



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

STATEMENT

20th June 2019

STATEMENT FROM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER ADAM BARNETT

Tonight, the controversial Fire Services (Reform) Bill has been passed by the Legislative Council, effectively bringing an end to the world respected CFA integrated model that has served Victoria so well.

Understandably, many CFA volunteers will be incredibly disappointed by this outcome.

And while many will go to bed tonight feeling betrayed and broken-hearted, all of them should sleep with a clear conscience. They have articulated their concerns, they have diligently put on public record their expert advice and analysis, and they have shared their vast knowledge and experience in warning of the dangers and unintended consequences that accompany such rash and ill-conceived arrangements to our fire services as those proposed in this Bill.

That their warnings and advice have gone unheeded by such a slim majority, that the promises and commitments made to the selfless men and women of our fire services through the Volunteer Charter has been so blatantly ignored by those supporting this Bill, and that our Parliamentary checks and balances have allowed such significant structural changes without any evidence, any modelling or any plan is extraordinary. These will be matters of deep disappointment for volunteers for quite some time.

I have no doubt that CFA volunteers' profound sense of duty to their communities and to the people of Victoria will overcome their immediate reactions. Don't forget, CFA volunteers are used to overcoming impossible odds – they are agile and adaptable. They train and exercise to stand against the sometimes-unstoppable forces of mother nature and the ravages of fire every year. They are used to backing themselves and backing each other.

They now have the unenviable task of doing their best to implement and work with what they have been given. It's another unnecessary challenge laid before them to overcome. And though many are sceptical and believe parts of this reform may simply be unworkable, they will proceed in good faith and look to salvage the best possible outcomes from these changes. They will work tirelessly to try and limit the potential damage of the changes, as well as continuing to seek real and practical improvements to such important areas such as operational training, safety, infrastructure and culture.

Decision-makers must now be held to account for the structures, promises and commitments they have made. VFBV will work with our Brigades and Groups to ensure they are supported during these changes. VFBV delegates will be on hand to help members identify needs, challenges and opportunities, and areas requiring support. They will monitor impacts and ensure that detrimental impacts on volunteers, communities and CFA brigades is well known and understood.

It is now critically important that we all unite behind our common cause in putting our communities first and protecting lives and property. For our part - VFBV is committed to working hard with the Government, agencies and all stakeholders to find common ground and heal the divisions of the recent past. We are committed to working constructively and in good faith as we move into the next part of this journey.

I also accept my responsibility to provide leadership and support for the work and challenges ahead of us. I have made this commitment direct to the Minister, Lisa Neville and we have made some positive progress on scoping a few early priority areas to focus on during the drafting of the new regulations. VFBV will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that the welfare and efficiency of CFA volunteers is well known and understood at all levels across the sector – and that community safety outcomes drives our priorities and effort.

I would like to thank all those who have been staunch defenders and supporters of the CFA and CFA Volunteers throughout this turbulent period. From MP's to commentators, fire service experts and members of the general public - your support and confidence has been invaluable.

And to my fellow CFA volunteers, supporters and friends – I offer my sincere thanks and respect. It has taken great courage and conviction to stand up for what you believe in – and in the face of significant odds. I have never been more proud to stand beside you. Never lose faith nor hope. We are stronger together, and together we will continue to stand up for our communities and the safety of all Victorians.

CFA WELLBEING SUPPORT LINE

1800 959 232

Providing CFA members and their immediate family access to 24 hour support 7 days a week.

Psychologists – Counsellors – Peer Support - Chaplains