



MEDIA STATEMENT

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White Paper is just the first step - VFBV

The CFA volunteers' representative association says the effect on local brigades and emergency management at the front line will be the real test of the State Government's new White Paper on emergency services.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) CEO Andrew Ford said volunteers are likely to be cautious but open minded about the possible results of the White Paper.

"Victoria's Emergency Management arrangements would not exist without volunteers and community based volunteer brigades, SES units and Coast Guard flotillas, and volunteers will be looking for White Paper outcomes that make it easier to work together across agencies, with common operating platforms, standardised communications systems and consistent procedures," Mr Ford said.

"Our members will be supportive of improvements that empower the people at the front line and make it easier for volunteers and other emergency personnel on the ground to get the best combined effort from existing resources," he said.

"Volunteers will take some comfort from the Government's commitment to establish a ministerial-level Volunteer Advisory Committee. This is something we have discussed with the major parties over number of years," Mr Ford said.

"The role of this advisory group will be all the more important given the forthcoming task of working at out the details that bring the White Paper vision to life."

"VFBV, representing CFA's 60,000 volunteers, expects to play a key role in this new forum and hopes it provides a solid and structured process to ensure front line volunteers have real input to designing and testing the working detail of the proposed White Paper reforms.

"The Volunteer Advisory Committee is a chance to make the most of volunteer experience and knowhow, ensuring White Paper decisions actually work on the ground, and providing an ongoing mechanism for volunteer representatives to provide advice direct to the Minister.

"With so much riding on the working detail and the fact that Victoria's emergency management arrangements rely so heavily on volunteers, having a forum that gives the Minister direct access to advice straight from the front line is an idea that has great potential," Mr Ford said.

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“Whatever shape the new arrangements take, there must be deliberate focus on encouraging, maintaining and strengthening the capacity of volunteers to deliver emergency services – this is CFA’s obligation under State Law now and must be part of the legislative obligations of the new Emergency Management Commissioner,” Mr Ford said.

“The proof will be in the pudding,” Mr Ford said. “The White Paper provides a road map but there is a lot of detail to work through. Volunteers are looking for results that empower and support front line workers and provide simple, clear accountability arrangements that make it easier for volunteers and other emergency workers to get the best results for the communities they protect.”

“At the same time, there will need to be a close watch on the outcomes to ensure they don’t lead to a centralised bureaucracy, making decisions remote from the agencies and in isolation of what’s needed to maintain and build an even more effective volunteer based CFA and emergency management sector,” Mr Ford said.

VFBV is encouraging local CFA volunteers to see the White Paper on its website www.vfbv.com.au and make their opinions known through their elected VFBV District Council.

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