

PRACTICAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

**DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER FOR MEMBER
FEEDBACK - AUGUST 2025**

**Identifying challenges and
building an action plan to
strengthen community-led
emergency preparedness**

*Volunteers: the heart of rural
emergency response*



Practical Emergency Management

Draft for Member Feedback

This draft discussion paper has been prepared by Protect Our Farms members to highlight key concerns and opportunities for improvement in Victoria's emergency management systems. It reflects the lived experience of rural communities and the crucial role of volunteers in protecting life, property, and livelihoods. We are seeking additional input from members before finalising this paper into a set of prioritised recommendations and an Action Plan to guide our advocacy.

Introduction

Protect Our Farms is deeply concerned about the current outlook and planning for emergencies in Victoria. The critical role of volunteers is not fully recognised, particularly in planning and decision-making processes. We urge the State Government to involve community members—especially volunteers—at all levels of emergency management. The real stakeholders in emergencies are the community members who live through them.

Justification

We acknowledge that this is a significant statement, but it is grounded in experience. The current costly, bureaucratic, multi-layered management structure does not appear to adequately cope with major disasters. The top-down model leaves little room for local input. Emergency management committees are composed almost entirely of bureaucrats, with little challenge to prevailing approaches. There is rarely full, frank, and open discussion of operational shortcomings.

Examples include the 2022 Seymour floods and the 2025 Little Desert fires, among others. These management failures have been repeatedly identified through Royal Commissions, yet the system remains resistant to change. The current approach needs voices prepared to reflect realistic community concerns in a rational and responsible way—volunteer community members are best placed to do this.

Funding and Bureaucracy

Adequate funding of emergency services is a core responsibility of government. Protecting citizens is a basic duty. While improvements to the system will have cost

implications, financial accountability and bureaucracy at all levels of government require urgent review. We see potential for substantial savings and better allocation of resources to frontline needs.

Supporting Volunteers

Volunteers are the backbone of rural emergency response. Recruitment procedures must encourage and support them in practical ways. Currently, there are approximately 7,000 fewer active CFA firefighters than on Black Saturday, with an ageing volunteer base—a serious concern.

Protect Our Farms opposes the current 30+ year replacement cycle for CFA tankers, which demonstrates a lack of respect for volunteers. We call for a realistic 20-year replacement cycle.

We also support a proper funding model for SES units, similar to or aligned with CFA funding, so volunteers are not constantly fundraising for essential equipment and running costs.

Strategic Reserve of Semi-Trained Personnel

We advocate for recognising and incorporating semi-trained personnel—particularly farmers and contractors—into a formal reserve force during significant emergencies. Private fire units, heavy equipment, and skilled operators are an underutilised resource. With basic training and pre-planning, they could greatly enhance capacity when official resources are overwhelmed. Volunteers remain the most cost-effective element in fire suppression in rural and regional Victoria, and the State Government must recognise this.

Fuel Reduction and Fire Prevention Standards

We will advocate for a common standard for fuel reduction and fire prevention works across Victoria. Government departments and agencies should be held to the same standards expected of the private sector. Compliance with the intent of current legislation must be enforced, with significant improvement in fire prevention and mitigation practices within government-managed land.

Emergency Dispatch System

We support a full review of the current emergency dispatch system, including:

- Better integration of fire tower intelligence.
- Dispatching the closest brigades to incidents.
- Improving understanding of local topography to achieve faster response times.

Planning for Safe Access and Egress

At the state planning level, we recommend the government examine mandatory multiple access and egress points for subdivisions above a certain lot or physical area size, particularly in the urban–rural interface.

Forest Management

With the cessation of old-growth logging comes the loss of specialised equipment and skilled operators. This, combined with rising fuel loads, heightens the risk of mega-fires. Adequate planning, funding, and maintenance of access roads and tracks are essential. It is easy for city-based bureaucrats to overlook the reality that Victoria is one of the most fire-prone regions on the planet.

Insurance and Recovery

Given the increasing frequency of major fires, floods, and other extreme weather events, insurance is an essential component of recovery. Governments—state and federal—must explore ways to ensure affordable insurance is available to those who want it.

Opposition to the ESVF Levy

We are strongly opposed to the so-called Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund (ESVF) levy. Only a small fraction of the funds raised will support volunteer services, despite the “V” in its name suggesting a focus on volunteers. Essential emergency services—largely concentrated in metropolitan areas—are a fundamental responsibility of government and should be funded from general revenue, not through a separate tax. Using the word “volunteer” in the title to capitalise on public goodwill is deceptive and undermines trust. This levy unfairly burdens rural communities, small businesses and farmers, many of whom already contribute extensively through volunteer service and local emergency response.

****Member Feedback**** (Please write your comments, suggestions, or additions below, or email to fightback@farmprotect.org):