



WAFARMERS



Bushfire Front inc



**Locals
Against
Wildfire WA**

MEDIA RELEASE

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Major state reform required for community bushfire safety

A group of volunteer fire brigades, fire fighters, farmers and state emergency services volunteers are calling on the government for major reform of WA's bush firefighting system, following a report into the management of this year's devastating Yarloop bushfires which found the current system for managing bushfires in Western Australia is failing citizens and government.

If the current system continues as it is, it will result in more loss of life and larger scale disasters, according to the lobby group, which includes the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades (AVBFB), Pastoralists and Graziers Association, WA Farmers Federation, the Bushfire Front, the State Emergency Services Volunteer Association and Locals Against Wildfire.

State President of the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades (AVBFB) David Gossage AFSM said there has been a steady decline and erosion of community firefighting capacity and in recent years there has been increased frequency of mega fires, fatalities, and an exponential increase in housing and property losses from bush fires.

"It is no coincidence that these worrying changes have occurred since the abolition of the Bush Fires Board, the centralisation of emergency services and the overemphasis on response at the expense of risk prevention and mitigation," Mr Gossage said.

The group is calling for the formation of a properly resourced, independent, community based Rural Bush Fire Service which is not controlled by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. This fire service would be charged with re-establishing community capacity in fighting fires and enabling mitigation activities to be carried out.

The Rural Bush Fire Service would be regionally based, decentralised and staffed by experienced persons who are skilled in fire mitigation, community liaison and working with volunteers. The group also believe the State Emergency Service (SES) Volunteers should be managed by persons who are experts in emergency services and where possible management staff being recruited from within the ranks of SES volunteers.

"Common sense decision making at a local level is pivotal to fire management, if further fatalities are to be avoided in bushfires and natural disasters in Western Australia," Mr Gossage said.

The group is also calling for the independent Office of Bushfire Risk Management to be moved to be within the State Emergency Management Committee secretariat and for the secretariat to answer to the Department of Premier and Cabinet, rather than the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

"These changes would lead to greater engagement of our emergency services volunteers and greater mitigation of fire risk and control of bush fires when they do occur. The consequence of doing nothing will be more loss of life and larger scale disasters," Mr Gossage said.

-ENDS-

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