VFBV District 7 Council representing CFA fire brigades across the Geelong, Bellarine, Surf Coast, Corio and Anakie regions

Media release

Volunteer firefighters across Geelong region express anger and disappointment ahead of 1 July break up of CFA

Friday 26 June 2020: Volunteer firefighters across the Geelong region have expressed their anger and disappointment at the lack of information addressing volunteer needs ahead of the 1 July break up of the CFA and dismay at the resignation of Chief Fire Officer, Steve Warrington.

With just days to go before the transition into a volunteer only organisation, members of the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) District 7 Council have called on local Member of Parliament and Minister for Emergency Services, Lisa Neville, to commit to putting the interests of volunteers, and therefore the community, first.

Vicki Dobson, volunteer firefighter and member of the District 7 Council said the number of broken promises were building up against a ledger that had no positives on the other side.

“CFA volunteers were concerned when the legislation was forced through last year that organisations outside the agency would have control in, and on, all operational and non-operational activity,” she said.

“This includes the United Firefighters Union’s (UFU) right to veto, and the requirement that the Chief Officer must consult with them on all matters - we are already seeing this play out in negative ways for volunteers and ultimately the public.

“Promises were made on the day the legislation was passed by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Lisa Neville, and by Premier Daniel Andrews that this would be a fair, transparent process with full and continuous consultation with members through their representatives - we are simply asking that the State Government honour this commitment.

“To date, a number of formal information sessions have been held in the Geelong region, where questions and concerns were put forward for resolution. This is not best practice consultation. There has been almost no direct follow up from those meetings and instead we are finding out decisions are being made that have no benefit to volunteers.

“Add to that the resignation of Chief Fire Officer, Steve Warrington last night, and we are left feeling dismayed, betrayed, anxious and extremely nervous about what the future holds,”said Ms Dobson.

The broken promises include:

- A pending decision to let the 229 FRV staff seconded back to the CFA wear the FRV uniform, and not the CFA uniform
- All 229 FRV seconded staff will bring their EBA agreements with them to the CFA, ensuring industrial interference will continue to plague CFA
- CFA would become a fully volunteer led organisation - yet we must accept seconded FRV staff into senior command positions who essentially serve two masters

“While transition periods are always flexible, to have so little in place for the start of the handover is of serious concern,” Ms Dobson said.

“All volunteers are committed to keeping their communities safe, no one can ever question our dedication. We are not criticising the CFA, we are criticising the process and asking for a fair go.

“We don’t contest or begrudge the conditions for the paid staff, and we actually support reform to improve service to our community - we just want a greater say in the direction of our organisation from 1 July onwards.

“We have paid staff who do not have any job security, we have volunteers sharing stations with paid staff who don’t know what their role is moving forward, and we have a broader membership who feels unheard and in many cases betrayed by this Government.”

- Ends -

Volunteer firefighters, through the VFBV, are asking for:

- answers to all the questions we have asked
- a commitment to involving volunteers front and centre in ongoing, meaningful consultation
- our feedback to be considered and included in all decision making
- the removal of any industrial interference
- reaffirm the a commitment that seconded FRV staff wear the CFA uniform of the organisation they are representing.
- the Minister to make decisions that are in the best interests of volunteers and therefore the community.

For more information:
Vicki Dobson
18 year volunteer firefighter and VFBV District 7 Councillor
M: 0416 049 066