

6 August, 2020

## KAP BACKS FIRIES IN PUSH FOR NEW DEPARTMENT

Katter's Australian Party Leader Robbie Katter has backed calls for the creation of a new Department of Fire Services to safe-guard the state from future fire events and provide better representation to outback volunteers who protect more than 93 per cent of the state.

On Saturday the Rural Fire Brigade Association of Queensland (RFBAQ) voted unanimously at a special meeting in support of the new department, citing "multiple failings in support for the 1,400 rural fire brigades" across the state as the catalyst for their calls.

Mr Katter said he'd backed the RFBAQ's pleas as he, and the broader KAP, held growing concerns about the "Brisbanisation" and "bureaucratisation" of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services since it was restructured in early 2019.

He said KAP offices had been in receipt of numerous complaints from the public regarding the centralisation of decision-making processes within the rural firies' chain of command and also the Blue Card debacle that demanded all volunteers sign-up for a Working with Children card.

Other major issues, as outlined the by the RFBAQ are:

- The disempowering of brigades to put "fire on the ground" during fire season
- Issues with rural fire service paid staff being unable to progress beyond the rank of Superintendent in the regions
- The low roll-out rate of newly-built rural fire trucks
- A lack of legislative support for volunteer firefighters
- The fact that of the \$750.4 million budgeted for the broader QFES in the 2019/20 State Budget, only \$39.1 million has been provided to the rural service.

Mr Katter said the \$30 million given in the last financial year to rural firies in Queensland was embarrassing and negligent, especially given that the NSW rural fire service's annual budget was more than \$200 million.

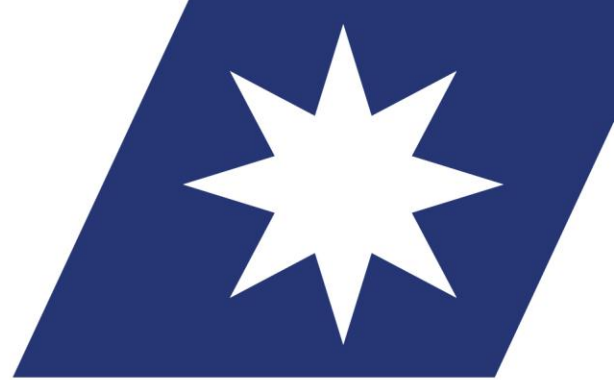
"It is not difficult to see, from numbers alone, that Queensland is deeply underprepared for the sort of catastrophic fire season southern states faced at the start of this year," he said.

**ROBBIE KATTER**

**Member for Traeger**

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## MEDIA RELEASE



"At the end of the day, the 32,000 people who make up the rural fire service in this state are volunteers and they do what they do to protect their communities.

"The fact that they are not only disempowered and underfunded by the government, but also persecuted as we saw with the mandated Blue Cards rules, is absolutely shameful.

"If a brand new department, as has been proposed by the RFBAQ, is what's needed to clean house and get things back on track then we support that 100 per cent."

Mr Katter has also provided his, and the KAP's, support in principle for five strategies being pursued by the RFBAQ to improve the operation and sustainability of the 1,400 volunteer brigades across Queensland.

These include QFES full-time, part-time and volunteer firefighters being able to claim PTSD as part of Worker's Compensation and the establishment of a "Conditions of Service" memorandum of understanding for rural fire brigade volunteers.

**—ENDS—**

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