



SOUTH WARRANDYTE FIRE BRIGADE

12 Brumbys Rd
Warrandyte South VIC 3141
Tel: (03) 9844 2861
Fax: (03) 9844 4708
Email: secretary@swfb.org.au

31 August, 2015

Mr David O'Byrne
Chairman,
Fire Services Review
Melbourne

By email:

Dear Sir,

RE: SUBMISSION FROM SOUTH WARRANDYTE FIRE BRIGADE FORMAL REVIEW OF FIRE SERVICES IN VICTORIA

I am Gregory James Kennedy, B.Comm. ACA, Captain and volunteer member of the South Warrandyte Fire Brigade, a member brigade of the Country Fire Authority of Victoria (CFA).

I make the following submission on my own behalf and also on behalf of the South Warrandyte Fire Brigade members.

I make the following observations and comments:

1. We welcome the Formal Inquiry as a means of an independent review of the activities of the fire services and look forward to the findings and recommendations. The ability to change and improve our operations and performance can only be enhanced with this type of review.
2. The inquiry will address major and important issues concerning fire service delivery in Victoria. We are however, disappointed with the amount of time allowed for preparing submissions and the time allowed for you to review and make adequate enquiry of the matters raised in submissions. We will be very disappointed and disgruntled if this inquiry becomes a white wash with predetermined outcomes.
3. South Warrandyte is a volunteer brigade with 48 members. The brigade borders with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) for approximately 50% of our boundary. We have done so since our formation in 1947. We have worked closely and co-operatively with the MFB, which obviously means working with career staff, for the past 68 years. If anybody knows how volunteers and career staff can work together we do.
4. As a brigade, we have only one objective - to deliver the best service we can to our community. As a dormitory suburb in the rural-urban interface on Melbourne's north eastern outskirts we have recognised that the significant increase in residential development throughout the brigade area in the past 30 years has placed enormous demands on the volunteer members of the brigade.

The brigade recognised this increase in demand for our services and in 2010 approached the CFA with a request for the CFA to consider South Warrandyte as a future integrated station. The members of the brigade considered the options available and unanimously voted to move to an integrated station. The principal reason was to ensure our ongoing ability to maintain and even enhance the service delivery capacity of the brigade but also to continue to make a valued contribution to our community.

The brigade believed an integrated station provided the guarantee of a timely response for emergencies not only into our current brigade area but for the Greater Warrandyte community whilst also continuing the valuable work undertaken by brigades in assisting our community to develop and strengthen their resilience to the risk of fire. The brigade is still strongly of this view.

The CFA considered the request and after completing due diligence including attending the brigade to confirm the resolve of the members, has commenced building a new station with integration due to commence by mid 2016.

Again we are a brigade right at the point of much of this inquiry.

5. We are looking forward to an integrated station because:
 - (a) of the guaranteed and enhanced response to emergencies which ensures our community receives the best service possible;
 - (b) the staff will be persons who are well trained, experienced, capable and willing to pass that knowledge and experience onto the volunteer members; and
 - (c) as volunteers our private time is important and not having to respond to false alarms and insignificant calls but always being available and ready for major calls, will improve our lifestyle and be much appreciated.

An integrated station at South Warrandyte will enable the volunteer members to remain committed and involved and will ensure that the surge capacity for which the CFA is renowned for local jobs, jobs in neighbouring areas, within the State of Victoria and interstate will remain intact.

An integrated station will provide support across all aspects of fire brigade and community life to our neighbouring brigades including Warrandyte, North Warrandyte and Wonga Park.

The whole community is a winner.

The CFA integrated model ("hubs and satellites") works extremely well in the urban/rural interface where there is a great need to retain volunteer numbers to ensure adequate manpower during the summer bushfire threat.

The integrated model means that stations with paid fire fighters can be rolled out across a much larger area of Victoria when compared to a straight career staffed station.

6. Volunteers come from a wide range of varied backgrounds enabling them to bring to the table a host of skills, knowledge and experience. Our brigade has volunteers that includes lawyers, accountants, IT specialists, electricians, builders, students, a paramedic, an ex-police officer and career firefighters. All of the attributes of our members can be utilised to develop a vibrant and capable fire service which is close to its community and very highly regarded.

IT IS TOO GOOD TO DESTROY

7. With regard to the specific terms of reference we make the following comments:
 - (a) Set a standard for equipment and resources based on risk and ensure there is adequate funding. It should not matter whether the risk is in the area of CFA, MFB, Parks Victoria etc. The government of the day **MUST** be transparent with regard to the Fire Service Levy as to the amounts raised through the levy and where and how expenditure is made;
 - (b) Staff, whether paid or volunteer, must be provided with adequate and appropriate equipment and protective clothing, adequate and appropriate training and the tools to satisfactorily resolve all situations they may be confronted with;

(c) Interoperability between CFA and MFB can be improved dramatically if both services used the same:

- (i) Control room when attending incidents;
- (ii) Radio frequencies for communications;
- (iii) Response system;
- (iv) Breathing apparatus;
- (v) Operating procedures when on the fire ground; and

(vi) Equipment

We have worked side by side with career staff from MFB for the past 68 years. The success of our relationship has been due to the attitude and approach by both parties. When the attitude is both supportive and co-operative, all works well. Success is directly related to attitude.

(d) Interoperability across all fire agencies is very simply achieved by the formation of one fire service for Victoria. Fire Victoria might be a suitable name. Currently there are too many agencies, too many alternative operating systems, too much duplication. We see as a very workable and viable agency, one that includes solely career staffed stations in the purely residential and industrial areas, integrated stations in the urban/rural interface and volunteer stations in the rural areas of Victoria;

(e) A move to one fire service as detailed in (d) above overcomes all management structures and management work practices as there is now only one organisation;

(f) Our brigade has always had good access to management within the CFA, both at District level and at Headquarters. We do not always get approval for our requests but all issues are dealt with in a timely and professional manner. Volunteers, because of their other occupation bring a wealth of knowledge, experience and expertise to the brigade. It would be foolish to ignore this, and above all else, there is no cost for all this knowledge, experience and expertise;

(g) We are not aware of what a Career Firefighters Registration Board will do, what role it plays and what it will achieve. If there are no clear advantages then we do not need it. The last thing we need is more bureaucracy; and

(h) Volunteer fire brigades in the rural/urban fringe, where calls are increasing with the population need:

- (i) Assistance where false alarm and minor calls are often a waste of volunteer's time. The CFA integrated station goes a long way to resolving this issue;
- (ii) Adequate funding for station building and facilities, vehicles, equipment, protective clothing etc. Transparency with regards to the Fire Service Levy would go a long way in achieving this objective; and
- (iii) Adequate training courses and training facilities to allow volunteers to grow in competence and improve their capability.

In conclusion, South Warrandyte Fire Brigade strongly believe the CFA integration model works extremely well in the rural/urban interface areas where the environment is neither urban nor rural. The integrated model allows the hub/satellite scenario to be extended to a larger area than just a career staffed station and allows the additional capacity and capabilities that could not be matched by any sole career staffed station.

The brigade and I would be more than happy to speak with you or persons assisting in the inquiry in order to clarify any of the comments made.

Regards,

Greg Kennedy
Captain