

STAKEHOLDER SUBMISSION – FIRE SERVICE BILL SELECT COMMITTEE 2017

To the Committee Members,

Re: Inquiry into the fire-fighters presumptive rights compensation and fire services legislation amendment (reform) bill 2017 - Submissions from key stakeholders

I am Station Officer Jonny Mahon, reg. # 10299, employed by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Melbourne. I have been a career fire fighter for 14 years.

I am currently stationed at Oakleigh Fire Station (25).

In addition Fire-fighting and Officer Qualifications I am trained in

- Road Accident Rescue
- Urban Search and Rescue
- Trench Rescue
- High Angle Rescue
- Emergency Medical Responder

I wanted to take the afforded opportunity to speak in support of the fire services reform legislation currently before your committee.

Firstly let me say that I lived my whole life in a community protected by a rural fully volunteer CFA Brigade, and an SES Road Rescue Unit. That I have absolute respect for the members of these brigades and the service they provide to our community can't be understated. I am well aware of the fact that whilst I perform my role within the Metropolitan Fire District, these volunteers are the ones charged with the protection of my family in the event of a fire in our home. I am also well aware of the pride of place these brigades hold within their communities and the value they add beyond their immediate response activities. I don't believe that my support for fire service reform should be seen as contrary to, or in any way opposing this sentiment.

There are many reasons for this Legislation to be passed but I will touch 3 key issues that I think are important.

1. 7 Fire-fighters on the Fire-ground.

Put simply, the protection of life and property is main role of the Victorian fire services. How well and how safely we are able to fulfil this role is dependent on the resources available to us. As a Station Officer, it is my fire ground role to decide how and where to commit the fire-fighters in my crew, this is always a risk verses reward decision. With an 8 minute response time career fire-fighters are normally on scene before a structure fire has escaped its compartment or structure of origin. This means there is a good chance of survival for any occupant still within the structure and a good chance that a large part of the structure can be saved. However it also means an internal fire-fight is the best or only means of attack.

To commit fire-fighters internally, no matter how willing or well trained, into the deadly environment presented by a going structure fire is never a decision that should be taken

lightly. This decision is even more difficult without the absolute confidence that a suitably qualified rescue crew will be available to render assistance if required. Within the Metropolitan Fire District I can be confident that a second appliance is on route within 90 seconds and is carrying fire-fighters with a complete urban fire-fighting skill-set each and every time. In areas where Professional and Volunteer Crews turn-out together response time data shows us that this guaranteed response or guaranteed skill-set is often not available. In these areas professional fire-fighters are often not responded and remain available in station whilst there colleagues, first on scene, face unnecessary risks just on the chance that volunteer crews will be available. This is madness, and if explained correctly to the public I believe it would be immediately rejected as an unacceptable practise. Dispatching a second professional crew along with the volunteer brigade mitigates this risk, and can easily be cancelled on route if the volunteer brigades are available. It allows us to do our job to the best of our abilities in the safest way possible professional or volunteer.

For a Career fire-fighter the fire-ground is a work place, all be it dynamic and potentially dangerous one, and as with all OH&S requirements it is incumbent on us to mitigate, or if not, minimise the risks as much as possible.

2. Emergency Medical Response.

The MFB has been providing a medical first responder program to assist Ambulance Victoria in the Metropolitan Fire District for 25 years. In responding to the most critical of patients, fire-fighting crews are able to provide essential life support whilst more advanced care is on route, allowing for much better patient outcomes. The program has delivered great outcomes for the community and a lot of lives have been saved. This kind of response is only viable with a 90 seconds turn-out and an on scene time of less than 8 minutes, not achievable with a volunteer response model. The fire service reforms would remove the boundaries that prevent this valuable lifesaving coverage from expanding with the community as Victoria's largest urban centres continue to grow.

3. Guaranteed 8 minute response times.

When someone suffers a heart attack the only hope they have is early intervention, if someone is trapped in a house fire the same rule applies. In my home town almost every house fire results in a total loss of property and in some cases a loss of life and many cause extensive damage or loss to the homes next door. We have recently lost our Pub and the local Primary School has burnt twice in recent history. This is not because the local volunteer brigade is not dedicated or competent, its members simply cannot get from home or work to the fire station and out of the door in time to contain a structure fire. Whilst I realise that this is just one of the realities of living in a rural town it is not acceptable in a large built up area. Professional fire-fighters are required to be out the door in 90 seconds and this reflects in the fire statistics such as '93% containment to room of origin'. The public are left to believe that any fire that is extinguished is a good result as long as no one is killed or injured and that all fire service delivery models are equal. Even when everyone is safe there is still so much in a family home that is of immense value, and with good response times fire-fighters can deliver outcomes that avoid the devastation of total loss.

It has been heart-breaking to see the political point scoring and the opportunism that some of our elected representatives has sort to gain out of such an important issue as fire service reform. I have been abused at fire calls, once whilst I was cutting someone from a damaged vehicle, and my family have been confronted in our home town by misinformed community members. This story is common to all the professional members of the fire services and it is damaging to our moral and mental health. We are not a fire services full of passionate unionists, we are a union full of passionate fire-fighters. We are fighting for the opportunity, side by side with a fully volunteer CFA, to provide Victoria with the exceptional fire service it deserves and the fire service we know we can provide.

Thanks for your time and honest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

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Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board

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