

3 July 2017

## **Fire Services Reform Bill 2017**

To the Fire Service Reform Bill Committee,

My name is Graeme Murphy and I am fire fighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB). I have been employed by the MFB for over 27 years and hold the substantive rank of Commander.

Currently I hold the position of Commander Health, Safety and Wellbeing in the South East Metro region, a position I have held since 2014. My responsibilities are to manage all aspects of Health, Safety and Wellbeing for both operational and corporate staff within the region. During the course of my duties (and after hours on-call) I could also be responded to any emergency (in an operational capacity), if and when required.

I write this submission in support of the Firefighter's Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2017

### **Impact on fire service delivery**

As the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Commander I have a sound understanding of the procedure, practices and safety systems within MFB. I also have some knowledge of these systems within CFA.

Should Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) be established then I believe there would be significant improvements and financial savings to the Victorian community. Some of these improvements would be through the consolidation of current injury and hazard reporting systems, streamlined injury management processes and affiliated compliance of 'AS 4801 OHS Standard Certification'. All career staff would operate under Common Operating Standards and receive standardised training, resources and equipment.

MFB have introduced many safety processes over recent years which would enhance health & safety to all FRV fire fighters including:

- Concise mental health management and peer support services
- Injury prevention – strength, conditioning and functional movement philosophies managed by accredited exercise sports scientists (currently employed by MFB)
- Injury management - access to qualified Allied Health accredited exercise physiologist (currently employed by MFB)
- Systematic injury/incident investigation – provided by MFB qualified ICAM (Incident Cause Analysis Method) investigators
- Fireground Accountability System (FAST-card) – multi-user intranet-based platform for visibility of crewing on appliances
- Automatic Vehicle Location – GIS mapping capability of all MFB appliances
- Health & Safety representatives across all Districts and all platoons

- On scene fire ground safety work practices - Strategic placement of fire firefighting personnel on appliances to ensure world's best practice of 7 fire fighters responded to all fire calls
- Asbestos procedures - this includes sound asbestos management such as PPC testing and cleaning including the recording of all asbestos related exposures
- Fire ground fatigue management, rehabilitation and decontamination processes

### **Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery**

I believe this proposed Bill would enhance volunteer engagement but also enable a stronger focus on surge capacity which in turn would assist volunteer participation in active firefighting duties during high risk Fire Danger Periods.

Unfortunately there is perception that surge capacity would be diminished should the CFA become a standalone volunteer organization. This ideology discounts the important role of Emergency Management Victoria which is to ensure all agencies in the emergency management sector work together to achieve joined outcomes which are community focused.

Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP), Parks Victoria and interstate fire services **all** play a role in providing surge capacity to support CFA volunteers. Since 2014, high risk fire danger days and long campaign fires have been serviced by these agencies working together. For example, volunteers were unable to sustain a long term presence at the Hazelwood fire. CFA career staff, along with MFB fire fighters and support staff provided a capacity which relieved CFA volunteers of their tasks and ensured their fatigue management was provided during this campaign.

### **Short term and long term cost impact on fire service delivery**

The costs associated with this Bill should not only be viewed from a financial perspective. What price do you place on life as a result of delayed response times to fire, road rescue, industrial accidents or a cardiac arrest? Since MFB have provided an Emergency Medical Response (EMR) capability in partnership with Ambulance Victoria (AV) there are hundreds of peoples which have been saved as a direct result of a quick response and early intervention in the chain of survival. FRV would work beside CFA brigades and guarantee a quick response 24/7 to these communities.

There will inevitably be short term costs associated with the formation of FRV. I feel these will be mainly associated with livery and administrative changes. I believe there will be greater long term savings overtime in areas such as training, procurement, property and administrative management systems, etc.

Service delivery to Victorian communities will be enhanced in areas currently void of the Greater Alarm Response System (GARS) used in MFB. Additionally the appropriate response of resources via Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) would increase safety to these communities and fire fighters. CAD uses assignment rules based on risk and strategic location of stations to dispatch appliances in a timely manner, instead of the current manual creation on the CAD

rules set by volunteers based on self-interest and not what's best for their communities.

Fire contained to the room with an expedient and appropriate response is not only a cost saving in terms of reduced fire damage to property but also the reduction or prevention of personal loss, and you cannot put a price on that.

### **Underlying policy rationale**

CFA was established as a rural fire service and served their communities very well for many years. Unfortunately as the urban footprint grew into the CFA area they had to adapt and learn urban firefighting skills and methodologies. This is how the integrated service model was created. I believe this model is a hybrid fire service delivery model which makes it very difficult for volunteers to maintain comprehensive urban firefighting skills required in high populated urban environments.

A volunteer only CFA organization will reinstate the service back to its origins. Local community based fire services in rural areas is integral, as a career based service is financially unsustainable in remote areas and small townships. It should also be noted that 85% of all CFA fire calls lie within the outer Melbourne urban fringe.

The risk profile in an urban environment is quite different to that in rural areas. For this reason MFB provide numerous specialist skills to ensure MFB fire fighters are trained and equipped to provide the appropriate service delivery according to these risks. Services such as High Angle Rescue (HART), Urban Search and Rescue (USAR), Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT), Emergency Medical Response (EMR), Marine firefighting capabilities and Swift Water Rescue are just some of the services provide to the community. Fire fighters attend intensive courses to obtain these skills and spend many hours continuously maintaining these skills. It is not reasonable to expect the same of a volunteer.

The policy rationale must consider the future expansion of outer Melbourne areas and major regional centers. Turf wars and territorial attitudes must stop, as this does nothing to benefit the community, but simply cause hostilities. Contemporary fire service delivery model must be based on risks created by increased infrastructures, population growth and environmental hazards.

On a personal note, I live in an area which was recently changed to an integrated station. The CFA Captain openly admitted that he and his members could no longer continue to provide the service to our community which they deserve. A 24/7 service was required as there were many times the CFA volunteers could not respond due to competing work commitments. As a community we now receive the benefit of a guaranteed and quick response every time.

I respectfully request you support this Bill as Fire Service Reform such as this is long overdue.

Kind regards

Graeme Murphy

