



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

STATEMENT

1 July 2020

CEO STATEMENT - VFBV WELCOMES OPPOSITION POLICY ANNOUNCEMENT

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria welcomes this morning's announcement by the leader of the opposition Mr Michael O'Brien that an elected Liberal-National government will end the relentless war that has been waged by the Andrew's Government on our CFA and our CFA volunteers.

The commitment to restore CFA's independence and autonomy within the first 100 days of taking office will provide hope and relief to many anxious and demoralised CFA volunteers.

A commitment to genuinely consult with VFBV and CFA volunteers to identify the essential powers, people and resources needed to rebuild and restore the CFA is most welcome and to be applauded.

And while our trust in politicians and the political process has been deeply shaken by the current governments relentless attack on CFA and its volunteers, for many – today's announcement by the opposition will be a welcome reprieve and a beacon of hope.

Many volunteers feel bitterly let down by our politicians and the institutions that are supposed to provide checks and balances and ensure our leaders govern for all. The duty to protect our emergency services and the selfless men and women who train, prepare and volunteer to protect the people of Victoria during emergencies should be sacrosanct.

Constructive reforms that strengthen and support our firefighters and truly modernise our fire services and allows each to flourish and thrive is welcomed. The whole team including Mr O'Brien, leader of the Liberal Party, Mr Peter Walsh, leader of the Nationals, and Mr Nick Wakeling Shadow Minister for Emergency Services should all be congratulated on their announced CFA policy which includes strengthening the CFA Volunteer Charter and the formation of an independent Volunteer Ombudsman/Commissioner - all initiatives which VFBV has long campaigned for.

Respecting all firefighters – and respecting them equally whether they are paid or not should always go hand in hand with any reforms of our fire services.

VFBV is pursuing positive and constructive policy that takes us away from the destructive and chaotic changes that have recently been forced upon us and have sidelined, ignored and taken for granted the selfless firefighters upon whom this State relies.

The dream of building two strong Victorian fire services of which each could stand proud has been shattered as promises and commitments to volunteers and CFA leadership have been broken by the current government. Instead, we are left with one service coming at the expense of the other. CFA and all the people who make it the iconic organisation that it is have been shut out in the cold.

Today's announcement provides hope.

For the first time in many years we finally have an alternative policy on the table. And the recognition that CFA volunteers and VFBV as their peak body will be fully engaged and respected is to be commended. Policy informed by the wisdom, experience and knowledge of CFA volunteers who have protected their communities for decades will provide a sound and exciting environment for reform.

VFBV is calling on all Victorian political parties to unite on this issue and throw their support behind these initiatives.

We have campaigned for many years for the return to the days of bi-partisan support for our fire services. A return to the days like when the CFA Volunteer Charter was supported across the whole chamber by all sides of politics when it was made law.

We expect politicians to keep their promises.

To my fellow volunteers – don't lose hope. Our communities rely on us.

To members of parliament - Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria will stand-by and support all those that support CFA volunteers.

Join us. Help us build a strong, vibrant and independent CFA that we can all be proud. Support your CFA and support the amazing and dedicated people that both volunteer and work to keep Victorian's safe.