

Worry over manning fire tower

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CONCERNS have been raised that staffing at a Pyrenees fire tower critical to watching the hills surrounding small towns is undermanned. Volunteer firefighters in the area are pushing the Department of Sustainability and Environment to ensure townships and brigades are not left in the dark about potential fire threats. Jim Browne, a former brigade captain at Landsborough for 16 years, said it was lucky nothing had happened last summer. The tower's location and proximity to several surrounding towns meant any potential fire threat could be identified and responded to reasonably quickly, Mr Browne said. "Mt Lonarch has a really good view to the east of the Pyrenees to the Mt Cole ranges and it's lucky nothing happened," he said. "It means those towers are on it straight away and can pin-point the location and notify brigades and aircraft." There were cutbacks in the manning of the tower. It wasn't manned as it should have been ... it wasn't full-time. "DSE acting midlands district fire manager Gary White said fire towers were just one of several options available to authorities to watch for fires. "For example, fires are also reported via aerial reconnaissance using specially trained air observers," he said. "DSE will continue to be prepared using a combination of fire tower surveillance and aerial reconnaissance, along with reports from the community." Mr White said the area was adequately protected last summer and will be this summer. Western Victoria MLC John Vogels met with Mr Browne to discuss concerns about the fire tower during the week. "(It) is a huge concern for local firefighters and members of the community," Mr Vogels said.