



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

## News Note

**Attn: Victorian State MPs - Thursday, 9 September 2010**

### **CFA union deal a setback for volunteering**

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) representing Victoria's 60,000 CFA volunteers is concerned that the CFA's newly signed enterprise bargaining agreement with the firefighters' union is a major setback for Victoria's volunteer fire fighting resource.

This industrial deal significantly disadvantages volunteers and was concluded without reference to them, departing from the CFA's signed commitment to involving volunteers in decisions that affect them.

The industrial agreement goes beyond normal union matters such as pay and conditions, and seeks to regulate CFA operations and management of other staff and volunteers.

In making this deal, CFA has committed itself to processes and practices that should relate to the 1% of their workforce the agreement covers, yet inextricably impacts heavily on another 97% (the CFA volunteers) who have had no say and, it would seem, no rights.

The CFA's deal with the union puts restrictions on volunteers by;

- Controlling and restricting volunteer training arrangements
- Including a clause designed to prevent volunteers making submissions on issues involving them
- Preventing the use of paid firefighters on day shift allocation to support volunteer brigades, unless it is part of a progression to a 24 hour staffed fire station, whether the community needs it or not
- Blocking experienced volunteers and other suitable industry candidates from entering paid employment with CFA in jobs they are qualified and experienced to do.

The industrial agreement represents another hurdle in the path for access to and adequacy of training for volunteers, endorses a push towards more paid staff firefighters simply to

add to union membership and is a departure from the *Volunteer Charter*, in which Government and CFA agreed to involve volunteers in any decision which affects them.

The *Volunteer Charter* was signed the Premier, Police and Emergency Services Minister and CFA Chairman in October 2008 to much fanfare.

VFVBV wrote to the CFA, Minister and Premier in February 2010, listing 12 points of concern with the enterprise bargaining negotiations that were then under way, but volunteers were still excluded from having their voice heard.

CFA's vast volunteer fire fighting resource has proven itself to be both professional and irreplaceable.

VFVBV stresses that if the state is to retain that protection, there must be greater priority and investment given to maintaining and building CFA volunteer capacity, not just in numbers but in levels of training and equipment of brigades.

The CFA's newly signed enterprise bargaining agreement is a setback for that vital community resource.

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