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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **SEYMOUR CFA VOLUNTEER AWARDED FOR SERVICE BUT FEARS FOR FUTURE**

Seymour CFA volunteer Mick Sanderson has been lauded for his contribution over more than 60 years.

But the veteran volunteer is worried proposed changes to fire services could threaten the future of fire fighting in regional communities.

He fears the Government's proposal to restructure CFA would take fire services backward, cost big money and result in fewer volunteers on the ground, delivering a crushing blow to Victoria's capacity to deal with major fires.

Mr Sanderson was recently presented with a special plaque of appreciation to recognise his service to the CFA, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) and Victorian Urban Fire Brigade Association (VUFBA).

At 79, the recently retired president of the VFBV District 12 council wants to continue volunteering with Seymour Fire Brigade as long as he can.

Mr Sanderson is in charge of the brigade's fire and equipment maintenance and is one of the junior leaders, where he has introduced his children and grandchildren to competitions.

"I still enjoy it; I like going along and meeting everyone in the brigade and doing my bit for the community," he said.

In 1956 he joined the Seymour brigade and, apart from a brief absence due to work, he's been there ever since.

Over the years Mr Sanderson has added to the CFA volunteer capacity in responding to major incidents across Victoria. "I've been around my share of the state," he said. "That's one of the advantages of having volunteers; we all help out when needed."

The fire that sticks most vividly in his memory was Black Saturday. "It started about 30 minutes away from here and I was involved from the word go," he said. "It was a hard day."

However, Mr Sanderson worries about the future for CFA volunteers, fearing the State Government's plans to dismantle the CFA would devastate the successful volunteer system.

“It’s unfortunate some don’t see the importance of volunteers,” he said. “You’ve got to have the volunteers; the taxpayers couldn’t afford to replace them.”

“If we don’t have CFA volunteers in the community we’re going to fall apart. I wouldn’t have stuck with it if I didn’t think it was important,” he said.

VFBV CEO Andrew Ford said the current model recognises volunteers and paid staff working together as one united team but the Government’s proposal would dismantle that for no reason and no benefit to service delivery.

“Everywhere else emergency services are talking about working as one team and yet the Government wants to further fragment the fire services in Victoria – it’s foolish.”

Mr Ford said the VFBV was concerned that the Government’s proposal to carve up the CFA would drive a huge reduction in volunteer numbers. “If this happens, Victoria will have lost forever the powerful volunteer surge capacity to tackle major fires that occur every summer and lost a community-based model that is regarded as one of the best in the world.”

“These changes would cost Victorians a great deal in increased Fire Service Levy, hand even more control of Victoria’s fires services to the union and there would be less flexibility and efficiency in how fire services deploy their firefighters.”

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