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MEDIA RELEASE

LABOR'S POLICY A DISASTER, SAY CFA VOLUNTEERS

The association representing Victoria's 60,000 CFA volunteers has described a Labor policy announcement as having disastrous consequences for CFA, the volunteers and public safety.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) President Hans van Hamond AFSM said Labor's plans could significantly reduce CFA's ability to deal with large scale emergencies like Black Saturday.

"We are concerned that Labor's policy will reduce CFA's volunteer firefighting force by thousands of volunteers, pushing volunteers out of CFA stations and hundreds of CFA trucks off the road when we need them for major fires such as Black Saturday," Mr van Hamond said.

"Labor has grossly underestimated the cost and impact of its policy. Labor's promise of \$141 million and an additional 350 paid firefighters actually only provides 70 additional paid firefighters on the ground at any one time under current paid firefighter rostering arrangements, and it will come at the expense of thousands of highly trained and professional volunteer firefighters," he said.

"Make no mistake, we do support and welcome additional paid support and resources for CFA, provided these resources are required and provided that the CFA determines the need, not a union."

"The big concern of volunteers is that Labor's policy is about handing over control of CFA to a union," Mr van Hamond said.

VFBV's Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Ford, said the volunteers have been talking to Labor for months about what is needed to build up CFA's ability to deal with day to day emergency response as well as major incidents.

More...

VFBV has been calling for;

- More resources to support training of volunteers
- Investment in a modern firefighting fleet
- Remove industrial restrictions that are designed to erode volunteer capacity
- Give CFA the flexibility to deploy resources when and where they are needed
- Remove industrial control over how CFA uses its workforce.

“The plan announced by Labor surrenders CFA operational decisions to an external industrial relations panel,” he said.

Our concern with the recently announced Labor policy is that it establishes external industrial interference with the CFA Chief Officer’s power to decide where and when and how he uses CFA firefighters.

“Victoria is one of the most fire prone areas in the world and there are predictions of longer, hotter and more severe fire seasons ahead. If Labor’s policy is allowed to push trained and experienced CFA volunteers out of fire stations across greater metropolitan Melbourne, Victoria will not have the fire fighting force it needs for day to day incidents and certainly will not have the force to deal with major incidents when they occur, such as Black Saturday,” Mr van Hamond said.

“CFA did not request these additional firefighters,” he said.

“As some of Victoria’s most senior volunteer firefighters, we believe Labor’s policy for CFA is not good for CFA volunteers, is not good for Victoria and is not good for the future of CFA.”

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