



Friday, 24 February 2012

MEDIA STATEMENT

VFBV WELCOMES RELEASE OF JONES INQUIRY REPORT

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV), the voice of CFA volunteers, welcomes the release today of the State Government's response to the Jones Inquiry into the effect of CFA's arrangements on its volunteers.

The findings of this independent Inquiry, headed by retired County Court Judge the Hon. David Jones AM, confirmed the vital role of volunteers to the State's emergency management arrangements and most importantly independently vindicated the broad range of concerns expressed by the State's dedicated volunteer firefighters over recent years.

The extensive State-wide consultation process, undertaken as part of the Inquiry, resulted in a range of findings that clearly indicated the need for a step-change in the leadership approach and culture within CFA.

VFBV strongly believes now these issues have been independently validated through this Inquiry, it is time for Government and CFA to act, in partnership with VFBV and volunteers, to immediately commence the process to ensure all the report's findings are fully implemented in a timely manner. "This means real action, real improvements and genuine effort," VFBV Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Ford said.

"Important to volunteers is re-establishing an organisational culture which is focussed on maintaining, strengthening and empowering the vital community-based volunteer resources, rectifying issues with access and availability of training, better utilisation of volunteers and much better genuine consultation with volunteers about matters that affect them before decisions are made," Mr Ford said.

Mr Ford congratulated Government on taking the initiative to commission this Inquiry and looks forward to the opportunity to work with Government and CFA to see all the Inquiry's outcomes are fully implemented. Mr Ford acknowledges this process will take some time to fully realise the benefits, but strongly believes it is essential there be an immediate and concerted effort from all parties to start the implementation and monitoring process.

"Without this genuine, co-operative effort, the current benefits the Victorian community receives through volunteer based emergency management arrangements will be adversely affected into the future," Mr Ford said.

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“This report must not become just another list of recommendations sitting on the shelf, the findings need to drive the necessary change identified as being absolutely necessary by the Inquiry,” he said.

“It is sad that it takes an independent inquiry to listen to volunteers but we are thankful that at least now the concerns of volunteers have been clearly heard. Victoria’s emergency management arrangements would not exist without volunteers and rely on arrangements where volunteers and paid staff can work effectively together as one integrated team,” Mr Ford said.

“CFA volunteers train hard and take pride in delivering first class professional services, dealing with everything from major bushfires to house and industrial fires and hazardous materials incidents across the State, including more than half of metropolitan Melbourne.

“In return, volunteers expect to be respected, supported and empowered by CFA and Government to do their work. Everyone in CFA has a responsibility to support the capacity of volunteers to deliver CFA services and anyone who isn’t committed to this is a liability for the future safety of communities across Victoria,” Mr Ford said.

VFBV is recognised in the CFA Act to represent the interests of volunteers to CFA and Government, raise matters effecting the welfare and efficiency of volunteers and provide a framework for genuine consultation with volunteers.

The Jones findings identified the need to ensure the VFBV is a strong, adequately resourced and independent organisation in order to perform its legislative role, discharge its duties in support of volunteers and provide better support to Government and CFA as a key partner in engaging volunteers.

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