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Our patron, Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau AC, Governor of Victoria

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Ms Sonja Terpstra MP  
Chair  
Legislative Council Environment and  
Planning Committee  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

24 May 2021

Ref: JH:nb2405

Dear Ms Terpstra

### Questions on Notice – Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline

Thank you for the email correspondence of 27 April 2021 from the Secretariat of the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee (the Committee) with Questions on Notice relating to the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria. These questions followed CFA attendance at public hearings on 11 March 2021.

Please find attached CFA's response to the Questions on Notice.

Any further questions may be referred to [REDACTED]

Yours Sincerely

[REDACTED]  
Chief Officer

Cc: [REDACTED]



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## Attachment - Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline

Response to Questions on Notice:

- Evidence presented to this committee points to the management and delivery of the CFA's vegetation management support service recently moving to a matrix management model. Among other things, this framework has led to some roles in vegetation management support being seconded to Fire Rescue Victoria.

CFA wishes to clarify that there has been no recent change to the management model for vegetation management.

Following Fire Services Reform, six Manager Community Safety positions were transferred to Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and seconded back to CFA, under the command and control of the CFA Chief Officer. Three project roles are also seconded from FRV. The majority of vegetation management staff are employed directly by CFA.

- Since the inception of this matrix management model, can you provide the levels of staff turnover in vegetation management support, with comparisons of turnover rates prior to transitioning to the matrix management-based approach?

As noted above, CFA confirms there has been no change to the management model.

Staff turnover in 2020-21 has been comparable to previous years since the Safer Together program was established. During 2020-21, four of 36 staff have resigned from CFA.

- There are concerns that increased tensions across the CFA's 21 districts has led to higher staff turnover, particularly in the pool of vegetation management staff.

CFA notes that staff turnover in vegetation management has not increased.

- Can you comment on the types of issues raised by VMOs?

From time to time, VMOs raise issues and opportunities for improvement such as planned burn planning and recording, checking of cultural and biodiversity values and use of joint systems with DELWP. This is a normal part of program delivery. CFA specialist staff provide support and instruction to assist VMOs carry out their tasks.

- How does line management through FRV secondees improve or otherwise delivery of the vegetation management program?

Seconded staff perform CFA duties under the command and control of the CFA Chief Officer. There have been no changes in the delivery of the vegetation management program as a result of the transfer of Managers Community Safety staff to FRV and their subsequent secondment to CFA.

- Vegetation management staff often work on fixed terms as a result of the project-funded nature of their duties and responsibilities. By not granting vegetation management staff ongoing positions, the CFA highlights that this arrangement impacts the capability and

capacity to ensure effective long-term and sustained vegetation management, fire prevention and environmental sustainability.

Following Black Saturday, 17 ongoing vegetation management positions were created. A further 21 fixed term positions were created through the Safer Together program in 2018. CFA will continue to seek to provide greater certainty of employment to staff, but this will be in line with the way the programs are funded.

- What would you like to see in terms of policy?

CFA considers there would be benefit in greater integration across the activities of all agencies with respect to biodiversity, weeds and pests, fire and ecosystem processes.

- Does this employment model create an environment where more staff are finding themselves responding to bushfires threats rather than engage in mitigation efforts?

The majority of staff do both aspects of emergency management, as is the case for all other fire management organisations across Australia.

- What are the barriers to allowing vegetation management staff ongoing positions within the CFA?

There are a mix of both permanent and fixed-term vegetation management positions in CFA. This mix is dependent on how the programs are funded.

- The introduction of Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) has resulted in frontline forest firefighters being locked out of FRV zones, therefore unable to carry out fuel reduction burns or fight fires in those areas. What is the basis for this arrangement?

Please refer to FRV and/or FFMVic.

- Does the United Firefighters Union wield too much power over emergency management practice changes as it applies to the FRV?

Please refer to FRV.