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MEDIA STATEMENT

AGREEMENT SOLVES BUSHFIRE LEADERSHIP PROBLEM

Victoria's volunteer firefighters say an agreement quietly signed on Thursday will solve Victoria's bushfire leadership problem by putting a single organisation - the CFA - in charge.

Andrew Ford, of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV), said the agreement between the CFA, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) will end last summer's unanswered questions over who is responsible.

"The agreement appoints the CFA's Chief Officer to the position of State Controller for bush, grass and associated fires," Mr Ford said.

"It gives him the responsibility and the power, to get the job done - no questions, no bureaucratic boundaries, no confusion," he said.

VFBV, which represents the state's 60,000 CFA volunteers, is now urging the Victorian Government to turn the agreement into a state law and make it permanent.

"The agreement puts one officer in charge of fighting major bushfires, someone who can act without having to discuss it with two or three other organisations or worry about whether it has crossed a dotted line on a map," Mr Ford said.

Until now, responsibility for a bushfire has depended upon whether it started on government owned or private land, and command of a mixed fire fighting force has been based on the co-operative efforts of the heads of the CFA, DSE and several other organisations.

"It has the support of the three fire fighting organisations and is the best solution - one officer in charge, quick decisions and no wondering who was responsible if things go wrong," he said.

"The volunteers now urge the State Government to back it with legislation that gives that one officer a single chain of command and the power to get the job done, quickly and without being handicapped by organisational barriers or lines on a map."

More...

VFBV lodged a submission in September, asking the Bushfires Royal Commission to recommend a system that makes the CFA the lead agency when fighting major bushfires.

Ends....

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