

**From:** Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017  
**To:** [LCSC](#)  
**Subject:** New Submission to Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017  
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Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

Mr Tim Hodges  
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## **SUBMISSION CONTENT:**

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My Name is Tim Hodges and I have been involved in public safety in various forms for the last 25 years. I am currently a Leading Firefighter with Broadspectrum, a private fire service that provides fire cover to the Australian Defence Force on bases around Australia. I started my service with South Morang Fire Brigade in 1992 and spent 18 years as an officer of the brigade. I am currently still a volunteer with South Morang. I have worked as part of and been the manager of the Ford Broadmeadows Assembly Plant Emergency Response Team. I have worked as a trainer for the National Australia Bank providing security and emergency reponse training around Australia.

I have been awarded the National Emergency Medal – Victorian 2009 Fires, the National Medal and been enrolled as a life member of South Morang Fire Brigade.

My qualifications towards my position include Certificate IV in Public Safety (Firefighting Supervision), Certificate III in Public Safety (Firefighting and Emergency Operations ) and Certificate II in Public Safety (Firefighting Operations)

I have been an instructor with District 14 where my role was to train other volunteers and mentor other members during their progression. This was a role that was not limited to my brigade, but all brigades within District 14.

South Morang is a recently integrated station (July 2015) that was desperately in need of help. Daytime turnouts were a roll of the dice and on many occasions, we were lucky to provide the service to the public. That is not to say that the volunteers of South Morang did not want to turn out or could not be bothered, quite the opposite was true, but, it is a simple fact that it is not always possible to be around at the time the community needed us.

The risks in our area has greatly changed over recent years. The housing area available has been built out, however there are now more multi-story apartment buildings and an increase in the number of townhouse units in the area. There is some commercial

construction beginning which may see a different type of response required. We have 6 nursing homes within our primary response area and directly support another three more. We currently have one of the busiest (and underdeveloped) road systems in Melbourne. A road system that has over the years made it not only hard for a truck to get from station to scene, but, for volunteers to get from home to the station to respond the truck, increasing response times.

South Morang has also been providing EMR response for nearly 9 years, a service that has been a great benefit to the community.

All the functions that volunteers once provided are now provided by full time CFA staff. A group of dedicated people who decided to join the South Morang Fire brigade as full time members. All of the members who started with us in 2015 had the single focus in mind. To serve the community. This was an epic change to the brigade. Many volunteers were concerned about the change and how it would affect how they volunteer their time, while others were relieved that the staff had arrived because it meant they did not feel obligated to be around the area in case there was a call. It should be noted that these two groups did not have common members. That is to say the ones who complained the most were not the ones who were providing the primary service (emergency, first truck response) to the community.

The current industrial dispute between CFA, UFU and the VFBV as placed exceptional strain on the South Morang Fire Brigade. I believe VFBV have been not as transparent as they should be and have used the good will of many volunteers to further some kind of vendetta. They have whipped up emotions of volunteers who would never be affected by the EBA to what end is unknown to me, but it makes for a good news story when the public see lots of “salt of the earth” volunteers marching against something. It is a shame when they are not sure what they are marching against. When a fellow Broadpectrum firefighter is abused at his volunteer station because he is a UFU member something is wrong. The station in question is not adjoining any integrated station and infact you would have to drive for nearly an hour before coming across any CFA integrated or MFB stations.

It is not possible for me to say how the reform will change my volunteering since I am a member of one of the 35 stations that will be directly affected by the change. I do know however I will be at peace with any change that occurs as it will be a benefit to the community. If the CFA can tap the resources of inner city suburbs to build surge brigades for strike team and summer duties then it's a bonus for the state. If integrated stations within CFA remove volunteers and only use retained firefighters to augment the staff crew then there would be a level required to maintain a position as a retained firefighter.

Currently the skills mix within CFA is greatly varied and while many CFA volunteers may hold a piece of paper that says they are able to do a task, when placed in the situation they are unable to make decisions or perform task when required. This undermines the trust that every firefighter should have in the firefighter standing next to them. As a volunteer I have always been careful to ensure I know the strengths and weaknesses of the other volunteers on my station, but this is from many years working with them and training them. Staff do not have that luxury. They need to be able to trust every person who shows up on a truck and in my opinion they would not be able to. There is no process within CFA to remove people who are not fit for the task and I fear that this may end up becoming a large problem because nobody what's to offend somebody who is giving their time freely.

In short, I believe the reforms are needed but not just to the change the name of the services and the response boundaries. There needs to be a reform within CFA itself. A

modern organisation that uses a popularity vote rather than qualifications to determine it's leaders. A service that relies on local decisions that may be prejudiced to determine the response requirements could find itself lacking. A service that keeps stations open purely for the fact they are volunteers instead of looking at the service provided from surrounding stations. There are many parts of the CFA that need to reformed.

The reforms will only improve the service to the community, which is what all members of the emergency services should be looking for. As I am fond of saying "It's the people on the other side of the fence who matter, not the little empires built in here"

This submission is my opinion only and does not reflect the opinions of any organisation I am currently working for or have worked for in the past.

Tim Hodges

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