



IN BRIEF



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Royal Commission

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission public hearings will commence on May 11. "The UFUA has been granted conditional leave to appear," says Peter Marshall. "Proceedings will be streamed live on the web."



chris maxwell

Numbers

There are somewhere between 120,000 to 150,000 volunteer firefighters in Australia. By comparison, about 11,000 professional firefighters are employed by fire services with very few assigned to manage bushfires.



Thanks fires

Give them a hand! The UFU Victoria Branch has published a website to give everybody the chance to thank the firefighters who worked so hard to protect lives and property during the February bushfires. Log on to thankyoufires.com

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Career firefighters are key to fully protecting all communities from fire

pic: chris maxwell

Vet better

Psychological evaluation should be considered to improve the recruitment of volunteer firefighters across Australia

The lesson from Victoria's calamitous Black Saturday is clear — vulnerable communities need better protection from bushfires. "Resources are important, but we also need a better selection process for volunteer firefighters," says UFUA National and Victorian Secretary, Peter Marshall.

Media reports suggest a prime suspect in the Marysville fire has been involved in the CFA. "It is important for the public not jump to hasty conclusions," says Peter Marshall. "Suffice to say, the Union has, for years, been telling all Authorities who engage volunteer

firefighters to use the most rigorous selection processes."

While psychological profiling would not necessarily produce a conclusive result in each case, it can indicate patterns of behaviour. "Career firefighters employed by the MFB and CFA undergo psychological screening," says Peter Marshall. "We say this is a recruiting tool that should be used for all emergency services volunteers as well." Currently, CFA volunteers only need to clear a police check and serve out a training / probation period before being integrated into a brigade.

POLICY FAILURE

The UFUA has issued repeated warnings about the likelihood of a bushfire disaster in southern Australia. In 2006, Tasmania Branch Secretary Richard Warwick wrote a detailed review of bush firefighting, focusing on the public policy failure that has left communities vulnerable.

"Richard's report gets right to the point," says Peter Marshall. "Fire services are far too reliant on volunteers in rural and regional

areas. Governments are also failing to implement meaningful laws that properly protect both residents and firefighters." "Richard identifies bushfire preparedness as the single most significant public policy failure in the nation," says Peter Marshall. "Most professional firefighters would agree." For all the details, download Richard Warwick's paper from the UFUA Tasmania website at ufutas.asn.au.