

Firefighters Against Renewables Over Victoria



18th of May 2025

The fire and flood cycle of regional Australia is a common one and Peter Knights, farmer and accountant, has seen the seasons come and go. Like many primary producers, he has a second string to his bow to provide an additional income in lean years. Australian farmers know they cannot afford to rely on the weather to be kind. Peter farms at Gre Gre, in the Victorian Wimmera, and this low rainfall, broadacre cropping country, has also seen its fair share of drought over the decades.

But now there is a threat to the region's safety, and it is brought about by the states poor planning and fiscal management.

Peter's family has farmed at Gre Gre for six generations. He is also the current captain of the village CFA Brigade and the deputy officer with the St Arnaud Group of Fire Brigades.

Peter said "our family and community has always worked through the threat and impact of fire, and the CFA, as I understand it, was born out of a commonality of purpose of those people that live here to defend themselves their properties, their homes, their stock and the natural environment, against what is a very common adversary in the form of fire. "

"Our district is dry for a long period of each year and invariably retains large fire fuel volumes over summer from cropping and grazing as well as large areas of remnant forest and vegetation."

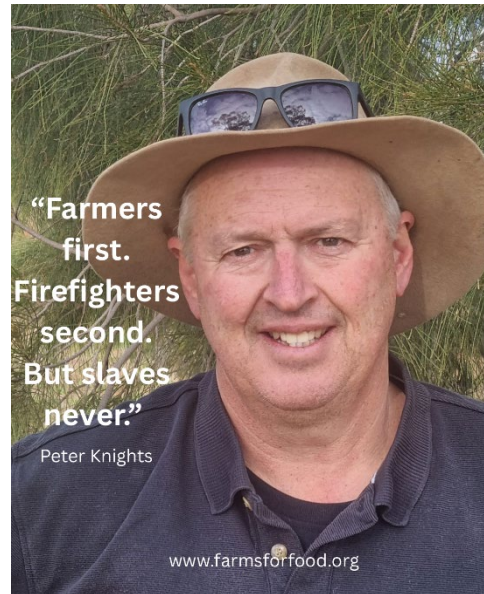
Since its original inception in the 1890, the Country Fire Brigade developed its own distinctive way of fighting fires in the Australian bush, and by 1914 a more formal structure developed of farmers and landowners fighting fires in the Bush Fire Brigade Association. The CFA was later established in 1945 to provide more legal protection for its fire fighters on the back of a royal commission conducted after the devastating Black Friday Fires of 1939.

Peter states that "the local volunteer brigades have evolved to be pretty good at dealing with fire events, but that security is tenuous should we fail to pay sufficient attention, fall away in number, or become apathetic and we are accepting of the reality is that there is no alternative for a paid Fire Service to maintain a constant all-encompassing protective service across the vast areas of our farming districts, given the importance of timeliness of turnout."

The nature of the Australian landscape, weather, and vegetation has always provided a significant risk when it comes to fire. The local people of the Wimmera, and surrounds,

spent large section of 2024/25 fighting the fires in the Grampians. But Peter is concerned about the lack of planning from the government when it comes to introducing future risks to their community; the introduction of significant electrical infrastructure and the emergence of several mining projects in the region. One providing an increased fire hazard and the other placing a new demand on water supply.

“The fundamental problem with these changes is the significant compromise to our safety and the absolute lack of capacity and appetite to defend these assets from the ever-present fire risk, as volunteers. Money is not the issue and paying us will not change that appetite. We are farmers first, firefighters second, but slaves never.”



Due to the semi- arid nature of the region, the local CFA's assess potential risks as part of their planning, and they have access to water from one of two sources; the pipeline water transported from the reservoirs in the Grampians or, for farming and bush areas, strategically located water tanks. The pipeline water, introduced several years ago, was developed to provide more water security for the Wimmera and Mallee people, but now it faces competing needs.

Peter said that “the current dry conditions highlight a major concern that the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline, which has operated for some 16 years providing great gains in our ability to produce food, is essential to underpin our ability to defend our region from fire with adequate water supply. There remains however, a finite water resource, and whilst we have co-existed with that for generations, we are genuinely fearful of overcommitting this resource for commercial gain from Mineral Sands Mining. The huge numbers of both intensively and broadacre farmed animals in our region, and the livelihoods of those that care for them, are placed at significant risk by the high-volume needs and corporate self-interests of the mineral sands mining industry which is driven by renewables ideology.”

Peter Knights believes that the state plans for the VNI-West transmission line and the emergence of a Renewable Energy Zone in the region will further negatively impact communities.

“All these installations [solar, wind and battery storage] have the propensity to start fires and inhibit safe firefighting which we see as untenable over fire prone regions.

Transmission lines at 500 kV are particularly dangerous, insofar as the flashovers than can occur when smoke plumes conduct electricity to the ground, are deadly.

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Where a fire's burning towards the lines, as will inevitably happen, and our job is to generally try and attack the sides of the fire, to get to the head to put it out, we will be forced to compromise our attack once we get within unsafe distances of the lines.”

Peter is now a spokesperson for FAROV Firefighters Against Renewables Over Victoria. The FAROV group which covers 24 CFA Brigades and a million odd acres from Callawadda to Woomelang, Laen East to Buckrabunyule in the Wimmera Mallee, have delivered their complaints and concerns to the CFA, VFBV, the VFF and to Parliament, to draw attention to what they see are the fundamental flaws and dangers of what is being proposed.

“We highlighted the inequity of the increase in Fire Service Levy in 2024 when the Allen/Pallas State Labor Government doubled the levy and at the same time gave the Renewable Energy sector a concessional public benevolent rate. They have repeated the dose this year with the Emergency Services Levy Legislation which we have all so strongly objected to in recent weeks.”

The Victorian Fire Service Property Levy was increased in 2024 from between 100-190% for all taxpayers depending on their property type. This week a new levy was introduced to replace the FSPL with the new Emergency Services Volunteers Fund. The rates of this levy are based on fixed and variable rates. The variable rate component of this levy is what is being opposed, as the State Government will increase variable rates to raise additional revenue to fund all the services being covered by the ESVF. Renewable Energy companies, who have been deemed as providing a ‘public good’ have received the same concessions as a charity organisation.

Peter states that “the current drought conditions are not the issue and shouldn’t blur the conversation or allow trade-offs for assistance or concession on levy amounts – we have droughts regularly and adequately manage our farms accordingly. This new levy is a thinly veiled redistribution of wealth as a land tax.”

As the spokesperson for FAROV Peter Knights is “asking CFA Brigades and members elsewhere to not resign, but take the same stance as we have, to protect regional Victoria as we know it and preserve our ag businesses and industries.”

“Whilst our Brigades and individual members will also determine their own reaction to this Levy, we also ask CFA Brigades Statewide to now nail their flag to the mast and support our stance of perimeter only defence of renewable installations, where they deem appropriate at their local level. This will, in theory, have a far greater impact to the budget than any levy increases and will support fellow CFA members in standing up for their districts.”

For more information on FAROV go to [Firefighters Against Renewables Over Victoria](https://www.farov.com.au)
www.farov.com.au

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