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MEDIA STATEMENT

MAKE CFA THE LEAD AGENCY FOR BUSHFIRES - VOLUNTEERS

Victoria's firefighting volunteers have called for just one agency to be put in charge of all bushfires – the CFA.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) says bushfires are currently divided among the CFA and DSE according to where they are, even when there is a direct threat to lives and homes.

VFBV President Gary Lyttle said the CFA is the logical choice as Victoria moves to a simpler, more effective way of dealing with bushfires.

“The Bushfire Royal Commission has already uncovered the confusion that is possible with the current system of shared responsibility and administrative borders,” Mr Lyttle said.

“Newspaper headlines saying ‘*No one was in charge*’ clearly show we need to choose one organisation and give it the responsibility and the power to get the job done.”

VFBV has submitted documentation to the Bushfires Royal Commission urging that the CFA be placed in sole command of any bushfire that may threaten lives or private property.

“We have pointed out that while DSE is a land manager and an environmental agency, the CFA's sole role is fighting fires to protect property and people's lives,” Mr Lyttle said.

“CFA and its 60,000 volunteers supported by 1,300 paid staff, including 500 paid firefighters, have provided fire and emergency protection for Victorians throughout regional, country and Melbourne's outer suburbs for generations.

“CFA's highly trained volunteers and paid staff are world renowned for their community organisation, experience and capacity to deal with fires, whether a house fire or a bushfire.

“But we've got to remove the current duplication and uncertainty of who is responsible for what in the current arrangements.

“While DSE remains the land manager for public land, the CFA should be in sole command of fighting bushfires, and responsible to the government, the courts and the people of Victoria for its performance,” he said.

“No ambiguity, no confusion and no wondering who was in charge if something goes wrong.”

The Bushfire Royal Commission has already recommended that the CFA’s Chief Officer be made legally responsible ‘to issue warnings and provide information to the community concerning the risk of bushfires’.

“The Royal Commission has taken a step towards giving the CFA the power and the accountability, and VFBV now urges the State Government to follow that through to its logical conclusion.

“It is vital to all Victorians that we learn from the past and don’t repeat mistakes whilst maintaining, building and supporting the very best of our system – our trained and committed volunteers.

“VFBV represents the 60,000 professionally trained and experienced CFA volunteers that protect the state, and those volunteers say it’s time we put the CFA in charge of fighting the bushfires,” Mr Lyttle said.

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