

Tanker loans prove 'chaos'

PETER HUNT

Forest Fire Management Victoria sent out an appeal to borrow up to 30 tankers from the NSW Rural Fire Service and another five from the SA Country Fire Service, to offset the grounding of its G-wagons and Unimogs.

A NSW RFS spokesman said it "was approached by FFMVic to identify any available firefighting vehicles that could be loaned".

"The RFS has offered a mix of light and medium tankers that are in the process of being decommissioned and are surplus to current operational re-



quirements. FFMVic has not yet indicated whether they intend to accept any of the vehicles offered.

"The proposed support involves vehicles that will not affect the RFS's preparedness or firefighting capability in NSW."

The SA CFS confirmed it was supplying five vehicles.

Sources close to the fire services said FFM had sought the interstate vehicles in the wake of discovering cracks in the chassis of its own 290 G-Wagons and structural issues in its 60 Unimogs.

Most of the FFMVic vehicles have to undergo rigorous inspections before they are returned to service, with sources saying two G-Wagons had already been written off as their

chassis could not be repaired.

Opposition public land management spokeswoman Melina Bath said borrowing interstate vehicles was "further evidence of the chaos that is occurring within our fire services ahead of a dangerous fire season".

She said Environment Minister Steve Dimopoulos "keeps assuring us that everything is fine and that having around 350 FFMV trucks offline has had no impact on our firefighting capability."

"Now we learn they're on a scavenging expedition interstate to try and fill the gaps.

The least the Labor Government can do is be transparent with Victorians and answer some basic questions: how many trucks will be written off, what is the cost of this failure and when will all trucks or their replacements be back in service?"

The Victorian government would not confirm how many firefighting vehicles it intended to borrow from interstate, but did state Victorian taxpayers were covering the operational cost of running interstate tankers.

The government also stated bushfire response agencies regularly shared fleets.

However industry leaders contacted said that while interstate crews and their vehicles often came to each other's aid, it was rare for agencies to simply hand over vehicles.

The office of Minister Dimopoulos, who is responsible for FFMVic resourcing, said: "The Victorian community remains well protected from the threat of bushfire due to the incredible work of all our agencies – CFA, FRV, VICSES and FFMVic."

"The safety of our firefighters is paramount, that's why regular safety inspections of vehicles and equipment are so important."

Weathering the weather

Marnoo farmer Trent Carter's crops are still holding on despite a brutally tough season. Recent rainfall, though welcome, came a few weeks too late to be a complete game changer. His Cyclops barley, sown into heavy black soil and lentil stubble, is expected to yield 6–6.5 tonnes a hectare, even after a frost caused some potential losses. Picture: Zoe Phillips

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Harvest receivals ramp up

NIKKI REYNOLDS

Australia's winter grain harvest has passed the 10.6 million tonne mark with Western Australia and the eastern states gathering pace.

Grain receivals in Queensland, NSW and Victoria reached 1.24 million tonnes last week, a 35 per cent increase, lifting the seasonal total to 4.78 million tonnes, with NSW accounting for the bulk of deliveries.

GrainCorp reports that NSW is leading grain receivals with 3.05 million tonnes, followed by Queensland on 1.55 million and Victoria on 180,600.

A GrainCorp spokesman said wet and cooler weather had slowed winter harvest progress in Victoria last week, with most activity concentrated in the northern Mallee, Swan Hill, and northeast regions, although harvest was expected to ramp up in the coming weeks.

Farmer Matt Curtis, west of Mildura, was harvesting wheat and barley this week and said crops were phenomenal given the small amount of rainfall this year.

He said wheat was yielding 1.7 to two tonnes a hectare, and barley was yielding two tonnes and more a hectare.

"This area has had about 110mm of rain for the calendar year so far and the crops have survived on subsoil moisture from last year," he said.

Meanwhile, Western Australia's grainbelt continued at full speed, with CBH reporting total harvest deliveries of 5.79 million tonnes, up from 3.18 million tonnes last week, representing an 82 per cent increase in just seven days.

At Esperance, farmers have delivered 1.67 million tonnes for the season so far, followed by Kwinana North 1.26, Geraldton 1.20, Albany 0.83, and Kwinana South 0.82 million tonnes.

CBH chief operations officer Mick Daw said several sites set records, including Chadwick, Narnghulu, Mullewa, and Mingenew, while Eradu recorded 5848 tonnes in a day.

Claims DAFF on corruption radar

TALLIS MILES

The saga over the fate of a video of footage from inside a Victorian abattoir has taken an unexpected turn.

Animal activists claim the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has been referred to the national corruption watchdog over its involvement in handling an initial complaint against Eurobin-based Game Meats Company.

In a statement published on Instagram, the Farm Transparency Project has accused DAFF of tipping off managers at the Game Meats Company, after FTP reported alleged animal cruelty at the abattoir to the department in May last year.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission was founded in July 2023 by the Albanese Government. It is an independent Commonwealth agency established to investigate and report on serious or systemic corruption within the Australian public sector.

When asked about the referral of DAFF to NACC, a spokesperson said: "While the commission encourages people to report corruption issues to us, and we can investigate corruption issues on our own initiative, we do not publicly disclose information about the receipt, status or existence of individual referrals."

"Nor do we comment on the subject matter of the referrals we are assessing, or investigating, as to do so may pre-

judice operational activities or unfairly impact people's reputations."

As of November 5 this year, the NACC has received 1045 referrals this financial year with 32 preliminary investigations underway and a further 38 corruption investigations underway. There are currently three NACC matters before the court.

The Weekly Times also questioned DAFF about the referral to NACC.

"The department has a robust regulatory framework and takes regulatory action, where appropriate," a spokesperson said.

"The department takes seriously any allegations of misconduct ... and refers them to the appropriate authorities where necessary."

The Game Meats Company abattoir video saga dates back to May last year when the Victorian abattoir was granted an injunction against the publication of a 14-minute compilation video of footage obtained by animal activist group, Farm Transparency Project.

At a Federal Court trial in August last year, the court heard Farm Transparency Project directors trespassed onto the Game Meats Company of Australia's property on seven occasions between January and April 2024, going under the property's fence before installing hidden pin cameras at the facility.

Following the trial the injunction was struck down with \$130,000 in damages awarded. However, a year later the injunction was upheld on appeal.