

6 May 2025

Sarah Mansfield MP

Member for Western Victoria

Via email: Sarah.Mansfield@parliament.vic.gov.au



Dear Member

A call to reconsider the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund

SouthWest Victoria Alliance (SWVA) is very concerned about the impact of the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund (ESVF) on rural communities and councils.

Our Alliance the six local councils of south west Victoria as well as significant employers Deakin University and Wannon Water. SWVA represents a region that more than 110,000 people call home.

We believe that this new levy is fundamentally flawed and disproportionately affects rural communities and primary producers. We have been calling on the government to reconsider implementing this levy, both directly and in public.

Disappointingly the government has not adopted this position. This significant change will be debated in the parliament on the 13 May in the ***FIRE SERVICES PROPERTY AMENDMENT (EMERGENCY SERVICES AND VOLUNTEERS FUND) BILL 2025***.

Our research and research by Rural Councils Victoria shows that rural landholders and our communities will bear the brunt of this new fund;

- On average, the change from the Fire Services Levy (FSL) to the ESVF will increase the collection of funds from rural areas for the State Government by 90% per year.
- This average of 90% equates to an additional \$140 million per year from areas across Victoria classified as rural.
- Residential landholders in rural Victoria (and by extrapolation, city residential landholders) will have, on average, a 31% increase from FSL to ESVF. In comparison, our calculations show that Primary Production landholders will have, on average, a 154% increase from FSL to ESVF.
- Three startling examples from our region: Colac Otway Shire will have an additional \$5.6 million, Corangamite will have \$4.5 million and Moyne \$5.9 million taken out of their communities every year.

Right now, when so many families are struggling with cost of living and many farming communities are facing drought conditions, rural communities cannot afford this increase. The South West of the state in particular has seen a number of seasons of drought, with the amount of support coming in \$13 million far outweighed by the amount that will come out of our region under the proposed levy.

This means flow on effects throughout country towns who are already struggling with attracting and retaining workers and growing their communities.

We recognise that regional communities across the state use and rely upon emergency services and in recent years there has been an increase in natural disasters and emergencies. Many of our communities have been struggling to recover from these very disruptive and traumatic events.



With such significant amounts slated to flow out of the South West, it is also very concerning that the funds are not hypothecated, creating no guarantee that what is taken from communities will go directly to the services in the areas where they are collected.

We are urging you to put forward and support amendments to this bill that;

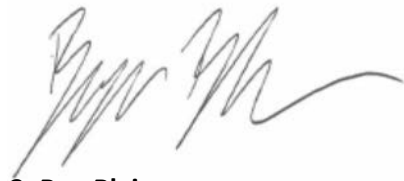
- Recalculate the levy so our farmers and rural businesses aren't disproportionately footing the bill for emergency services across the state.
- Utilise the State Revenue Office to collect the levy – taking the burden off councils.
- Guarantee that funds taken from rural communities will return to rural communities.
- Look at the vacant land category and why it has been excluded from the ESVF.

SWVA would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the points outlined.

To discuss this letter please contact Rhiannon Carter-Buntman at SWVA Secretariat on 0438 778 121 or myself, Cr Ben Blain on 0437 900 646.

Kate Downward at the SWVA Secretariat is available to provide further information or assistance to arrange a meeting. She can be contacted on 0400 430 584 or info@southwestvictoriaalliance.com.au

Yours sincerely



Cr Ben Blain
Chair, South West Victoria Alliance
Mayor Warrnambool City Council

