



March 2020

MEDIA RELEASE

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS JOIN FORCES TO HELP FIRE VICTIMS

Volunteer firefighters are banding together to help their fellow volunteers and other Victorian communities impacted by the summer's disastrous bushfires.

The volunteers are forming a task force to carry out weekend recovery projects in eastern and north-eastern areas, with the main focus on volunteers who have lost homes and other property.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) state councillors Wonthaggi firefighter Bill Watson and Monbulk firefighter Rod Stebbing, who are organising the task force, said it showed another side of the work done by CFA volunteers.

"Volunteers are running this for volunteers," Mr Watson said. "We were there to battle the fires but we're all part of the same community and this is a great way to follow-up and help people in a tangible, hands-on way.

"Our main priority is volunteer firefighters but we won't exclude anyone; if we're doing a job and see a neighbour who needs help then we'll help them.

"A number of Victorian volunteer firefighters lost homes and other property in the fires. Along with their respective brigades we will support them wherever we can.

The task force will be divided into separate teams to help in the recovery process and to facilitate multiple tasks at one time.

Mr Watson said the task force aimed to cover cracks left by insurance and government support. "We'll pick up those areas in between; it might be felling trees and cutting them up, general maintenance, fencing, clearing up and other jobs not covered by insurance.

"It's about helping fellow firefighters and others in their time of need and helping them move on."

Ms Watson was involved in a similar recovery program after Black Saturday and said the work had been greatly appreciated. "We removed dead trees, installed fencing and general cleanups. We have also worked on flood recovery projects, standing up farmers' fences after tons of stubble washed onto fences and held them down."

More volunteers are being recruited, particularly those able to help with heavy labour and with skills such as using a chainsaw.

The first project will be dedicated to the memory of Don Bigham, a former member of the Gruyere Fire Brigade who Mr Watson described as a great humanitarian who supported previous efforts with time and personal equipment.

The taskforce is being coordinated by VFBV volunteers in Districts 8 and 13, covering Mornington Peninsula to Wonthaggi and Gembrook and District 13 covers Knox and Warrandyte to Warburton and Dandenong Ranges. it is an approved CFA operational activity.

People can register their interest with Mr Watson on 5672 4731, 0417 494 253 or watson.network@bigpond.com, or Mr Stebbing on 9756 7735, 0417 362 255 or rstebbingvfbv@gmail.com

Ends...