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Victorian Opposition Leader Claims Ignorance of Offensive Protest Slogans

July 15, 2025

— Categories: Human Rights



Victorian Opposition Leader Brad Battin has denied awareness of offensive slogans displayed on a fire truck at a Werribee rally, sparking debate over accountability and the Liberal Party's stance on inflammatory rhetoric. The protest, attended by Battin and United Firefighters Union (UFU) president Peter Marshall, was marred by misogynistic phrases

targeting Premier Jacinta Allan, raising questions about leadership oversight and the Labor government's controversial policies.

The rally in Melbourne's west opposed the Labor government's Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF) levy, a new tax replacing the Fire Services Property Levy (FSPL), designed to fund the Country Fire Authority (CFA), State Emergency Service (SES), and other agencies. Handwritten slogans on a CFA fire truck – including “ditch the bitch” and “Truck Jacinta” – were widely condemned as sexist and inappropriate. Battin, speaking to *9News*, stated, “I never saw the offensive words and find the language unacceptable.” Deputy Liberal Leader Sam Groth defended Battin, saying the trucks were parked separately from the rally, suggesting Battin was unaware of the slogans at the time. The UFU also distanced itself from the slogans, with a spokesperson stating, “This language is unacceptable. Mr Marshall and the UFU condemn it in the strongest possible terms.”

Critics argue Battin's presence at the rally, without an immediate condemnation of the slogans, reflects poorly on the Liberal Party's leadership and its respect for women. Acting Premier Jaclyn Symes accused Battin of “turning a blind eye to sexist slogans”, adding, “This pathetic display tells you everything about the Liberals' deep-rooted issues with respecting women.” Police Minister Anthony Carbines called the slogans “appalling”, criticising Battin for failing to call out the behaviour. The CFA confirmed that the slogans – reportedly written by female volunteers from the Pura Pura brigade – were being removed and emphasised that they do not reflect the organisation's values.

The ESVF levy has sparked widespread discontent, particularly among farmers and emergency services volunteers, who claim the new funding

model increases costs for primary producers by up to 150 per cent. While this figure reflects concerns raised by industry groups rather than official government estimates, it has fuelled strong opposition in regional communities. Battin has pledged to scrap the tax if elected. However, the incident has underscored the need for stronger leadership and messaging to ensure protests remain respectful and free from sexist or inflammatory language. The Liberal Party will need to address these missteps to maintain public credibility ahead of the 2026 election.