

DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES — VOLUNTEERS — CODE OF CONDUCT

**690. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the minister representing the Minister for Emergency Services:**

I refer to the mandatory online code of conduct training for all Department of Fire and Emergency Services volunteers, which commenced this week.

- (1) What consultation took place with DFES volunteers in the formulation of the code of conduct, and what are the consequences if a DFES volunteer refuses to sign up to the code of conduct?
- (2) Is the minister aware of the potential impact this code of conduct may have on already plummeting volunteer numbers?
- (3) Are DFES volunteers afforded the same protections as DFES employees under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2003 to allow whistleblowing for improper conduct; and, if not, will the minister commit to extending these protections?
- (4) Will the minister refer the code of conduct to the State Solicitor to ensure that volunteers' constitutional rights to implied freedom of political communication and expression are protected?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. Honourable member, there must have been an administrative error because I thought that this was a question asked by Hon Jacqui Boydell. I am confident it is a question that the member has asked, so I will provide the answer.

- (1) The code of conduct is a mandatory requirement under section 9 of the Public Sector Management Act 1994. The code of conduct course forms part of the induction for all employees and Department of Fire and Emergency Services volunteers. Bush fire brigades are not included unless the brigade is managed by DFES. New employees and DFES volunteers are required to complete the training as part of their induction. Existing staff and volunteers are expected to complete the course. There is no sanction for not completing the course. There is no requirement to consult volunteers in the formulation of the code of conduct.
- (2) There is no evidence that training or specifically code of conduct training is an issue in DFES volunteer recruitment or retention. The DFES code of conduct course takes approximately 15 minutes to read and complete. The code of conduct training sets out the expected standards of conduct and behaviour of all employees and DFES volunteers, which supports an inclusive culture conducive to the attraction and retention of volunteers.
- (3) Section 13 of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2003 affords the same protection to everyone who makes a public interest disclosure, DFES volunteers included.
- (4) DFES has already sought legal advice from the State Solicitor's Office, which found no legal impediment to rights of volunteers within the code of conduct.