

Fire Services Review  
Level 30, 121 Exhibition Street  
Melbourne, VIC 3000

Re: Submission for Fire Services Review

To whom it may concern.

Please consider the following submission regarding best mechanism to provide support for volunteer fire brigades in your review. This is a personal submission which may not reflect the views of my fire brigade.

Over recent years Victorian Fire Services have made impressive progress in working together during large emergencies such as bushfires. The breakdown of silos has improved the quality of emergency response, cooperation, communication between services and the respect of the community. The recent focus on cooperation needs to continue to make Victoria safer.

Equipment and PPC has also improved over the last decade but a blatant gap between rural and urban brigades in the areas of preparedness, training and OH&S considerations for volunteer firefighters is still remaining.

The following points need to be addressed to improve volunteer retention to ensure adequate resources are available during large scale emergencies:

- a) **Professional Training:** Class 1 and 2 brigades need better access to more professional and accredited training. CFA needs to have adequately trained trainers that can support brigade training and improve the quality of training offered to volunteers. Volunteer retention is affected by the impression that volunteers are considered unpaid cannon fodder without adequate training.
- b) **Protective Equipment:** Most rural brigades are expected to fight vehicle, structure, farm and other fires without Breathing Apparatus although it is globally recognised in developed countries that smoke exposure during firefighting is linked to 12 types of cancers. Volunteers are increasingly being asked to fight fires outside of their own communities and the huge gap in protective gear between urban brigades and rural brigades gives volunteers the impression that their health is not worth protecting although they provide a free service to Victorians.

- c) **Infrastructure Disparity:** Huge amounts of infrastructure funding is being used for non-essential features and glamour on urban/suburban or high profile fire stations which affects available funding and quality of fire stations in areas that may have less turnouts on average but experience immense fire threat during the bushfire season each year. This wasteful spending for political interests needs to be reigned in to have sustainable evenly distributed infrastructure across Victoria.
- d) **Staffing of regional district HQs:** The lack of adequate resources and frequently changing personnel in regional district headquarters causes waste of urgently required funds. Examples include inadequately supervised infrastructure projects due to changing personnel which leads to ongoing repairs, poor quality builds and disengagement of firefighters who are confronted for decades with costly but poorly executed infrastructure. Other examples include brigades having to repeat support requests, repeat document submissions or change organisational directions because of too frequent staff turnover. Career progression and relocation of CFA staff needs to take administrative waste and organisational impact into consideration to create some stability in the organisation.
- e) **Equipment resources at regional district HQs:** During large fires I have experienced district offices running out of spare hose, foam and other equipment, which highlights poorly planned cost cutting at regional or state level. Centralised storage of available spare equipment may have cost benefits but can create shortages of urgently needed equipment in regional Victoria.
- f) **Capital Programs Review:** Although CFA has implemented standard layouts for fire stations, the building cost is still exceeding equivalent commercial buildings in the private sector. An independent review should be undertaken why CFA does not receive savings expected from standardisation, especially when these savings could improve emergency services by allowing the organisation to complete more projects within the same budget.

I hope you can consider this submission in your review.

Kindest regards

Klaus Mayer

Equipment Officer and Firefighter - Pomonal RFB