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MEDIA RELEASE – Attack on VFRS Members by AVBFB

This Association is astonished at the attack made on both it and its members in the Association of Volunteer Bushfire Brigades (AVBFB) newsletter published on Friday 7th October.

The Western Australian Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services Association (WAVFRSA) is the peak body representing WA's 2,700+ Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service (VFRS) members – serving their communities in 100 locations across the length and breadth of the State. 97% of these Brigades are members of our Association and pay an annual affiliation fee.

We are particularly concerned at their assertion that *“The two volunteer groups that have voiced their opposition to an independent Rural Fire Service, ESVA and VFRS, are volunteer groups managed by DFES hence it is not surprising that they would spruik the departmental position.”* The insinuation that the views and needs of our members are being ignored to push the position of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) is not just insulting, but completely erroneous.

It is becoming increasingly clear that Mr Gossage and the members of the AVBFB committee have little to no idea (and no interest in understanding) how a VFRS Brigade operates, and their increasingly ridiculous rhetoric is difficult for our members to comprehend. Relationships between VFRS and BFS volunteers at a local level are, in the main, effective and cordial. The current disrespect being shown to our members by the AVBFB Executive has the capacity to seriously erode this long standing working relationship – this is especially concerning given the extreme forecasts for the upcoming fire season.

Our Association has put forward a proposed structure of a sub-department of DFES that we believe could effectively, efficiently and sustainably support the mitigation and firefighting capabilities of the communities of Western Australia. The AVBFB has been vocal in its support of an independent Rural Fire Service, but has not provided any insight into what this would look like.

Their statement that *“The cost of this would be met from the current emergency services budget as the Rural Fire Service replaces DFES in the bush fire sphere. Cuts to DFES staffing and spending would provide much of the Rural Fire Service resourcing.”* is misleading and again shows the lack of awareness of how DFES operates. There are no management staff within the regional areas of DFES that solely manage and assist Bush Fire Brigades. The DFES managers are in place to train and support VFRS Brigades and their members, in addition to Volunteer Fire and Emergency Services (VFES) units. Any assistance provided to BFB is undertaken via local arrangements; in some circumstances in conjunction with Community Emergency Services Managers (CESMs) partly funded by DFES.

We look forward to the AVBFB releasing their proposed structure for an independent Rural Fire Service in the near future so that all of Western Australia – including members of the Bush Fire Service – can see what the future of firefighting under their model looks like.

All enquiries with regards to this media release should be directed to the Association office on 08 9377-8900.

Paul du Boulay
Association President

As Volunteer Firefighters we do **WHAT we can, **WHEN** we can, **WHERE** we can and to the **VERY BEST** of our **ABILITY****