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22 May 2025

To:

The Hon. Vicki Ward MP
Minister for Emergency Services
Email: vicki.ward@parliament.vic.gov.au

Cc:

Mr. Mick McCarthy
Member & Network Development Representative
Victorian Farmers Federation
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The Hon. Ros Spence MP
Minister for Agriculture
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The Hon. Ingrid Stitt MLC
Minister for Mental Health
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The Hon. Natalie Suleyman MP
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The Hon Brad Battin
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The Hon Georgie Crozier
Shadow Minister for Health
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Re: Statement on the Mental Health and Economic Risks of the Victorian Fire Levy

The Australian Medical Professional Society (AMPS) and the Australian Firefighters Alliance (AFA) expresses grave concern over the Victorian Government's proposed 100-fold increase in the fire levy and its likely consequences for mental health, rural livelihoods, emergency services, and food security.

While well-funded emergency services are essential, the current levy structure is deeply unfair, placing a disproportionate financial burden on farmers and regional Landowners, already under pressure from drought, rising costs, and isolation.

Mental Health and Emergency Service Impacts

This levy risks tipping many rural families into psychological distress, depression, and suicidal ideation. With rural health services already stretched, the result could be a surge in preventable mental health crises.

Critically, the policy may also accelerate the decline in CFA volunteer numbers, undermining vital local emergency response capacity. This threatens:

- Timely bushfire response
- Road crash rescues
- Delivery of early CPR and defibrillation—all crucial for saving lives in regional areas

Food Security and Economic Consequences

Forcing farmers off the land through punitive taxation risks:

- Reduced domestic food production
- Greater import dependency
- Higher grocery prices for all Victorians

The policy could spark a chain reaction of negative outcomes—economically, socially, and in terms of health.

A Deeply Unjust and Short-Sighted Policy

The levy appears to be a regressive fix for poor state fiscal management, unfairly targeting

productive rural sectors to sustain urban-centric public spending. It sets a dangerous precedent that other sectors could soon be forced to follow.

This is not just bad economics—it's bad public health policy.

Call to Action

We urge the Victorian Government to:

1. Pause the implementation of the proposed levy changes
2. Enact a moratorium and refer the legislation to a Parliamentary Committee for full review and community consultation
3. Assess mental health, economic, and emergency service impacts
4. Engage meaningfully with affected stakeholders
5. Develop a fair, risk-based emergency services funding model

This policy, as it stands, risks causing irreparable harm. It must be reviewed before further damage is done to the health, livelihoods, and resilience of rural Victoria.

Signed,

AMPS Executive
Australian Medical Professional Society

AFA Executive
Australian Firefighters Alliance

