



Barry O'Farrell MP

Premier of NSW

Minister for Western Sydney

MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW GOVERNMENT ACTS TO PROTECT VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell and Minister for Emergency Services Michael Gallacher today announced the NSW Government has put in place legal protections to ensure emergency services volunteers involved in current bush fire fighting operations are not penalised by their employer for giving up their time.

"We have had an early start to the fire season and the scale of yesterday's bush fires is simply staggering," Mr O'Farrell said.

"The NSW Government – and indeed every citizen of this state - is deeply grateful to the volunteer and salaried firefighters involved in protecting the lives and property of others across NSW.

"Without the help of the thousands of volunteers we would not be able to effectively fight fires around the state.

"That is why the NSW Government is today taking steps to provide employment protections to these volunteers during this bush fire emergency.

"Today I have signed an order ensuring volunteers who participate in operations relating to the current bush fires will be protected from victimisation by their employers.

"I praise the vast majority of employers who do the right thing by granting emergency services volunteers leave from their regular employment while they are deployed on operations.

"Sadly, there have been cases in the past where a small minority of volunteers have been subjected to victimisation by an employer, through the loss of their employment or some other penalty such as a financial penalty.

"That is unacceptable – and this order triggers an offence meaning an employer can be fined if they are found to have taken negative action against a volunteer and allows a court to make directions, including that a sacked worker be reinstated.

"While most employers support their employees' service to the community, this order is designed to give our volunteers peace of mind that their regular job is safe while they are involved in essential emergency service work."

Mr Gallacher has paid tribute to all firefighters who are involved in the current operations around NSW.

“We depend on volunteer organisations such as the Rural Fire Service and the State Emergency Service to protect our lives and property during natural disasters,” Mr Gallacher said.

“These brave men and women respond to emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“The NSW Government is granting these protections to the volunteers so they can carry on this essential work – without fear that they will be penalised by their employers.”

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