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24 08 2015.

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Mr David O'Byrne

Fire Services Review

Melbourne.3000

Dear Mr O'Byrne

I appreciate the State Government initiating a review on the State Fire Services. I believe the terms of reference should include the realignment of boundaries for the CFA to reflect current population trends and reflect the original charter of the CFA.

I would firstly briefly outline my interest and involvement in community and fire services. I am a former Mayor of the City of Hamilton and was a Local Government Commissioner in the restructure of Local Government conducted by Minister Roger Hallam. I am a long time member of the Dunkeld Fire Brigade and am a CFA Air Base Manager and CFA Aircraft Officer [volunteer]

My concern is the encroachment of the Country Fire Authority into Melbourne outer suburbs.

My recollection on the formation of the CFA was just pre World War 2 but did not become structured until after the World War when many fine ex servicemen took a leading role in its development. It was designed to be a country fire fighting service, to provide a service for country towns, and rural lands, excluding Crown Lands. Its responsibilities excluded city and suburban Melbourne, [Country Fire Authority Act 1958]. It has for generations been acknowledged Melbourne required a full time dedicated service with specialist equipment and training. Consequently MFB was formed in 1891 to service this requirement and should have expanded to meet the growing needs of greater Melbourne. Its boundaries have not been increased since the 1960's. Conversely the CFA should have withdrawn from these newly created outer suburban areas as they embraced the growing residential and industrial fabric of Melbourne. The Country Fire Authority was not created to service metropolitan industrial complexes' or suburban residential towers. It was designed and should remain a 'specialist fire service' dedicated to country rural lands and towns. The definition of its responsibilities under the Act is to service 'outside the metropolitan fire district' [1958 Act]. This Act is overdue for amendment to embrace reality of the new Melbourne outer suburbs and to clearly redefine the parameters of CFA involvement, boundaries and responsibilities.

Such is the concentration of resources and involvement of the Country Fire Authority around greater Melbourne that its administrative head quarters and aerial fire fighting head quarters are also sighted in the city and inner suburbia. The CFA has become 'city centric' with its regions reduced to arms of the Melbourne centred bureaucracy. Its rural regional management is now a shadow of what it was originally intended. Only when the Country Fire Authority is restructured to return to its original mandate and volunteers are empowered to run the organisation as a specialist rural based organisation, will the organisation be reenergised.

The views I express are commonly felt amongst many long time, experienced, and competent volunteers, who attempted root and branch change for years, their only reward being constant frustration with the lack of will of Government to address the core issue of having in place two specialist bodies. I hope you and the Government have the political will and courage to make the fundamental changes which should have been addressed decades ago. Still much remains to be achieved from the observations and recommendations of previous reports. E.g. 2009 Vic Bushfires Royal Commission recommendations

Sincerely Leighton Wraith

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