



VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS CONCERNED ABOUT BOUNDARY CHANGES

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) fears proposed boundary changes in the Latrobe West region of Gippsland could threaten the future of local volunteer brigades.

Under new Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) boundaries, FRV will gain control a vastly expanded area in the region, prompting fears about the future of the Trafalgar and Westbury volunteer brigades.

CEO Adam Barnett said the VFBV stood with Trafalgar and Westbury in their opposition to the proposed changes.

Mr Barnett said the State Government had not followed the defined process for modifying FRV boundaries and had rejected all compromise options.

“There has been very poor consultation, leaving no opportunity for brigades to provide input,” Mr Barnett said. “This lack of local knowledge and risk assessment is a serious flaw in the development of a brigade primary boundary.”

The new map was solely based on road network modelling, which Mr Barnett described as a radical departure from the usual practice of using geographic landmarks and topography. It also uses assumptions about road modelling disputed by local volunteers.

The new boundaries significantly expand on the primary area of the CFA brigade it replaces.

Mr Barnett said Trafalgar and Westbury brigades believed the proposed changes would have a significant impact on morale and on their sustainability and volunteer surge capacity. “There is no community benefit to these changes. All brigades support the Latrobe West career staff response area remaining unchanged, and I fear the government is deeply underestimating the impact this proposal could have on community-embedded local fire brigades.” he said.

“Changing their role from primary to support only, would fracture their small community.”

Both brigades have exceptional records of service to their communities, and both are recording a 100 per cent Service Delivery Standard result.

VFBV is concerned that in many areas proposed for transfer to FRV, the CFA volunteer brigade is closer and able to respond in a timelier manner with tankers that are more appropriate due to the lack of reticulated water. Mr Barnett said this was not a volunteer versus career staff issue and there were good relationships in the region built on the current primary areas and response model.

“Motivated by their connection and responsibility for their area, these volunteers have developed a relationship with the local community over decades. Decisions that start to chip away at these primary motivators put the volunteer model at serious risk,” Mr Barnett said.