

29 June 2020

## Australian Volunteer Support Trust meets to direct support to families of lost volunteer firefighters

The Advisory Panel for the Australian Volunteer Support Trust (AVST) established in the wake of the summer bushfires to support the families of volunteers who die in the course of their duties will meet for the first time this Wednesday 1 July to ensure arrangements are in place to support the first beneficiaries of the trust – the families of the volunteer firefighters who tragically lost their lives last bushfire season.

The Panel, chaired by The Hon Jeff Kennett AC (chairman of Equity Trustees), includes Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO, David Gonski AC, Jennifer Westacott AO and Lisa Paul AO.

“We are honoured to have this responsibility to support the families of volunteers who pay a terrible price of helping protect and preserve our communities during disasters,” said Mick O’Brien, Managing Director, Equity Trustees.

“It is our aim, through the AVST, to provide support – particularly where there are dependent children with education needs or families that have lost a breadwinner through this selfless service.

“We know that the recent bushfires will not be our last – and the coronavirus pandemic has shown we will face further disasters as a country. It is up to all of us to look at what we can offer and how we can play our part to build our community’s ability to respond and recover. A trustee company is built to last and already legislated to serve the best interests of its clients – which is why we are a logical part of any recovery effort,” he said.

Equity Trustees, together with the Business Council of Australia (BCA), established the [Australian Volunteer Support Trust](#) and the [Community Rebuilding Trust](#) in response to the recent catastrophic bushfires but designed them to support any future disaster and emergency event recovery efforts.

The two trusts have raised nearly \$10 million, with funds being directed in part to bushfire affected communities via the [BizRebuild](#) program managed by BCA and to support the families and children of emergency volunteers who died in service during the fires.

“The benefit of an independent professional trustee leading the structuring of charitable trusts like these means they are designed with the benefit of 130+ years of experience in trust law dealing with charitable trusts. We have the ability to ensure the funds are invested and professionally managed to grow the corpus – and to ensure all granting of distributions are managed through proven processes, which is what people who donate should expect in return for their generosity,” said Mr O’Brien.

However, he said the main aim of the AVST was to provide a Trust that people could have confidence in, and which would provide some relief to the families and children it was designed to benefit.

“We manage more than 600 charitable trusts – many are nearly as old as we are. These two trusts have been structured so they can receive funds from the widest possible range of sources – including other charitable structures such as private ancillary funds. This maximises the ability of the AVST to channel maximum funds to families impacted by disasters.

“The Australian community has rightly been concerned recently about charitable funds making their way to the intended beneficiaries as efficiently as possible. With Equity Trustees at the helm of the AVST, we will make sure of it now and in perpetuity,” he concluded.



## **MEDIA INQUIRIES**

**Alicia Kokocinski**

General Manager – Marketing & Communications

03 8623 5396 / 0403 172 024

[akokocinski@eqt.com.au](mailto:akokocinski@eqt.com.au)

Equity Trustees was established in 1888 for the purpose of providing independent and impartial Trustee and Executor services to help families throughout Australia protect their wealth. As Australia's leading specialist trustee company, we offer a diverse range of services to individuals, families and corporate clients including asset management, estate planning, philanthropic services and Responsible Entity (RE) services for external Fund Managers.

Equity Trustees is the brand name of EQT Holdings Limited (ABN 22 607 797 615) and its subsidiary companies, publicly listed company on the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX: EQT) with offices in Melbourne, Bendigo, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, New York, London and Dublin.