

The Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

My name is Simon Kirton I am a Level 2 Firefighter working at Morwell Fire Station for the Country Fire Authority (CFA). I have 1 year of service as a Professional Firefighter and 5 years prior service as a Volunteer Firefighter at Phillip Island Fire Brigade, were I live.

My submission in support of the proposed fire services reform is based on both my experiences as a Volunteer Firefighter and as a Professional Firefighter.

As a Professional Firefighter, turning out within 90 seconds and performing a primary search within minutes of the call it is important to me to know that with a guaranteed 2 trucks and 7 firefighters dispatched, there are breathing apparatus operators that have gone through the same training as me ready to work. The career firefighters would come to my aid in an emergency, help with multiple casualty rescues and fighting the fire. It is my opinion that the safety of the community, other firefighters and me on the fire ground will be dramatically improved with 7 Professional Firefighter.

As it currently stands the volunteers in the Latrobe Valley and district 27 can not be relied on to turn out let alone arrive on scene with a competent crew to perform the said tasks. This is not just an issue in the LaTrobe Valley but in my local area as well. During my 5 years service as a volunteer I can count the number of times I was the only volunteer initially to turnout to an incident. Many other times I have turned up to the station 10-15 minutes after the initial call, about the minimum time possible for me to get there

from home, sport or work, expecting other volunteers to have attended the call but for them to count on me to drive the appliance to the call. Personally I think in an area where the population is seasonal and peaks over spring/summer to over 100,000 people such activities show how unprofessional the volunteer service can be. It is an extremely dangerous situation here on Phillip Island where access is from a 2 lane bridge and 1 main access road designed to handle the non high-season traffic. I have no doubt that these examples are not the only ones to occur across the state.

With the continued character assassination and defamation of my colleagues across all media forms I face questioning and criticism from my friends and associates who are misinformed by these media reports. I actually understand what "False News" is.

Staff and Volunteer's at integrated stations relations are at an all time low and trust has been all but lost because of this and it is hard to see how this can be reversed. In the fire services teamwork and trust is imperative.

For me I see the reforms to the Fire Service, a priority for community safety. The areas protected by the 35 integrated stations are highly urbanized, have warranted risks and critical infrastructure. As population grows the community should be allowed to expect more career firefighters in more career fire stations across the State as the risks increase. I see this happening quicker and easier with the main priority being community safety not settling disputes and turf wars created by volunteers some of whom I know. These members I know in my opinion are stuck in the past not realizing the town they have grown up and lived in is no longer a country town but heavily a populated suburban community.

As a professional firefighter, I am proud to say that I have and will continue to receive some of the highest quality training in the

world. All my colleagues have endured a competitive recruitment process and are required to continue to train and develop their skills every day whereas in my 5 years as a volunteer training was sporadic and if volunteers didn't attend a training there was no consequence and some operational members rarely turned up to this training at all. In my opinion it is the professional men and women that are the best people to perform a specialist response like Road Accident Rescue (RAR) roles. The fire services reform will ensure a RAR service from integrated stations and take the strain from and reliance off volunteer State Emergency Service crews. As I describe it to my family and friends, if it was their Mother, Father, Son, Daughter Brother, Sister etc. trapped in a vehicle after a crash, who would you rather attending to them? People that train day in day out, using the equipment and are required to keep up to standards or a volunteer member whom like me when I was a volunteer firefighter, could not always attend calls due to lifestyle and work, couldn't find time to train with equipment and would often and at times found it hard to commit to the role.

One career fire service, will in no way affect the volunteers from being active in their communities and my community. Volunteers will continue to volunteer no matter the outcome of the fire services reform and contrary to reports in the media will not affect surge capacity or bushfire response. Most people are passionate about their communities and want the best for it. In my opinion its shameful the way the media along with the VFBV and some members of parliament in this state and even federally have run this scare campaign putting words in the mouths of community and volunteers and have not used facts or truth in their attempts to undermine the Fire Services Reform.

In my short career I have seen and learnt why it is so important that the committee approves of the FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE

RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES
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Yours sincerely,

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