

My name is Cameron Rees and I have been a professional MFB firefighter for 30 years. I am writing to express my support for the proposed fire services reform. I have been pleasantly surprised at the number of parliamentarians that have supported this fire sector reform agenda and the notion of a progressive fire sector.

What follows from here is my personal submission and may not match the view of my employer. I do not believe that what I am about to share with the select committee, contravenes the Public Service Code of ethics section 3.5 as this is a submission to parliamentary enquiry. All privileges are as such protected. I along with all other operational MFB employees, received via the internal e-mail system a troubling e-mail from our CEO, inferring we should not make submissions. In keeping with the Public Service Code of Conduct, I will not be sharing this message or any part of it, in the public domain or on social media.

The qualifications associated with my employment that I currently hold are:

- [Certificate IV in Public Safety \(Firefighting Supervision\)](#)
- [Institution of Fire Engineers - Graduate member](#)
- [Cert IV TAE40110](#) – Training and Assessment
- Associate Diploma of Applied Science – Fire Technology
- Station Officer with Metropolitan Fire Brigade of over six years
- Qualified and recognised (internal & external):
 - Chemical, Biological and Radiological training, Advance heavy vehicle control, Emergency Medical Responder, Wildfire 1&2, many other internal qualifications for pumping and fire/rescue service vehicle variants (recognised externally), qualifications to use state-of-the-art, hot-fire training equipment at Craigieburn VEMTC.

I am currently a Recruit Instructor at the Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre, in Craigieburn. A matter that is related to fire service reform and interoperable fire agencies is the Victorian Recruit Firefighter Project. For the last two years, I have been temporarily assigned to the Victorian Recruit Firefighter Project. I am an integral team member of the project tasked to establish a single career firefighter recruit course for Victoria whose stated outcomes are:

- Maximised interoperability, capacity, capability, resilience and sustainability through training that harnesses synergies and improves consistency of practice;
- A hazards-specific approach to training that capitalises on knowledge and expertise of the collective, which reduces duplication of effort and keeps our personnel safe; and
- An innovative and flexible training model for the collective that meets evolving community needs and expectations and examines the most effective way for fire and emergency agencies to train, maintain skills and undertake professional development.

The project has sought to assemble positive likeminded people from both the CFA and MFB to configure a single recruit course for career firefighters. It has been a positive and rewarding process that has seen in just 20 months, the successful completion of the project, which was to plan and run a truly combined recruit course for Victorian career firefighters. There will be four combined courses which consist of CFA and MFB recruits; the first course starts 21 July 2017 and the remainder will commence in the following four weeks. The last of the courses finishes 19th December, 2017. They will each have duration of 20 weeks and deliver content that responds to the requirements of both fire agencies, now and into the future.

All Victorian, career and volunteer firefighters, deserve modern fire services that meet the needs of our growing communities. Indeed, with all state governments under such pressure to ramp up construction of dwellings in the built environment, these pressures for change will only become greater, hopefully not at the cost of lives and livelihoods. To ensure the safety of all Victorians - including me as a firefighter, I ask you to please seriously consider your support for the proposed fire services reform. Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of your constituents, who are taxpayers and all communities in our growing state. The rapid growth rate of population density and urban growth has been a challenge for governments over many years. The challenges of resourcing all facets of infrastructure needed to respond to this increased density of urban areas include building fire stations and attracting volunteers. This is a real challenge in an era when people have to work long days and weeks to support their families. Finding time to devote to worthwhile community support activities can be challenging for all concerned. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our firefighters and stop the ever increasing, unrealistic and potentially dangerous demand being placed on volunteer firefighters because of the sprawling urban growth and density, resulting in inevitably increased emergency calls to ESOs. Improved resourcing for career and volunteer firefighters will make these emergencies safer.

I live with my family, in the half of Greensborough that falls within CFA area of responsibility. We have lived in Greensborough for 28 years. I've seen first-hand what happens when the fire service model is hopelessly out-dated and dysfunctional. Several weeks ago, a house at 7 Cassia Close Plenty, was completely destroyed by fire due to an unacceptably long response time by CFA brigades. Quite a number of Brigades were responded that night including Diamond Creek, Yarrambat, Plenty and many others. Greensborough's MFB station is the second closest station, but was only responded when the quick thinking Diamond Creek Fire Brigade Captain requested that MFB Greensborough respond immediately. The damage from the fire house was so severe that the house was later demolished. The homes in this area are well appointed in a relatively new estate. Current median values would be around the \$ 1 million plus mark.

Whilst stationed at Templestowe fire station approximately six years ago, we received a call from an automatic fire alarm at [The Pines shopping Centre](#). This was the type of call that was and is, very routine for career firefighters. The call was at 11pm on a Saturday night and in CFA area. An emergency response was initiated from MFB Templestowe and CFA Warrandyte stations. According to agreed MFB & CFA response protocols, two firefighting appliances were responded from Templestowe (a pumper tanker and water tanker). These two MFB vehicles responded within 90 seconds and arrived on scene in around four minutes. The fire call was investigated, the fire extinguished and a word back (alarm status) sent via MFB Communications (VKN8), via CFA Communications (Vicfire) [as is doctrine and practice]. The fire was in an electrical sub-station housed in an out-building within the shopping centre boundaries. The fire had a concerning potential to cause severe damage and disruption to a major business, with the capacity to severely disrupt people's lives, businesses and become a major inconvenience to local commerce and industry. It took 45 minutes for an operational CFA appliance to come from Warrandyte. It happened that this station was crewed by volunteers, hence the long wait time. Once the CFA appliance arrived, I performed a normal business handover (what we had, what we did, what else needs to be done) to the IC of the Warrandyte truck and returned to Templestowe station.

Approximately eight years ago, a fire causing substantial damage occurred at [Apollo Parkways Primary School](#), on the corner of Brentwick and Civic Drives, Greensborough. The fire (like most) was small in size in the initial stages. It had started as an electrical fire in an illuminated 'exit' sign. MFB response was not requested until about the thirty minute mark, by which time, the fire was through the roof and rapidly spreading unchecked, throughout the whole building which normally has around 700 children enrolled. When MFB appliances were eventually responded, no effective

firefighting had been taking place. MFB resources responded from Greensborough (the closest station, but due to arbitrary boundaries – was not included in initial dispatch), Bundoora and Thomastown. This fire which caused \$3 million damage and severely impacted school operations to the point, senior education department staff considered closing the school to re-build and setting up a temporary school or appropriating students from Apollo Parkways PS to other nearby schools. Volunteer brigades came from near and far. Plenty (the brigade responsible), Yarrambat, Diamond Creek and many other CFA brigades joined in the effort to extinguish the fire at Apollo Parkways PS. Forty per cent of the school was damaged to the point where the school required major re-build and upgrade works. Many portables were brought in to allow school classes to continue. The resultant disruption lasted for years as building works hampered school activities and much consideration had to be given to areas and works involving construction staff and equipment. I have never blamed these consequences on volunteer firefighters; it is the system that is at fault. The responsibility for these and many other tragedies rests squarely with successive state governments since the 1960's who have collectively twiddled their fingers and squandered every opportunity to rectify this out-dated fire sector resourcing and response model.

Arbitrary boundaries and artificial lines drawn on maps don't stop fire. Policies and procedures that support emergency response need to be clear, logical and transparent by design to meet or exceed society's emergency needs. Government and Emergency Service Organisations (ESOs) have a statutory authority to ensure that this is the case. Take for example the baffling and disparate approach to fire service levy applied to CFA and MFB areas within the state of Victoria. By any definition, the amount of fire service levy paid by ratepayers living in CFA areas is greater by percentage than those living within the MFD (Metropolitan Fire District). Also, having already paid more in fire services levy, those ratepayers also receive a lesser service (using current delivery models) than those within the MFD. [Containment to room of origin – MFB 88% - CFA 75% , 7.7 minute response time and seven firefighters on the fireground]. What this means, is that firefighters responding in 'Country areas' areas have to wait longer for additional firefighting resources that back up all of our safe work practices and give firefighters a sense of relief when support resources are on the way. The Incident controller (IC) will execute a plan of strategies and tactics to bring the emergency to a safe conclusion. This will be drastically altered and much more defensive, if back up resources aren't BA trained (as is the case in many volunteer responses) or within a reasonable travel distance (7.7 minutes). The strategies and tactics will be even more defensive if seven firefighters aren't available on the fireground before the fire escapes the room of origin.

I believe the Victorian State Government should be congratulated for recognising and embracing the current drive for fire sector reform. They have shown the leadership and vision lacking in recent Victorian Governments. The very old delivery model that relies on the timely arrival of volunteer firefighters is sufficient in areas that have minimal infrastructure, commerce and industry. The simple fact is that waiting for volunteer response is costing a fortune in damage from fire and other emergencies and lost productivity due to resultant loss from preventable damage.

I also respectfully ask that you give consideration to my request, to further support the fire services with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect fire service personnel in the case of occupational cancer. In my 30 plus year career with MFB, I have sadly attended the funerals of too many colleagues (many of whom were friends) who have died from various occupational related cancers. Both are needed to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament as soon as possible. A days delay, could cause the unsupported death of another firefighter. This support is important to me and my colleagues, career firefighters and volunteers.

Victoria's fire services' boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this out-dated model, 35 areas are incorrectly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised, commercialised

and or industrialised. Plenty, Eltham, Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia, Caroline Springs and Geelong are just some of the 35 'country areas'. These 'country areas' desperately require a modern fire service delivery model as part of the current fire service reform agenda, as they are highly urbanised areas. This structural change will facilitate a rapid eight minute fire response, with seven professional career firefighters on two fire trucks, which are the minimum standards needed in highly urbanised areas.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to talk further about my personal experiences as a professional firefighter and why this reform is so vital.