

NATIONAL EMERGENCY



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The website has sections for each State as well as National Areas. If you have ideas for State Division content, please contact your State Secretary, for National content, email web@aies.net.au Please be aware that all content must go past the National Secretary prior to web publication to ensure it meets required guidelines.

NATIONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE



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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Steve **Jenkins**, FAIES

National President

With the pace of change in the emergency and disaster management environment over recent weeks and months, it is difficult to know where to start. At the outset though, I sincerely hope that all our members, and all persons involved in the emergency services and allied fields are safe and well, especially those directly involved in providing assistance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis that is now essentially a global 'calamity'. We have seen overseas examples where multiple health professionals, including doctors and nurses, have succumbed to the effects of this virus. I hope that we here in Australia have managed to avert such outcomes.

In my last report in October 2019, I made mention of the bushfires that had then been impacting New South Wales for a couple of months. Up till then, two persons had unfortunately lost their lives in the fires. Sadly, from that time and during summer, the situation in NSW, and other states and territories, deteriorated significantly. By the time meaningful rains were received in late February 2020, sufficient to suppress the fires, 34 people had died; including three NSW Rural Fire Service volunteer fire-fighters and the three crew members of a C130 Hercules fire bomber from the United States of America. Our sincere condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of the deceased fire-fighters, and the other community members who also lost their lives.

On 23 February 2020, in my role as a local government councillor, I attended the NSW Bushfires State Memorial for the six fire-fighters and 18 community members who died in NSW. The Memorial was held at Qudos Bank Arena in Sydney. Speeches were made by the NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimons AFSM, the Prime Minister, The Honourable Scott Morrison MP, and Premier of NSW, The Honourable Gladys Berejiklian MP. The Governor-General, His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) and Mrs Hurley were also in attendance. A Catafalque Party was provided by members of the NSW RFS.

The ceremony was extremely moving, and I congratulate the organisers on the quality of the event.

The lives of so many others have also been affected by the bushfires. A significant number of residents, farmers and business owners lost their homes, livestock and fences, and business premises to the fires. Approximately 186,000 square kilometres were burnt, equivalent to nearly 2.5 per cent of the Australian land mass. The percentage in NSW is much higher – almost 10 per cent. Property losses were significant; 5,900 buildings including approximately 2,800 homes. The fires also claimed an untold number of animals, birds and reptiles not to mention the damage to the natural environment. Recovery of the community, economies



How well did Governments respond? How effective, or ineffective were the strategies that different countries implemented? Politics and economics will also be topical. And in the case of the *Ruby Princess* debacle (I don't think that word aptly describes the severity of this fiasco), which is now the subject of a criminal investigation by the Homicide Squad of the New South Wales Police Force, I will not be at

It would be remiss of me not to make special mention of the "front-line emergency" medical personnel, the ambulance paramedics, nurses and doctors, who front up day after day and risk their own personal safety to help the sick. Like the firefighters during the floods, they are heroes as well, and we salute them.

of the towns affected, and regrowth of the natural environment will take quite some considerable time. Some areas may never truly recover. As so often happens in nature though, things can so from one extreme to another very quickly. Flooding rains fell and helped extinguish the fires, as well as falling in some areas that had been drought affected for numerous years.

But then, during January, the world watched as the COVID-19 virus (Coronavirus) established a foothold in Wuhan, capital city of Hubei Province in the People's Republic of China. What followed globally will now be discussed and researched for decades to come. Many questions will be asked and assessments made. How prepared were countries?

all surprised if criminal prosecutions eventuate, including for manslaughter and other serious neglect of duty offences. The NSW Premier has also announced an inquiry irrespective of the outcome of the police investigation.

Australia was well back from the lead in terms of the counties affected by COVID-19. As an island nation, we have the ability to quickly and effectively control who enters our country. That should have been a significant advantage in stopping, or at least severely limiting the virus' spread in this country, and our efforts to do so should have been spurred by the rapidity with which the virus took hold in other countries resulting in so many deaths. Yet, as I write there are now over 6,000 positive cases and 50 persons are sadly deceased.



Cases from the *Ruby Princess* account for about 10 per cent of these positive cases and 30 per cent of the deaths. My condolences to the families, relatives and friends thereof, and all those other families that have been adversely affected thus far, and those others who will be affected in the weeks and months to come. I can only hope that the social distancing, self-isolation and other restrictions placed on our 'normal' way of life eventually, but quickly, result in full suppression of the virus in Australia.

It would be remiss of me not to make special mention of the "front-line emergency" medical personnel, the ambulance paramedics, nurses and doctors, who front up day after day and risk their own personal safety to help the sick. Like the firefighters during the floods, they are heroes as well, and we salute them. I find it difficult to fathom though how any human being could criticise their efforts, let alone commit despicable and disgusting acts like spitting on them. Those that engage in such activity do not deserve the liberty that we have come to enjoy in Australia, and I am

pleased that legislation and penalties are being strengthened to ensure those perpetrators are more severely punished for the heinous crimes.

In recent days, it has been announced that Commissioner Shame Fitzsimons AFSM will conclude his tenure as Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service at the end of April and take up a new role as the head of a newly formed government department Resilience NSW. I will have more to say on that in the next edition, but for now I thank him for his service and dedication to, and compassion for, the emergency management community.

A reminder that AIES members are eligible for nomination through the organisation to attend Volunteer Leadership Programs (VLPs). VLPs are scheduled for Katherine in the Northern Territory and at Lismore in NSW during 2020. They are presently postponed from their scheduled dates due to the COVID-19 crisis. Please monitor the following website for updates on new course and applications due dates when they are released once the COVID-19 restrictions

are lifted: <https://www.aidr.org.au/programs/volunteer-leadership-program/>. Applications are to be forwarded to president@aies.net.au for endorsement.

Members are also advised that, due to the COVID-19 crisis, the Institute's Annual General Meeting (AGM) scheduled for Saturday 18 April 2020, has been postponed. Further advice regarding dates for the rescheduled AGM will be forwarded in due course.

As we all endure these trying and challenging times with COVID-19, please be vigilant and observe the protocols for hygiene, social distancing, self-isolation and other limitations. Please be patient and look after each other (within the guidelines), and remember – we are all in this together. It will not be forever, but the more we do the right thing now, the shorter the time we will have to endure these restricted freedoms. Please stay home and save lives – it's a small price to pay. You never know whose life you might put at stake if you don't.

In closing, another special thank you to all the medical personnel, front-line in particular. You're all awesome. ●

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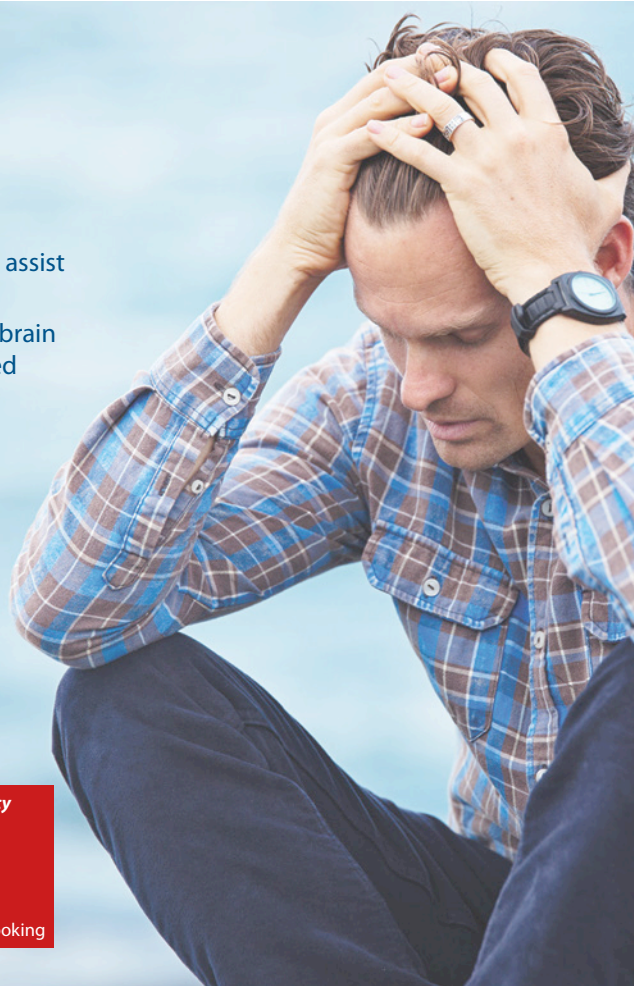
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NEW MEMBERS

The Australasian Institute of Emergency Services is pleased to announce the following emergency services people joined the AIES between December 2019 and March 2020.

NAME	ORGANISATION	DIVISION
Aram Ross	QFES	QLD/NT
Alan Ozolins	ANSTO	NSW
Michael Cooksley	NSW SES	NSW
Ken Osborn	NSW SES	NSW
Haydn McComas	SA Country Fire Service	SA/WA
David Lyster	Ambulance Victoria	VIC
Jemma Nesbit-Sackville	Vic SES	VIC
Steven Schwartz	Qld SES	QLD/NT
Larry Ting	NSW Rural Fire Service	NSW
Anna Gao	NSWPF	NSW
John Iliff	Royal Flying Doctor Service	SA/WA
Brett Gash	NSW SES	NSW
Matthew U'Brien	NSW Dept of Planning, Industry & Environment	NSW



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Articles, photographs and short stories are sought for the *National Emergency Response Journal*. Please submit items for the next edition to editor@aies.net.au by **7 February 2020**. There is an annual award for the best article submitted by an AIES member.



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING UPDATE

Dear Members,

You are all no doubt aware, that Australia, and indeed the world, is in the grip of a pandemic due to COVID-19/Coronavirus. Restrictions have been placed on many aspects of life, such as the introduction of limitations on mass gatherings and the need to maintain social distancing.

Many members of the AIES' National Board are members of the emergency services (both full and part-time). These organisations have placed restrictions on their members (including volunteer members) in order to limit their risk of exposure to the Coronavirus and maximise the capacity to maintain the essential services they provide. These include restrictions preventing interstate travel.

Having considered a number of options, the National Board has taken the decision to postpone the 2020 AGM until further notice.

The Board will continue to monitor the situation and new AGM dates will be advised when convening such a forum without the risk of infection is permitted.

In the interim please stay safe, follow the advice of health professionals, and practice good hygiene, social distancing and other strategies for minimising the risk of infection from this contagion .



THE DAY THE FIRE STORM HIT RAPPVILLE

By Raelene **Davis**, MAIES

Deputy Captain, Secretary and Crew Leader, Woodburn Rural Fire Brigade, New South Wales Rural Fire Service.

On Tuesday, 8 October, 2019, the day started out hot in the morning. Members of the Woodburn Rural Fire Brigade knew it would be a bad fire day for the area. At 9.00am it had all ready started with a house fire in our Brigade's area which both the brigade vehicles attended, a Category 1 and a Category 9 vehicles. My 20-year-old daughter Chantelle and I were in the two-person Category 9 fire truck. After we were finished from the house fire the two Woodburn trucks returned to the station.

When we arrived back at the station the four members present cleaned the trucks. We had been asked by the

Fire Control Centre to have a crew on standby at the station for a quick response to any incidents.

There was a fire to the west which was the Long Gully fire that had been going for weeks. There was the Busby's Flat fire as well. These fires were in the containment lines and all good – at that time.

As we cleaned the truck the weather was getting hotter, the wind was picking up and coming from the west. By midday we looked out to the west of the station and could see the smoke from the Long Gully and Busbys Flat fires. It was like these fires were making their own weather with the smoke



Prime Minister Scott Morrison shaking hands with Chantelle Davis as Raelene watches on. Photo from Scott Morrison's Twitter feed.



Left to right: Michael Collins – fire-fighter, Sandy Beach RFB, Dave Tierney – fire-fighter, Coramba RFB, Chantelle Davis – fire-fighter, Woodburn RFB, Raelene Davis – Crew Leader and Secretary, Woodburn RFB, Jeff Phillips – fire-fighter, Bungawalbin RFB, Steve Jenkins – Captain, Megan RFB (AIES National President), David Littleproud MP and Superintendent Michael Brett, Zone Manager, Northern Rivers.

circling around in a clock wise motion. Then it got hotter, the wind got stronger, leaves where being blows from the trees and falling to the ground.

By 1.30pm the sky got darker, the sun was gone behind the smoke that now filled the sky. We were listening on the radio to the crews that were at these fires. We knew that they needed help. Then the phone call came from the Fire Control Centre to get the two trucks and four crew on board to respond to the township of Rappville.

Rappville is about 63 kilometres to the west of Woodburn. We knew the urgency to get there to help our fellow members of the RFS.

We left the station within 5 minutes of the phone call. As we were driving towards the west, we could see the massive fire front that the crews were dealing with. The two trucks talked on the Fire Ground radio to each other

to make sure that we knew what the crews were going to deal with when we got to our destination. It helps to talk because at this stage as we got closer, the sky was getting even darker and the winds where stronger, about 50km and westerly. The smoke was thick in the air. The adrenalin was kicking in.

As the two trucks hit Casino and turned left (south) onto the Summerland Way, the winds picked up stronger. We travelled along there for about 15km to the Rappville turn-off which is on the right. Instruction came through on the radio for the Cat 1 to respond to a rural address for the welfare of the property owners and property protection. The Cat 9, with myself and my daughter Chantelle, to continue on to the Rappville township.

It was like early evening with the sky so dark and the smoke so thick. I was making sure Chantelle was right as

we were approaching the township. I have never in my 13 years with the Rural Fire Service seen such a big fire front as this one. I have been on many deployments all over Australia, but this was massive.

We arrived at Rappville and responded to the western side of the train lines where we met up with the Group Captain. The fire front was not far away from this little township. The thick smoke filled the air, winds were so strong and the heat was unbearable. There were enough trucks on that side of the rail lines for property protection. We were requested to go with Shannon Brook to a property up the road. As we got to the beginning of the road, we could see the northern side of the fire front lapping the railway lines so we responded back across the railway lines to the eastern

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Photo: Steve Jenkins.



This house in Rappville was gutted by the fire. ABC News: Matt Coble



Part of the North Coast line damaged in fires. Picture: Facebook.

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side to see what properties would be impacted first.

Then the Group Captain told us to go into property protection on the eastern side of the rail line with numerous other RFS and Fire and Rescue trucks. The fire was lapping over the railway lines, the smoke was thick which was burning our eyes, the heat from the flames was burning through our fire gear. There were embers flying in every direction. There were spot fires everywhere around us, back sheds just starting to catch on fire. There was an urgency in trying to get these small fires out. As we put one out there where more popping up around us.

The State School was the evacuation point for all the residents in this little township. One RFS truck was there putting spot fires out. There were trees in the school ground that were also catching alight so we rushed there and

tried to help. Near the school there were spot fires in the back yards of houses. The Cat 9, which was where myself and my daughter were, was one of the only vehicles that could get into these small areas. One after another, into one yard then another to try to stop the devastation of this community.

Then the old church was under ember attack so we rushed around, got out of the truck with hot ember hitting us all over our bodies, flames coming from the house beside us, fences on fire and gasping for clean fresh air which there was none of. We hosed under the church to stop the embers catching it alight.

We then looked across the street to where another house had caught alight in the roof and under the front veranda. We rushed to see if we could put the fire out then the front fence caught alight – we could not reach it. There were power lines above us, flames touching the power lines and power

poles alight. It was like hell.

Across a lane a house was alight. At the house next to it we saw a little old man was there with his garden hose trying to put a tree out which was right outside his house near a wall. Chantelle and I rushed to help him – we know him only as Macky. There was no pressure in the garden hose as the power was gone from his pump. Chantelle told Macky to go to the school to get cover and to make sure he was safe.

The last words my daughter Chantelle told Macky were something like “we as a team will try to save his house”.

There were trucks going from house to house to see what could be saved. Flames lapping from house to house. We stayed at Macky’s house wetting the roof and the walls of his house. Chantelle was at one stage laying on the ground as the flames from the neighbouring house were leaping above her head – she was still wetting the



house down. A Fire and Rescue truck came along and protected the house so we could fill up with water and go back to Macky's house.

There were horses and dogs running through the streets trying to get to safety away from the fires – this was so upsetting. After filling up we returned to Macky's house. This filling up happened several times – the Cat 9 only carries 600 litres of water. Chantelle and I were so drained by this time, but kept going.

When the fire storm had passed, we had saved Macky's little house, the shed and his car.

The sun then reappeared from the smoke.

As we looked around, both the church and Macky's house were still standing. But in those few moments there were so many other houses lost.

Along the streets one house would be burnt, then two still standing. It went along all the streets like that – a hit then a miss with the properties.

This is a day that I will never forget for the rest of my life. I am so proud of my 20-year-old daughter in the way she handled herself in the time of need for a small little community.

On the afternoon of Sunday, 13 October, 2019, Chantelle and I decided to return to Rappville and see Macky, the old man whose house we had saved. When we arrived, we met up with a number of RFS members from the Coffs Harbour area. We were then told that the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, NSW Premier and Deputy Premier, and David Littleproud MP, Federal Minister for Emergency Services, were about to arrive to attend a community meeting and that they

wanted to meet members of the emergency services, including the RFS. The other RFS members present insisted that we join them to meet the delegation. That was a very moving moment.

Then we went and found Macky and chatted with him. That was even more moving. ●

EPILOGUE

In January 2020, Hawaiian Airlines generously donated to the NSW RFS a return trip for two to Hawaii and accommodation for four nights. The NSW RFS sought nominations from across the State. Chantelle was nominated by a number of people, including one of the fire fighters from Coffs Harbour. I am pleased to say that my daughter, Chantelle, in recognition of her efforts that day, was selected as the winner of this trip. She has kindly invited me to go with her.

RAELENE DAVIS

Raelene lives in the small NSW Northern Rivers town of Woodburn where she and her daughter, Chantelle, have a rural property with livestock. She is a single mother of five and joined the NSW Rural Fire Service (Woodburn Brigade) in 2006. Four of Raelene's five children are also members of the Woodburn Brigade. Raelene has found the past 13 years with the RFS very rewarding, and also challenging.

During her 13 years with the RFS, Raelene has gained many qualifications which, combined with her experiences, has made her a better person and enabled her to work more effectively as a team member. Raelene's qualifications include: Basic Firefighting (BF), Village Firefighting (VF), Advanced Firefighting (AF), Crew Leader and Closed Area Breathing Apparatus (CABA) operator – Woodburn is an approved CABA brigade due to its proximity to the Woodburn Sugar Mill. Raelene has also has a passion in aviation and completed the Aviation Course in 2011 and is qualified as an Aviation Officer; she is a dual member of the Support Brigade to assist with aviation-related activities and been on deployment to many areas around Australia in that role. Woodburn Brigade has one of the highest call-out rates in Northern Rivers, 166 in the past year. Brigade members, including Raelene, attended numerous Section 44 fires in the Northern Rivers and surrounding areas. Raelene has also been a Deputy Captain and Secretary of the Woodburn Brigade for a number of years.

CHANTELLE DAVIS

Chantelle is 20 years of age and lives in the small NSW Northern Rivers town of Woodburn where she and her mother, Raelene, have a rural property with livestock. She currently works on the Pacific Highway upgrade project. With her twin sister and a brother, Chantelle joined the NSW Rural Fire Service (Woodburn Brigade) as a junior member in 2014. She wanted to serve the community and give back to the people of this small town, and understand how to work as a team member at critical incidents. Chantelle completed her Basic Firefighting (BF) in 2016, and Village Firefighting in 2016. She is now working towards completing Advanced Firefighting (AF), Crew Leader and qualifying as a Closed Area Breathing Apparatus (CABA) operator. Woodburn Brigade has one of the highest call-out rates in Northern Rivers, 166 in the past year. Brigade members, including Chantelle, attended numerous Section 44 fires in the Northern Rivers and surrounding areas. Chantelle also recently went on her first deployment with the RFS to the Canberra area during the NSW Black Summer Fires. This was a new experience for her as she did not have her mother Raelene beside her as she normally does at home where they are affectionately known as "The Girls". She holds the following positions within the Woodburn Brigade: Community Engagement Officer, Callout Officer and First Aid Officer.



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WHAT HAS AUSTRALIA LEARNED FROM THE CORONAVIRUS AND BUSHFIRE CRISES?

By Michael **Shoebridge**

Director of the Defence, Strategy and National Security program at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute

Australian governments at all levels have learned a lot between the onset of the bushfire season and the first stages of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

There's a clear understanding that national crises require coherent national responses. And that the seams between and among the Commonwealth and the states and territories that are tolerable during normal circumstances become unacceptable when the situation isn't normal. Australians look to their prime minister to lead and to other leaders—including state premiers—to work coherently, positively and constructively together, if only for the period the crisis lasts.

Such crises empower prime ministers well beyond the letter of the constitution and beyond any political conventions.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has recognised this and clearly knows that we need more than periodic Council of Australian Governments meetings to make our way through the coronavirus crisis, so he has formed

a national cabinet with premiers and chief ministers that will meet as often as needed.

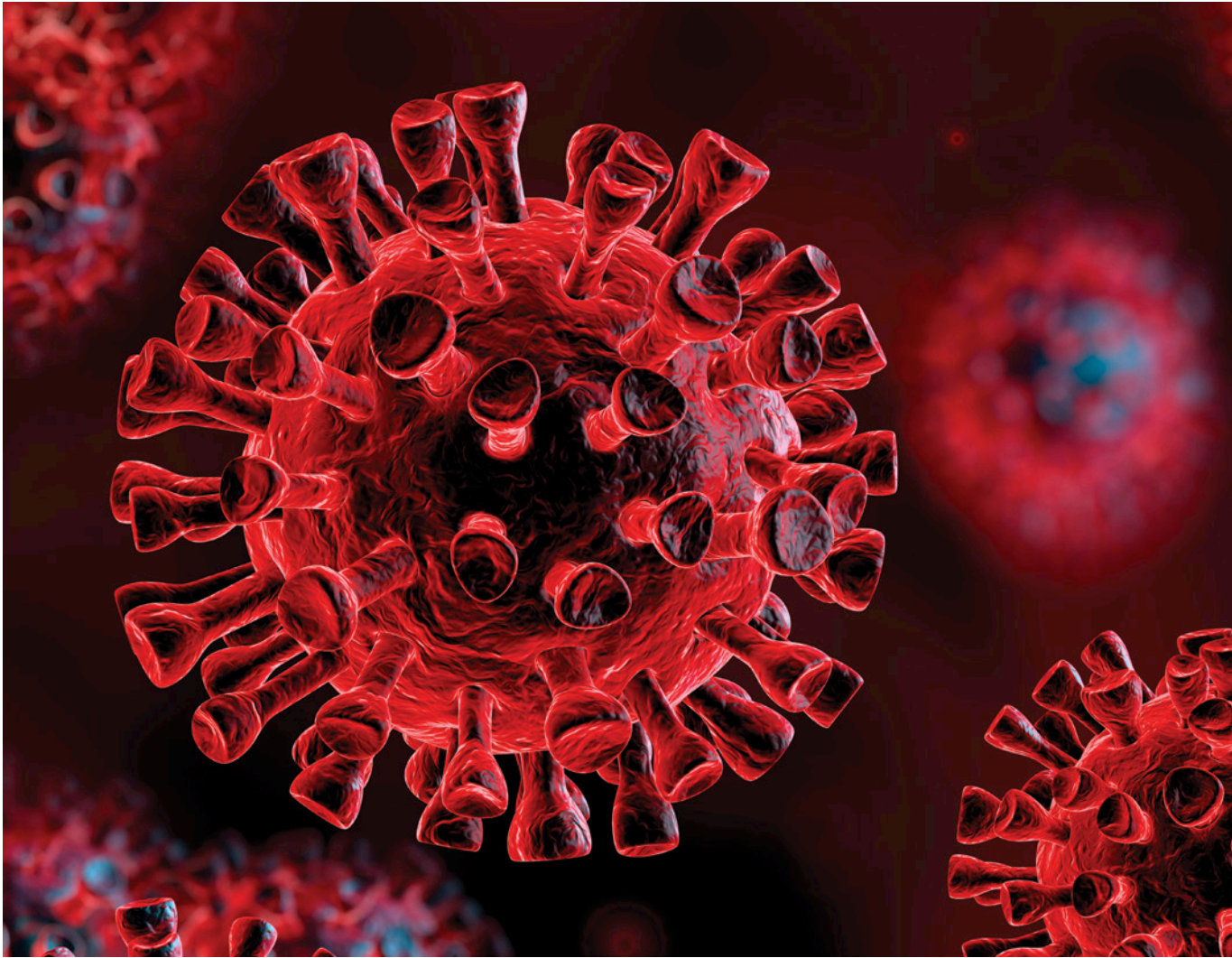
But there's more to managing crises nationally than creating greater coherence and coordination at the political level. Below the waterline, ministers expect public-sector leaders and agencies to work across portfolio boundaries and, like the public in their expectations of state–federal relations, have no patience for jurisdictional or portfolio-based boundary claims. That's a good thing.

As important as national leadership and improved inter- and intra-government operation is the return of the experts. In an era of dismissal of expertise and subject-matter knowledge, during crises governments and publics look to experts for guidance. We saw this with the rural fire service and emergency services chiefs during the bushfires and we are seeing it now with chief medical officers. These experts also become key to trusted communication with the public.

The good news is that the new national cabinet has support from respected experts and senior officials. Australia's chief medical officer, Brendan Murphy, and the governor of the Reserve Bank, Philip Lowe, both participated in Friday's emergency COAG meeting. And the new cabinet will receive continual expert advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, meaning this expert body will be a primary driver of national policy and action throughout the pandemic—which is all to the good.

This new national machinery will provide consistency of advice and decision-making. Once it gets into stride, we'll have less of the discordant actions and advice we were starting to see—like some political figures recommending particular measures such as school closures or avoiding handshaking, while others still promoted large public events like Melbourne's Formula 1 Grand Prix.

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That's a big step forward, and will help meet Australians' need for clear and consistent messages from our leaders during this time of anxiety and uncertainty. National decisions are complex, so we should expect the national cabinet to expand or to at least have sub-groupings that bring in key private-sector leaders—from the food and logistics sectors, for example.

But there are differences between what we saw during the bushfires and what we are already seeing with coronavirus, so there are new lessons to be learned.

The bushfires generated a great surge of community spirit, with neighbours helping neighbours evacuate, strangers opening their homes to and feeding people in need, and a whole set of small businesses from motels to restaurants offering accommodation and free food.

The recovery phase, now interrupted by the coronavirus,

has been bringing out similar qualities—from the Business Council of Australia's BizReBuild initiative that has the top end of town helping small businesses in regional communities, to the huge public donations to charities, like the \$180 million donated to the Red Cross for bushfire recovery.

Unfortunately, the coronavirus has already brought out some of the opposite behaviours: fights over toilet paper and panic hoarding show a tendency for this crisis to drive our community apart rather than be a source of unity. Disease outbreaks in history show that fear and anxiety drive people to narrowly selfish behaviours, even within families. And the unfortunate fact that social isolation is a primary public health response to the virus means that what we'll all need to do in coming days and weeks will make it harder to reach out and help those around us.

Toilet paper skirmishes may seem trivial, but there's real work for leaders at all levels of government and

society to do to tend to the sense of community and cohesion that we'll need during and in the recovery from this global pandemic.

As we saw with our firefighting volunteers, we know that Australian medical professionals—community nurses, GPs, staff and specialists in our hospitals and aged care facilities—will provide countless examples of service and compassion to their fellow Australians. Similarly, the behind-the-scenes work of people across essential supply systems—from fuel to food, and from health supplies to waste removal, will be invaluable.

The work these Australians do matters on a very practical level, but it will also matter as glue to hold our communities together. To encourage what Abraham Lincoln called the 'better angels of our nature', perhaps the communications campaign the federal government is putting together needs to portray their work. Healthcare workers and essential service providers must not be taken for

Healthcare workers and essential service providers must not be taken for granted; they need to be made visible to us as we live out weeks of social isolation.

granted; they need to be made visible to us as we live out weeks of social isolation.

And for all our public cynicism, the visible presence of our national leaders and their words and behaviour will be a source of comfort and reassurance.

In the middle of this national health, societal, financial and economic crisis, it's hard to look ahead. But we need to.

One thing we need to learn and keep from both crises is that events now routinely cross our fixed organisational boundaries. The national cabinet machinery will need to be kept and improved and probably exercised more often than we expect. This has redesign implications for the machinery of government at the federal, state and territory levels and is probably best thought through with the lessons from this crisis fresh, but outside the crucible of the crisis itself.

A challenge we have yet to comprehend or deal with is the

likely future where different crises overlap, with effects that compound and interact. My colleague Robert Glasser's report *Preparing for the Era of Disasters* shows how regional disasters will likely not be isolated but will cascade and escalate. An example we are experiencing now is that communities damaged by the bushfires are simply in a worse position to cope with coronavirus than those left unaffected by the fires. They will need particular attention in broader plans.

And one other major challenge will be how we tune our national systems to spot indicators of potential crises earlier and empower ourselves to act rapidly and decisively at the earliest stage.

A last element will be revitalising our international engagement. That means more investment in our diplomats and diplomacy as well as currently derided international organisations like the UN, NGOs and more prosaic ones like international standards and

regulatory agencies. This is a necessary reinvestment in experts, including in our public service.

It is also part of a recognition that, no matter how elegant Australia's national crisis machinery becomes, our interconnected world requires a sense of global community and a structured system for this community of nations to act together. ●

Article courtesy of The Strategist
<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/what-has-australia-learned-from-the-coronavirus-and-bushfire-crises/>





FIRST RESPONDERS LIVING COMPASSIONATELY

By Dr. Asa Don **Brown**

Ph.D., C.C.C., D.N.C.C.M., F.A.A.E.T.S.

First responders are often compelled to be compassionate, but not all first responders can relate to compassion. While the field encourages compassion, do you really know and fully understand what it is to be compassionate? There is often confusion around the word compassion and whether or not everyone is compassionate.

COMPASSION FATIGUE

It is not uncommon for first responders to develop compassion fatigue (a.k.a. vicarious trauma). Compassion fatigue occurs when an individual has become numb and disconnected to those that they are serving. As a public service organization, first responders witness a barrage of tragedies, traumas, and experiences that are associated with their day-to-day duties. Such events may cause cognitive, affective and physical arousal. Cognitive arousal involves

mental stimuli. It occurs when an individual is aroused by the inquisitive, his or her curiosity, and the state of questioning his or her surroundings. Affective arousal, could also be called emotional arousal, occurs when an individual is emotionally charged, excited or feeling tension. Physical arousal occurs when the body experiences an adrenaline overload. The overload may make an individual attempt risky behaviours; have negative emotions; intense feelings, stress, or anxiety;

and a host of other emotional related messages. Compassion fatigue and a heightened arousal can prove incompatible, driving the individual to think and perform poorly.

THE DISILLUSIONMENT

First responders across the board become desensitized and disillusioned by their surroundings. The tasks related to being a first responder can play havoc on the emotional wellbeing of an individual. First responders often become sceptical





about those they serve. They may even avoid showing empathy, compassion or a lack of concern out of fear of bonding with others. The disillusionment rarely stops at the badge, they frequently take the issues of the day with them. Thus, the home life of many first responders are immersed with the issues of their employment.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY'S IMPACT

For the first responder, engaging with others often becomes a cat and mouse game. They are always the detective questioning the intent of others. The high tech and social media world we live in only fuels the sense of disillusionment and distrust of others.

It is this same high tech and social media society, that often makes those that are involved in it feel disconnected.

Moreover, these feelings may make the average person feel as though we live in a narcissistic, self-absorbed and selfish society, but research reflects otherwise. In fact, recent research has indicated that compassion comes in a variety of forms. David Rand, Associate Professor of Management Science and Brain and Cognitive Science at MIT suggests that human behaviour instinctively encourages us to help others, make peace, and to avoid conflict. The Max Plank Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology conducted research where they observed 56 two-year-olds who were divided into three study groups. The researchers observed the children's reactions when an adult initially dropped one of two objects: either a can or a crayon; and that same adult struggled to pick it up. There was an observed increase in the dilation of the infants'

pupils when the adult was in distress and a decrease in the size of the infants' pupils when the adult's issue was resolved either by the infant helping the adult or someone else helped the adult. The research concluded that the infants' level of stress was alleviated when the adult had his or her need met.

UNDERSTANDING COMPASSION

As a first responder, you are often exhausted by the end of your shift. You seldom want to share compassion with anyone beyond those that you have an intimate relationship with. The drive to share compassion with others often lessens as the first responder serves. For the average community of first responders, there needs to be a reintegration of compassion into the community. There needs to be a shift; from feeling as though everyone might be a perpetrator, to feeling compassion for even the perpetrator.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world." Compassionate individuals are neither seeking compensation for deeds done nor are they acting in a way to grab the attention of others. Dacher Keltner at the University of California, Berkley stated "Compassion and benevolence are an evolved part of human nature, rooted in our brain and biology, and ready to be cultivated for the greater good." There is an innate neurological response that occurs automatically triggering compassion for others.

Whether or not you would describe yourself as compassionate; you are probably compassionate at least some of the time. The compassionate individual can relate to other's struggles and being down on their luck. A compassionate individual thinks about the needs and welfare of others. A compassionate individual is often socially and emotionally conscious. They are often aware of and responding to their personal surroundings.

BEING COMPASSIONATE

So, what does it mean to be compassionate? If we are compassionate, then we have a deep connection to others. We not only empathise with the plight of the

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other person, but we often have an emotional connection to the burdens and challenges that they are carrying. If someone is struggling with an addiction, we may feel compelled to urge that individual to seek help or to provide them resources that help them deal with their addiction. Research has shown that a large majority of addicts suffer from past traumatic experiences and severe life challenges. Sadly, there have been past philosophies that taught that those who suffer from addiction need not compassion, but rather a stern and unapologetic steering into the right direction. Addiction is neither an issue of willpower or lack of self-control. It is not a weakness in the moral integrity of an individual. It is important that we understand that those who struggle with addiction are often compulsively and obsessively driven by the issue. We should not have a visceral response that often arises from deeply felt feelings, but rather a heart filled with compassion and the capacity to feel sorrow for another's suffering.

COMPASSION BREEDS COMPASSION

We must have an unconditional acceptance and compassion for our own person. If I do not understand compassion, then how will I offer it unto another? Moreover, if I lack empathy for another or myself, then how will I be capable of showing compassion for others? Compassion is driven by the knowledge that we have within our own person. As individuals, we must be willing to have an unconditional acceptance and compassion for our own person. Furthermore, compassion is driven by experiences. Most individuals have experienced some form of compassion. We may have had a parent who showed compassion the first time that we fell down and skinned our knees. We may have had a compassionate teacher who encouraged us when we felt discouraged. Compassion often occurs when we least expect it.

Compassion is not simply having an understanding of another's plight, or sharing in their feelings, but rather, it encourages us to take action and to engage the positive behaviours and pursuits of another.



TEACHING AND ENCOURAGING COMPASSION

Compassion can be learned. For those with young children, you teach them lessons of compassion by living a life filled with compassion. If they witness you leading a life of compassion, then they too will live a life filled with compassion.

Even an adult can learn to be more compassionate. As a volunteer firefighter I have witnessed the loss of life, goods, etc. and it has left a profound impression upon my life. A person who freely offers their time gains a lot from this experience. My own children have been encouraged to be volunteers from an early age. If you take the time to volunteer for the most vulnerable and those in need, it will most assuredly leave an impression upon your life.

A key to being compassionate is active listening. If nothing else, be attentive and engaged. Do not let your own worries and struggles overshadow those of another. If you are attending to the needs of another resist the urge to cast judgement. Everyone has an opinion, and everyone is entitled to their opinion, but sometimes all a person needs is to be heard. It is okay to share your personal experiences when applicable but avoid conveying the impression that you have all the answers. For many who are struggling, they are commonly feeling weak and vulnerable, try to avoid making them feel as though you are superior.

We must become a society filled with compassion. Compassion is not only about having a sympathetic ear to hear, or a shoulder to lean upon, but it is about embodying the fullness of empathy. Compassion must come from an unconditional state.



If I am compassionate to my own person, then I am much more likely to be compassionate unto others. Likewise, if I live a life of select compassion, then I am going to show my own person limited compassion. Compassion should not be shown only to those who deserve it. Compassion should be embraced and shown to those who often are undeserving of it.

Compassion understands that we rarely have the whole picture. Often, people are struggling with a host of issues. It is important that you are unconditional in your approach. Be empathetic and be willing to meet an individual where they are at. Do not foreshadow an individual's life or issues to come; allow the individual to live in the present moment and to learn from that moment. Compassion is about being centred, attentive, and it requires active participation. The Dalai Lama once said, 'if you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion'. Compassion can be encouraged,

influenced, and facilitated through a variety of avenues including meditation, modelling, teaching, and active participation.

Research has clearly shown that the act of compassion has tremendous health benefits. It is well documented that when we give of ourselves in an altruistic way, we receive more pleasure, than when we receive. Being a compassionate first responder will make you more relatable to those that you serve. Ultimately, you will have a deeper understanding and willingness to empathize with others. Being a compassionate person will make your intimate relationships healthier.

Compassion is contagious; it encourages others to be empathetic. Dr. James Fowler and Dr. Nicholas Christakis' research documented that small acts of kindness and generosity have a ripple effect triggering a tidal wave of positive behaviours. If we encourage compassion, then we are ultimately going to have a more compassionate society. Carpe Diem! ●



ABOUT DR ASA BROWN

Dr. Asa Don Brown provides those he serves, the effective tools for communication, interaction, and essentials for living life abundantly. He has an applied way of helping those he serves, to transform negative thoughts into a positive way of thinking. His principles are based on his years of solid academic training and professional employment. Visit asadonbrown.com for more.

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The Australasian Institute of Emergency Services offers members of emergency service and affiliate organisations the opportunity to be a member of a professional body dedicated to the progression and recognition of the Emergency Service role in the community. The Institute acts as an independent forum where members can be heard and their opinions shared with other emergency service members. We provide a voice for the Emergency Services, by speaking out on issues that affect our members and the community in general.

THE INSTITUTE'S OBJECTIVES

- To raise the status and advance the interests of the profession of emergency management and counter disaster services administration.
- To represent generally the views and interests of the profession and to promote a high standard of integrity and efficiency in the skills of emergency and counter disaster administration.
- To provide opportunities for association among members and students to promote and protect their mutual interest.
- To facilitate full interchange of concepts and techniques amongst members.
- To bring to the notice of the public such matters that are deemed to be important for safety and protection of the community and to promote research and development of emergency services generally.
- To establish a national organization to foster international cooperation in counter disaster services administration.



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Diane Coon receives the AIES National Certificate of Commendation for her outstanding work as a Volunteer with Ambulance Tasmania.

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Dean Wotherspoon receives the AIES National Certificate of Commendation for his outstanding work with the Tasmanian Police SAR and his involvement in training and support of SAR Volunteers inc SES SAR.

SES DEPLOYMENTS TO ASSIST FIRE CAMPAIGNS

BLACK SUMMER: SES VOLUNTEERS IN KEY ROLES

While the ADF and overseas personnel were hailed as 'heroes' during the recent fire campaigns, SES volunteers were quietly working in key frontline and support roles.

Photos by Faye **Bendrups**

VicSES

Article courtesy of the Phoenix Journal, the official journal of the Victorian SES Volunteers Association.



Red skies at Swan Reach.

During major fire campaigns and the unprecedented devastation across huge swathes of the Australian landscape, SES volunteers play an important role in support to fire services, substitute road crash rescue crews, relief crews assisting other SES units, assisting VICPOL with traffic closures, and many have taken on other specialist responsibilities in roles such as Base Camp Manager, Staging Area Manager or in Incident Management Teams. In regional areas, many SES volunteers are also CFA volunteers, fighting at the fire front.

VICSES estimates that 124 out of 149 – or 83 per cent – of Victorian SES Units have been actively assisting during recent fire operations, which must surely be a record. For specialist roles, SES volunteers

are trained by DELWP as Base Camp Managers. Others are progressing through the AFAC Emergency Management Professionalisation Scheme (EMPS) which accredits them for higher level roles as Operations Officers, Incident Controllers, Public Information Officers, etc.

BASE CAMPS

DELWP/Forest Fire Management Victoria has several base camp packages ready to go at short notice all year round at their warehouse. They are made up of multiple containers with tents, kitchens and supplies, which can be loaded onto the back of trucks and transported quickly to where they are needed. Setting up and running a Base Camp is a complex logistics task. The camp provides all living requirements for

frontline responders for extended periods; including dining marquees, recreation marquees, individual tent accommodation, shower and toilet blocks, laundry, fuel tanks, water and sullage tanks, generators, lighting towers, etc. They are an almost fully self-sufficient mini-city, able to accommodate 350-400 firefighters and other personnel. The kitchen might provide 700 meals at each sitting and the laundry works around the clock. A Base Camp might take up to 3 days to set up and can expand as the fire campaign progresses. Base Camps were set up throughout Eastern Victoria, including at Swan Reach near Lakes Entrance, Tallangatta near Wodonga, Swifts Creek near Omeo, and in the Snowy River town of Delegate in NSW. ●





Rescued animals at Swifts Creek.



Staging Area Manager Chris Welsh and St John personnel at Tallangatta Base Camp.



Staging Area Manager Chris Welsh and St John personnel at Tallangatta Base Camp.



Burnt out farm near Nurran.

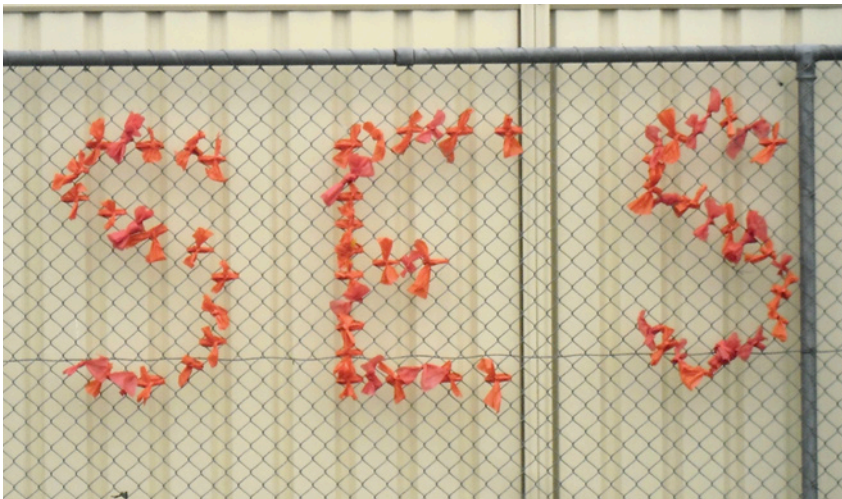




Tallangatta Base Camp.



Swan Reach Base Camp.



'Tie an orange ribbon...' Stratford locals acknowledge SES.



Red Box Farm.



Swifts Creek surrounds.



Burnt cars along the Monaro Hwy.

VFBV STATEMENT ON COMMONWEALTH PAYMENTS TO VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

VOLUNTEERS NEED TARGETED AID AND NOT JUST HANDOUTS

Adam Barnett

Chief Executive Officer Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV)

Our CFA volunteers are among the best firefighters in the world. Every day they put their communities first, from highly complex bushfires to specialist response and structural firefighting in highly urbanised areas. They are well trained, well exercised and are sought after across the country for their knowledge and experience. They are true professionals in every sense of the word, only as volunteers they do it without pay.

As their peak representative body, my organisation welcomes and appreciates the Federal Government's intention to provide financial support for volunteer firefighters. But we are worried that this initiative is misplaced and may have unintended and lasting consequences. There are far better ways to support volunteers, reimburse expenses and support their employers and their communities.

What we want is for the federal minister David Littleproud, state minister Lisa Neville and our CFA volunteer representatives to work together to ensure state and federal government support and assistance can be tailored and targeted to best support our incredible volunteer firefighters in Victoria.

Volunteers are proud to be volunteers; that is the ethos they live by every day. They work, train and deploy out of love for their communities. Their bravery and selflessness lie at the very heart of the enormous respect for and trust in them. Volunteers, their families, employers and friends all pitch in to support emergency management volunteers, financially and in kind. We work as a team with like-minded volunteers before, during and after disaster strikes.

The volunteer ethos defends millions of Australians, protecting lives and property from the ravages of fire and other emergencies, year after year. And if we look after it well, it will continue to do so long after this fire season is over. Therefore, it is vital we support and protect it in a way that does not undermine the very system and thinking on which we rely.

Long after announcements of new schemes, it is those on the ground who then have to make it work. Saddling brigades and volunteers with additional administrative bureaucracy while they sort out who should and shouldn't receive payment is an unwelcome distraction.

Instead, it is time we recognise and respect the incredible contribution that all emergency volunteers make to our communities. The most common complaint I hear is about the unfairness of CFA volunteers having to pay for a fire services levy that funds the very service they are providing to the state for free. Adding insult to injury is the expectation they then must fundraise for essential trucks and equipment to make up the difference between what the government funds and what they actually need to keep us all safe. Long-term investment in more fire trucks, equipment, personal protective equipment and clothing is needed desperately.

And from a Commonwealth perspective, how about recognising emergency management volunteers as a special occupation that would allow any personal expenses incurred during the year to be tax deductible just as employees can claim them now. In Victoria alone, the CFA volunteer

contribution is valued at more than \$1 billion dollars a year. Why not recognise part of that contribution as a tax-deductible donation?

And let's not forget the employers and business sector who are often among the unsung heroes during these massive campaigns. Many employers continue to cover wages for many of their staff deployed as volunteers, not just for fire but in relief and recovery. The establishment of federal emergency service leave that would allow employers to claim for additional entitlements for their employees to take leave during declared emergencies would inject much needed support to grow and sustain Australia's proud and enduring volunteer movement.

Our message is simple. We are not saying no to additional financial support. We are grateful for it. But please give CFA volunteers the courtesy and respect of involving them in the decision and working with us to deliver a more appropriate package that respects and protects our members and the precious volunteer ethos that Victoria relies upon. ●



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

Article courtesy of the Phoenix Journal, the official journal of the Victorian SES Volunteers Association.



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Membership forms are available online at www.aies.net.au

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To provide a professional body for the study of the roles and functions of Emergency Services and Emergency Management Organisations throughout Australasia, and the promotion and advancement of professional standards in these and associated services.

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- A Certificate of Membership.
- The opportunity to use the initials of the particular membership status after your name.
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