



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

News Note

14 November 2018

Note to members

VOLUNTEERS ASK POLITICIANS TO TAKE A PLEDGE NOT TO DISMANTLE CFA

Members will be very aware of ongoing concerns about the current Government's proposal to dismantle CFA. This proposal is still on the table and just last week, Daniel Andrews confirmed he plans to pursue the same agenda to dismantle the CFA and hand the UFU even more control of Victoria's fire services if he is still the Premier after the election.

Those of us involved with CFA are all acutely aware of the negative impact this fragmentation of Victoria's fire services will have on the CFA's capacity to respond to major fires, the way volunteers and paid firefighters work together and the operations of CFA generally. But many people in the community incorrectly think the threat of dismantling CFA was removed last Easter when the legislation underpinning the planned dismantling of CFA was defeated in the Upper House of Victorian Parliament. Also many people in the community won't realise that some of their local state election candidates are active supporters of carving the CFA up and diminishing the role of volunteers.

And we know that the result of the forthcoming Victorian State election will determine the fate of CFA, unless candidates can be convinced of the need to take the flawed plans to dismantle CFA off the table.

VFBV is non-party political but we do have an important and legitimate role and responsibility to raise concerns about issues impacting on volunteers and to try and shape Government policy, raise concerns and actively advocate for a rethink when flawed policy has the potential to erode CFA volunteer capacity or reduce the ability for volunteers to deliver community safety benefits for Victorian's.

Despite the Premier's recent and disappointing confirmation that he still proposes to go ahead with the plans to dismantle CFA we should not give up trying to gain support from candidates who do not want CFA to be destroyed; change the minds of those candidates who perhaps do not understand the dire consequence if the flawed plans go ahead; gain support of any candidates yet to make up their mind; and/or call out any candidates who do not support CFA and CFA volunteers.

To this end VFBV has written to every candidate running in the forthcoming Victorian State election, asking them to take the following public pledge:

“I commit that I will not support any action that alters the existing CFA legislative arrangements unless such changes are recommended by an expert and independent review based on proper, transparent and evidence-based feasibility/cost/benefit analysis involving thorough consultation with CFA volunteers

AND

I commit that I will not support any action, policy or legislative change likely to impact on CFA volunteers until the obligations and commitments set out in the CFA Volunteer Charter have been explicitly and fully adhered to.”

(A copy of the letter sent to every candidate is attached to this news note)

We have also set up a website www.SupportCFAVolunteers.com.au specifically established to allow volunteers and the community to quickly and easily see which candidates in their electorate have taken the pledge and which have refused to publicly support CFA volunteers in this way. The website will be continuously updated as new pledges or comments are received and there will be links to publicise other relevant historic comments from candidates regarding this matter.

Action required from volunteers is to actively approach your local candidates via email, letter, phone call or visits to express your concerns about the flawed policy to carve CFA up and to encourage them to take the pledge and broadcast to their community that they have done so. It is also vital that you actively follow up with communications in your local community to let as many people as possible know where your local candidates stand on this matter. As your local candidates take the pledge or do not take the pledge we need you to:

- actively spread the word by talking to your friends, family, neighbors, community networks and work colleagues;
- contact your local newspaper, radio and other media to celebrate candidates who support CFA and encourage those yet to take the pledge to do so;
- let everyone know about candidates who do not take the pledge;
- write letters to the editor of your local newspaper or post articles on social media simply thanking those who take the pledge and encouraging those who haven't to rethink;
- encourage everyone to visit www.SupportCFAVolunteers.com.au;
- share links and relevant updates via social media; and
- take the time to continue to work with candidates who are reluctant to take the pledge in the hope that we can collectively talk some sense into them.

While you are talking to candidates be clear and listen carefully for tell-tale spin, candidates who claim to support CFA and CFA volunteers will be prepared to take the pledge. Candidates who still support plans to carve the CFA up and give even more control of Victoria's fire services to the union, do not support CFA volunteers and are not being honest if they say they do.

Keep your commentary non-party political and simply talk the facts about who takes the pledge and who doesn't, and why Victoria can't afford to carve CFA up.

Remember we are not telling people how to vote at the forthcoming state election but we are trying to achieve transparency and a more sensible policy outcome, and we do want people to vote with their eyes wide open about how their prospective local political candidate will work to determine the fate of CFA after this state election.

This is an extremely important issue for the safety of all Victorian's, act now to ensure the message is spread while it still counts. Do not leave it for someone else to spread the word and do not look back one day if it comes to be that CFA no longer exists as we know it today and say to yourself that wished you had done more.

I am asking every volunteer to act personally before it is too late. Please visit www.SupportCFAVolunteers.com.au for the link to see where your local candidate really stands on this issue.

That site also contains news, information and support material to help you spread the word.

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[Candidate name]

[Electorate name]

Dear [Candidate Name],

RE: YOUR COMMITMENT TO COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY (CFA) VOLUNTEERS

The current volunteer-based CFA model has the capacity to deliver a world-leading, highly efficient emergency service for Victoria. Regrettably, unchecked and often reckless industrial interference over the past four years has led to some forming the view that the only way to reform the CFA is via the heavy hand of legislated structural change.

This is not correct and as the peak body for Victoria's 55,000 CFA Volunteers, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) is vehemently opposed to any policy seeking to dismantle the CFA or diminish the ability of volunteers to undertake the important work they do to keep our community safe.

Indications are that Premier Daniel Andrews will continue to pursue his agenda to dismantle the CFA after the 2018 State Election, so it is very important for the friends and families of CFA Volunteers to understand the views of each of the Candidates seeking their vote prior to 24 November.

I therefore ask you to carefully consider the pledge below then visit our candidate-only webpage (address at the bottom of the page) to confirm your commitment and provide any personalised comments you may like us to share with your electorate about your support for CFA Volunteers.

"I commit that I will not support any action that alters the existing CFA legislative arrangements unless such changes are recommended by an expert and independent review based on proper, transparent and evidence-based feasibility/cost/benefit analysis involving thorough consultation with CFA volunteers

AND

I commit that I will not support any action, policy or legislative change likely to impact on CFA volunteers until the obligations and commitments set out in the CFA Volunteer Charter have been explicitly and fully adhered to."

I humbly urge you to give this request your most urgent and personal attention as VFBV will soon launch our public-facing website to help the Victorian community identify which candidates in their electorate have taken the pledge.

Finally, congratulations for your nomination and I sincerely wish you well at the election. If you would like to discuss this letter or any other issues relating to CFA Volunteers, please contact me directly as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Ford
CEO