

Media Release



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VFF and CFA launch joint trial - voluntary harvest fire risk management

This week the VFF Grains Group supported by CFA will launch a trial programme for fire risk management during harvest called the Voluntary Grain Harvesting Guide. This joint initiative of VFF and CFA provides an objective measure for farmers and header operators to manage fire risk.

The trial Voluntary Grain Harvesting Guide will be announced by VFF Grains President Brett Hosking and CFA Chief Officer Euan Ferguson this Friday at Cannum Fire Station near Warracknabeal, with local VFF and CFA members.

CFA Chief Officer Euan Ferguson said he was pleased to attend the launch of the trial programme and to support the VFF in this important initiative.

“Research is telling us that fires which start during harvesting can and do occur. We want to do everything we can to prevent costly fires in equipment and in valuable grain crops at this crucial time of year. If farmers can consider suspending harvesting during the few hours of highest fire danger we should see a reduction in fire starts.”

“Last season was busy. Early indications suggest that the fire season may be 2 to 3 weeks earlier than in past years. It’s so important that we’re all well prepared across the state.”

“VFF Grains President Brett Hosking said a major advantage of this voluntary scheme is that it provides a straightforward, user-friendly, and objective way for growers to manage potential fire risk on their individual properties rather than relying on less accurate broad-based measures.”

“The guide which we have developed this year in conjunction with the CFA is based on a system that has been in operation in South Australia for many years.”

Mr Hosking highlighted the positive feedback and input that the VFF has received from growers and industry groups alike, such as the Contract Grain Harvesters Association, as well as the enthusiasm with which several local CFA groups have offered to trial it this harvest.

“We know that there has been pressure mounting from some quarters that harvesting should stop on total fire ban days” said Mr Hosking, “however this view does not take into account that harvesting of our food crops is seasonal and must occur in summer as the crops ripen in hot dry conditions”.

“The Guide that the VFF and CFA have developed offers a much more targeted approach to risk management rather than imposing blanket bans for entire days and entire regions”.

Mr Ferguson pointed out that “the guide is based on a model referred to as the Grassland Fire Danger Index (GFDI), which is the most objective measure that can predict fire behaviour”.

“The GFDI is a complex formula that takes into account relative humidity, temperature, wind speed and fuel curing. This enables farmers, contractors, and local committees to measure temperature, humidity, and wind speed using portable weather stations, and referencing a table to determine when fire danger is deemed to be too high”.

Mr Hosking said that “the GFDI is presented in a user-friendly matrix on a sticker that farmers and header operators can stick in the cabs of their headers and utes and refer to during the day”.

“We have received positive feedback from growers so far, many of whom have said this is a much more common sense, accurate, and practically applied approach than blanket bans.”

“The Guide also takes that local knowledge and experience and provides an objective measure so that we know everybody is applying the same criteria to conditions in their paddock.”

“The Grain Harvesting Guide will be trialled by local CFA groups around Warracknabeal over the harvest season, and we are eager to hear feedback from growers,” concluded Mr Hosking.

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