

FIRE & EMERGENCY AGENCIES AMALGIMATION

FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES VICTORIA (FESV)

A new service embracing the great Australian tradition of community service.

This new single government agency responsible for educating, informing, preparing, training, preventing, mitigating, responding to and recovering from fire and emergencies within Victoria.

A community based organisation, with career staff and predominantly volunteers working in tandem to deliver seamless operations enhancing community safety.

Here is a chance for Government to make strategic decisions for the long term benefit of their communities.

Government and politicians have lost the visionary decision makers that once inspired our communities. Today's leaders have lost the courage to make difficult long term plans to the benefit of everyone's tomorrow. Current leadership's long term planning and decision making focuses as far as next week's poll results.

Does this current government have the courage to break free of this play it safe, make a decision that is agreeable, mentality or can it make bold decisions that are needed and deliver long term gain for our society?

If the government has the desire to be seen as visionary, show leadership and deliver inspired long term decisions for the benefit of the very communities they govern.

Then the result of the current Fire Services Review should be one Fire and Emergency Agency protecting all Victorians across private and public land. One agency delivering the planning, functions and services that facilitates a safer, prepared, resilient community into tomorrow. One agency prepared for and responding to any emergency, rather than the multitude of government agencies that currently exist.

The Federal, State and Territory Governments by all adopting AIIMS (The Australian Inter-service Incident Management System) have already realised the enormous benefit of having one consistent, universally understood and applied system to manage all emergencies. Having one system enables

seamless integration of activates and resources to respond to any emergency, imminent or actual, natural, industrial or civil, irrespective of location, size and complexity.

Having one agency to address fire and emergency activities is a natural extension to adopting AIIMS (a single emergency management system). Several points in the Governments current Fire Service Review look to address interoperability between fire services. By having one agency responsible for all fire and emergency activates in the state. You create an environment of complete seamless operability between all activities required to respond to emergencies.

A single agency delivers enormous benefits to the government and community as a whole. Completely removes the duplication and waste of resources inherent in having several separate agencies delivering parts of any emergency response.

One agency with one management structure, one administration system, one communications system, one training regimen, and one set of resources and equipment, all activities common across the single agency.

The financial and resource saving to the government will be significant.

The savings delivered by having one agency will enable government to enhance one of the most significant findings from the Black Saturday Royal Commission. That while our fire services are amongst the best in the world and as good as they are in responding to and supressing fires. The best means of protecting our communities in the future is by delivering information and programs so individuals can identify and remove potential dangers themselves.

More lives are lost in house fires than during the summer fire season.

Expanding our current community engagement and hazard awareness programs that identify potential threats, heaters, electric blankets, clothes dryers, dangers within the kitchen, hording around the home and highlight lifesaving actions such as working smoke alarms. These activities will deliver the best protection in our communities. Avoiding an emergency is far superior than having to respond to one.

Finally savings from amalgamation can also be directed at upgrading services and equipment to deliver best practice responses when fire and emergencies do occur.

CFA Volunteers have been reluctant to embrace any plan to amalgamate fire services in the past, as they see joining with MFB could result in a loss of identity as a predominantly volunteer fire service, a reduced voice within government, and reduced involvement in planning policy and reduced influence in government's decisions. Additionally that a merged organisation could see resources diverted from regional areas with a greater focus on Melbourne CBD fire services.

Government could easily elevate volunteers concerns by embracing what is the government's greatest asset volunteerism itself.

The brand "CFA Volunteer Firefighter" is one of the most respected, trusted and valued brands in the community. Our community holds volunteers in such high trust and respect for putting themselves in potentially hazardous and dangerous positions to protect lives and property in the community.

Whenever surveys are conducted in the state, whether the respondents are in Melbourne or Regional Victoria the results are consistently the same. Our community sees Ambulance Officers and Volunteer Firefighters as the two most respected groups within the community.

Other rescue volunteers such as SES, Coast Guard and Life Savers etc., follow closely behind Ambulance members and CFA Volunteers.

The value of that respect within our communities for ALL volunteers is virtually incalculable. The public embrace and relishes that their fire, rescue and emergency responders are predominantly volunteers. Through their words and deeds of support understand, appreciate and recognise the commitment volunteers make in preparing communities for, training for and responding to emergencies in the community. This positive public trust and respect can be implanted into a single agency

The Government could by incorporating the new agency as a volunteer and career staffed, community based fire and emergency service, maximise the goodwill in the community towards volunteers and would confirm to volunteers their value and importance within the new service. Also confirm to volunteers that they would still have representation at the highest level in the new organisation (Board Level).

A final indication to volunteers from government that their contribution to this

new agency would be essential and recognised would be the government's agreement to support financially an organisation like VFBV (Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria) to be the voice of and represent the interests of all volunteers to the new Fire & Emergency Services Victoria management and Government as VFBV represents CFA volunteers today.

As Victoria is one of the most fire prone states in the world, and as fire is such a part of our community the new agency should have the word fire in its name to indicate to all the recognition that fire services are so essential to Victorians. Also the word services has more of an action or doing connotation than the word management.

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The embryo of a single fire and emergency agency is already in place EMV (Emergency Management Victoria). A renamed agency could progressively incorporate CFA, MFB, SES and DELWP Fire Services into its operations. There is also a solid argument to include Ambulance Victoria into a new Fire & Emergency Services Victoria

Adopting a single emergency management systems (AIIMS) leads to creating a single authority to provide emergency services as the natural next step.

One fire and emergency agency for Victoria can deliver economic efficiencies, remove the duplication of multi-agency, a single point of contact for all Victorians to receive assistance, a seamless integrated service to prevent and respond to any emergency within the state, enhanced opportunities for staff and volunteers to develop their careers and skills, continue the great Australian tradition of volunteering to benefit our community.

One Fire & Emergency Service is a win situation for everyone. All that is need is the courage by government to make long term decisions to the benefit of all.

Robert Fraser

