

Fundraising firefight

TOM MINEAR

CFA boss warns volunteers off chasing legal cash

THE Country Fire Authority has moved to ban Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria from raising money to cover the costs of its expensive legal battle to protect the fire service from a union takeover.

In a veiled accusation, CFA chief executive Frances Diver has also told the volunteer association that she fears money from the CFA's official donations trust may "be being utilised for improper purposes".

Ms Diver wrote to all volunteer brigades yesterday to remind them that all CFA

fundraising activities had to be authorised by the management of the fire service, and threatened to penalise volunteers who breached protocols.

"Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria is an association under the CFA Act. As such, all fundraising activities to support the VFBV must be authorised by the CFA," Ms Diver wrote to brigades.

"CFA has not received any requests for authorisation from brigades wishing to

undertake fundraising activities to support the VFBV.

"CFA is aware that members and brigades may have undertaken unauthorised fundraising activities ... This is a serious matter, and may open individuals up to penalties under the CFA Act and the Public Administration Act.

"All instances of unauthorised fundraising reported to the CFA will be followed up by the chief financial officer directly with the brigades involved."

Ms Diver said any funds raised by firefighters in CFA uniforms had to be used "for an appropriate purpose, and with appropriate accountability".

Ms Diver also wrote to VFBV chief Andrew Ford, raising concerns about the use of money in the CFA's donation fund, which has seven trustees, five of whom are nominated by the volunteer association.

"CFA relies on the generosity of the Victorian public to build its firefighting and emergency response capability," Ms

Diver wrote. "CFA seeks VFBV support to ensure that the trust is used ethically and appropriately. In this respect, VFBV can assist by continuing to communicate the distinct role and purpose of the trust to its members."

Opposition emergency services spokesman Brad Battin blamed the State Government for stopping volunteers from raising money.

"We have a Premier who continues to bully and intimidate instead of lead our state,

this time demanding volunteers they cannot do local fundraising," he said.

An online crowd-funding effort by the volunteer association raised over \$90,000, but it was reported last month that a Supreme Court action to stop the workplace agreement had cost over \$1 million in legal fees. The VFBV is planning to challenge the workplace deal at the Fair Work Commission, once it has been voted on by paid firefighters, and it has also flagged a potential action in the Federal Court if the agreement is certified.

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THE MAN TO TINSEL THE TOWN

MEGAN MILLER

FORGET boughs of holly — tinsel is the only decoration that decks Ciaran O'Sullivan's halls.

His North Geelong factory makes, stores and ships kilometres of it, ready to festoon retail premises with Christmas sparkle.

Away from Christmas, Mr O'Sullivan's main business at Glook is selling tinsel curtain to event stylists and planners for parties and retail window displays.

Glook is one of the last companies in Australia to still make tinsel onshore, especially the commercial-grade product.

Ciaran O'Sullivan embraces the season. Pictures: DAVID CAIRD



City drivers should 'pay road price'

TOM MINEAR

DRIVERS should pay to use Melbourne's roads in the same way they are charged for utilities like water and electricity, according to the State Government's infrastructure advisers.

Infrastructure Victoria has renewed its push for a radical road pricing scheme to replace what it says is an unfair and ineffective system of car registration, fuel excise taxes and tolls.

The plan was rejected by Premier Daniel Andrews in October after Infrastructure Victoria released its draft 30-year planning blueprint.

But in a new report, the independent body warns Melbourne's roads will grind to a halt without road pricing, saying more than half of all car trips will be in traffic by 2046 when the average peak-hour speed will be just 31km/h.

Clogged roads will cost motorists an extra \$1700 every year by 2030, delivering a \$10 billion blow to the state's economy.

The Federal Government this week pledged to investigate its own plan to slug drivers a fee for every kilometre they travel, in exchange for dumping fuel excise taxes and car registration costs.

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