



Submission to 'Review of the Fire Services'

Background:

Knox Fire Brigades Group (the Group) incorporates 8 fire brigades; Bayswater, Boronia, Ferntree Gully, Montrose, Rowville, Scoresby, The Basin and Upper Ferntree Gully and is one of over 140 Groups across Victoria. All brigades in Knox Group with the exception of Boronia and Rowville are volunteer brigades. Boronia and Rowville are integrated brigades with volunteers and staff. The Group area consists of the whole of the City of Knox, parts of the Shire of Yarra Ranges and parts of the City of Maroondah. Knox brigades respond to in excess of 3000 primary and support calls each year and have approximately 400 to 450 volunteers and 45 Full time staff.

The Group's primary firefighting resources consist of:

- 7 Pumpers (medium/heavy)
- 9 Tankers
- 2 Pumper/Tankers

Knox Group brigades have, over a number of years, developed a number of specialist response vehicles that are managed and operated by volunteers, incorporating:

- Breathing Apparatus support
- LPG Emergency response
- Hose Layer
- Lighting van
- 4 x Slip On tankers
- Light pumper
- 3 x FCV's
- 1 Big fill
- Other support vehicles

Additional roles and functions undertaken by volunteers within Knox Group consist of:

- Support and assistance in the management of multiple brigade responses within the Knox Group area;
- Co-ordination of local area integrity when multiple Knox Group resources are involved in incidents;
- Management / co-ordination Knox Group response for support to other Groups and Regions;
- Management / co-ordination of Knox Group IMT capability and response;
- Provision of volunteers to operate and support the Local Command Facility (Boronia LCF) and support to the local Incident Control Centre (Ferntree Gully ICC).

Knox is approximately 25kms from the Melbourne GPO and at an area of over 120 sq km covers one of the most populous municipalities in Victoria¹ with over 160,000 residents the area has residential, commercial and retail precincts and incorporates the Dandenong Ranges foothills. While Knox has a large residential population base, it also has substantial business, retail, industrial and manufacturing precincts. The CFA District Operations Plan identifies Knox Group as having the largest structural risk in the District as well as having a large wildfire risk.

Since the completion of the Eastlink freeway there has been increased access to the eastern suburbs and this generating further growth in industry, particularly within the municipality of Knox.

¹ Details are primarily drawn from the City of Knox website and extrapolated to represent the Knox Group area.

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The Knox Group area encompasses a range of risks which include:-

- Large industrial areas encompassing light, medium and heavy industry,
- Extensive established residential areas with some areas of ongoing development,
- Significant commercial and retail areas with principal activity at Knox City shopping centre,
- 28 government primary schools are located in Knox, 6 government secondary schools and a number of private education facilities.
- A number of sporting facilities with fluctuating populations
- Areas of tourism and hospitality
- Numerous and varied (road and rail) transport corridors
- Significant areas of environmental (urban/rural) interface
- Significant wildfire risk in areas of both National Parks and private wildfire risk

The City of Knox Council's vision for the Knox City shopping centre precinct indicates that a residential/commercial/office/shopping precinct as large in area as Melbourne CBD is being considered.

Methodology:

This submission is a joint response on behalf of the 8 brigades within Knox Group. Comments have been provided for each of the Terms of Reference that jointly submit to individual Terms of Reference with some matters relevant across several Terms of Reference. Individual comments have been provided in note form, and in no particular order of preference, for consideration under each particular Term of Reference.

Submission:

a) An assessment of the resourcing requirements necessary to ensure Victoria is appropriately equipped and fire ready;

- Introduction of Volunteer Fire Fighters into MFB brigades
- Review response business rules, to investigate ways to promote and enhance volunteer skills & experience as well as Command & Control expertise.
- Increase in Day Time (06:00 to 18:00) manning for outer metro and Rural City Brigades to fill shortfalls due to Volunteer employment commitments and requirements
- Establish satellite Fire Stations in the Metropolitan area to cover night time gaps and Delivery Standards
- Matching Appliance typology to the risk potentials and have consistency in design & operation across all services. For Metro, Rural City, Country Town & Rural areas.
- Funding is required to reconfigure response flexibility within the CAD system, particularly where integrated stations are contained within response assignments. Currently when career fire fighters are responded, that appliance is still considered online rendering the volunteer element component of that station not next in line for response. This causes some cases where the "closest resource" is not responded.

b) How CFA and MFB staff can be best supported in protecting communities, taking into consideration operational needs, as well as Occupational Health and Safety best practice and best training methods;

- The creation of Metropolitan Volunteers will increase fire fighting resources and allow for greater surge capacity during manning shortfalls.
- As the CFA's "Volunteer supported by Staff" model was considered to be the best Fire Service models in one of the most fire prone areas in the world it must be recognised that this model is one of the Best Practices available to the Fire Service and should be increased to meet the growing demands of the community. A review of the model may find ways to further improve the changing culture of our society.

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- Develop and build on to Australia's Volunteer Culture for migrant communities and new immigrants and encourage these new Volunteers into the Volunteer Fire Service to help build resources and community spirit.
- Standardise OH&S standards across all services to reflect best practice for Fire services, without hamstringing operations
- Cross train all services so they are skilled and experienced in all risks for the Fire service, to standardise skills and experience and increase surge capacity resources
- Train all services to a national standard and have the same qualifications across all services without prejudice.
- Recognition of all National Competencies by all services without bias.
- Where practical, conditions and requirements (other than wage) should be balanced between Volunteer and Staff to provide equality.

c) The interoperability between the CFA and MFB;

- MFB & CFA fire-fighters should be equipped with the same tools and equipment to perform their task so the interoperability between CFA & MFB is seamless.
- Appliances should be similar in both design and layout so fire fighters can use the equipment from either services appliances without making adjustments.
- Pumps should have similar gauging and valve setups (for type of pump)
- BA's Gas Suits, DSU, Decontamination units, Gas Detectors, TIC's should all be of a similar make and same operation.
- Hoses and branches should be similar with the same coupling and capacities
- Standardise SOP & FGP's all Fire Services so they are all aligned in their operational procedures.
- Allow Cross crewing between all services to better integrate and maintain skills.
- Radio and communication systems should be the standardised and a single Network should support all services equally without duplication. All emergency services (Fire SES, Coast Guard, Ambulance & Police) should be operating on the same system however Police should have a secure system that will talk to the other services whilst restricting access to their operational channels.

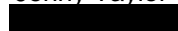
d) The interoperability across fire agencies responsible for preventing and suppressing all types of fire in Victoria, whether on public or private land;

- Incident controllers to be appointed by EMV based on skills, qualifications and availability, not on fire service
- Standardised Incident Management training and qualifications for all fire services, based on a National & or International Standard with training offered at times suitable for all fire service personnel.
- Standardise fire ground command qualifications across all fire services based on a National Standard and offered at times suitable for all fire service personnel.
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- More flexible employment arrangements for staff to cross crew and to be seconded to other fire services.

e) CFA and MFB management structures and management work practices;

- Maintain the separate Fire Service management streams to retain the separate Fire Service cultures and values. Whilst at the same time eliminating discrimination and bias between the services.
- CFA Volunteer Culture should be preserved and enhanced to foster community engagement, support and involvement.
- Return corporate operational decision making to the employed, elected or appointed management of the respective fire service, whilst always encouraging input from employee and volunteer associations, allow the employed, elected or appointed management to make the decisions for their corporate operational responsibilities without fear or favour.
- Combine and streamline administrative services to reduce duplication and waste.
- Allowing for the standardising of typology and equipment across the fire services can allow for the amalgamating of support and maintenance systems. E.g. Mechanical & PPE services

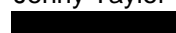
f) Enhancing workplace culture, including fostering greater respect and cooperation between management and its workforce, as well as enhancing workplace innovation and diversity;

- If cultural difference remains, maintain the separate Fire Service management streams to retain the separate Fire Service cultures and values. Whilst at the same time eliminating discrimination and bias between the services
- CFA Volunteer Culture should be preserved and enhanced to foster community engagement, support and involvement
- Return corporate operational decision making to the employed, elected or appointed management of the respective fire service, whilst always encouraging input from employee and volunteer associations, allow the employed, elected or appointed management to make the decisions for their corporate operational responsibilities without fear or favour.
- Provide for greater flexibility for employees and volunteer shift times to suite work/life balance, family requirements etc.
- Where staff shortfalls occur and station closure is likely, consider casual / retained staff using suitably qualified and competent Volunteers for all positions from Fire Fighter to Senior Station Officer allowing for and providing training to volunteers to these levels of competency.
- Either remove any Power of Veto from the Fire Services or enhance it to encompass all stake holders to enable equity for the decision making process.
- Enforce Anti-Bullying requirements for all facets of the fire service, including management, Union & Associations.
- Review any exclusion of Unions from Stalking and Bullying laws and enforce behavioural policies for all employees irrespective of their position or association.

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- Demonstrate equal opportunity for all Fire Service members.

g) Options for the establishment of a Career Firefighters Registration Board; and

- A Registration Board must be a Nationally based not State based
- Membership for The Board must be based on National Qualifications not employment status, local endorsements or association
- Any person that meets the qualification criteria must be eligible to become a member without discrimination nor bias
- Local or Agency specific endorsements need to be equally available to all arms of the Fire Service including Volunteers
- The board must allow for lateral transference between fire agencies

h) The best mechanism to provide support for volunteer fire brigades and to ensure their viability in providing emergency services.

- Promote and extend the integrated model within CFA. Our Career Staff are a fantastic asset to be built on. Guaranteed response support, local training, assisted week day activities plus policy and procedure development is already being conducted with some shifts. New projects and responsibilities offered to our staff will enhance the quality of our end product plus give ownership and job satisfaction. Time and resources need to be supplied to enable this initiative.
- Increase daytime manning without the requirement to evolve to 24/7 manning or full integration
- Review Night time response across all Fire Services to develop and encourage volunteer development and skills.
- Provide the opportunity to develop leadership and fire ground skills by continuing to utilise Volunteers as a first line fire fighting force and not discriminating against the volunteer.
- Where practical, conditions and requirements (other than wage) should be balanced between Volunteer and Staff to provide equality.
- Providing equal opportunity for Volunteers and Staff to receive training and professional development at time to suite their work & lifestyle balance.
- Provide Employer incentives to release Volunteer fire fighters to man stations, respond to calls respond to special calls and/or surge capacity for major calls or national disasters.
- Create a National scheme to support Emergency Service Volunteers similar to Military Reserves, where employers are required to provide Government Supported Emergency Service Leave for volunteers to provide services and/or receive training for approx. 2 weeks per year, without impacting on their employment and career paths.
- Promote the culture of volunteerism and develop it in the communities.
- Build on Community Safety and Community Resilience programs with events similar to the Interagency workshop conducted on the 1st & 2nd August, 2015
- Promote the Value that Volunteers add to their communities and the society in general that other services can't or don't offer e.g.
 - **Active community engagement**, because the volunteers are part of the community they protect, not just assigned to the area for a period of time
 - **Surge Capacity** – Volunteers offer the ability for the fire service to combat major fires throughout the State, mostly resourced from the outer metro brigades and areas, without the Volunteer network it would be cost prohibitive to maintain an alternative surge resource whilst maintain standard fire operations. However if the Volunteers are

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not trained, competent & experienced then the capacity to provide an effective fire fighting force would be negated

- **Specialisation** – the volunteers have a history of developing and maintaining a force of specialist appliances and equipment, mostly self-funded, that enhance the capability of the fire brigades and offer greater security for the community. E.g. Bayswater BA, Scoresby Hoselayer, UFTG Slip-ons, Boronia Hazmat. The Basin Light Pumper, Boronia Light Pumper, Montrose LPG response.
- **Innovation** – The volunteers have led the way for many years in creating and developing innovation into the Fire Service by utilising their career knowledge and skills, such as the introduction & development of a radio network, introduction & development of a paging system, plus many other items of equipment and appliances.
- **Youth Engagement and Future Proofing** – CFA junior brigades have been a key in the development of youth in their community, instilling ethics and values and developing skills as well as instilling a culture of community awareness and service along with developing the future leaders of business and the community.
- **Auxiliary & Family Engagement** – CFA Volunteerism is often a family affair involving partners and children in the community engagement and social activities.
- **Local Fundraising** – CFA community fundraising develops community engagement and community interest in the fire service. Funding of Fire Station buildings & Brigade owned vehicles fosters the feeling that the community are stakeholders in their local brigade. It also allows Brigades to develop initiatives that the Fire Service cannot afford to do with their existing budgets or manpower resources.
- **Skills & Experience** – The diverse knowledge, experience and skills that volunteers bring to the service brings a wealth of knowledge that would not be available to a full time career fire service. Membership includes a wide range of experience from elected government representatives, government officials, business owners, business managers, trades, administration, retailer's labourers, manufactures and students that can all bring a widespread range of experience and opinions to the service. This is demonstrated by the initiatives of vehicles and equipment as well as the management capabilities utilised in the brigades.

Knox Fire Brigades Group welcomes the opportunity to provide input to this review and would welcome the opportunity to provide anything further in relation to our submission.

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