



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

News Note

Attn: Victorian State MPs - Tuesday, 27 July 2010

Volunteers back Premier's decision

Victoria's CFA volunteers have backed the Premier's decision to take his time in responding to the Bushfires Royal Commission's final report.

"This will be the most significant report on Victoria's bushfire prevention and response capacity since the Stretton report of the 1940's," said Mr Andrew Ford, CEO of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV).

"It is important that we get the response right."

VFBV represents the state's 60,000 CFA volunteers at over 1,200 CFA brigades in Melbourne's outer suburbs, provincial centres and rural communities, and will be one of the key organisations to be consulted on the Government's next steps.

Recognising the CFA volunteers' critical role in keeping Victoria safe, the Victorian Government under then Premier Steve Bracks concluded a *Volunteer Charter* with CFA volunteer organisations in December 2001.

In October 2008, Premier John Brumby renewed the *Volunteer Charter* under his signature, recognising that CFA volunteers are fundamental to emergency management in Victoria.

The Charter recognises VFBV as the voice of CFA Volunteers and commits the State Government and CFA to "*consultation with VFBV on all matters which might reasonably be expected to affect volunteers*".

"For CFA Volunteers, the Charter is an article of faith and provides the guarantee that CFA and State Government will hold meaningful and informed consultation before decisions are made on matters which may affect volunteers," Mr Ford said.

"There is no greater matter than the development and determination of the Government's response to the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission's report and we look forward to full and detailed discussions with the State Government on this vital matter," he said.

“The importance of consulting with volunteers in the development of the Government’s response is highlighted by the fact that more than 90% of Victoria’s firefighters are volunteers.

“Volunteers have enormous frontline experience and they are the ones who will have to make any new systems work, out there on the fireground.

“The tens of thousands of volunteer firefighters who have been dubbed the heroes of Black Saturday are not just amateurs in yellow overalls.

“It takes experience and professional qualifications to a nationally recognised standard for all firefighters, to be a regular member of a volunteer fire crew, either in metropolitan Melbourne or country Victoria,” Mr Ford said.

VFBV says the Premier’s commitment, to hear the volunteers’ experienced advice and consult them before decisions are made, is part of what makes volunteering work.

“CFA volunteers are irreplaceable in the country and in Melbourne’s suburbs, where 200 city-based volunteer brigades protected their own communities on Black Saturday and still had the numbers to send thousands of volunteers to fight the state’s bushfires,” Mr Ford said.

“The Premier knows that volunteers on the front line and volunteers involved in command and decision making are Victoria’s main weapon against another Black Saturday.

“We look forward to finalising arrangements with the Premier for providing volunteer input as representatives of their local communities and being the ones who will ultimately make any improved bushfire response work, out there on the fireground.

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