



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Belmont and Tingira Heights Fire Stations**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 27 May 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 27 May 2013  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Chester, Darren, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr CHESTER** (Gippsland) (13:20): I accept the invitation of the member for Parramatta to stand up in support of the CFA volunteers and professional firefighters in my electorate of Gippsland, and I acknowledge the very first point of the member for Shortland's motion, where she encourages the House to acknowledge the outstanding contribution made by both full-time retained firefighters and volunteer firefighters within our community. I take this opportunity, particularly in the wake of the extreme conditions that the people of Gippsland endured over the past summer season, to recognise the volunteers from right across Victoria who rallied to support my community in a time of great need, particularly in relation to the Seaton and Heyfield bushfires, where tragically one life was lost. Extensive property damage was sustained across the region, and the impact on wildlife and stock throughout the Heyfield, Seaton and Glenmaggie area was very significant. So I take this opportunity to thank the volunteers who travelled from right across Victoria to support our local crews in our time of need.

The role of our CFA volunteers, in particular, in rural communities is something that deserves recognition in this place. I appreciate the words of the member for Riverina, who spoke about the important investments being made by the New South Wales state government in supporting volunteer services in his community. There has been a similar situation in Victoria, where the state coalition government has increased the investment in new services, in terms of vehicles, and in physical infrastructure, in terms of new sheds for our volunteers.

At the start of this year, I encouraged Gippslanders to consider what contribution they could make to the community and whether they would be prepared to volunteer some of their time to join a community organisation. I can think of no better organisation to recommend to people in my community than the CFA. Right across Victoria, we already have about 60,000 CFA volunteers. The Country Fire Authority hierarchy would be the first to acknowledge that their workforce is quite an ageing workforce. A lot of their volunteers are getting towards the more mature stage of their volunteer life, and they are trying to encourage more younger people to participate.

There is only one thing that it costs you to become a CFA volunteer, and that is your time. The CFA itself provides all the training and equipment, and that is obviously very important for the proper conduct of its roles. I would argue that your time is the most generous gift that you can give. If a millionaire came to a local CFA station and provided them with \$10,000, it would be a warmly received gift, but the millionaire knows he has still got \$990,000 left. When you give your time, you do not know exactly how much time you have got left. It is a great contribution that many country people make in donating their time to the CFA and to other community service organisations in my electorate.

The CFA is one of the most highly respected and iconic community service organisations in our nation, and I encourage Gippslanders who have thought about perhaps donating their time to any community service to consider what role they might play within the Country Fire Authority. There are roles within the Country Fire Authority which go beyond the most obvious operational ones of firefighting, accident rescue missions, crew leadership, communications, all forms of emergency response, incident controller, pump operator and so on. They are the active roles within the CFA, but there are also non-operational roles, where perhaps people who might not necessarily have originally thought of themselves as a CFA volunteer can play a very important part behind the scenes, whether it is delivering education throughout our communities, fundraising, public relations, catering for the people on the ground at times of emergency or working in the areas of management and recruitment. There really is a job for everyone in the Country Fire Authority in Victoria.

But the benefits that I mentioned before, of helping to keep our community safe and protecting our region, extend beyond the feeling of doing something worthwhile for your community. Being a CFA volunteer allows the individual to also develop a range of skills which will serve them well in life. They learn leadership and other professional development skills. They receive accredited training which is recognised throughout the world. Australia's volunteer fire services are very highly regarded throughout the world and are often called upon to serve in the United States or New Zealand or in other fire grounds. It is also an opportunity for them to work as part of a team and to meet new people in regional communities, which is often very important.

I commend them to point (1) of the motion which acknowledges the outstanding contribution made by full-time, retained firefighters and by the volunteer firefighters in our community. In doing so, I encourage people who are listening today, whether they be in Gippsland or throughout our nation, to consider whether they could take on a volunteer role in our firefighting services to make their own contribution, to make a difference in their local community. It is an outstanding service. It is something we should be very proud of in Australia and I know that members of this place on both sides of the House value the contribution our firefighters make. I congratulate the state governments for investing in these services. I encourage them to continue to do so in the interests of community safety.