

Open Letter to CFA Management, District Controllers, VFBV and CFA Brigades in Renewable Energy Zones,

We are a collective of CFA Brigades in Districts 16 & 18 who have taken a position where our Brigade will not commit to operating on or around electricity generation and transmission infrastructure by taking a perimeter only defense position except for where lives or safety of public is threatened. Specifically, this is Renewable Energy Infrastructure (REI) being wind turbines, large-scale solar and battery installations, high voltage (220 kva plus) transmission lines and connection hubs.

Whilst initially communicated as "Industrial Action", whilst we still seek the objectives in the initial communication, this is not so much Industrial Action as it is Brigades simply giving notice of their stance and that this position is ongoing and that we request support from CFA, VFBV and other Brigades.

The fundamental reasons for, and objectives of this stance are :-

- to state our objection to the compromised safety of our members and community imposed by REI
- to draw attention to the immense negative and divisive impact these projects will have to both our people and their communities if they proceed, as well as the threat they impose to the livability of our homes, the viability of our family businesses and to food and fibre production capacity generally.
- to halt, and genuinely explore alternatives to, a multitude of proposed REI projects in our immediate region, none more impactful than the WRL and VNI West transmission lines which we genuinely believe paves the way to transforming the Wimmera Mallee and much of Regional Victoria's food bowl communities into a divided industrial zone with a significantly reduced population and fire fighting capacity.
- to determine where in the regions that this REI is accepted or tolerated and where it is **not**, irrespective of where Renewable Energy Zones are imposed,
- to establish clearly under what terms and safety compromises members and specific Brigades are prepared to continue donating their time and resources to support REI and non farming enterprise given the complete dependence on volunteer firefighters over much of the State,
- to avoid impacted members leaving brigades due to division and in protest to REI issues, further depleting CFA membership and response capacity
- to obtain genuine representation and consideration of our concerns at Technical Reference Groups and planning hearings as they pertain to REI projects.
- for CFA to ensure community information remains accurate and accessible with respect to safety of firefighting operations on and around REI and misstatements or inaccuracies by proponents of REI are appropriately rebuked and withdrawn

- to correct and remedy the injustice of the new Fire Services Levy funding model, particularly the negligible contribution by the RE Industry and the significant increase in levy payable by the farming community and volunteer members owning property, in stark contrast to the lack of spend on fire protection resources to the CFA in our regions and the expected increase in volunteer time commitment required from both call outs and training due to renewables expansion,
- to request immediate consideration and response by CFA on their position with respect to Brigade safety and compromise to fire fighting capacity imposed by Mineral Sands Mining in farming areas. Specifically, as they present further firefighter risks and impediments, and negatively impact water availability for firefighting. High water use requirements of dredge sand mining will likely put extreme pressure on the reticulated supply in our fire brigade zones. Firefighting often relies on this pressurised system via standpipes and augmented by strategic tank storages and we are conscious of impacts to pressure in the pipeline and interruptions to the replenishment of our tanks when firefighting,
- to obtain an immediate halt of any service or funding reduction to DEECA and Forest Fire Management fire services in regional Victoria which will place increased and unreasonable reliance on CFA and volunteers.

The CFA was founded out of commonality of purpose however with the rollout of renewables there is the creation of two categories of landholders, community members and therefore Brigade members, causing fragmentation and leading to much angst and division.

Those already with, or with the prospect of hosting and profiting from, renewables infrastructure on their properties, as well as others sympathetic to the expansive renewables rollout, are fundamentally at odds with those with no appetite to increase risks to our safety, host renewables or see our districts changed permanently and communities divided, with a focus on retaining their purpose of food and fibre production, and to remain living in a region not impacted by industrial energy generation.

We appreciate that various brigades will already have the impact of this division playing out and invariably have situations where members are compromised by involvement at different levels in the renewable energy industries, or where the implementation is broadly accepted as palatable.

The clear identification of these areas is essential both for planning purposes and to maintain volunteer members. Brigade areas provide a very clear picture on maps of where Renewable Energy Zones should not be. We are genuinely attempting to maintain the CFA institution in our region which has been and will be fractured further by the renewables rollout.

The adequacy of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) relating to High Voltage Transmission Lines was questioned and fire fighter safety concerns identified with WRL and VNI West Transmission Line projects nearly 12 months ago but is yet to be delivered, all the while

proponents of the renewables rollout have been able to play down safety concerns we have raised.

We need the support of the CFA to shine light on misinformation regardless of whether there are political ramifications of doing so, and to ensure SOPs pertaining to High Voltage Transmission, Mineral Sand Mines and Renewables installations err on the side of caution in proclaiming safe distances and procedures so that the reality of the risks they impose can be fairly assessed.

We maintain that brigades taking a perimeter only defence of renewables stance, where controlling an incident, will appraise both the risks of non action and the risks of action, and if considered sufficiently safe, take action where lives are considered jeopardised or external properties placed at higher risk due to non action. Similarly, our Brigade members will make the same assessment of their involvement at all operational turnouts.

We ask that the CFA and other members acknowledge our stance and if undertaking the same action, formalize their Brigade position with respect to availability for unrestricted protection of industrial renewable energy facilities, and communicate that position to their respective CFA District Command and Group Officers for their planning purposes pre fire season.

We can be contacted on the numbers below or by email at farov2024@gmail.com

Sincerely

Firefighters Against Renewables Over Victoria

Contacts

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Brigades

Callawadda	Gre Gre Village	Teddywaddy
Carapooee	Jeffcott	Traynors Lagoon
Cope Cope	Kooreh	Wallaloo East
Coonooer Bridge	Laen East	Watchem
Curyo	Litchfield	Wooroonook
Gooroc	Narraport	
	Rich Avon	

(confirmation pending further Brigades)