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MEDIA RELEASE

CFA – Another messenger shot for speaking the truth

CFA Chief Officer Joe Buffone has become the latest casualty of the industrial/political interference in the CFA by the Andrews Government and the United Firefighters Union in Victoria.

Because of the deal which gives the union and its boss Peter Marshall significant power over critical CFA organisational and operational matters, including volunteers, Joe Buffone had no option other than to resign.

It is understood that Mr Buffone wrote last week to the new Minister & Deputy Premier James Merlino and the new CFA Board Chair outlining his concerns over the government's UFU industrial deal and its implications for public safety. It is understood that he has received no reply addressing his concerns.

"We are seeing another case of "shoot the messenger" where the Premier and his Minister don't want to hear the truth," Andrew Ford, CEO of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) said after hearing of Mr Buffone's resignation.

"Casualties so far include Emergency Services Minister Jane Garrett, the whole CFA Board and CFA CEO Lucinda Nolan," he said.

"Both Mr Buffone and MS Nolan were appointed by this government because of their expertise and experience but when they provided "frank and fearless advice" that got in the way of the government deal they were made sacrificial lambs.

"It appears that the Premier and his government are committed to the UFU deal no matter the cost.

"This is all against a backdrop of the Andrews Government refusing to consult with VFBV representing Victoria's 60,000 CFA volunteers before making the deal with the UFU as they are required to do by the CFA Act.

"Clearly, they don't want to hear from volunteers because we know the threats to CFA volunteer organisation and operations and public safety if the deal was adopted and implemented by CFA at direction of the government.

VFBV Media Contact: Peter Beaton 0419 504 111



In a statement sent to CFA staff Mr Buffone makes it quite clear that his powers as CFA Chief Officer are compromised by the UFU deal and that public safety is placed at risk.

“This industrial-political interference in CFA, and all the emergency services, has got to stop.

“The organisation and operation of emergency services is not a political game or a pawn in a game of political power.

“CFA as a volunteer based fire and emergency service covering the outer suburbs of Melbourne and the rest of regional and rural Victoria has got to be above all that.

VFBV President, Mr Nev Jones paid tribute to Mr Buffone.

“He is a man with a wealth of experience at every level of fire and community safety, from CFA volunteer to senior government roles in emergency management to Chief Officer of the CFA.

“He was hand-picked for his role in CFA in October last year, a decision widely applauded by volunteers.

“To see him forced out like this is a complete travesty and will undoubtedly shock CFA volunteers across the state and further fuel the anger they feel towards the Andrews Government and its deal with the UFU.

For further information contact Garth Head 0408 553306

Attached for background:

Weekly Times article: Union slams Buffone appointment as Victorian Chief Fire Officer, 21 October 2015

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BRIGADES VICTORIA

Union slams Buffone appointment as Victorian fire chief

KATH SULLIVAN, *The Weekly Times*

October 21, 2015 12:00am

THE appointment of a chief fire officer with no professional firefighting experience has riled the United Firefighters Union.

Victoria's new Chief Fire Officer Joe Buffone — a CFA volunteer for more than 15 years — worked in emergency management for 25 years before his appointed last week to the role vacated by Euan Ferguson.

Despite Mr Buffone's experience as deputy commissioner at Emergency Management Victoria and a former deputy chief officer with the CFA, the Union said he was a "very bad choice" because he had "no operational experience". "This flies in the face of what's needed at the CFA," UFU Victorian secretary Peter Marshall said.

"We hold Mr Buffone in high regard," he said. "But it's a concern to us how you could appoint someone who has never undertaken a recruitment training program, never served time on a professional fire station or shift and does not have the competencies his subordinates have."

Mr Marshall questioned the timing of the appointment given the Victorian Government is reviewing the state's fire services. "This organisation has been in turmoil for a decade or more," Mr Marshall said. "It hasn't had the right people steering the ship to give confidence to the people below."

Emergency Minister Jane Garrett said Mr Buffone was highly accomplished.

"His knowledge and understanding of the CFA will be a great asset for the organisation," Ms Garrett said.

Mr Buffone will take up the role when chief executive Lucinda Nolan starts next month. Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria welcomed Mr Buffone's appointment.

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