

INTERNATIONAL FIREFIGHTERS' DAY

Mr BROCK (Frome) (12:35): I rise to support this motion put forward by the minister. Our communities, particularly in the regional areas of South Australia, benefit from the services of full-time and volunteer firefighters. Permanent firefighters who are members of the South Australian fire service, along with many other members, provide their services across all regional South Australia through the CFS organisations. These people are always there whenever there is a need for their services. They risk their lives to protect the lives of others; and they protect their properties and the properties of others. These services are not only offered during normal working hours but at any time of the day and throughout the year, 365 days a year.

International Firefighters' Day is a small way to pay tribute to those who may have lost their lives or suffered some form of injury, and to pay tribute to the great sacrifice they make during the course of their actions. However, the beginning of International Firefighters' Day was born from a tragic event that took place in the Linton community, Victoria, in 1998, when crews were called to fight a large wildfire, which brought numerous units across, including volunteer firefighters from the Geelong West Fire Brigade.

During the fire, five water tankers required refilling. It was during one of these occasions that there was a very sudden and violent wind change. As the change eventuated, it cut off the tanker that was refilling with water, tragically resulting in the truck being engulfed in flames and killing all five firefighters in that vehicle. After that dreadful incident, a volunteer lieutenant and firefighter, J.J. Edmondson, started the journey to what is now known as International Firefighters' Day.

This event, along with letters of support and the fellowship that flowed from the tragedy spurred J.J. to set a new year's resolution for 1999, namely, to organise an internationally recognised symbol of support and respect for all firefighters and a date on which this could be coordinated worldwide. For many weeks, J.J. coordinated email discussions with national and international communities, seeking comments and suggestions for an appropriate date and symbol. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with great support for the chosen date and the symbol of ribbons.

As mentioned earlier, firefighters in most European countries celebrate their day on 4 May as a day of fire service, as well as St Florian's Day. St Florian's Day is known worldwide and has been traditionally celebrated for 150 years in Europe. Often communities remember human sacrifice through observing a minute's silence. For International Firefighters' Day in 2002, an inaugural sound-off was conducted to reflect on the commitment and sacrifices of firefighters worldwide in a truly poignant manner for emergency service workers. Due to the amazing support of the sound-off in 2002, there is now an annual sound-off on the first Sunday of every May.

One of the most significant symbols of International Firefighters' Day is the red and blue ribbon. This ribbon is cut precisely five centimetres long and one centimetre wide, with the two separate colours co-joined at the top. J.J. Edmondson chose red and blue because red represents the element of fire and blue represents the element of water. Coincidentally, red and blue are also the colours recognised worldwide to signify emergency services. Therefore, red and blue was the best choice of colour to recognise the international holiday. The ribbon is traditionally worn on the lapel (otherwise known as the fold of fabric on a shirt), but is not limited to that spot. The red and blue ribbon is a simple yet effective way to show support for International Firefighters' Day.

While there have been many incidents across the nation that can be mentioned, I would like to mention a couple that recently occurred in close proximity to me, namely, the Bangor and Pinery fires, and not forgetting Black Wednesday and other incidents across the whole of the state. During these incidents, the volunteers not only risked their own lives but, on many occasions, helped to protect their own properties and those of their friends. As was mentioned earlier, firefighters have to contend not only with naturally caused fires but also with those fires that are deliberately lit. This is a tragedy. Whoever sets these fires may think it is a joke or that they are being funny, but I can assure people that that is far from being the case.

This loss by many people causes not only financial loss but, very importantly, on many occasions the loss of great memorabilia that may be the only remembrance of a loved one. Again, have had personal experience where a fire has gone through and people have lost the only photos they may have had of a deceased family member or friend.

Firefighters also have to attend issues unrelated to fires. They also attend road accidents with CFS volunteers and other emergency services. I can speak personally about an incident in which my late wife was killed, just 10 days before Christmas some years ago. People ran out to the accident and, even to this day, 25 years later, those people still vividly remember that day. Even after 25 years, people still talk about it and have vivid and tragic memories of that particular day. That incident affected not only my own family but also the volunteers from the SES, the ambos, St John's, the fireys and others. We have to remember that the volunteers and firefighters not only attend fires and accidents but also have these tragic memories for many years, and it can really affect their mental health. As I said, there have been many occasions where a firefighter has gone to a motor vehicle accident only to find out that it involves a close friend or, even worse, a family member.

Another sector of the community that needs to be greatly acknowledged is the numerous small business operators who have volunteers working for them. When the bells and the sirens sound, there is a requirement that these people attend an accident or a fire, and they go out there immediately. They do not hesitate. They do not say, 'I'm still working.' They do not consider that. They get into their vehicles, they get onto the fire units and they go out there immediately. This can often be a great disruption to the operation of a business, especially when the volunteer may continue to get paid by that business. I think this is something the general public does not understand in metropolitan areas where we have full-time firefighters. However, in the country, volunteers may suffer a financial loss. Alternatively, businesses may continue to pay them even though it is a financial loss for them.

We need to remember and congratulate those who have served previously and show gratitude to all those who have given their time and risked their lives to protect the rest of us and our communities. Again, I commend all the CFS volunteers across the electorate of Frome, the MFS full-time people stationed at Port Pirie and all the other volunteers who serve. I offer my heartfelt thanks to them for volunteering their services. I congratulate them and give them my 100 per cent support throughout the year. I commend this motion to the house.