



Media release

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VOLUNTEER FORUM TO ADVISE POLICE & EMERGENCY SERVICES MINISTER

The CFA volunteers' association has welcomed the announcement of a Ministerial volunteer consultative committee to provide direct input and advice to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services on major changes to the emergency management sector.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) CEO Andrew Ford said the new Volunteer Consultative Forum will give the Minister direct access to the valuable practical knowledge of the people at the front line.

It will provide a forum for volunteers to provide direct advice to the Minister, on;

- Issues affecting Victoria's emergency management volunteers
- Matters relating to the capacity of volunteers to deliver emergency management services in Victoria
- Strengthening the culture of volunteerism in Victoria
- Maximising the capacity, capability and utilisation of volunteers
- Monitoring the health and wellbeing of the volunteers, and
- Volunteer views about how to achieve changes proposed for the Emergency Management sector

The State Government's announcement of the new Forum follows many discussions between VFBV and the Government, and comes with the endorsement of the Fire Services Commissioner.

"The new Forum is being initiated at an important time; with the move towards a more joined-up emergency management network," Mr Ford said.

"For the new arrangements to work it will be extremely important that decision makers listen to the volunteers on the ground, and take advice from volunteers about what it will take to achieve improvement on the ground," he said.

"It's a matter of common sense; when making major decisions, nothing works as well as listening to the people at the front line."

"Engaging with volunteers should not be seen as a burden. Engaged and empowered volunteers are tomorrow's volunteers. Engaging and empowering volunteers must become a core mindset of everyone in Victoria's emergency management sector," Mr Ford said.

“VFBV has committed its support to help the State Government to engage with volunteers, and have regard to their practical advice about what works on the ground, what has or has not worked in past, and what needs to be factored in to make sure things keep working into the future,” he said.

The Volunteer Consultative Forum will include volunteer representation from the CFA, SES, Life Saving Victoria, Australian Red Cross, Ambulance Victoria, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, St John Ambulance, Volunteer Coast Guard, Salvation Army, Volunteer Emergency Service Association and the Victorian Council of Churches, plus management nominees from the various agencies.

“The decisions being made now will have a strong influence on the capability and capacity of volunteers to contribute to emergency management in Victoria into the future,” Mr Ford said.

In addition to the establishment of the Volunteer Consultative Forum, the State Government introduced the Emergency Management Bill 2013 into Parliament earlier this month. The Bill continues the move towards a more joined-up emergency management network, co-ordinated by an Emergency Management Commissioner.

In introducing that legislation, Police and Emergency Services Minister Kim Wells said “Volunteers play a critically important role in the emergency management sector, and the Bill recognises this by including specific measures to ensure volunteer capacity and capability is encouraged, strengthened, and maintained.”

The Bill requires both the Emergency Management Commissioner and Emergency Management Victoria to have regard to this important feature of Victoria's emergency management arrangements in the carrying out of their functions. The Bill requires that agency work plans include specific actions and measures to encourage, strengthen and maintain the capacity and capability of volunteers and the community.

Minister Wells said, “Volunteers have been and will continue to be fundamental to emergency management service delivery in Victoria. They do a magnificent job for this state. Equally, they will be fundamental to the successful implementation of these reforms”.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, the Victoria Emergency Service Association and the Volunteer Coast Guard made a joint submission on behalf of their volunteer members, to the Government’s White Paper on Victoria’s Emergency Management reform and amongst other things requested the establishment of a Ministerial-level Volunteer Consultative Forum. VFBV’s representatives will be President Hans van Hamond AFSM and CEO Andrew Ford, the SES volunteers’ association is represented by President Neil Hedger and David Rowlands, and the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard volunteers by Richard Burgess and David Goldfinch. All of those representatives are active emergency service volunteers.

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