



2026 Catastrophic Fires Inquiry Briefing Paper for the Victorian Public 15 January 2026

This briefing paper explains why an urgent call for a Parliamentary Inquiry into the catastrophic 2026 Victorian fires is needed.

The Allan Government's new **Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF)** is increasing costs for Victorians while **cutting funding to frontline fire services**, at a time when catastrophic fire risk is escalating.

- Victorian home owners are paying twice as much ESVF tax
- Primary Producers (Farmers) will be paying three times as much ESVF tax.
- Allan Government has paused farmers increase until after the election.
- Victorias fire services will be receiving less funding under this new scheme
- 65% FRV's fire trucks are out of date and need replacing
- 800 CFA tankers are out of date and need replacing

2026 Catastrophic Fires devastation so far:

Homes lost: 163

Total Buildings lost: 500+

Loss of life and injury to people

Area burned: 404,000 hectares

Livestock losses: 15,000+

Critical assets impacted: Communication towers, drinking water, sewage treatment plants, major highways and railways.

1. What is the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF)?

On 1 July 2025, the Allan Government introduced the **Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF)**, replacing the former **Fire Services Property Levy**.

The ESVF was created by then Minister for Emergency Services **Jaclyn Symes**, now Victoria's Treasurer.

What this means for Victorians

- The average Victorian is now paying **around double** the previous emergency services tax
- **Farmers face increases of up to three times** what they previously paid
- Following backlash, the Allan Government has **paused the farmers' increase until after the election**, clearly to avoid electoral scrutiny



Despite these significant tax increases, **fire services are receiving less funding**.

2. Less Funding, Despite Higher Taxes

Parliamentary Gazette figures **submitted and approved by Jaclyn Symes** confirm that under the ESVF model:

- **Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV)** faces a funding loss of **\$114 million**
- **Country Fire Authority (CFA)** faces a funding loss of **\$41 million**

This means Victorians are paying **more**, but frontline fire services are receiving **less**.

3. Why Fire Truck Funding Matters

Victoria's ability to respond to catastrophic fires depends heavily on the **type, reliability, and capability** of its fire truck fleet. Combined both services, if fully funded offer maximum capability to protect Victorians during emergencies.

Urban Fire Trucks – “Pumpers”

Used by both FRV and CFA:

- Designed primarily for **structure fires**
- Capable of pumping **large volumes of water**
- Provide **asset protection** during bushfires
- Not designed for sustained off-road bushfire attack

CFA “Tankers”

- Carry **larger water loads**
- Pump water at lower rates to conserve supply
- Operate **off-road**, in forests and paddocks
- Fitted with **water deluge systems** to protect firefighters if overrun by fire



FRV “Pumper Tankers”

- Combine high-volume pumping with **increased water capacity**
- Can operate **off-road across grasslands**
- Capable of bushfire attack **and** urban asset protection
- Fitted with **water deluge systems** for crew survival

These trucks are critical during fast-moving grassfires and catastrophic bushfires that threaten towns and cities.

4. Victoria’s Fire Truck Crisis: An Ageing Fleet

Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV)

- FRV policy is to replace trucks after **15 years**
- **65% of FRV’s fleet (138 fire trucks)** are beyond this service life
- These trucks are increasingly **unreliable** and prone to failure
- Government funding of **\$40 million over four years** will replace **less than a quarter** of what is required

Country Fire Authority (CFA)

- **Over 800 CFA fire trucks** are beyond their service life
- Many of these are based in **regional and rural Victoria**
- These trucks are the **frontline defence** during catastrophic bushfires
- CFA has **around 165 new trucks on order — less than a quarter** of what needs replacing

This shortfall leaves vast areas of Victoria exposed during peak fire conditions.



5. Where Is the ESVF Money Going?

The ESVF has expanded to include services that were **previously funded from general government revenue**.

This shift means:

- Victorians are now directly paying for services the government once covered
- The Allan Government frees up **consolidated revenue**
- This allows the government to redirect funds toward managing its **escalating state debt**

In effect, the ESVF is not strengthening fire services — it is **shifting costs onto the public** while cutting frontline capability.

Summary

- Victorians are paying significantly more under the new Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund
- Despite higher taxes, FRV and CFA are receiving less funding
- Hundreds of fire trucks across Victoria are beyond their safe service life
- Current replacement funding will fix less than a quarter of what is required
- Ageing and unreliable fire trucks increase risk to firefighters, communities, and property
- At a time of worsening fire seasons, frontline capability is being actively weakened

The ESVF has failed its core purpose. Instead of strengthening Victoria's fire services, it has shifted costs onto the public while cutting investment in the very resources needed to respond to catastrophic fires.

This approach leaves Victoria less prepared, more exposed, and facing unnecessary risk as future fire seasons intensify.

Demand a Parliamentary Inquiry. Sign the e-Petition now!