integration) and I believe others as well, but all this after 15 years has just created a blur of ridiculous behaviour that you start to resent after a while. I thought we were supposed to be here to serve the community and not ourselves. I believe that CFA management has allowed this culture to exist and to a degree promoted it.
3. When working at Springvale and Dandenong, I would constantly see the failure of Noble Park brigade which became farcical with CFA management allowing them to continue to distort turnout times and say they have turned out to a call while they were still at station. On several occasions, we drove past the brigade to see them still in station and not on route to the call as stated. This practise also happened with Bayswater brigade while I worked at Boronia.
4. Daily, CFA Career Fire Fighters attend approximately 66% of the states CFA fire calls. This doesn't sound like much, but it equates to the 3% of CFA members (the just under 1000 Career staff Fire Fighters) responding to 66% of the states calls giving the career Fire Fighters the most exposure to emergencies and the least say.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Gater:

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