



MEDIA RELEASE

7 September 2010

STATE GOVERNMENT CAN'T DELAY ON CHANGE TO FIRE SERVICES LEVY

A group of prominent regional businesses that champion the needs and causes of rural Australia has demanded faster action from the Victorian Government in overhauling the levy that funds rural firefighting services.

In welcoming the State Government's response to the 2009 Bushfire Royal Commission's findings, Champions Of The Bush Chairman, Greg Walsh said the Commission's recommendations mirrored the findings and proposals of previous enquiries. "It's refreshing to see the recommendations, in large part, being adopted," he said.

However, Dr Walsh said Champions Of The Bush – which counts a decorated CFA volunteer with more than 30 years experience amongst its founding members – was disappointed in the apparent delays in implementation of some of the actions, particularly the new Fire Services Levy structure.

In its response to the commission's findings, the State Government slated a July 2012 date for the launch of a more equitable levy to fund emergency services. Dr Walsh said this was too long to wait for changes to an unfair model that placed the CFA funding burden only on those with home or property insurance.

"Currently only those businesses and individuals who insure their assets carry the burden of funding the CFA. When there is a fire the CFA does not discriminate whether the house or business is insured and has consequently paid their Fire Services Levy. The fire or emergency is dealt with anyway," he said.

Dr Walsh said approximately 30% of privately-owned property was either not insured or under-insured. "This thereby puts an unfair burden on the rest who must make up the shortfall," he said.

"It should not take two years and another enquiry to determine and implement what needs to be done" Dr Walsh said.

Models in other states, such as South Australia and Western Australia, could be emulated whereby the levy was attached to all rateable property, he said. A prompt introduction was also likely to gain support from the insurance industry, he added. "The insurance industry has long pointed out that the ever-increasing Fire Services Levy is a disincentive for people to adequately insure their assets.

"Champions Of The Bush urges the State Government to implement a fairer system to the current Fire Services Levy within a twelve month timeframe, rather than 24."

Release Ends

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