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VOLUNTEER RESPONSE NEEDS BETTER CO-ORDINATION

The Brumby Government should establish a central volunteer co-ordination unit to ensure the skills of Victorians volunteering after an emergency are fully utilised, the Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition said today.

Meeting with volunteers from Blaze Aid, set up in the Kilmore-Kinglake region to rebuild fences after the February bushfires, Coalition Leader Ted Baillieu and Nationals Leader Peter Ryan said Labor's ad-hoc approach to emergency volunteering had undermined the great response by volunteers.

Volunteer groups such as Kevin Butler's Blaze Aid along with many other organisations have done an absolutely incredible job, but there is something wrong when offers of assistance from many Victorian volunteers are falling by the wayside under the Brumby Government.

Many Victorian volunteers who offered their skills and energy after Black Saturday did not have their calls returned because the government had no central agency to respond to the overwhelming generosity of the community.

Following the February bushfires, the government created confusion by suggesting various ways for volunteers to respond.

A single government contact for volunteers would ensure the generosity of the community is fully utilised.

Victoria needs and values volunteers during and after emergencies, but people wanting to volunteer don't always know where to go, so there should be a single access point so the government can direct volunteers to where they are most needed," Mr Baillieu said.

More than 8,000 kilometres of boundary fences have been destroyed during the bushfires, prompting a massive volunteer effort across Victoria's fire-stricken communities.

With the support of the Victorian Farmers Federation, Blaze Aid has been instrumental in providing labour but the cost of replacing materials, estimated to be at least \$32 million, has been largely borne by farmers.

The Opposition has urged the government to contribute more towards the cost of rebuilding not only boundary fencing but also fencing separating private land from national parks, yet it continues to turn a blind eye.

The Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund has contributed to this critical area of need, but the Brumby Government can and should do more to help.