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MEDIA RELEASE – Government’s Response to Ferguson Report

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.

This Association reiterates its position that the creation of a fully independent Rural Fire Service (RFS) would be a short sighted and financially irresponsible decision that would not serve the communities of Western Australia any better than the current arrangements. A totally independent RFS would limit the opportunity for multi-agency co-operability and raise impediments for our members to undertake their roles.

We strongly believe that a “Rural Operations” sub-department of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services would be a more efficient, co-operative, financially viable and effective path forwards. It would also ensure that the high level of training currently undertaken by our membership could continue.

We again reiterate our disappointment in the lack of consultation and acknowledgement of the members of the VFRS – who accounted for approximately one third of the firefighters on the ground at the Waroona/Yarloop fires – and their significant experience in mitigation works (through hazard reduction burns) and landscape firefighting. They are not only “urban firefighters”; and their views, opinions and experience needs to be taken into account when undertaking any review of firefighting practices and procedures.

Both the Ferguson Report and the Government’s response are silent on the issue of mitigation practices such as hazard reduction burns. It is the Association’s view that unless a tenure blind approach to mitigation is adopted, and the responsibility for ensuring mitigation activities are completed is moved to the Office of Bushfire Risk Management (OBRM); it will not matter how many Fire Services are created (independent or otherwise), the large scale, catastrophic incidents of the last 5 years will continue to occur.

There are also a number of concerns regarding how an independent RFS would be funded given that the majority of monies raised by the Emergency Services Levy (more than 75%) come from the metropolitan area that would not be covered by an RFS.

Dave Gossage and the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades (AVBFB) do not represent all volunteer firefighters; nor their views. The VFRS attend more incidents – including landscape fires – than any other volunteer firefighting service in the state and we see our affiliation with DFES as a distinct advantage in undertaking our roles and responsibilities. There are a number of individuals and lobby groups who are pushing their own agendas and these are not always to the benefit of the community of Western Australia.

This Association is, however, fully committed to working with the Government to voice the needs and opinions of our membership to ensure they are also heard; and to ensure the communities of Western Australia get the firefighting (both proactive and reactive) service they deserve, expect and pay for.

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****