

Combined Column in *The Fireman* - December 2007

Joint Meeting of Associations/Meeting with Senior Volunteers

On Sunday 25th November, a joint meeting between members of the VRFBA State Council and the VUFBA Governing Body was held. This meeting took the place of separate scheduled meetings of both Associations.

Items of business from brigades and Regional Councils were discussed by all delegates and appropriate actions agreed upon. Many items of business will now be taken up with the CFA on behalf of brigades and their volunteers.

The meeting adjourned at 11.00am to allow the delegates and other senior volunteers from around the State to discuss a growing level of concern at an apparent erosion of volunteer rights and a growing disconnection between the CFA Board and Management and volunteers, and the failure of the CFA Board and management to acknowledge or act on these concerns.

Some of these concerns centre around the Board's decision to negotiate the Career Firefighters EBA which continues to include clauses adversely impacting on volunteers despite previous assurances that these clauses would be removed; ignoring the recommendations from the Structural Apparel Working Party and making a compromise decision on structural PPC; stipulating that brigades had to work under the CFA ABN by 30th June 2008 and their failure to discuss this decision with the Associations; a suggestion from the CFA Board that a legal deed be drawn up between CFA and the Associations protecting the rights of volunteers; lengthy delays in addressing many volunteer issues.

At the conclusion of the meeting, those in attendance gave unanimous support to a course of action aimed at overcoming the current unsatisfactory position.

The two Associations returned to their meeting and confirmed their understanding of, and concern about, the growing lack of confidence in the CFA Board, CFA Management and the Government's commitment to protect volunteer rights and the CFA as a volunteer based culture. The meeting also authorised VFBV to communicate this growing lack of confidence to stakeholders and to determine any other appropriate action as may be required.

Unified Body Discussion Paper

In September this year, VFBV released a discussion paper outlining proposed changes to unite the VFBV, VUFBA and VRFBA as a single unified body to represent all CFA volunteers. The paper was issued to all Brigades, Groups and Association Regional Councils requesting discussion and feedback by end of December this year. A number of responses have been received and these will be used to develop a final proposal and position paper for release by early February 2008 with the intention of being ready for vote on the issue at a joint meeting of the VRFBA and the VUFBA in April. Feedback is important and Brigades, Groups and Regional Councils are reminded to give this issue their consideration and provide feedback on this important issue.

Single Stage Ladder – Medium Pumper

Brigades which have a Medium Pumper issued to them will be pleased to know that the CFA Ladder Review Committee has recommended to the Chief Officer, that a 4m single stage ladder be approved for these appliances.

Brigade Owned Vehicles

It is no wonder that we become frustrated with the CFA from time to time. Since 2002, the Associations have been requesting the CFA to convene a meeting of the Brigade Owned Vehicle Working Party to discuss policy issues surrounding these vehicles and the amount of the allowance paid to brigades. We are still waiting for the CFA to set a date for the Working Party to meet.

Administrative Support Needs of Brigades Project

This project is in its final stages with the consultants Kokkin & Brown providing CFA with their final report.

The consultants met with a wide range of stakeholders whilst undertaking the project including many members of brigades throughout the State. It was generally agreed the administrative support to brigades can be considerably improved and that there is a wide variation in the delivery of this support across the State.

Kokkin & Brown have valued the honesty and openness of all stakeholders involved throughout the project. They also recognised there was a significant concern that the project would not eventuate into the required changes but at the same time CFA staff and volunteers had consistently given their time and shared their thoughts in a cooperative and positive manner.

Bill Rodda and Bob MacDonald represented the volunteer bodies on the stakeholder reference group.

The full report can be accessed at brgdadminspt@cfa.vic.gov.au or at Brigades Online.

VFBV Prepares Submission

The Minister for Police & Emergency Services, Bob Cameron has requested County Court Judge Gordon Lewis to carry out an enquiry in to the reasons why it has taken so long to select a new structural personal protective ensemble for firefighters both paid and volunteer.

Along with CFA, MFESB and UFU the volunteer bodies were each invited to present a submission on the matter. We decided that VFBV would prepare a submission on behalf of the Associations and such submission would have the full support of VRFBA and VUFBA.

The VFBV submission goes into the reasons we saw for the extended and repeated delays and is supported with significant supporting documentation. We have also submitted a statement from an expert witness in Brett Hume who was the Assistant Commissioner in NSW who chaired the PPC procurement committee for the NSW Fire Services. Brett is now a volunteer member of Nyora Fire Brigade in South Gippsland.

On Thursday 13th December we have been invited to meet with the Judge to provide an oral submission in support of our written submission.

Peter Bishop, Hans van Hamond, Bob Horner and John Kennedy have all provided much of the documentation supporting the submissions.

Joint Research & Development Committee Meeting

A meeting of the Joint Research and Development Committee was held on 2nd December. The Committee is made up of six representatives from each Association along with research staff from CFA.

The Committee was briefed on the need to put forward to the Federal Government a new bid for funding of the Cooperative Research Centre into Bushfires as the current funding runs out in 2009. Since the introduction of the CRC some 70 Equivalent Full Time Researchers have entered the field of Bushfire Research as well as 44 PHD or Masters Students.

Information on the various research projects can be obtained on the Bushfire CRC website which currently receives some 20K hits per month.

Updates were provided to the meeting on the personal flotation devices being developed for marine brigades, Emergency Medical Response project and a new fire resistant curtain material for covering tanker windows etc.

Hoses have recently come under consideration again with trials being conducted on percolating hose for use in particular applications. Major fires in past few years have led to large quantities of hose being burnt at significant cost. Research is also being undertaken on cross woven hose as opposed to the transversely woven hose we currently contract for.

2008 Open Forum

VFBV and the two Volunteer Associations will again be conducting a Joint Open Forum and representatives from all CFA brigades are invited to attend.

VFBV, the VRFBA and the VUFBA, encourage all brigades to send delegates to the Open Forum to receive direct feedback on the operations of VFBV and the two Associations, and brigades are given the opportunity to raise directly any other issues of interest or concern.

The Open Forum will be held at the Whitehorse Club, 298-336 Burwood Highway, East Burwood on Saturday 29th March 2008, commencing at 1.00pm. Further details will be provided to all brigades.

The Chairman and Board Members of VFBV and the Presidents and Members of the VRFBA and the VUFBA, wish all volunteers, CFA members and families, a very happy and safe Christmas and New Year.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - February 2007



From the VFBV Chairman, Gary Lyttle, AFSM.
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

WELCOME TO ANDREW FORD OUR NEW VFBV CEO

As mentioned in December, Andrew Ford has now commenced work as our new CEO for VFBV. At the time of writing this column, Andrew has been with us for one week and already has been involved in many briefings and discussions including VFBV Board, VRFBA Executive Committee, VFBV Volunteer First Working Group, CFA CEO and CFA Chairman. Andrew has indicated a strong desire to hear the views from volunteers across the State and has already arranged to attend several Region Council meetings during February. There will be opportunity for many of you to talk with Andrew at the forthcoming Junior Championships later this month, and the Urban and Rural State Championships in March and April, or at Regional meetings.

Andrew has asked that I remind people that we are keen to identify interested volunteers who have specialist expertise in areas that will be important for VFBV and the Associations as we strengthen a unified voice of volunteers. In addition to the working parties already formed, two immediate priorities include raising the public profile of VFBV, improving VFBV web site and exploring ways to improve information flow to and from volunteers. If you think you have specialist expertise that may be of assistance please contact VFBV.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Peter Davis and Bob Macdonald for the terrific work they have done over the past months juggling a shared responsibility for various VFBV CEO responsibilities as well as managing respective Association matters. Andrew, Bob and Peter are now working closely to ensure strong coordination across a large list of issues warranting the collective attention of VFBV and the Associations.

A busy time ahead but now an even stronger team to help us address the many challenges.

AUSTRALIAN FIRE SERVICE MEDALS

Congratulations are extended to the recent recipients of the Australian Fire Service Medal awarded in the Australia Day Honours. This is the highest award available in our fire service and is well deserved recognition of outstanding contributions by these members.

Our congratulations to:

- Edwin Colverson AFSM (Yarra Junction)
- John Dodemaide AFSM (Melton)
- Terrence Hedt AFSM (Little River)
- Chief Fire Officer Greg Allisey AFSM
- and, Kevin Knight OAM (Linton)

A BUSY DECEMBER AND JANUARY

December and January have seen some of the most significant fire activity that Victoria has experienced and the efforts of our CFA people and many other agencies have been outstanding. The contribution made by volunteers attending the fires, those that stay behind in critical support and logistical roles and the support given by families and the employers who enable the time to be given is truly remarkable and a priceless asset to this country.

There has deservedly been very strong public recognition of the enormous contribution made by volunteers and with this recognition various questions and media interest about how the volunteer effort can be recognised and perhaps rewarded. The topic of recognising the vital efforts and contribution made by both volunteers and also employers needs deep and focused consideration and this is something that VFBV is already actively considering. The view held by the overwhelming majority of volunteers is that we do not want nor expect payment for services. What we do want is to be respected, to have a real say in matters that impact on us and to be adequately supported so that we can get on with the job we have to do. We also expect to be treated equally regarding involvement in decision making on matters that affect volunteers. This basic and fundamental respect is at the heart of our concern with the current CFA firefighters EBA that gives virtual power of veto to the United Firefighters Union on matters that also impact on volunteers.

I expect that there will be increased attention to the issues relating to volunteer and employer recognition in the forthcoming months and VFBV will continue to play an active and key role in these discussions, both in the media and through other forums.

OPEN FORUM – SATURDAY 14th APRIL, 2007

A reminder of the Joint Open Forum between VFBV, VRFBA, VUFBA and representatives of all CFA brigades, being held Saturday 14th April, commencing at 2.00pm. The Open Forum will be held at Quest Knox Serviced Apartments, 137 Mountain Highway, Wantirna.

I strongly encourage all brigades to send delegates to the Forum to receive direct feedback on the operations of VFBV and the two Associations, and to raise and discuss items of concern or interest. It would be appreciated if brigades could advise VFBV or either Association of the number of brigade volunteers attending by 28th February.

DECEMBER 2006

NEW CEO APPOINTED

I am pleased to announce that the Board has appointed Andrew Ford as the new CEO of VFBV and Andrew will take up the position in February next year.

Many of our volunteers will know Andrew as he was previously the General Manager of CFA's Westernport Region and brings to the role a vast experience with both volunteers and CFA.

Andrew has a clear understanding of where VFBV wants to position itself in the future and has committed himself to achieving that target.

The Board and myself look forward to working with Andrew to achieve our aims over the next few years.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Board has set up a working party to look at the key issues for VFBV that were identified at a Strategic Planning meeting held on the day prior to the last Board meeting.

Quentin Turner will chair the Working Party with membership to include Peter Marke, Bernie Pearson, Hans van Hamond and Max Maher. The Working Party will have the power to co-opt other members.

I am sure the experience and knowledge of the group will assist VFBV to position itself to address these key issues.

We are also keen to develop a register of interested volunteers who could be available and bring specialist skills as members of future working parties of VFBV.

MEETING WITH EMERGENCY SERVICES COMMISSIONER

On 27 November the Board met with Bruce Esplin, Emergency Services Commissioner as part of an ongoing process of consultation. Items discussed included:

- Volunteers views arising from Mr Esplin's meeting around Victoria
- Creation of the Catering and Accommodation Project
- Progress on Fire Safe Victoria Report
- State data base for mapping
- Availability of water for firefighting
- Valuing Volunteers Committee Volunteer Survey
- Wildfire Project
- Frankford Brigade water supply initiative

PASSING OF ORIGINAL BOARD MEMBER

All Board members were saddened by the untimely passing of original VFBV Board member Rick Hill from Paynesville in Region 11.

Rick had been a great contributor whilst a member of our Board and only resigned to accept a position on the CFA Board when he saw there would have been a conflict of interest between the two roles.

The large attendance at his funeral in Bairnsdale was a fitting tribute to the life and times of our friend Rick Hill.

VOLUNTEER HEALTH & WELLBEING PROGRAM

Following confirmation of funding from the Valuing Volunteers Project, CFA will undertake a Volunteer Health and Well Being Program which will also extend to cover SES, Coastguard and Life Saving volunteers. The Program will be voluntary and will be available to all CFA volunteers and staff.

VFBV was invited to nominate a representative to a Management Working Party and six representatives to a User Group.

I have been appointed to the Management Group whilst the two Associations will be invited to nominate those to sit on the User Group.

It is planned to launch the Health and Wellbeing Program in February, however, this could be dependent on the severity of the current fire season.

National Firefighter Championships

CFA will be hosting the National Firefighter Championship at Lakes Entrance in October 2007. VFBV has been requested to co-ordinate the planning for these Championships. There are 10 events included in the Championship program conducted over a Saturday and Sunday. The majority of events involve CFA's Type 3 Pumper. The maximum number of competitors in any event is four. All Australian States plus New Zealand are expected to send teams to the Championship. Any Victorian brigade interested in competing must lodge an Expression of Interest with VFBV by the end of March 2007. A copy of the details of events can be obtained from VFBV, VRFBA or VUFBA.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - November 2006



From the VFBV Chairman, Gary Lyttle, AFSM.
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

At the Annual General Meeting of VFBV I was re-elected as Chairman with Mick Taylor being also reappointed as Deputy Chairman. The Treasurer is again Peter Davis with Chris Falkingham of Balance Corporation agreeing to carry out the audit this coming year.

Other Board members are Quentin Turner, Tom Brodie, Rob Waterson, Bernie Pearson, Hans van Hamond and Peter Downes.

I have been reappointed as a Board member for a further three years whilst Hans van Hamond has been appointed to fill the casual vacancy created when Rob Waterson was elected President of VUFBA.

STRUCTURE OF VFBV

The Board at its meeting in late October decided on the preferred interim structure for VFBV following a future amalgamation of the two Associations.

Subject to acceptance of the structure by the two Associations it is proposed to test it at a combined meeting in March or June 2007.

ASSOCIATION MEETING DATES

Following an approach from a number of Regional Councils the Board has recommended to the Associations that they look to aligning their state meeting dates more closely as the Regional Councils are having difficulty in setting their meeting dates to match those at state level.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR VFBV

The Volunteers First Working Group has recommended to the Board that it identify its key issues going forward as it was felt this was critical to the future direction of the organisation.

The Board has accepted the recommendation and will proceed with the project. Former Chief Officer Trevor Roche and strategist David Butcher have been invited to provide input into the project.

Key issues already identified include:

- VRFBA & VUFBA Amalgamation
- Relationship with CFA
- Relationship with Government
- CFA Act Review
- Emergency Management Arrangements
- CFA Organisational Form
- CFA/UFU EBA
- Relationship with Department of Justice

CFA SERVICE AWARD RIBBON SURVEY

The survey of two options for a Service Award Ribbon sent to all brigades for their input has now closed and some 297 brigades responded. In a close vote the majority favoured the checker board design and this will be forwarded to CFA as our recommendation.

BARMAH FIRE RAISES ISSUES

The Barmah fire that ran from 14 October to 22 October has raised a number of concerns for senior volunteers who attended and these will be addressed with the Chief Officer Russell Rees by VFBV Board.

Catering continues to be a real bugbear and thankfully some action is being taken in this regard with a project team appointed to address this matter. Board members Bernie Pearson and Tom Brodie are members of the project team and both have many years of practical experience as strike team leaders.

Other areas of concern included Incident Control, Red Flag warnings not being acknowledged, tabards not being worn and apparent lack of preparation or pre planning for a major incident

ANNUAL REPORT

VFBV's Annual Report for 2005/2006 is available on the website and copies have been provided to each Regional Council.

A limited number of printed copies are still available and can be obtained by contacting the Joint Executive Officers.

NATIONAL FIREFIGHTER CHAMPIONSHIP

The National Firefighter Championship will be hosted in October 2007 at Lakes Entrance. This will be there 3rd occasion the Championship has been held and a considerable amount of work has been undertaken to adapt the events to suit CFA pumpers. Early in 2007, invitations will be extended to Victorian brigades to enter a team in the Championship. There are 10 events and the majority are centered around the current Type 3 Pumper. The maximum number of competitors in any event is 4. The Lakes Entrance brigade has been very active in the preparations for hosting the Championship, preparing the competition track, arranging local sponsorship and accommodation venues. Brigades from around Australia and New Zealand will be competing.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - October 2006



From the VFBV Chairman, Gary Lyttle, AFSM.
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

ENTERPRISE BARGAINING AGREEMENT

Government bureaucrats have been pressuring the CFA to sign the EBA. The CFA Board has again refused to sign the EBA unless the clauses disadvantaging volunteers are amended or removed. VFBV supports the Board's decision but would like to see a system introduced whereby the career firefighters could receive their pay increase while the clauses in contention were still being negotiated. Our position has always been that the career firefighters were entitled to their pay rise. All we want is an equitable say for volunteers on issues which impact on them

Feedback from volunteers, favoured rallies at country locations rather than a Rally in Melbourne. This feedback plus logistical problems associated with a Rally in Melbourne, has prompted VFBV to cancel the Rally planned for 4th October. Alternatively, plans are now in hand to conduct rallies at 4 or 5 country locations on dates best suited to local arrangements. Local co-ordinators will contact brigades with details. These arrangements are dependent on progress with the EBA negotiations.

APPOINTMENT OF CEO

The selection panel appointed by the Board has completed the interview process for a new CEO and has made a recommendation to the Board.

It is anticipated an announcement will be made shortly with the successful candidate being invited to take up the position in the new year.

ANNUAL MEETING

VFBV will hold its Annual meeting on Friday 27 October 2006 commencing at 1400 hours at CFA Headquarters, East Burwood.

The Annual Report will be presented and it will show that VFBV has had a satisfactory year in terms of finances and issues dealt with.

PLANNING PERMITS FOR REMOVAL OF NATIVE VEGETATION FOR FIRE PREVENTION PURPOSE

In response to a letter from VFBV John Thwaites, Minister for Environment has replied there are existing exemptions for native vegetation removal for fire fighting and fire prevention measures, including removal of ground fuel within 30 metres of a building.

This exemption is included in all Victorian planning schemes. Mr Thwaites further said the Minister for Planning has appointed an Advisory Committee to undertake a review of the native vegetation exemptions. The Advisory Committee established a working group of key stakeholders, including the CFA and local government.

The Committee held public meetings around the State and received public submissions to obtain community views.

PROMOTION OF EMERGENCY CALLS PROCEDURES

The VFBV Board wrote to the Emergency Services Commissioner Bruce Esplin seeking his assistance in having the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) undertake a program to further educate regional Victorians on how the ESTA service operates.

ESTA has responded by saying they are planning quite an extensive campaign in regional Victoria in preparation for the fire and holiday season.

October

- 14th - Ballarat SECC Open Day (emergency services sector)
- 26th - Ballarat SECC Official Opening (media function)
- 27th - 28th - Bendigo Show - ESTA exhibit
- *Where is it? What is it?* Media release
- *Where is it? What is it?* - Regional radio promotion

November

- 10-12 Ballarat Show - ESTA exhibit
- Radio campaign continues

December

- 1-2 Traralgon Show - ESTA exhibit
- Radio Campaign concludes

The *Where is it? What is it?* campaign deals with the issues surrounding calling Triple Zero and the information required.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - September 2006



From the VFBV Chairman, Gary Lyttle, AFSM.
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

JOINT COMMITTEES APPROVED

Following approaches from VFBV and the two Associations CFA has agreed to establish a Joint Operations Committee and to re-establish a Joint Training Committee.

Both Committees will have 10 volunteer representatives on them with 2 members of the VFBV Board and 4 from each of the Associations making up the numbers.

It is our view that both Committees will provide valuable forums for volunteer representatives to put the volunteer perspective to CFA Operations staff and Training staff.

Mick Taylor and myself have been appointed to represent VFBV on both committees.

AUXILIARY MEMBERS REGISTER

The Board has asked our Executive Officers to meet with CFA Director of Finance and Administration Michael Wootten for the purposes of exploring the opportunity to develop a register for auxiliary members.

Currently CFA only registers persons who are members of brigades proper yet there are many hundreds of auxiliary members who are most valuable to brigades yet are not registered in any way.

ORGANISATIONAL FORM

We have been receiving many confusing and conflicting messages on the progress of CFAs Organisational Form Project and it was felt timely to invite Geoff Spring Director Strategy & Financial Planning and his Project Manager James Holyman to our latest Board meeting to brief us on the current state of the project.

The Board was advised that pilots are continuing in the North West and Bendigo areas and another will be conducted on the border between Regions 13 and 14.

A number of proposals have been floated for consideration including rationalizing the nine areas into seven.

CFA OPERATIONAL CATERING AND FACILITIES

The fires in December 2005 and January 2006 highlighted shortcomings in the current catering arrangements at large fires and VFBV Board offered to co-operate with CFA in reviewing the existing arrangements.

CFA has established a Project Board to carry out a review and we have appointed Bernie Pearson and Tom Brodie to be part of the Board.

CFA MINING AND ENERGY SECTOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT REVIEW

In response to an invitation from CFA to appoint a person to the Project Board overseeing the conduct of a Mining and Energy Sector Emergency Management Review we have appointed Peter Downes.

LONG SERVICE AWARD RIBBON

Brigades are reminded that if they have not already done so it is important they respond to the survey we sent out in regard to a long service award ribbon.

We have received over 200 replies to date but we would like to get a lot more prior to the closing date of 30 September.

WELFARE FUND FOR ALL VOLUNTEERS

Two companies have been invited to submit proposals to carry out an actuarial assessment of what funds would be required to establish a welfare fund for all volunteers.

Currently there is only a welfare fund for members of urban brigades administered by VUFBA.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - August 2006



From the VFBV Chairman, Gary Lyttle, AFSM.
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

REVIEW OF VOLUNTEER CHARTER

As advised previously, the Volunteer Charter is being reviewed. The original Volunteer Charter Committee members have recently met and agreed to develop a re-commitment document, as a supplement to the original Volunteer Charter.

UNDER 35 YEARS FORUM

VFBV in conjunction with the CFA, are proposing conducting a Forum for members under 35 years of age to address and discuss issues affecting young CFA volunteers. A Working Party is being formed to develop the forum's program etc. Young volunteer members interested in being involved on the Working Party are requested to contact Bob MacDonald 5428 4005 or Peter Davis 9775 0117.

NEXT REGIONAL MEETING

The Board will be holding its next meeting in Ouyen on Friday 29 September at the Ouyen Community Club.

Representatives from Region 18 brigades are invited to meet the Board at 1900 hours on that day to allow the Board to give an update on current issues, and in turn, for member brigades to discuss their issues and raise any concerns they may have. A light meal will be available prior to the meeting from 1830 hours.

LONG SERVICE AWARD RIBBON SURVEY

VFBV recently forwarded a survey to all brigades on their preference of two alternative ribbons for a Long Service Award for all CFA members – volunteers and staff. Brigades are reminded to forward their preferred option of the two alternative ribbons, to ensure the majority view of brigades is obtained. The final decision, based on the majority view of brigades, will then be forwarded to the CFA for approval.

EBA BRIEFING MEETING

Early in July the Board invited representatives from all regions to a meeting in Melbourne to receive a briefing on progress with the issues in the CFA/UFU Enterprise Bargaining Agreement that we believe affect volunteers.

We were looking for about 100 participants but the response was such we had to seek an alternative venue at short notice to accommodate those who wished to attend.

VFBV invited both Len Foster, CFA Chairman and Neil Bibby to address the meeting and then questions were invited from the floor.

Subsequent to the meeting a task force has been set up of volunteers to develop our future strategy and 5 volunteers in each region have been appointed to act as local spokespersons and conduits between the regions and the task force.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DISCUSSION PAPER

Following a briefing from the Department of Justice the Board has responded to the Emergency Management Discussion Paper.

The paper was developed by Government to explore opportunities and new directions for Victoria's emergency management arrangements. It is anticipated the discussion paper and its responses will form the basis of a green paper that will be released later in the year for widespread discussion.

APPOINTMENT OF CEO

Applications have closed for the position of CEO and a panel representing VFBV Board and the two Associations has been appointed to carry out interviews of those that have been short listed.

MEETING WITH EMERGENCY SERVICES COMMISSIONER

The Board met with Bruce Esplin on the 6th July and were briefed on the feedback he has been receiving on his tour of the areas that were ravaged by fires in the 2005/2006 summer.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - July 2006



From the VFBV Chairman, Gary Lyttle, AFSM.
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

PASSING OF ELWYN PEARSON

I along with other members of the Board were extremely saddened by the untimely death of Board member Bernie Pearson's wife Elwyn.

Elwyn will be greatly missed by us all as her enthusiasm and personality were always to the fore at any fire service function she attended.

Along with all members of the fire service we have expressed our deepest sympathy to the Pearson family.

CEO POSITION ADVERTISED

The Board has placed a display advertisement in this issue of the Fireman inviting applications for the position of Chief Executive Officer of VFBV.

An advertisement has also appeared in this week's Saturday issue of The Age and the position description of the position appears on the VFBV web site at www.vfbv.com.au.

Applications for the position must be received by the close of business on Friday 28 July.

VACANCIES ON VFBV BOARD

Two vacancies will occur on the VFBV Board at the end of September with the terms of Gary Lyttle (Rural) and Mick Taylor (Urban) expiring. Both members are eligible to apply for reappointment

Members of fire brigades that are financial with either the VRFBA or VUFBA are eligible to apply to be considered for the vacancies and a display advertisement giving greater detail appears elsewhere in this issue of the Fireman.

Written applications close with the respective Associations on Friday 25 August.

NEXT REGIONAL MEETING

The Board will be holding its next meeting in Wangaratta on Friday 28 July at the Wangaratta Fire Station.

Representatives from Regions 23, 24 and part of Region 12 have been invited to meet the Board at 1900 hours on that day to allow the Board to give an update on current issues, and in turn, for those in attendance from the Regions to discuss their issues and raise any concerns they may. A light meal will be available prior to the meeting from 1830 hours.

IMFMP SUBMISSION

The Board has responded to the IMFMP Draft Position paper and the response is available on the VFBV web site.

PROVISION OF EAS PAGERS

We wrote to CFA to CFA in May seeking clarification with regard to the strategy to address the provision of EAS pagers.

CFA responded advising that when the original number of 25,000 was established as the requirement there were 23,500 operational members. Since the introduction of minimum skills the number of operational personnel has risen to 29,000.

A submission to government for additional pagers has not been successful to this point. As part of 2006/97 planning, the provision of an SMS gateway has been identified as a priority project, which will provide another option to alert operational members.

This SMS gateway would not provide priority messaging but would supplement EAS pagers by providing a second level response.

CFA confirms it is committed to provide an EAS pager to all primary operational brigade members and an appropriate messaging system for other brigade members. To this end CFA will continue to pursue appropriate funding for additional pagers.

JOINT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES MEET AGAIN

The Policy and Service Review Committee of VUFBA and the State Executive members of VRFBA who met at Eaglehawk in May met again on Saturday 24 June at CFA Headquarters.

Following Board approval the paper will be released for consideration by RPCs, Regional Councils and Group/Brigade meetings.

As part of a continuing dialogue the meeting also discussed:

- Relationship between VFBV Board and State Council
- Raising of issues
- Retiring age for Board members

Both Associations will discuss the outcomes of these meetings at their respective quarterly meetings prior to any actions being initiated.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - June 2006



From the VFBV Chairman, Gary Lyttle, AFSM.
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

REGIONAL MEETINGS CONTINUE

The Board met with representatives of brigades in Region 2 and parts of Regions 15, 18 and 20 at Eaglehawk Fire Station on 26 May.

As is the usual format I outlined the activities of the Board in recent months then invited questions from the floor.

Some of the matters raised included CFA/UFU EBA, new structural firefighting ensemble, BASOs being used by Areas for purposes other than brigade support, lack of detail on new FEM financial systems, likely impact of IMFMP document and review of Volunteer Charter.

On 23 June the Board will be visiting Warragul and has invited representatives of brigades from Region 9 and parts of Regions 8 and 10 to meet with them in the evening after a light meal at the Warragul Fire Station.

JOINT ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES MEET

The Policy Service and Review Committee of VUFBA and the Executive Committee of VRFBA met with the VFBV Board at Eaglehawk Fire Station on Saturday 27 May.

Chief Officer Russell Rees started the meeting with the presentation of a draft discussion paper on Brigade and Membership Classification. The Group will meet again on 24th June to provide feedback to the Chief Officer on the content of the paper before it is presented to the CFA Board.

After the Chief Officers address the meeting looked at a number of issues relating to the future direction of VFBV under the facilitating of consultant John Wooles.

Matters considered were:

- System of representation
- Representative selection process
- Meetings and committees
- Size of Board and how appointed
- Affiliation and general funds
- Raising of issues by brigades and regions

As previously stated the same group will look at a further series of issues on 24th June at CFA Headquarters.

APPOINTMENT OF CEO

A draft CEO position description and selection criteria has been prepared and circulated to Board members for discussion at the next Board meeting.

JOINT TRAINING COMMITTEE

The Board has again made representation to the CFA CEO Neil Bibby on the need to reconvene the Joint Training Committee. We are hopeful that on this occasion our approach will be successful.

VFBV UNIFORM POLICY

The sub-committee of VFBV developing a uniform policy for all volunteers has had its proposal ratified by the Board of VFBV and forwarded to CFA for its consideration.

MEETING WITH PETER RYAN

Peter Davis and myself met with Peter Ryan, Leader of the National Party in Victoria on 7th June to discuss the National Party scheme of free motor vehicle registration for emergency service volunteers. The National Party respects the volunteers' stance on not wanting payment for their services and have proposed the registration scheme as a form of recoupment of out of pocket expenses having regard to the current high costs of operating motor vehicles and the added burden this places on volunteers.

BOARD TO MEET BRUCE ESPLIN

The Board has sought a meeting with Bruce Esplin, Emergency Services Commissioner and this is scheduled to take place in early July.

Matters we will be bringing forward are:

- Fire Strategy for Victoria
- IMFMP
- Water replacement
- 40 km traffic limit at road incidents.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - April 2006



From the VFBV Chairman, Gary Lyttle AFSM
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

Impact of Enterprise Bargaining Agreement on Volunteers

Further to the update in the last edition of *The Fireman* on the actions we have been taking in an attempt to have the CFA remove or renegotiate those sections of the CFA/UFU Enterprise Bargaining Agreement which are adversely impacting on volunteers, I can report that we have continued to hold meetings with the Minister for Police & Emergency Services, and have also met with the Premier to ensure he and his Government are aware of the position of CFA volunteers. We have been well received at all of these meetings with the Government and the volunteers' position is understood. We wish to make it clear that VFBV is attempting to protect the interests of CFA volunteers. The areas of the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement which impact on volunteers are not related to the firefighters' wages and conditions - those areas are rightly matters between the UFU and the CFA.

Regional Meeting – Warrnambool

As part of its policy of holding meetings around the State, the April meeting of the VFBV Board will be held at the Warrnambool Fire Station on Friday 28th April. Invitations have been issued to all brigades in Regions 4 and 5 to meet with the Board at 7.00pm following the Board meeting. A light meal will be available from 6.30 onwards.

These meetings provide an ideal opportunity for volunteers to raise issues directly with VFBV and to hear direct feedback on our activities over the past months.

On Friday 26th May, the VFBV Board will hold its meeting at Ouyen and local brigades will be invited to meet with the Board members following the Board meeting.

Appointment of Chief Executive Officer

The Board has agreed to advertise to fill the vacant Chief Executive Officer position and is currently developing the position specifications. On current indications, it is possible that the position could be advertised initially as a part-time position.

CFA Service Award

The VFBV Awards Working Party has continued to meet to design a medal to replace the current rural and urban service awards. A design has been agreed upon and sample medals and ribbon bars are currently being produced for further consideration by the Working Party.

Brigade Auxiliaries

VFBV has been requested to give consideration to an appropriate forum to assist and provide a level of representation for all brigade auxiliaries.

VFBV recognises the important role played by many brigade auxiliaries and the need for auxiliary activities to complement the role of their brigades. Whilst auxiliaries have traditionally had a level of representation provided by the VRFBA or the VUFBA, VFBV is happy to work with both Associations to examine alternative structures. This would be an ideal topic to be discussed at the annual Auxiliaries Conference.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - March 2006



From the VFBV Chairman, Gary Lyttle AFSM
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

Death of Rebecca Helwig

Once again, I was sorry to learn of the death of another volunteer firefighter in the line of duty. Communications Officer Rebecca Helwig of the Barnawartha brigade lost her life at a fire on Friday 17th February.

We extend our sincere sympathy to Rebecca's husband Shayne and their three sons.

Rebecca was obviously a very popular member of her brigade as was evidenced by the large attendance at her funeral on Monday 27th February. Several hundred firefighters as well as friends and relatives attended.

Impact of Enterprise Bargaining Agreement on Volunteers

The last two Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBA's) between the CFA and the United Firefighters Union on behalf of career firefighters, have had adverse impacts on volunteers. Even though we attempted to have these issues rectified after the initial EBA, the last EBA continued to disadvantage volunteers.

Afraid of this happening again, VFBV approached all volunteer brigades requesting them to make representations to their local Members of Parliament to ensure we were consulted with as provided for in the Volunteer Charter. We also provided the brigades with examples of where volunteers were being disadvantaged by the EBA.

Our issues are not with the career firefighters. Volunteers and career firefighters have an excellent relationship with each other and we do not want to see this relationship deteriorate. Our issues are with their Union. We would certainly hope that the career firefighters would not want to see the volunteers disadvantaged by certain parts of their EBA which are not related to their wages or conditions. Our volunteer system has been in existence for more than 120 years – the Union should ensure that these EBA's do not disadvantage our 58,000 volunteers.

VFBV met with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services on Wednesday, 1st March 2006. The meeting was positive and we received an assurance that we will be consulted on matters which impact on volunteers. This is all we want.

We wish to thank those brigades who have been active with their local parliamentarians. You have ensured that the voice of the volunteers has been heard.

Visits to Regional Councils

Members of the Board of VFBV accepted invitations from Regional Councils Nos. 4 and 10 to meet with them to discuss proposals for the future development of VFBV and joint Regional Council meetings. Both meetings were successful with a mutual sharing of information.

Catering at Large Incidents

We are aware that during the recent bushfires CFA experienced problems with catering. Hopefully, these issues and any other problem areas will be identified in incident debriefs.

VFBV has made representations to the Chief Officer to work with him to address the catering issues to have an improved system in place for the next summer fire season.

Meeting With Integrated Brigades

We held a meeting with volunteer officers from integrated brigades, and brigades supporting and supported by these brigades, on 12th February 2006.

The purpose of this meeting was to ensure the volunteers at those brigades were aware of the industrial bans in place and to discuss any impacts of the bans on the volunteers.

All who attended agreed the meeting was valuable and should be repeated if necessary.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - February 2006



From the VFBV Chairman, Gary Lyttle AFSM
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

DEATH OF TREVOR DAY

I was extremely sorry to become aware of the death of one of our volunteer firefighters in the line of duty.

Captain Trevor Day of Campbells Creek Fire Brigade was obviously a most popular and enthusiastic member of the fire service and will be sadly missed by his family and brigade.

The death of Captain Day is a sober reminder to us that strike team duties carry inherent risks associated with operating in strange environments on quite often newly formed tracks.

VFBV was represented at the memorial service by myself, Vice Chairman Mick Taylor, Board members Hans van Hamond, Bernie Pearson and Peter Downes as well as our Executive Officers Bob MacDonald and Peter Davis.

BUSY JANUARY

Following the Stawell fire on New Year's Day little did I think we would be back in the area so soon.

Large fires in various parts of the State along with numerous small fires has stretched our capacity to the limit through the month.

I would again thank volunteer firefighters and families for the extraordinary effort they have put in to first battle the fires and then contain them in concert with career staff, DSE personnel and interstate task forces.

Hopefully welcome rain will give us some respite although the northern parts of the state remain at risk.

AUSTRALIAN FIRE SERVICE MEDALS

Congratulations are extended to the recent recipients of the Australian Fire Service Medal awarded in the Australia Day Honours. This is the highest award available in our fire service and is well deserved recognition of outstanding contributions by these members.

Our congratulations to:

- Captain Sydney Green AFSM (Lancefield)
- Mr Daryl Love AFSM (former Instructor and OIC Warrnambool)
- Firefighter Reg Stevens AFSM (Winchelsea)
- Area Manager Trevor White AFSM (Yarra)

PRE-AMBULANCE BASIC LIFE SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Following discussion with CFA CEO Neil Bibby and DCO Graham Fountain VFBV has agreed to be represented on a steering committee to look at CFA's capacity for Pre-ambulance Basic Life Support in the MAS area ie. Outer Metro.

Vice Chairman Mick Taylor and Werribee Captain Darryl Wells will represent VFBV.

REGION MEETINGS

Following requests the VFBV Board has agreed to meet with the Region 4 Urban Council on March 1 and a Joint meeting of Regional Councils 10 on February 9.

We have also appointed individual Board members to attend Regional Meetings around the State on a regular basis.

Hans van Hamond, Bernie Pearson and myself have accepted an invitation to attend the first joint meeting in Region 16.

In addition, the VFBV Board will be holding meetings at Warrnambool, Sale, Ouyen and Wangaratta between April and July and will provide an opportunity for brigades to meet with the Board.

MEETING OF ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

An invitation has been extended to VRFBA State Executive and VUFBA Policy Committee to meet the VFBV Board on May 21 in Bendigo.

The meeting will review VFBV's constitution and many of the outstanding issues relating to future directions.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - October 2005



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

VFBV Strategic Directions

As I reported in our last column, the series of Regional Workshops has concluded and a Strategic Directions Seminar with VRFBA State Councillors and VUFBA Executive Members in early September has provided the board of VFBV with guidance and direction for the next stage of the development of VFBV.

At its meeting on 23rd September, the Board agreed on a document prepared by consultant John Wooles which sets out a plan for the further development of VFBV. This plan has been prepared utilising the output from the Strategic Directions Seminar and input provided at the Regional Workshops.

The plan (Strategic Directions 2006-2007) has been forwarded to all volunteer brigades, Regional Councils, VRFBA State Councillors and VUFBA Executive Members for their consideration and feedback.

The Strategic Directions plan clearly outlines the broad objective of aiming to amalgamate the two Associations into one effective Association providing a strong voice for all volunteers. The plan also includes a suggested system for representation which ensures the continuation of "grass roots" input as well as strengthening the VFBV management structure with the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer. Another objective is improved communication and marketing.

It is envisaged that representatives of the Board plus our two joint Executive Officers will visit Regional Councils to discuss the plan in greater detail and receive direct feedback from brigades.

Combined Newsletter (VFBV, VRFBA and VUFBA)

Copies of the combined Newsletter have recently been posted to all brigades and brigade Captains. If volunteers wish to receive a copy of the Newsletter via email, they should forward their email address to us. Please forward the email address to vufba@vfbv.com.au

VFBV Board Vacancies

Each year two vacancies arise on the Board – one vacancy for a rural volunteer and one for an urban volunteer. The VUFBA has advised that Ex Captain Rob Waterson AFSM has been re-appointed to the Board. The VRFBA is conducting interviews to select its representative on 18th October 2005.

Pagers for Volunteers

On behalf of both Associations, VFBV has raised its concerns with the CFA on reports received from brigades of insufficient numbers of pagers being made available to cater for the brigades' operational requirements.

CFA has advised that it has addressed these concerns and has options under consideration to ensure that all volunteers eligible to receive a pager will do so.

CFA Service Awards

The CFA has obtained samples of alternative designs for service awards. A meeting of the VFBV Awards Working Party will be held during October to consider and hopefully select a design which will be acceptable to all volunteers.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - September 2005



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM.
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

Regional Workshops Completed

The final Regional Workshop was held at Ouyen in August and there was an excellent attendance from Region 18 volunteers. This was probably the best attended of all the workshops and was a great credit to the local members who organised it.

The VFBV Board has appreciated the interest shown by volunteers as we have travelled around the state and I would expect the Board to make more visits to various parts of the state in the future as a means of communicating with you.

Strategic Directions Seminar

VFBV conducted a Strategic Directions Seminar for members of the VRFBA State Council, VUFBA State Executive and VFBV Board Members on 9th & 10th September.

The aims of the seminar were:

To agree on critical issues and associated priorities emanating from the Regional Workshops

To develop objectives and strategies in relation to these critical issues

To recommend next steps in:

- refinement and implementation of strategic directions
- the planning process

The seminar was extremely successful and has provided VFBV with guidance on the development of strategic direction in the areas of:

- a structure to provide for eventual amalgamation of VUFBA, VRFBA and VFBV and suggested timeframes;
- communications;
- classification of brigades in their risk classes as opposed to 'urban' and 'rural';
- appointment of a Chief Executive Officer and appropriate staff.

The Board of VFBV will be meeting to review the outcomes of the seminar and will consult widely with Regional Councils and brigades as it continues to develop its future directions proposals.

Review of CFA Act

The CFA Steering Committee on the Review of the CFA Act recently met to discuss the way forward on this matter. Myself, Bruce Conboy and Hans van Hamond are the volunteer representatives on the steering committee.

Matters discussed included the need for further consultation, the role of the Chief Officer, volunteer representation on the CFA Board and the use of terminology to describe a volunteer brigade in accordance with its risk as compared with the terms “urban” and “rural”.

We anticipate the program for further consultation will commence shortly.

Flat Batteries on Pumpers

At the request of the VUFBA, the VFBV Board has taken up the matter of recurring flat batteries in pumpers.

This problem has been reported from various parts of the State and the CFA is in agreement that it is a situation that cannot be allowed to continue in an emergency response organisation. The CFA Engineering Section is investigating the cause of the problem and possible solutions.

Pagers for Volunteers

The Board has learned that in some Regions Brigades have not been allocated sufficient numbers of emergency alerting devices and has pursued the matter with CFA.

We understand that the matter has now been resolved in the particular instances we drew to CFA attention.

Future Direction for AAVFBA

As reported earlier in the year we in Victoria have been very concerned at the future of the Australasian Assembly of Volunteer Fire Brigade Associations and made it clear to the Executive of that body of our concern.

Recently myself, Bruce Conboy and Hans van Hamond have been involved in a series of teleconferences with representatives of all other Australian States and New Zealand to design a road map for the future of AAVFBA.

This proposal will be put to the AGM of AAVFBV in Auckland, NZ in October.

CFA Organisational Form

At the last meeting of VFBV Board a report was received on a presentation from The CEO of CFA on the proposed organisational form into the future.

The Board has asked CFA for more detail on how they see the new arrangements working administratively and we will examine any impacts on the current practice of representing our volunteers on a Regional basis.

DSE Draft Code of Practice for Fire Management on Public Land

VFBV has previously indicated its intention to comment on the draft Code to the Code Review body and this it has done.

Whilst in general VFBV was happy with the proposed code as it has addressed most of the concerns we have previously raised with DSE, there are a small number of issues that we have drawn to the attention of the Review body.

In most cases it related to strengthening the wording on matters that might affect our brigades and include a clear view of our continued engagement with the community on fire prevention and safety issues.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - August 2005



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM.
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

REVIEW OF CORONERS ACT 1985

The Board has forwarded its submission on changes to the Coroners Act 1985 to the Victorian Parliament Reform Committee for its consideration.

Our main thrust was that the Coroner should only investigate fires where there is a fatality and that all other fires where an investigation is required should be investigated by a separate and independent entity. Ideally this entity would have the power and capacity to establish and develop an information base so as to become pre-eminent in fire investigation and analysis. Such an information base would also assist in identifying trends and help to reduce the number of preventable fires.

We are of the view that this alternative forum to the Coroner's Court would reduce trauma experienced by volunteers who in the past had to live with, wait for and then endure Coronial style inquests.

VFBV NEWSLETTER

Our quarterly newsletter that carries information from ourselves and the two Associations has recently been circulated to all brigade secretaries. In an endeavour to improve our communication with volunteer brigades we have also forwarded a copy to the Captain of each brigade.

This initiative was in response to the feedback received at our regional workshops conducted over the past two months.

EMERGENCY SERVICES FOUNDATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE, MELBOURNE

As Chairman of VFBV I have been invited to be part of a discussion panel at this year's Emergency Services Foundation Conference to represent the views of emergency service volunteers.

It is pleasing to note that VFBV is being recognised as a legitimate spokesperson for volunteers in this State.

VALUING VOLUNTEERS PROGRAM

Following the significant fires of 2003 the State Government provided funds to recognise the value of emergency volunteers in this State and each year the emergency services bodies make application for funding of specific volunteer related projects.

For the next round of funding, the CFA in collaboration with VFBV has submitted a list of 14 projects in order of priority to the Valuing Volunteers Program Committee.

The first five preferences are:

- 1 Finance for research into the economics of a Welfare Fund for all CFA volunteers
- 2 A memorial for emergency service workers
- 3 Emergency Services travel grants
4. Additional funding for Chaplains
- 5 Bar coded ID Cards

CFA MEMBERS ON DISABILITY PENSIONS

The Board at its last meeting considered a paper raised by the CFA on the issue of active members who are on disability pensions and the impact on any operational roles they may perform.

This issue will require further discussion with the CFA and principles agreed upon which will have a minimum impact on the way brigades operate.

MEETING WITH VFF

Motions carried at this year's VFF Annual meeting were tabled at our most recent Board meeting and a number of these related to fire.

It was agreed to seek another meeting with VFF to exchange information and establish where both organisations might be able to assist each other.

DRAFT CODE OF PRACTICE FOR FIRE MANAGEMENT ON PUBLIC LAND

The Board has received a copy of the DSE Draft Code of Practice for Fire Management on Public Land and is now preparing its response to the document.

Once our position has been finally established a copy of our response will be available on our website.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - July 2005



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM.
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

AUSTRALIAN FIRE SERVICE MEDALS

I extend my heartiest congratulations to the recent recipients of the Australian Fire Service Medal. The AFSM is the highest award in the fire service and is a well deserved recognition of outstanding contributions by these members.

Group Officer Brian Halit (Wesburn)
Group Officer Denys Steinhauser rtd (Kergunyah)

I also congratulate John Tindall of CFA Corporate Communications who also received the AFSM. John is a former Captain of the Berwick brigade.

John has recently retired from CFA and I thank him for the support he gave to volunteers and State Championships over many years in his role with Corporate Communications.

VACANCIES OF VFBV BOARD

The terms of Board members Tom Brodie (VRFBA) and Rob Waterson (VUFBA) are about to expire through the effluxion of time.

Both members are eligible for re-appointment however any member of a financial brigade is eligible to apply to fill the vacancies.

Greater detail is available in a display advertisement elsewhere in this newspaper.

WORKSHOP DATE CHANGES

The Workshop which was previously scheduled for Swan Hill on 22 July has been transferred to the Eaglehawk Fire Station and representatives of Regions 2, 2E, 19 and 20 have been invited to attend.

An extra Workshop to be held at Ouyen on 19th August has been arranged to accommodate representatives of Region 18.

VFBV will also be hosting a strategic planning workshop at Fiskville on Friday 9 and Saturday 10 September 2005 for State Councillors of VRFBA and Executive members of VFBV.

This meeting will have the benefit of all the feedback from all the workshops around the State and will recommend the direction VFBV Board will take into the future.

COAG NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO BUSHFIRE MITIGATION

VFBV has determined its position on each of the recommendations of the COAG National Inquiry into Bushfire Mitigation.

Copies of our position have been forwarded to representatives of both Associations and CFA.
For others interested in VFBV's position the document is available on our website at www.vfbv.com.au

RURAL FIRE SERVICE OF NEW SOUTH WALES AGM

I attended the above meeting in Bathurst at the request of RFS and delivered a paper – “Volunteerism – Where to from here?”

VFBV and the two Associations are members of the Australasian Assembly of Volunteer Fire Brigades and a meeting of a working party looking at the future direction of the Assembly was also held at the same time and has drawn up a proposal for presentation to the Assembly's next meeting.

40KM SPEED LIMITS AT ROAD INCIDENTS

VFBV continues to press for the introduction of a 40 km speed limit at road accidents and other emergency incidents in Victoria and has decided to prepare a submission for presentation to the Coroners Inquiry into the recent roadside death of a policeman.

CORONERS ACT 1985 REVIEW

As mentioned in last month's column we have agreed to put a submission to the Panel currently reviewing the Coroners Act and have engaged Jeffrey Moore QC to assist us.

Those who were involved in the Linton Inquest will remember Mr. Moore represented the volunteer witnesses who appeared before the Coroner.

DSE CODE OF PRACTICE

The Department of Sustainability and Environment is reviewing its Code of Practice for Fire Management on Public Lands and is about to release its first draft report.

On receipt of the report VFBV will be responding with its submission.

2007 NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The VFBV Board has agreed to undertake a co-ordinating role for the organisation and running of the 2007 National Championships which are to be held at Lakes Entrance.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - June 2005



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM.
INFORMATION FOR ALL CFA VOLUNTEERS

REGIONAL VISITS CONTINUE

During the month of May the VFBV Board conducted Regional Workshops at Hamilton and Stawell as part of its ongoing commitment to seek volunteers' views on the future direction of VFBV.

The next workshop will be held on Friday 24 June at CFA Headquarters at Burwood and Regional representatives from Regions 7,8, 13 and 14 have been invited to attend. As part of the workshop consultant John Wooles conducts a session on what those present think is the way forward for VFBV. This session is conducted without VFBV Board members being present.

When the series of workshops around the state have been completed a strategic workshop will be held at Fiskville on 9 & 10 September to consider the outcomes of the regional workshops and to prepare a strategic direction for VFBV based on that aggregate information.

Regions are encouraged to participate fully in the future workshops as the VFBV Board is keen to get as wide a representative view as possible.

VFBV BOARD VACANCIES

VFBV has recently advised the two Associations that each has a Board member retiring due to the effluxion of time at the Annual General Meeting set down for 21 October this year. In the case of VRFBA this is Tom Brodie and in the case of VUFBA it is Rob Waterson.

Both the incumbent members are entitled to re-nominate for their position as is any volunteer member of a brigade that is a financial member of their respective association.

Advertisements will shortly be appearing in this newspaper along with information to regional secretaries.

COAG NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO BUSHFIRE MITIGATION

At its most recent meeting the VFBV Board considered a report on the COAG National Bushfire Inquiry that it had commissioned and after some amendment has arrived at a position on each of the recommendations that were included in the COAG Report.

Once the VFBV Board position on the report is consolidated it will be made available to stakeholders.

CORONERS ACT (1985) REVIEW

The VFBV Board has agreed it would be appropriate for it to make a submission to the Review of the Coroner's Act and is currently determining its best method of preparing the submission.

VFBV considers it can make a useful and informed submission having regard to its experience at recent Coroner's Inquests and other inquiries.

AUDITOR GENERAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Further to my report in last month's copy of the Fireman we recently met with CFA to get a further briefing on the initial meetings with RPC's conducted by Project Officer Rick McKay.

The VFBV Board has agreed that myself, Deputy Chair Gary Lytle and the two Executive Officers be represented on the CFA steering committee set up to oversee the project of gathering information to implement the Auditor General's recommendations with the least inconvenience to brigades. That VFBV is committed to a process involving full and open consultation with volunteers.

VFBV MEETS WITH CFA DIRECTORS

VFBV maintains a register of issues to enable it to monitor the progress of matters that it and the two Associations raise with CFA and other parties.

Many issues on the register have been there for some considerable time and the Executive Officers have sought meetings with each of the CFA Directors to establish the status of each issue and to endeavour to bring them to a satisfactory conclusion where appropriate.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - May 2005



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all CFA volunteers.....

Future Direction of VFBV

The Board of VFBV has engaged a consultant to conduct a feasibility study into the operations of VFBV and its future development. The consultant will be gauging the views of volunteers, the VRFBA, the VUFBA and CFA as part of the process. VFBV will be guided by the views of the volunteers when it gives consideration to the outcomes of the consultant's study.

Regional Visits

VFBV has commenced its series of visits to Regional centres to meet with senior volunteers from Regional Councils. On 29th April the Board met with representatives of Regional Councils 9, 10 and 11 at Sale, and had the opportunity to discuss matters of mutual interest and answer questions. Further visits will take place at Hamilton, Stawell, Wangaratta, Swan Hill as well as a meeting at CFA H.Q. for Regions 7, 8, 13 and 14.

The consultant will be present at these meetings to gain the views of senior volunteers.

Review of CFA Act

The CFA has agreed to extend the consultation period for the review of the CFA Act. VFBV has requested that brigades be further consulted via their Regional Councils.

Meeting with Minister

Representatives of VFBV met with Tim Holding, the new Minister for Police and Emergency Services in April. The meeting was to acquaint the Minister with the role of VFBV, as well as the current roles of VRFBA and VUFBA, and to discuss a range of issues that are of importance to all CFA volunteers.

Auditor General's Recommendations

VFBV has been briefed by the CFA on recommendations made by the Auditor General to the State Government following his audit of the CFA's financial statements.

The Auditor General has recommended that the CFA include all brigade financial assets and liabilities in its financial statements and also implement a comprehensive accountability and audit framework for all brigades. These recommendations have been adopted by the State Government.

VFBV is well aware of brigade views on the management and control of brigade finances and has reinforced to the CFA the need for full consultation with brigades as it gathers the necessary information to meet the Auditor General's recommendations.

VFBV has also been assured that whilst the CFA will need to include this amount in its financial statements, brigade funds will continue to remain the responsibility of the brigades.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - December 2005



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all volunteer firefighters...

CFA OPERATIONAL SKILLS PROFILE DRAFT POLICY (SKILLS MIX)

Further to my report in the last issue of the Fireman I can now advise that the Executive Officers of VFBV will be meeting with DCO Lapsley to put forward a recommendation on the mentoring of trainee firefighters and to discuss the skills mix policy.

They will also be seeking clarification of the proposals for structural qualifications and the ramifications on the issuing of the new structural protective clothing.

CFA ORGANISATIONAL REVIEW

The last Board meeting of VFBV in December received an overview from Geoff Spring (CFA Director Strategic & Financial Planning) and James Holyman on the options that are being considered in the structural review and the factors that have been considered.

Following the presentation the Board were invited to provide feedback and to comment on the weighting used to develop the models put forward.

The Board recommended the presentation be made to joint meetings of regional councils and RPC's and acknowledges this early involvement in the consultation process which will ensure all volunteers have the opportunity to have input.

DSE and VOLUNTEERS

DSE used the term "Volunteer Firefighters" recently in newspaper articles to promote its initiative of training staff from other government departments to work as summer fire crews.

The Board is of the view that this is misleading and that these people are being paid at all times they are working with DSE and therefore are not volunteers at all.

Consequently the Board wrote to the Premier Steve Bracks expressing our strong opposition at the attempt to portray these DSE firefighters in the same light as CFA volunteers.

Quentin Turner, AFSM.

VFBV Chairman

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - November 2004



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all volunteer firefighters...

VFBV Annual General Meeting

The second Annual General Meeting of VFBV was held at CFA Headquarters on Friday 15th October 2004. The Annual Report on the operations of VFBV for the 2003/04 financial year was presented by the joint Executive Officers and was received. The report highlights the progress made over the last 12 months in addressing issues on behalf of all volunteers. Major issues tackled by VFBV are also included. Copies of the report will be mailed to all Regional Councils shortly.

Election of Office Bearers for the next 12 months were conducted by CFA Board Member Michael Tudball. These Office Bearers being:-

Chairman:	Quentin Turner AFSM
Deputy Chairman:	Gary Lyttle AFSM
Treasurer:	Peter Davis AFSM

AFAC Conference

I presented a paper titled "Volunteerism - Where To From Here" at the AFAC Conference in Perth during October. The paper was well received and we have received much positive feedback. A copy of the paper will shortly be included on the VFBV Webpage once we completed negotiations with a new Webpage provider. The NSW Rural Association has invited me to present a paper at its next Annual General Meeting in 2005.

VFBV Working Parties

Meetings of VFBV Working Parties formed to discuss common issues such as Uniforms, Championships and a Welfare Fund for all volunteers have been held over the past month. These Working Parties include representation from both urban and rural volunteers. The outcomes from the Uniform and Championships Working Parties will be discussed with both the VRFBA and the VUFBA prior to any further action being taken. The Welfare Working Party will require further meetings prior to a position being developed. A meeting of an Awards Working Party is still to be held.

Australasian Assembly of Volunteer Fire Brigades Associations (AAVFBA)

The Annual General Meeting and Annual Conference of the AAVFBA was held in Perth immediately prior to the AFAC Conference. Both the VRFBA and the VUFBA are members of the Assembly and agreement was reached for VFBV to be a member also. AAVFBA provides the opportunity for all of Australia's Volunteer Fire Brigades Associations to meet annually and discuss issues of mutual interest.

Broader Role for Brigades

VFBV has had initial discussions with the CFA's Director of Community Safety in regard to greater involvement by brigades in the creation of safer communities through increased emphasis on community safety and fire prevention activities. This involvement would be facilitated under the Broader Brigade model with brigades recruiting non operational members from their communities to undertake these roles. Training in the roles would be provided by CFA. The concept aims to reduce fire calls through greater emphasis on prevention activities and ease the workload of our operational volunteers. Discussions are still in the preliminary stages.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - October 2004



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all volunteer firefighters...

Meeting with Emergency Services Commissioner

The Board of VFBV met with Emergency Services Commissioner, Bruce Esplin, on 22nd September 2004 to discuss the outworkings of the report into the 2003 Victorian Bushfires and other issues of importance to the volunteers.

VFBV also initiated discussions on the promotion of community safety roles for volunteers which are currently being worked on in conjunction with the CFA. These roles will be of significant importance in relation to maintaining the fabric of volunteerism within the CFA.

SAVFBA and VFBV meet in Horsham

On Saturday 24 September the VFBV Board met with representatives of the South Australian Volunteer Fire Brigade Association at Region 17 Headquarters in Horsham. The object being to explore issues of mutual concern to all volunteers.

The meeting covered a wide range of issues including :

- Effective representation of Volunteers at a National Level on generic issues;
- A follow up of the EMA Volunteer Summit 2002 Outcomes;
- Volunteer Support issues which impact on all volunteers and employers;
- Matters in relation to the autonomy of Brigades which is a vital link to true volunteerism;
- A Broader Brigade Model providing a real opportunity to improve the safety of communities;
- VFBV's view of non payment to volunteers;
- Non-operational Members to have the same status as operational members;
- Government and Municipal procedures in relation to Burning Off practices;
- Discount Programs similar to the CFA initiative;
- Safecom (proposed new SA structure for emergency services).

One ABN Issue

At this time the moratorium brokered by VFBV between the Australian Taxation Office and CFA is still in place and will remain so until the ATO responds to the CFA's submission that brigades are not legal entities in their own right.

As indicated by the Associations in correspondence to brigades and regions, brigades do not need to take any action on this matter until it is clarified.

Decisions of September Board Meeting

It has been agreed to seek support from the CFA in a submission to the State Government for a subsidy scheme to assist farmers with safety features of their private fire fighting appliances.

The Board also recommended to CFA that it raise the issue of an Australian Standard for external lug couplings with the AFAC Standards Committee, as currently the Canadian standard is being used and is not suitable for our application.

The Chairman's action in discussing with Naomi Brown, CFA Director Community Safety, volunteer involvement in prevention issues and the promotion of the broader brigade model to facilitate an increased community safety, was endorsed. VFVB will work with the Directors of Operations and Community Safety, to establish job descriptions and duties for these vital roles.

Recent media coverage on the safety of smoke detectors currently in use has recently been dismissed and further clarification is being sought from the CFA

On the recommendation of volunteer representatives on the Training and Development Committee, the Board could not support the CFA Brigades Operational Skills Profile (Volunteer) Policy in its present form. Further discussions will be held with CFA to reach an agreement.

Quentin Turner, AFSM.
VFVB Chairman

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - September 2004



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all volunteer firefighters...

Brigade ABN's

As you will note in the statement issued jointly by CFA, VFBV, VRFBA and VUFBA on the front page of this edition of *The Fireman*, the CFA has agreed to honour the moratorium established between CFA, ATO and VFBV not to promote its position in regard to brigade ABN's and will take no action to force brigades to relinquish their ABN's until the legal status of brigade ABN's has been resolved with the Australian Taxation Office.

VFBV in collaboration with the two Associations sought an urgent meeting with the CFA to seek reinforcement of the moratorium, in view of the conflicting information circulated, which has caused considerable confusion amongst brigades.

At the meeting we also agreed that CFA's Peter Schmidt could gather information from brigades on the impact of any changes to the current practice.

VFBV together with the two Associations will keep brigades informed of any developments on this issue.

Another Successful Workshop

Nearly 50 volunteers from around Victoria attended the Workshop hosted by VFBV at Fiskville on Sunday 22nd August 2004. The Workshop had been arranged to provide volunteers the opportunity to have input into volunteer and employer support issues such as tax breaks, rate rebates, reimbursement for lost wages, national recognition, scholarships etc.

The Workshop overwhelmingly agreed that it was opposed to payments for volunteers and that any support proposals considered must be equitable for all volunteers. This was a great outcome as it strongly reinforces the fabric of volunteerism within the CFA. Attendees also agreed that the CFA should reimburse reasonable out of pocket expenses incurred by volunteers over and above normal activities. Another common suggestion was greater support for brigades via the Brigade Administrative Support Officer system. A national recognition service award was also supported.

VFBV is currently collating all suggestions made during syndicate sessions and these will be given further consideration at the next meeting of the VFBV Board.

Meeting with Emergency Service Commissioner

Emergency Services Commissioner Bruce Esplin, has sought a further meeting with the Board of VFBV to discuss, among other things, progress made with the implementation of the recommendations from his Inquiry into the 2002/03 Victorian Bushfires.

The Board is scheduled to meet with Commissioner Esplin on Wednesday, 22nd September 2004.

Meeting with South Australian Volunteers

Following an approach from Cam Stafford , President of the South Australian Volunteer Fire Brigades' Association, the Board of VFBV has agreed to meet the Executive of that body in Horsham on Saturday , 25th September.

It is proposed to discuss issues that are common to both State bodies, and in particular, matters which are strategic in nature.

VFBV Annual Meeting

The Annual meeting of VFBV is set down for Friday, 15 October at CFA Headquarters in East Burwood and members will be advised of more detail in the next copy of The Fireman.

Issues Register

In an endeavour to better manage the matters before it, the Board of VFBV established an issues register some time ago.

The issues register is now in a form that will provide Regions, Groups and brigades with meaningful information on the matters that VFBV is currently pursuing on their behalf and will be circulated on a regular basis.

Quentin Turner, AFSM.

VFBV Chairman

Joint CFA / VFBV September 2004:

CFA and Brigade ABN's

As reported, the Board has resolved to have one ABN number for the CFA. In reaching this decision, and in order to have full transparency, the VFBV and Associations were invited to attend the CFA Board meeting to provide input and hear the same legal briefing as the Board. The Board's strong position is that brigades and individual volunteers must be legally protected.

On 1 September 2004, at a meeting between executives of VFBV, VUFBA and VRFBA and CFA Chairman, CEO and Director Finance and Administration, the moratorium agreed to between CFA, the Australian Taxation Office and VFBV has been reinforced. This moratorium is an agreement by all parties that they would not promote their own position on brigade ABN's until the Taxation Office has given consideration to the CFA legal opinion on the status of brigade ABN's, or until other solutions are agreed. The CFA has also undertaken that it will not instruct brigades to cancel existing ABN's until the Taxation Office position is known.

It has also been agreed that any brigades wishing to voluntarily surrender their ABN and operate under the CFA ABN are free to do so.

VFBV and the Associations sought to have this issue clarified as a matter of urgency, in view of the confusion amongst brigades and the conflicting information which had been circulated.

In the interim, the CFA's Peter Schmidt will be collecting information from brigades to establish the workload impacts on both existing arrangements and any changes to the current practices. This process will be managed in full consultation with the Associations and brigades.

CFA Chairman Len Foster, VFBV Chairman Quentin Turner, VUFBA President Ron Schultz and VRFBA President Bruce Conboy have all agreed to this joint statement being released.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - August 2004



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all volunteer firefighters...

'Fireman Sam' Article in July Fireman

I read with interest the article by Fireman Sam in the July edition of *The Fireman* and must say I agree with many of the sentiments expressed in the article. I believe many other volunteers would also agree that the many changes that have recently occurred have certainly impacted upon us.

VFBV and the two Associations have been concerned for some time about the effect that legislation has had on our volunteers and their workloads. Whenever the opportunity has arisen, we have made representations to the policymakers to have regard to the possible impact on the volunteer movement of their particular policies.

In some cases we have been successful. For example we have worked with the State Government to improve the legislative protection for our volunteers, we made submissions to the State Government to retain funding for the CFA under the Fire Service Levy, we made representations to the Federal Government for the CFA to retain its status as a charity and we have supported the position being adopted in the review of the O H & S Act giving an exemption for emergency service volunteers from criminal liability under the Act. However, we need to be more strategic in our thinking to become involved early and properly consulted by Governments and Government Departments in all instances where their legislation and policies may impact on the CFA volunteers.

Meeting with Dr Jim McLennan

The Board of VFBV met with Dr Jim McLennan at its July meeting. Dr McLennan is working on the Federal Government Bushfire CRC on Volunteerism and in particular volunteer recruitment and retention. Dr McLennan has met with all Australian fire agencies and the VFBV Board was pleased to have the opportunity to be able to provide direct volunteer input into the his project. It is of vital importance that CFA volunteer views are considered in his work which has a national impact.

Creation of Working Parties

The Board has decided to create four working parties to examine some of the issues of differences between both Associations and their urban and rural volunteers. These working parties will work through the issues of uniforms, championships, awards and the possibility of a welfare fund for all volunteers. Each working party will be chaired by a member of the VFBV Board and there will be wide consultation before any recommendations are made.

VFBV Workshop – Volunteer and Employer Support

As previously advised, VFBV will conduct a Workshop on Sunday 22nd August at Fiskville. The Workshop will address volunteer and employer support issues. Regional Councils have been invited to nominate representatives to attend the Workshop. Other interested volunteers can contact VFBV, the VRFBA or the VUFBA if they have an interest in attending.

Brigade ABN's

The CFA Board has reiterated its decision that the CFA and its brigades will operate under the one ABN. The CFA decision is supported by its legal opinion that brigades cannot be treated as separate entities. This legal opinion has now been lodged with the Australian Taxation Office for its consideration following its initial advice that brigades could be treated as separate entities.

VFBV will wait for the decision of the Taxation Office before pursuing the issue in greater detail on behalf of brigades with the CFA. Members can be assured that VFBV will be seeking to achieve the optimum result for brigades.

Meetings with Regional Councils

The VFBV Board will sponsor meetings with Executive Members of Regional Councils in the near future. Five meetings will be held throughout the State to meet with Regional Council Presidents, Vice Presidents, Secretaries, VUFBA Executive Members/VRFBA State Councillors and up to two other members of each Region, to discuss a range of strategic issues including future directions for the Associations and VFBV.

Quentin Turner, AFSM.

VFBV Chairman

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - July 2004



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all volunteer firefighters...

Australian Fire Service Medals

Congratulations are extended to the recent recipients of the Australian Fire Service Medal. This is the highest award available in our fire service and is well deserved recognition of outstanding contributions by these members. Our congratulations to:

Captain Nev Jones AFSM (Moorooduc)
Fire Officer Peter Lucas AFSM
Captain Ray Newnham AFSM (Bonang)
Ex Captain Allan Small AFSM (The Basin)
Captain Hans van Hamond AFSM (Wendouree)

Charities Legislation and Brigade ABN's

In view of a recent letter I received from an Assistant Commissioner of Taxation, it appears that the information as reported in our last two columns was not entirely correct.

CFA cannot be a Charity because it is seen to be controlled by a Government, however, the Federal Government had agreed to amend the Taxation Assessment Act to recognize CFA as a Deductible Gift Recipient, this preserves many of the benefits otherwise available to charities. This approval will also flow on to CFA brigades through the CFA & Brigades Donation Fund once amendments are made to the Income Tax Assessment Act. This will allow gifts and donations to brigades to be claimed as income tax deductions by the donors.

The Australian Tax Office expressed their view that brigades were unincorporated associations and hence were not controlled by Government and could be classed as separate charities. I am advised the CFA's legal advice differs significantly from this view and I have summarised this advice below:

“Were brigades unincorporated associations then brigade members and office bearers could be liable for any tax liability (and not CFA) and brigade officers will have the compliance obligations and corresponding penalties if they fail to comply. These matters will be of great significance to FEM brigades. It is CFA's advice that brigades are subject to the control of Government and cannot be charities.”

The issue of a single ABN is relevant to how brigades are characterized (i.e. as separate entities to CFA or as part of CFA). CFA's position is there is only one legal entity and it has the responsibilities, liabilities, compliance and legal obligations, not the brigades.”

At the regular VFBV/CFA consultative meeting the CFA's strong view was that an individual brigade [or its officers] must not be exposed to any legal action.

In mid-June, officers of the Australian Taxation Office, legal representatives of CFA and VFBV executives, met to work through this conflicting advice. VFBV respectfully requested a stay on any immediate action and the parties agreed not to further promote their positions until the legal differences could be reconciled. CFA is to make a legal submission to the Taxation Office for its consideration.

VFBV will wait on the decision of the Taxation Office following its consideration of the CFA legal submission. In the meantime the CFA and Brigades Donations Fund is being created for those brigades operating under the CFA ABN.

Emergency Alerting System Workshop – June 27th

A very successful workshop on the introduction of a state-wide emergency alerting system was conducted by VFBV at the Ballarat Country CAD Centre on Sunday 27th June 2004.

Over 40 volunteers from across the State attended and were briefed by DCO Geoff Evans and Acting Project Manager for Country CAD Mark Glover.

The project will cost approximately \$100M and it is planned to have one paging system in place across the State by November 2005. 190 towers will be required to provide coverage plus temporary boosters where a need is identified. Some 25,000 pagers will be issued to CFA volunteers.

The system is an alerting system only at this stage (apart from a small area in Regions 15 and 22) and normal radio communications as currently exist, will continue except for some advice back to Country CAD when brigades have responded.

Information on the continuing introduction of the Spectrum Pre Conferencing telephone system to replace the ERS which Telstra is withdrawing was also provided.

The introduction of the emergency alerting system is being funded by the State Government.

VFBV Workshop Sunday 22nd August 2004 – Volunteer and Employer Support – Fiskville

The next Workshop to be conducted by VFBV will be on volunteer and employer support issues.

Victoria has a proud history of volunteering. Can we improve on what we currently have? Are additional forms of support appropriate for volunteers and employers? Should consideration be given to tax incentives, Council rate rebates, special leave arrangements or other issues? Should there be greater recognition given to CFA or emergency service volunteers and their employers? Or are we comfortable with our current arrangements?

Invitations have been forwarded to all Regional Councils to nominate interested volunteers to attend. The opportunity may be available for other interested volunteers to attend also. Interest should be registered with either VFBV, VRFBA or VUFBA at:

VFBV: P O Box 453, Mt Waverley 3149; Tel 9886 1141; E-mail: vf bv@vf bv.com.au
VRFBA: 5 Hamilton Street, Gisborne 3437, Tel 5428 4005; E-mail: vrfba@vf bv.com.au
VUFBA: P O Box 91, Patterson Lakes 3197; Tel: 9775 0117; E-mail:
vufba@vf bv.com.au

Quentin Turner, AFSM.
VFBV Chairman.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - June 2004



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all volunteer firefighters...

Joint Meeting – VFBV, VRFBA, VUFBA

An historic and important joint meeting between Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, the VRFBA State Council and the VUFBA Governing Body was held at Fiskville on Sunday 23rd May 2004.

One of the aims of the joint meeting was to continue to bring the workings of the two associations closer together and it was extremely pleasing to see the level of support for the direction being taken to achieve this goal.

The morning session was an open forum format with input from the delegates on issues of concern and suggestions for future directions or actions by VFBV. As this meeting was not a decision making forum, these suggestions will be taken to the next VFBV Board meeting.

Syndicate sessions were also held to discuss measures to further the development of VFBV as the body to provide a consolidated voice for all CFA volunteers. Positive feedback on VFBV direction was provided by all syndicates and this will be further considered jointly by the VFBV Board and both Associations.

In the afternoon, presentations by Michael Wootten (CFA Director Finance and Administration) on impacts of the Charities Legislation, and by DCO Craig Lapsley on the vehicle procurement program and development of two prototype tankers, were received with great interest by all delegates.

One item of interest for all volunteers from Craig's presentation, is the move by CFA to the use of Crew Cabs (or twin cabs) for all future tankers.

Charities Legislation

Michael Wootten's presentation addressed the implications of the new Charities Legislation, the requirements of the Australian Taxation Office for the CFA and its brigades to operate under the one ABN and the creation of a Trust Fund for all donations received by the CFA and its brigades. The Trust Fund must be created by 1st July 2004 while the one ABN issue could take several years to implement.

The creation of the Trust Fund is a legal requirement of the Taxation Office, and VFBV has been in discussions with the CFA in regard to its creation. It has been agreed that the Fund will have seven trustees – five from VFBV and two from the CFA.

VFBV has nominated Quentin Turner, Gary Lyttle, Ron Schultz, Mick Taylor and Tom Brodie as Trustees. The CFA's Trustees are Len Foster (CFA Chairman) and Neil Bibby (CFA C.E.O.).

This Trust Fund is for donations made to brigades and the CFA – it is not for general fundraising such as raffles etc. Brigade donations paid into the Fund will be transferred back to the brigades. The Trustees have yet to meet to develop the operating guidelines, policies etc.

CFA will need to advise all brigades of the operation of the Fund, definition of donations etc. This article is to give early notice to brigades and volunteers of this requirement of the Taxation Office.

A separate meeting will be held on 11th June 2004 with the Joint FEM Committee and some representatives of brigades involved in FEM activities, to discuss the impact of the Taxation Office ABN requirement on brigades with FEM fundraising involvement.

Employee Alerting System Workshop – Sunday June 27

Regional Council Secretaries are reminded to submit names for this important Workshop. Participants will receive up to date information on the introduction of this alerting system, proposed timetables for implementation, pager details etc. The Spectrum telephone system which is replacing the Telstra ERS will also be included for discussion.

There could be the opportunity for additional volunteers to attend if all nominations are not received. Interested volunteers should indicate their interest by contacting Peter Davis (0407 334 685, email vufba@vfbv.com.au) or Bob MacDonald (0418 322 680, email vrfba@vfbv.com.au).

Quentin Turner, AFSM.
VFBV Chairman.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - May 2004



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all volunteer firefighters...

Charities Legislation – Brigade ABN's / Trust Fund

As a consequence of the Federal Government's agreement to the CFA retaining its status as a charity, the Australian Taxation Office has indicated that the CFA and all of its brigades must operate under the one ABN. The VFBV Board has received a briefing from the CFA in this regard and will continue to provide input into the manner in which this matter is treated by the CFA. As brigades could imagine, there are some very complex issues involved in resolving this requirement of the Australian Taxation Office. All volunteers should be assured that there will be no agreement until full consultation takes place.

An additional requirement placed on the CFA (and all charities) is for all donations to the CFA and brigades to be banked in one Trust Fund – this is a legislative requirement. The CFA is currently investigating how this requirement can be best implemented. Any Trust Fund will have a majority of volunteer representation as trustees. VFBV will ensure that the views of the volunteers are given full consideration by the CFA as they develop proposals to address the requirements of the legislation.

Volunteering Australia Conference

VFBV has been invited to present a paper at a Volunteer Conference to be held in Melbourne in June. The VFBV Board has nominated Chairman Quentin Turner to present this paper.

Joint Meeting Between VFBV and Two Associations

A joint meeting between VFBV, the VRFBA State Council and the VUFBA Governing Body, will be held at Fiskville on Sunday 23rd May 2004. A further joint meeting is planned for later in the year.

Items of mutual interest will be included on the agenda for the meeting. Input will also be sought from all members on strategies to continue to bring the Associations closer together and to rationalise the role of VFBV.

Volunteer Workshops

Sunday 27th June – Emergency Alerting Systems, Country CAD Centre at Ballarat

“The CFA is moving towards a Statewide alerting system for emergency service staff and volunteers. A country computer aided dispatch (CAD) centre is now operating and the Spectrum telephone system is replacing the soon to be decommissioned ERS system. What do the volunteers require from these systems and is it achievable?”

Sunday 22nd August – Volunteer and Employer Support, Fiskville

“Are additional forms of support appropriate for volunteers and employers? Should consideration be given to tax incentives, Council rate rebates, special leave arrangements, volunteer payments etc.? Should there be greater recognition given to CFA volunteers or emergency service volunteers?”

VFBV has invited all urban and rural Regional Councils to nominate one volunteer for each of the above Workshops to provide input into advice to be provided to the CFA or to assist in the development of a volunteer position in regard to these two issues.

Names of the volunteers nominated, together with contact details, are required to enable pre-workshop papers to be forwarded. Naturally, it would be expected nominees have an interest or some expertise in the topics, but if not, this should not preclude another volunteer from being nominated.

Closing date for nomination forms is 1st June 2004 – nomination forms are available by contacting VFBV.

Quentin Turner, AFSM.
VFBV Chairman.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - April 2004



From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all volunteer firefighters...

Information for all Volunteers

Welcome to Peter Davis and Bob MacDonald who have now taken over the roles of joint Executive Officers of VFBV following the departure of Allan Woodward. Allan's decision not to extend his contract with VFBV was reported in the December issue of *The Fireman*. Management of VFBV is very much a team effort with Peter and Bob working closely with myself to form a strong management team. This team is further strengthened by the members of the VFBV Board – all of whom are volunteer firefighters themselves.

Peter and Bob will be responsible for the day to day operations of VFBV whilst still managing the affairs of their respective Associations with assistance from Jenni at VUFBA and Lisa at VRFBA. All contact details remain the same.

Peter and Bob have many years experience in the management of their respective Associations and in representing volunteers' views to the CFA. This experience will be invaluable in their roles with VFBV and will ensure that the close working relationship between the Associations, VFBV and the CFA continues and can be further improved upon.

Proposed Volunteer Workshops

As reported in the last edition, VFBV proposes to conduct two volunteer workshops during 2004, however, the timetable as previously advised will be altered.

On **Sunday 27th June**, a Workshop on Emergency Alerting Systems for volunteers will be conducted at Fiskville. The move towards a Statewide alerting system and the use of the Telstra Spectrum System as replacement for the ERS which is to be decommissioned by Telstra, will be included amongst the items to be discussed.

On **Sunday 22nd August**, a Workshop on volunteer and employer support will be conducted at Fiskville. Areas to be covered will include volunteer and employer recognition, financial considerations including reimbursement for out of pocket expenses, tax incentives, schemes similar to the Army Reservist Scheme and other topical issues.

Invitations will be forwarded to Regional Councils to nominate appropriate volunteers to attend the Workshops.

Spray Protection System

VFBV is aware that the field trials of the spray protection system for tankers has been completed and is seeking details of the outcome of these trials from the CFA.

Charities Inquiry – Brigade ABN's

The CFA has been in discussions with the Australian Taxation Office in regard to the implementation of the Federal Government's undertaking to protect the tax deductibility of donations to volunteer fire brigades. Some brigades have been pro-active in seeking to obtain an ABN from the Taxation Office and the CFA has requested that no action be taken by brigades to apply for separate ABN's until the CFA and the Taxation Office can resolve the process to be adopted. One suggestion is for all brigades to operate under the CFA ABN – however, this requires considerable discussion and consideration. VFBV is seeking to become involved in the resolution of this matter.

Charging for False Alarms

One of the recommendations from the Inquiry into the Funding of the Fire Services conducted during 2003 was for both fire services to become more active in the recovery of costs for attendance at false alarms.

It appears that the CFA has adopted this recommendation which can have both benefits and disadvantages for our service.

Benefits can include greater emphasis by businesses in ensuring that their fire alarms are properly maintained thereby minimising the number of false alarms we are attending, whilst the disadvantages can include the disenchantment of employers who are supporters of volunteers and allow them to readily respond to call outs. These employers could withdraw their support and not allow their employees to respond in future.

VFBV has written to the CFA requesting it to improve the information to brigades on false alarm attendances, what constitutes a false alarm and what is chargeable. In addition we have recommended that career staff be informed of the discretion of whether or not to charge for false alarms and that the CFA reiterate to Area Managers, FIRS call takers and the volunteer brigades, the discretion which exists for brigades to recommend whether or not to charge for false alarm attendances.

Quentin Turner, AFSM.
VFBV Chairman.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - Mar 04

From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all volunteer firefighters...

Another Landmark Meeting

Both Association Executives and VFBV Board met with the Emergency Services Commissioner, Bruce Esplin, on 25 February 2004 at the OESC in Collins St.

In a two-hour meeting, senior association volunteers were able to ask questions concerning the Report into the Victorian Bushfires. This provided an opportunity to clarify issues and obtain an enhanced understanding of the review committee's views. The meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss other issues important to volunteers allowing a better understanding of the direction of OESC.

Commissioner Esplin indicated that he welcomed input and comment from volunteers. Whilst he couldn't always guarantee to agree, he felt that better results could flow from active debate.

The meeting was attended by VFBV Board, Rural Executive Committee and Urban Policy Services and Review Committee members. The exchange of views was so successful that the Commissioner has welcomed another meeting to be held later in the year.

Review of CFA Act

Both Associations have nominated delegates Quentin Turner and Bruce Conboy to a high level steering committee that will oversee the two year project.

The steering committee, which includes the CFA Chairman and CFA CEO, will establish a working party that will involve key stakeholders.

Although no firm decision has yet been made, VFBV hopes the steering committee will develop an issues paper and widely distribute it for volunteer comment before any proposals for change to the Act are considered. This will allow identification of key issues and allow input from volunteers on this important review. VFBV and the Associations positively support this project which has given a commitment to volunteer consultation.

To support this process, the Combined Association's Executive has endorsed a number of key principles to guide the review process:

- CFA is fundamentally a volunteer organisation supported by career staff.
- Volunteers prefer not to lose any privileges that currently exist.
- Specific volunteer benefits, such as volunteer immunity and volunteer compensation, should be retained.
- A definition of volunteerism could be incorporated in the Act.
- The principles in the Volunteer Charter could be incorporated into the Act.
- Adequate time is needed to permit broader consultation with volunteers on proposed changes to the Act
- The proportion of volunteer delegates to the CFA Board is preferably not changed.
- Volunteer awareness of the review project and its outcomes is promoted.
- Volunteers' overall status and participation should ideally be the same or better.

Charities Bill

VFBV has now confirmed with CFA that CFA's charitable status will remain unchanged, except for voluntary relinquishment of PBI benefits for CFA staff, and that there will be no impact on brigades or groups.

Two Volunteer Workshops Planned

VFBV has further progressed plans to conduct two volunteer workshops. The first will elicit volunteers' views on support of volunteers and employers. The second workshop will identify issues important to volunteers in the introduction of a statewide emergency alerting system. Input provided to each workshop will be developed into issues papers that will assist CFA to be better informed about the volunteer perspective.

In the area of support to volunteers and their employers, VFBV knows that volunteers don't want to be paid, but they do want some tangible recognition. This workshop will seek to identify what that tangible recognition could be. This workshop is planned for the first half of the year.

The transition from ERS to Spectrum to EAS will bring with it a number of issues for volunteers. We want to identify those concerns so that CFA may be better able to support that transition with as little inconvenience to volunteers as possible. This workshop is planned for mid year.

Volunteer participants will be drawn from across the state and the issues papers developed will be distributed through regional council executives for comment and feedback. These workshops have been conceived in conjunction with CFA and both Associations and they are designed to identify and promote volunteers' views.

Volunteer Charter

The VFBV Board feels the Charter could be better promoted within CFA and within government. VFBV will make approaches to CFA seeking the inclusion of the Volunteer Charter in the CFA red diary from 2005.

This will provide an opportunity for a range of volunteers to have ready access to the Charter. The Volunteer Charter can also be downloaded from the VFBV website:

www.vfbv.com.au/policies/volcharter.pdf.

COAG Bushfire Review

VFBV forwarded a submission to the COAG review in December and has received an acknowledgement from the Review Chairman, Mr Stuart Ellis, complimenting VFBV on its well-written presentation. Because volunteers provide their services on interstate and campaign fires, it is expected that some of the recommendations may impact on volunteers.

VFBV, in conjunction with both Associations will monitor these developments seeking to make an appropriate submission through CFA and the AAVFBA.

Quentin Turner, AFSM.
VFBV Chairman.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - Feb 04

From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To all volunteer firefighters...



Changes to CFA Regulations

On behalf of all Associations, VFBV reviewed the regulatory impact statement released on 13 December and provided appropriate comment on the changes to the Regulations.

Since this submission, CFA has provided an assurance that the practice of nominating persons who have made an outstanding contribution to CFA with Honorary Life Membership of the CFA will be retained. CFA has also further discussed issues in relation to striking off the roll and volunteer discipline. VFBV will continue to monitor these matters and continue appropriate discussions under the review of the CFA Act.

The CFA Regulations 2004 came into effect on 31 January 2004.



Charities Bill

VFBV is pleased, along with VUFBA and VRFBA, to have supported CFA in achieving an outcome for volunteers and congratulates CFA on the principle of its achievement. We will continue to seek information about any impacts that the Treasurer's offer may have.



Meeting with Emergency Services Commissioner

VFBV Board, VRFBA Executive Committee and VUFBA PS&R Committee will have the pleasure of meeting with Commissioner Esplin on 25 February for a briefing on the Victorian Bushfire Inquiry report. This meeting will provide an opportunity to raise some issues with Mr Esplin.



Volunteer Workshops Planned

VFBV, in consultation with the Associations and CFA plans to host two volunteer workshops in the first half of 2004. The purpose of the workshops is to elicit volunteers' views on topics and incorporate these views into discussion documents. Whilst details have yet to be finalised and approved, workshops on topics related to volunteer and employer support and emergency alerting systems are currently proposed.



Work continues on VFBV Interim Arrangements

Discussions between VFBV, VRFBA and VUFBA continue concerning the details of the interim arrangements for the overarching body. Whilst not yet finalised, both VUFBA Secretary, Peter Davis, and VRFBA Executive Officer, Bob MacDonald, are to become joint VFBV Executive Officers to continue the day to day work of VFBV. At the landmark meeting of senior association executives on 28 January, the clear message was given that the Associations should get on with working through this proposal.

This will involve more Association work being handled under the VFBV banner. This would allow one Executive Officer to manage an issue on behalf of all Associations rather than both secretaries duplicating the same work on behalf of their own Association. The resulting benefit will be more

efficient use of human resources. This step is consistent with the Overarching Body Stage II that was set out in the VFBV Business Plan.

Both the Rural and Urban Associations in many ways will continue as they do now. They will continue with the same meetings and still have coverage of the issues they do now although, as stated above, the majority of Association issues would be dealt with as VFBV issues by exception unless they are purely matters pertinent to an Association. Consultation with and feedback to both Associations on all issues will be paramount.

The aim at this stage is to obtain better efficiencies of time and resources and to provide better information to brigades and regional councils across the state.

Final details have not yet been agreed on at this stage. The VFBV Chairman Quentin Turner, Rural President Bruce Conboy and Urban President Ron Schultz are continuing their discussions with Bob and Peter.

Quentin Turner, AFSM.
VFBV Chairman.

VFBV Column in *The Fireman* - Nov '03

From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To *all* Victorian fire brigade volunteers...



Charitable Status of Volunteer Emergency Service Organisations

Proposed changes under the draft Charities Bill could impact on CFA's status as a charity and this could also impact on brigades' and groups' charitable status.

The CFA Chairman has been discussing this matter with advisors to the Treasurer, Mr Costello, and VFBV along with the Urban and Rural Associations have supported CFA in this strategy.

Although the Government does not intend to tax volunteers or to increase their administrative burden, the proposed changes to the legislation under the Draft Charities Bill (2003) could have an effect on CFA's charitable status and, as a consequence, on the charitable status of 1,228 brigades.

VFBV feels that the possible loss of charitable status and consequent loss of tax concessions and other benefits would greatly disadvantage volunteer brigades and their ability to raise funds within their respective communities. In support of CFA, VFBV has drawn this to the attention of the Treasurer. No decisions have been reached yet and VFBV will continue to monitor this situation.



Changes to CFA Regulations

In conjunction with both Associations, VFBV has worked with CFA by providing feedback on proposed changes to the CFA Regulations. The draft finalised by CFA has now been forwarded to Parliamentary Counsel and it is expected that a Regulatory Impact Statement will be released along with the proposed amendments for public comment during November.



Report of the Inquiry into the Victorian Bushfires 2002-03

This report was released on 14 October by the Premier at a ceremony at Parliament House attended by a broad array of emergency services personnel. The substantial and comprehensive report contains a large number of recommendations to which volunteers will no doubt have some response. Volunteers are welcome to channel their comments through their Associations or to VFBV.

VFBV is engaged in discussion with CFA on some of the mutual concerns arising out of the report.



Water for Fire fighting

This issue has become more topical now that DSE has released a green paper (*Securing Our Water Future*) for public comment. The deadline for response to the green paper has been extended to 30 November 2003.

The green paper makes it clear that we need to conserve water for our environment and for domestic and agricultural purposes and provides some important strategies to achieve this. However, it is what the green paper doesn't say that is of concern.

VFBV along with others are working in conjunction with CFA to discuss these issues which are of mutual concern.



The Fabric of Volunteerism

A paper presented at the AAVFBA Conference in Lake Bennett, NT has been published on the VFBV website which outlines a view that we need to be very careful in arguing for payments to volunteers because it could destroy the fabric of volunteerism. Further details are available at www.vfbv.com.au/issues/index.htm.



Protecting Victoria Traveling Scholarships

A package of benefits announced by the Premier on 14 March included a traveling scholarship program for CFA and VICSES volunteers. Within *Protecting Victoria*, the purpose of the scheme is to enable grants to be made to individual volunteers of CFA and VICSES to assist them to undertake studies in Australia or overseas to improve the range, quality and efficiency of the emergency services for the benefit of the community. The activities might include observation, investigation, research, and participation in specialised training.

Details of the scholarships have yet to be finalised, but volunteers need to be aware that this program is in development. VFBV is working in conjunction with CFA on this program. Further information will be published when available.

Quentin Turner, AFSM.
VFBV Chairman.

Article for inclusion in *The Fireman* - Oct '03



VFBV Annual General Meeting

VFBV conducted its Annual General Meeting on 26 September 2003, a year after the inauguration the overarching body.

At the General Meeting, Quentin Turner, AFSM was re-elected as VFBV Chairman, Bruce Conboy was re-elected as VFBV Deputy Chairman and Peter Davis, AFSM was re-elected as VFBV Treasurer.

The Chairman welcomed Peter Downes to the VFBV Board. Peter's period of office will continue until September 2004. The Chairman also welcomed the re-appointment of Gary Lyttle, AFSM and Mick Taylor, AFSM as Board Members. Their period of office will continue until September 2006.

The VFBV Chairman's report is reproduced below. A copy of the VFBV Annual Report is available on www.vfbv.com.au/issues.

From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To *all* Victorian fire brigade volunteers...



VFBV Chairman's Report

The inaugural year of the overarching body has been filled with challenges and many significant gains. However we still need to further enhance our working relationships with CFA, the Urban and Rural Associations and to further consult with volunteers about their expectations of VFBV.

In terms of our relationships with the Associations and with CFA, we are still feeling our way. We have been forward in representing views on behalf of volunteers who will need to decide if this is consistent with the level of presence that they want. It is always difficult when a new organisation begins operations because in the process of establishing a purpose and identity, unforeseen relationship issues appear. From a Chairman's perspective and respecting CFA's statutory responsibility for all volunteers, we would like to settle into appropriate routines that allow key issues for volunteers to be collected, consulted upon and considered.



The work of the VFBV Board has seen the appointment of our CEO and the establishment of an office with appropriate infrastructure within the CFA complex at Burwood East.

Key achievements of the VFBV Board have been to make volunteer submissions to the Fire Service Levy Review and to both the National and State bushfire inquiries. Working in consultation with CFA, we have had an opportunity to raise matters that are important to all volunteers.

More importantly, the value of the combined volunteer voice has been recognised by external organisations, such as the Fire Services Levy Review Committee, in seeking to consult with volunteers on matters that are likely to affect them. In my mind, this is the true intention behind the

Volunteer Charter: for volunteers to be respected and valued for their contribution and be consulted on matters that are likely to impact on them.

Another key achievement has been the establishment of VFVB's website at www.vfbv.com.au. This, along with a regular column in *The Fireman* and with a quarterly newsletter posted to all brigades, groups and regional councils, forms the basic platform for communication with volunteers about Association issues. It supplements the information already provided by CFA through a variety of mechanisms.

In addition to this communications program, VFVB has also been active in the public arena, making relevant media comment that has profiled the achievements of volunteers. A further example of our external presence was the delivery of my paper at the Australasian Assembly of Volunteer Fire Brigades' Associations Conference on behalf of all volunteers in August of this year. The paper referred to the fabric of volunteerism and how that fabric might be affected if we are not careful about payments to volunteers.

An Associations' issues register will help us coordinate work between the Associations and CFA and we will continue to work with CFA on establishing appropriate levels of consultation that advance the interests of Victorian fire brigade volunteers.

In addition to those issues handed up through both Associations, future issues that are likely to emerge include

- water resources for firefighting purposes,
- enhancing the preventative focus of our work,
- how volunteers can continue to work with CFA to achieve improved volunteering as the CFA Act is reviewed, and
- how volunteers perceive an integrated Association might work best for them.

On behalf of the VFVB Board, I am enlivened by the many challenges faced by volunteers and, in conjunction with CFA, will be working together to find a way through them.

We express our gratitude for the support of CFA to the overarching body, to the Associations for their support and to the volunteers who have provided their encouragement.

Quentin Turner, AFSM
VFVB Chairman

Article for inclusion in *The Fireman* - Sep '03

From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To *all* Victorian fire brigade volunteers...



Conjoint Regional Council Meetings

As previously mentioned in an earlier edition, the Association Secretaries will be making contact over the coming months with Regional Council Presidents and Secretaries to better understand views about conjoint regional council meetings. There are some regional councils who have already initiated these meetings or are holding discussions about this and at least one regional council has given thought to a constitution.

An information paper will be prepared by Allan Woodward that may help regional councils to consider options. It is expected that this will be made generally available after preliminary feedback has been obtained.



Fire Service Levy Update

Mr Jeff Byrne, Fire Service Levy Review Committee Chairman, invited the VFBV Chairman, VFBV CEO, Association Presidents and Secretaries to meet with him on 20 August to obtain feedback on the FSL Report and recommended actions. One of the recommendations in the report was to move towards full cost recovery from the non -insured, generators of hazardous materials call-outs and avoidable false alarms by increasing direct charges. Whilst the report argues that this would improve equity and efficiency of the FSL collection system, VFBV's initial response was that this could impact on volunteers. The concept of a proactive focus on prevention was also discussed.

These, of course, are matters for CFA. VFBV with the support of the Urban and Rural Association have appropriately raised these issues for further discussion with CFA. A brief review of the FSL Review Committee's report is available at www.vfbv.com.au/issues/fsreview.htm. A copy of the full report is available at <http://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/> (click on community consultation, current reviews).



Review of CFA Act and Regulations

With the support of both Associations, VFBV convened a special meeting of volunteers to discuss the impact of changes proposed in the draft regulations. A number of matters were raised including issues about the discipline procedures contained in the regulations. This feedback has been discussed with CFA's Legal Officer and in accordance with the CFA's direction, some of these issues have been fed back through the Directorate of the Chief Officer.

In relation to the review of the CFA Act, the CFA Chairman at the CFA/Associations Consultative Committee meeting on 27/8/03 indicated senior volunteers would be to involved at a strategic planning level. It is expected that this project may take up to two years to complete which would allow appropriate time for wide consultation with key stakeholders.



Paper on the fabric of volunteerism

The VFBV Board has endorsed a paper presented by the VFBV Chairman at the recent Australasian Assembly of Volunteer Fire Brigade Associations (AAVFBA) conference held at Lake Bennett in the

Northern Territory in August. The paper outlines a volunteer position that payments to volunteers could destroy the fabric of volunteerism. The paper also advocated that a more proactive focus on prevention would help to enhance community safety and encourage retention of volunteers. There were many positive questions from the floor and the paper appeared to be well received.

A copy of the paper is available at www.vfbv.com.au/issues/index.htm.



Seeking volunteer feedback

VFBV and the Associations are seeking your feedback on the following:

The **Victorian Auditor General's Report into Fire Prevention and Preparedness**.

Go to www.vfbv.com.au/issues/auditorgen.htm to view the recommendations. Click on the feedback link to give your views on-line.

A **Green Paper** entitled **Securing Our Water Future** has been released by the Department of Sustainability and environment. VFBV and the Associations are seeking feedback from volunteers about this paper. The paper can be obtained from <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/index.htm> (click on Securing our Water Future and follow the links). Feedback can be e-mailed to vfbv@vfbv.com.au or by fax to 03 9886 1618.

Quentin Turner
Chairman VFBV

Article for inclusion in *The Fireman* - Aug '03

From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To *all* Victorian fire brigade volunteers...



Dismissal protection in Workplace Relations Act

Volunteers who are employed under federal awards are now protected from dismissal and victimization in relation to their volunteering. However, the Associations advise volunteers not to neglect talking with their employer and discussing an agreement about their volunteering commitment.

Amendments to the Workplace Relations Act came into effect on 16 July. It is now unlawful to dismiss an employee who is temporarily absent from work on voluntary emergency management duty. An absence needs to be reasonable in all the circumstances in order to be covered, and the protection applies to volunteer members of a recognised emergency management body. The amendments require that employers should not subject employees to victimization because they are absent from work on legitimate voluntary emergency management duty.

In our understanding, there is no expectation of payment while absent from work so volunteers may expect to be unpaid unless they make other arrangements with their boss.

The vast majority of volunteers do the right thing by asking their employer in advance to agree to the absences. They also take reasonable steps to notify their employer of absences. By doing so, they are focusing on a central industrial relations principle of *a fair go all round*.

Many volunteers are business owners themselves and disruption to their livelihood can have negative effects. By talking the issue through and agreeing on a procedure before an event, difficulties can be avoided further down the track.

Based on input from volunteers, a standard form has been produced that brigades may wish to use. It provides a point for discussion between volunteers and employers and can be used to formalize an employer's permission for absences. Our VFBV CEO, Allan Woodward has established a website where you can obtain this form (www.vfbv.com.au/issues/wract/erapprov.pdf). A more detailed discussion of this topic is also available at www.vfbv.com.au/issues/wract/wract.htm.



Insurance based fire service levy to be retained

The Treasurer, John Brumby MP, announced on 31 July that the existing insurance-based fire service levy (FSL) system would be retained.

Of course VFBV supports this decision having argued this view in its extensive submission to the Fire Service Funding Review Committee. VFBV was a key leader in encouraging Associations, brigades and Regional Councils to lobby politicians. Our argument was that insurance companies were in the best position to determine risk and a levy system based on risk was the fairest approach. There is a strong link between fire services and the insurance companies whose role in collection of the FSL should be retained.

VFBV, along with VUFBA and VRFBA, thanks all of those urban and rural brigades and regional councils who supported this campaign by writing letters to their local and state politicians. The lobbying by volunteers seems to have paid-off.

The Treasurer also declared that the government has ruled out the introduction of a levy on vehicles. Other models considered were a uniform rate property levy and a risk-rated property levy. Both of these were rejected because of the cost of implementation and administration. The Treasurer also mentioned that there was no guarantee savings through reduced insurance costs would be passed on to policy holders.

The Treasurer outlined four key findings from the review:

- Fire is a major element of insurance policy risk.
- The level of under insurance was found to be low.
- There was a degree of over-collection of FSL amounts by Department of Treasury and Finance estimations, and
- There was poor cost recovery for directly charged services.

We are encouraged by the Review's findings and that the current system is being maintained.

A more detailed outline of the Review is available from VFBV website at www.vfbv.com.au/issues/fslreview.htm.



Seeking volunteer feedback

VFBV is seeking your feedback on the following:

The **Victorian Auditor General's Report into Fire Prevention and Preparedness**.

Go to www.vfbv.com.au/issues/auditorgen.htm to view the recommendations. Click on the feedback link to give your views on-line.

Water for firefighting. If you have concerns about access to water for firefighting, record your concerns on-line at www.vfbv.com.au/issues/water.htm.



Download VFBV information and views...

Combined VFBV, VUFBA and VRFBA submission to the Victorian Bushfire Inquiry: www.vfbv.com.au/issues/SubmissiontoVicBushInq.htm .

View latest copies of **VFBV Board Minutes** at www.vfbv.com.au/board/index.htm

Quentin Turner
Chairman VFBV

For inclusion in *The Fireman* - July '03

From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To *all* Victorian fire brigade volunteers...



New VFBV Website

VFBV's website is now established. At www.vfbv.com.au you can find the latest information on relevant emerging issues. This is a key achievement of the VFBV business plan and the website seeks to increase two-way communication between volunteers and the Associations. You can obtain up-to-date information relevant to all CFA volunteers, and give feedback on key issues as they arise.

The site is updated regularly and has been designed around the "3 clicks and you're there" principle...

- A click on a *Headlines* page key article link goes direct to that article.
- Navigation bars (left of screen) take you to regular pages.
- Typing a key word in the *search* box lists relevant pages.
- A click on a *feedback* link takes you to a page that will allow you to provide your feedback *on-line*.

Latest publications include:

- VFBV/VUFBA/VRFBFA volunteer submission to the Inquiry into the Victorian Bushfires 2002/03
- Associations' response to CFA's s.29 Monitoring discussion document
- Recent minutes of VFBV meetings.
- Background information about VFBV
- A range of newspaper articles which show how volunteers have been promoted in the news media.

A central function of the website will be the ability to collect feedback from volunteers on key issues presented. You can better understand key emerging issues by visiting the *Issues and Information* section on the website. You can give your brigade or group's opinion about key issues *on-line* by following the feedback links.

A future planned development is an automated newsletter. For those who subscribe, they will receive bulletins when new surveys, issues and information are posted to the website. This will allow individuals to look at those topics that interest them without having to wade through pages of text. The on-site link is not available yet, but if you want to register in advance, e-mail your name and e-mail address to vfbv@vfbv.com.au or fax it to 03 9886 1618.

Please let others know that this communications service exists:

- E-mail it to a friend
- Tell others at meetings
- Let others know by pager message



Auditor General's Report – seeking volunteer feedback

The Victorian Auditor General's Report into Fire Prevention and Preparedness had praise for CFA and DSE in the areas of strategic planning, common ICS procedures, risk-based approaches to resource allocation, community education programs and training.

The report highlighted the need for improvement in state wildfire strategies, improved strategic management of hazard reduction on public land, improved fire prevention planning and hazard management, Improved management of critical firefighting assets, and attention to fire access needs. A summary of the key recommendations has been published on the VFBV website.

What's your view of the recommendations? Feedback is sought from brigades and groups on these matters through the VFBV website. Look at the key recommendations by visiting www.vfbv.com.au/issues/auditorgen.htm. There are links to a feedback page to help you provide your *on-line* response. Feedback closes 31 August 2003.



Submission to Victorian Inquiry into Bushfires

In conjunction with VUFBA and VRFBA, and in consultation with CFA, VFBV has incorporated volunteers' views in a submission to the Victorian Bushfire Inquiry. The key volunteer issues considered relevant at the state level included: fuel reduction, obligations on landowners to reduce risks, research into the effectiveness of fuel reduction, concerns about water conservation policy, protection of water supplies following bushfires, maintenance of roads, trails and bridges that provide access during fires, adequate funding for fire appliance replacement, occasional funding assistance for the introduction of new technology, retention of the existing ERS until such time as an equivalent or better service is available, consideration of ways to offset out of pocket expenses for volunteers, consideration of a model for compensation for employers and self employed persons, and a call for a more flexible approach with volunteers who are unemployed.

VFBV has also been working in conjunction with CFA to support a substantial CFA submission to the Bushfire Inquiry. Already VFBV has been briefed on the broad picture of the CFA submission and ways in which VFBV might support this have been discussed.

A copy of the combined VFBV, VUFBA and VRFBA submission to the Victorian Bushfire Inquiry can be down loaded from the VFBV website: www.vfbv.com.au/issues/SubmissiontoVicBushInq.htm .

Quentin Turner
Chairman VFBV

For inclusion in *The Fireman* - June '03

From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To *all* Victorian fire brigade volunteers...



Do you have enough water for firefighting?

The Victorian and New South Wales Governments have joined together in a program to return a flow of water to the Snowy River. This water conservation strategy includes general closing in of open irrigation channels.

Many volunteers in the past have voiced concerns that this could have a negative impact on fire fighting operations. Irrigation channels have provided fire tankers with ready access to water when needed for firefighting purposes. The general closing in of these channels may restrict access to water in fire emergencies which may have some impact on the safety of firefighters and the efficiency of rural fire services.

Concerns have also been voiced by volunteers about the decommissioning of some dams and reservoirs and the impact that this may have on availability of water for firefighting. For example, Honeysuckle Creek Reservoir south east of Violet Town is being considered for decommissioning. This is an existing community asset that would play an important role in the event of fire. If water is likely to become more scarce in the future, the logic of decommissioning water storage assets needs to be seriously evaluated.

Supply of water for firefighting purposes is a vital issue that needs to be brought to the attention of water conservation policy makers. VFBV is willing to support CFA in discussing this with water resource planners, and the cases presented could be enhanced by examples of practical impact at brigade level.

Do you have any concerns within your brigade or group about access to water? VFBV would like to hear from any fire brigade with concerns about water supply or experiencing difficulty in obtaining sufficient water flow. We are working in conjunction with CFA on this issue and information may be helpful in influencing policy development by authorities responsible for water conservation.

Feedback can be directed to VFBV on 03 9886 1141 or by fax to 03 9886 1618 or by e-mail to vfbv@vfbv.com.au.



Vale Rob MacLennan

The VFBV Board was saddened to hear that Rob MacLennan passed away in late May. Rob was a very active contributor to CFA in many areas. He provided his time through his brigade, his region, the Urban Association and through his contribution as a CFA Board Member to name only a few areas. The VFBV Board wishes to acknowledge Rob's work and support for VFBV. He served on the VFBV Steering Committee which led to the establishment of the organisation in October 2002. His outstanding contribution will be missed. The VFBV Board extends sincerest sympathy to his family.



National Bushfire Inquiry

Thank you to all those brigades who provided information to help with the bushfire inquiries. VFBV, in conjunction with VUFBA and VRFBA, has delivered a submission to the National Bushfire Inquiry. The key issues considered relevant in the national arena included:

- fuel reduction
- obligations on landowners to reduce risks
- support for research into the effectiveness of fuel reduction
- concerns about water conservation policy not taking firefighting needs into account
- protection of water supplies following bushfires
- maintenance of roads, trails and bridges that provide access during fires
- support for the National Aerial Firefighting Strategy
- support for a national approach to equipment purchase if this can result in cost savings
- support for national initiatives that consider tax rebates to volunteers to offset the out of pocket expenses involved in volunteering, and
- consideration of a model for compensation for employers and self employed persons.

A copy of the combined VFBV, VUFBA and VRFBA submission to the National Bushfire Inquiry can be down loaded from the VFBV website: www.vfbv.com.au/issues/SubmissiontoNatBushInq.htm .



VFBV Board Member positions

In the last edition, volunteers were notified of VFBV Board Member vacancies and invited to apply for these positions. Copies of the advertisement and role statement for Board Members can be found on the VFBV website at www.vfbv.com.au/about/index.htm. Applications close with your Association Secretary/Executive Officer on 20 June 2003.



VFBV Board goes regional – Seymour 27 June 03

In keeping with its policy to have a presence in the regions, VFBV Board will meet at Seymour Fire Station on Friday 27 June. Region 12 volunteers are invited to attend an open session from 5.30 – 6.30 pm. Further regional visits are planned for Hamilton on 29 August and in Corio on 31 October.

Quentin Turner
Chairman VFBV

For inclusion in *The Fireman* - May '03

From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To *all* Victorian fire brigade volunteers...



VFBV Board Member Resigns to take up CFA Board Position

Rick Hill tendered his resignation from the VFBV Board at the April meeting. Rick has been appointed to the CFA Board as a Rural Association delegate. The Board thanked him for his contribution on the Steering Committee and on the inaugural Board in the establishment of VFBV and accepted his resignation with regret. All board members and VFBV staff wish him well in his future representation of volunteers at CFA Board level. Rick's resignation creates a casual vacancy on the VFBV Board and action will be taken to fill that vacancy.



Concerns with CFA Firefighter Recruitment Program

Whilst there are some improvements in CFA's new selection procedures for the recruitment of career firefighters, complaints have been received through Associations about the reporting of psychological test findings that are part of the screening process. VFBV has taken up these issues with CFA and is working to establish improved processes.



Update on Fire Service Levy Review

The Fire Services Funding Review Committee has not yet handed down its report which is now expected in June. The Review Committee has indicated it intends to publish all submissions on its website but recent inspection has revealed no update. www.dtf.vic.gov.au. VFBV will monitor developments on behalf of all volunteers.



Bushfire Inquiries

The CFA Recovery Project is developing a database of issues which will be formulated into strategies that will be put to the OESC Bushfire Inquiry. **VFBV will be working in conjunction with CFA** on this process.

The VFBV Update distributed in April advised brigades how they could make submissions through their Associations and VFBV to the bushfire inquiry. Volunteers can contact their Association Secretary/Executive Officer, or fax issues to VFBV on 03 9886 1618 or by e-mail to vfbv@vfbv.com.au. The closing date is 30 May 2003.



CFA Pumper Tanker Replacement Program

In addition to consultation and **cooperation with CFA** in general on this issue, VFBV has initiated, through the Joint Equipment Review Committee (JERC), a working party on the issue of long term funding of appliances. The first meeting of the working party is scheduled for May. At this meeting, issues of funding, appliance replacement, and service life of appliances will be discussed. Recommendations will be channeled back through JERC for consideration by CFA.



Role of BASO's

Through the VRFBA and the VUFBA there have been a number of complaints that BASO's may not be performing the original roles for which their positions were created. For the information of brigades and regional councils, the CFA Board resolved in November 2001 and again in May 2002:

"That the (CFA) Board reaffirmed the position that BASO's are to be directly interfacing and working with brigades. They must be located as close as possible to the Brigades they service, not working from the Area Headquarters. Any variation to this resolution may be made with the written approval from the Director Community Safety after consultation with all brigades being serviced by the BASO"

This matter **will be further discussed with CFA.**



Congratulations to Centenary Medal Awardees

VFBV congratulates all those CFA Members who were awarded Centenary Medals. The list of awardees announced on 24 April includes volunteer and career members and executives. A full listing is available at www.itsanhonour.gov.au



VFBV Board goes Regional – Warragul 30 May 03

VFBV Board will meet at Warragul Fire Station on Friday 30 May. Volunteers from local brigades and regions are invited to attend an open session from 5.30 – 6.30 pm. Further regional visits are planned for Seymour on 27 June and Hamilton on 29 August.

Quentin Turner
Chairman VFBV

Board Members of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) Invitation to Apply

Urban Volunteer Representative – 3 year term until September 2006
Rural Volunteer Representative – 3 year term until September 2006
Rural Volunteer Representative – balance of existing term until September 2004

Closing date for written applications is 20 June 2003.

VFBV advances the interests of **all** Victorian fire brigade volunteers and advocates on their behalf to CFA and other key stakeholders. The VFBV Board drives policy development based on volunteer input and is involved in management of issues that are of central importance to all CFA volunteers.

VFBV now seeks written applications from interested CFA urban and rural volunteers who are keen to be the driving force that propels fire and emergency service volunteering to new heights.

One Urban and one Rural Board Member position will become vacant in September 2003. These positions are for a 3 year term. One Rural Board Member position is currently vacant. This position will be for the remainder of an existing term that expires in Sep '04. Applications are invited from urban and rural volunteers to fill these positions on the VFBV Board.

You are a committed CFA volunteer and a member of an Association affiliated volunteer brigade. You have a wide range of experiences in CFA and you have your finger on the pulse of volunteer issues. Your contact network is wide, you are an avid participant at CFA meetings, and your passion for CFA volunteering is balanced by a practical view of what is achievable.

The role of a VFBV Board Member involves contributing to debate at Board Meetings, networking with others about policies and issues management, and not only making decisions but being prepared to defend them for the benefit of all CFA volunteers.

If you are challenged by the prospect of making a difference for CFA volunteers, then send your written application addressing the key selection criteria in the role statement, plus an outline of your CFA activity including the names of two referees, by 20 June 2003 to:

For members of affiliated Urban Brigades
The Secretary
VUFBA
PO Box 91
PATTERSON LAKES VIC 3197
Tel: 03 9775 0117
Fax: 03 9775 0096

For members of affiliated Rural Brigades
The Executive Officer
VRFBA
5 Hamilton St
GISBORNE VIC 3454
Tel: 03 5428 4005
Fax: 03 5428 4406

A Board Member role statement including the key selection criteria is available from your Association Secretary or from VFBV (tel: 03 9886 1141). This is an honorary position. No honorarium is paid. Out of pocket travel and accommodation expenses to attend necessary meetings will be reimbursed.

Further information can be obtained from Peter Davis, Secretary VUFBA or Bob MacDonald, Executive Officer VRFBA.

Written applications addressing the key selection criteria in the Board Member role statement will be received by the respective Association Secretaries until 20 June 2003.



Volunteer
Fire
Brigades
Victoria

Inc. A0043424H

ABN 110 830 80403

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Mt Waverley Vic 3149

Level 2, 4 Lakeside Drive
Burwood East Vic 3151

Tel: 03 9886 1141
Fax: 03 9886 1618
Mob: 0418 506 378

VFBV Policies – out for comment

Introduction:

VFBV is distributing two policies: Payment of Volunteers and Recognition of Volunteers. These are being distributed through Associations to brigades and regional councils for comment.

If you would like to provide feedback to the VFBV Board on these policies, you can:

- E-mail a response to vf bv@vf bv.com.au
- Fax your comments to 03 9886 1618, or
- Sent written comment to PO Box 453, Mt Waverley 3149.

The feedback opportunity closes 30 May 2003.

Policy 1: Payments to Volunteers

Payment of Income for Firefighting Services

VFBV is not in favour of volunteers receiving income in return for their voluntary firefighting services.

Rationale:

According to the National Standards on Volunteering¹, volunteering is defined as an activity which takes place in not for profit organisations and is undertaken

- to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer,
- of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;
- for no financial payment; and
- in designated volunteer positions only.

Volunteering one's time is a gift to the volunteer's community. When income is attached, it is no longer given freely.

Reimbursement of Expenses

VFBV supports payments to volunteers to cover out-of-pocket travel and incidentals expenses.

Rationale:

Volunteers give freely of their time but do not expect to be out-of-pocket for their efforts.

Receipt of reimbursement for travel or incidentals costs is not income and is a fair and reasonable way to reimburse costs associated with providing volunteer services.

Right to Decline

Volunteers have a right to decline participation in emergency callouts or strike teams where their personal income will be seriously affected.

Rationale:

Volunteers' families and personal circumstances must be considered along with their volunteer commitment to their communities. Where volunteering will disadvantage them financially, they must have the right to say no and be respected for that decision.



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Tel: 03 9886 1141
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¹ **National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-for-profit Organisations.** Volunteering Australia Inc. 2nd Edition. 2001, Appendix 1, p.62.

VFBV supports and respects volunteers who choose to say no to volunteer activities because it affects their family or their income.

Emergency Service Leave

VFBV is opposed to mandatory emergency service leave being forced on employers through industrial awards. On the other hand, VFBV supports voluntary emergency service leave being negotiated at personal/local levels.

Rationale:

Just as volunteers have a right to choose to offer their services, employers should have the same right to choose to support employees who are volunteers. It is unfair to mandatorily impose a financial or operational burden on employers. Some employers may not be able to afford the leave or may find that the absence from the operation impacts negatively on the business. The guiding principle is choice.

On the other hand, employers may choose to provide leave arrangements to employees who are registered emergency service volunteers. It is expected that employees will negotiate and agree leave conditions with their employers beforehand and provide timely notice of absences for being reasonably absent from work to attend emergencies.

Maintenance of an existing employee benefit or income can be seen as being fundamentally different from the provision of additional income. Payment for emergency service leave is seen as an employer donation that supports an emergency service volunteer by maintaining an existing benefit. It upholds the principle that volunteers should not be out of pocket as a result of their volunteering. Payment for emergency service leave is not regarded as income in return for voluntary services.

Reimbursement for Employers or Self Employed

VFBV would support any government initiatives to provide full or partial reimbursement to employers or self-employed persons for release of workers who are emergency service volunteers to attend specialist training.

Rationale:

The level of training required of emergency service volunteers is increasing. In order to meet requirements for competency development as well as occupational health and safety requirements, it is essential that volunteers attend these training courses.

A government system that reimburses employers or self-employed persons for leave taken to attend necessary training will decrease the burden on employers and the self-employed.

Such payments are seen as maintenance of existing benefits and not seen as additional income.

Policy 2: Recognition of Volunteers

VFBV recognises that CFA's 58,000 volunteers contribute an estimated \$460 million to the State every year through provision of their volunteer labour.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria supports the following strategies for the recognition of CFA volunteers.

- Recognition of particular firefights through the provision of CFA funded mementos that acknowledge and honour the contribution of volunteers involved, both those who participated in strike teams and those who provided support or vigilance from their home regions.
- Provision of tax breaks that reduce the out-of-pocket expenses of volunteers.
- Provision of exemptions from Fire Service Levies or other fire related charges.
- Contributions to a welfare fund to support volunteers in need who may be experiencing hardship as a result of their volunteering.

- Recognition of the contribution of employers who release their employees to attend emergencies as volunteers.
- Government announcements that link acknowledgement of a special volunteer contribution to tangible statements of support such as additional funding for resources and equipment or acknowledgment that minimum equipment standards will be maintained.
- Strategies that help employers to appreciate and benefit from the skills developed by volunteers.
- Recognition of volunteers through the formal system of honours and awards from the Associations, CFA and the National Honours Secretariat.
- Strategies that link communities with local volunteer brigades. These strategies could include practical support at the individual volunteer level, community involvement in award ceremonies and participation in nationally acknowledged recognition days such as International Firefighters Day – 4th May.
- Establishment of a permanent, publicly accessible recognition site that allows recording of group and individual achievements with the opportunity to add to this list on an annual basis.

Comment Requested

Whilst your general comments about the above policies are welcome, please indicate if you

- (a) support each policy
- (b) generally support it but propose amendments, or
- (c) do not support these policy at all.

Closing date **30 May 2003**. Further details:

Allan Woodward
CEO
Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria
Level 2, 4 Lakeside Drive
Burwood East Vic 3151

Tel: 03 9886 1141
Fax: 03 9886 1618
Mob: 0418 506 378

Press Release

Embargo Details: For inclusion in April 2003 Edition of The Fireman

From the VFBV Chairman, Quentin Turner, AFSM...

To *all* Victorian fire brigade volunteers...



Update on Fire Service Levy Review

Thank you to those brigades and regional councils who have written to the Treasurer to express concerns about changes to the Fire Service Levy System. Unless we maintain our position, it may lead to changes in the funding system that could threaten CFA volunteerism. If brigades and regional councils would like to contribute their views the time to do this is now. A form letter available from VFBV CEO (tel: 9886 1141) may assist with letter content.

The Fire Services Funding Review Committee Report is due in April. Both CFA and VFBV on behalf of volunteers have a particular interest in this report. VFBV will monitor developments on behalf of all volunteers.



Bushfire Inquiry

A proper review of the 2002/03 wildfires is important to volunteers and the Associations. The Premier has announced a Bushfire Inquiry which will be conducted by the Emergency Services Commissioner. CFA, through its Recovery Project, will receive input on operational matters and Regions will contact brigades involved during March and April to elicit input. CFA plans to categorise this input into themes for further consultation and presentation to the inquiry. VFBV will be working with CFA on this process.

If brigades and groups feel they have other information to offer, VFBV assisted by both Associations, will receive the information and take it up on volunteers' behalf. Volunteers can submit issues through their Association Secretary/Executive Officer, by fax to 9886 1618, by e-mail to vfsv@vfsv.com.au or by telephone to VFBV CEO on 9886 1141 or 0418 506 378. The closing date is 30 May 2003.



Employee and Workplace Relations Act

On volunteers' behalf, VFBV has communicated with the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations about protection of volunteers from unfair dismissal. Whilst VFBV supports protection of volunteers' jobs, we also need to support employers who, in effect, volunteer to release their employees to attend emergencies.

It is important that volunteers maintain their existing good workplace relations practices where volunteers negotiate in advance with their employers concerning absences from the workplace for the purpose of attending emergencies.

A final position has not been announced by the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. VFBV will continue to monitor this situation on behalf of volunteers.



Emergency Service Leave in Industrial Awards

A significant issue has emerged concerning the insertion of emergency service leave clauses into some awards. Whilst VFBV understands the intent of the industrial bodies in support of volunteer firefighters, the danger is that insertion of such clauses may disadvantage employers as well as affect the employment of emergency service volunteers.

VFBV prefers that any such arrangements for leave be negotiated at the local level because this allows employers the option to release their employees rather than it being a mandatory award requirement. If volunteers can choose to volunteer their time, employers deserve similar respect to be allowed to choose to release workers. VFBV currently has a draft policy on *Payment of Volunteers* which is important to this issue. Volunteers are invited to comment on this policy before 30 May.

If you would like a VFBV Board Member to attend as a visitor at your next Regional Council meeting, contact Allan Woodward on 0418 506 378.

Quentin Turner
Chairman VFBV

Press Release

Embargo Details: For inclusion in March 2003 Edition of The Fireman

From the VFBV Chairman...

CFA Appliance Fleet

VFBV has now produced an information paper on the status of the CFA fleet of current and future appliance replacement needs in CFA and has e information paper² will be used to negotiate funding and volunteer in Government.

VFBV has worked with CFA to clarify issues relating to the CFA fleet replacement and contributing to the analysis of current and future appliance replacement needs.

Discussions with CFA are currently being held to fine tune details of

seek support from the Government for CFA's vehicle replacement program. It is Government policy to review strategic resource requirements such as an expanded fire appliance replacement program.

On behalf of all volunteers, VFBV will be meeting with the Minister in and put the volunteer view.

VFBV has also held discussions with DC continue to provide input into vehicle replacement issues through the CFA has already provided written confirmation of their commitment t without consultation with volunteers and that the appropriate forum for matters is through JERC.

VFBV will raise these matters with the Minister in early March. Discussions have also been...

Update on Fire Service Levy Review

VFBV and both the Urban and Rural Associations filed submissions with the Fire Services Funding Review Committee (FSFRC) secretariat in the Department of Treasury and Finance before 14 February. These were important submissions that outlined the issues of concern to volunteers. A copy of the VFBV Executive Summary was published in last month's edition of *The Fireman*.³

Since these submissions were prepared, the VFBV CEO has met with the Victorian Farmer's Federation (VFF) and the CEO and VFBV Chairman have met with Mr Jeff Byrne, Chairman of the FSFRC.

The VFF understood volunteers' concerns about the impact of a loss of CFA territory and changes to appropriation status of CFA funds. They were also supportive of the need for proper funding of the fire services.

VFBV was able to elevate the FSFRC Chairman Jeff Byrne's awareness of volunteers' concerns. He is now more aware of the impact of changes to the CFA funding mix and the resultant impact this would have on CFA service provision. He also understood volunteers concerns about loss of appropriation status of CFA funds.

Whilst these meetings went well, it is vital that we remain focused on representing volunteer concerns and contributing volunteers' views concerning the overall funding of CFA. We must guard against any attempts at

² Copies of the VFBV Information Paper on the Status of CFA Fleet Replacement is available from the VFBV Office (Tel 9886 1141)

³ Copies of the VFBV Submission to the Fire Services Funding Review Committee are available from the VFBV Office (Tel: 9886 1141) of your regional office.

overall revision or amalgamation of the fire and emergency services because the current integrated mix of career and volunteer fire services is working well.

Brigades who have contributed to forwarding letters to the Treasurer concerning changes to the Fire Service Levy system are thanked for their efforts. VFBV is planning further media releases on this matter and will be seeking the assistance of volunteers in speaking with local politicians.

Employment and Workplace Relations Act

VFBV has also responded to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations' intention to legislate for the protection of volunteers against unfair dismissal. The current federal Government proposal will make it illegal to dismiss a worker who is an emergency service volunteer who is necessarily absent from work to attend an emergency.

Whilst VFBV has praised this move to further protect volunteers, caution is required in its implementation. The majority of volunteers work hard to build relationships with their employers and negotiate their volunteer commitments in advance giving timely notice of necessary absences. We would not want any of this good workplace relations practice to be changed by legislation. In VFBV's view it is still necessary that volunteers negotiate and agree workplace absences to enable them to attend emergencies and volunteers should not interpret this legislation as an excuse to be absent from work without permission.

New policies out for comment

The VFBV Board at its February meeting endorsed two draft policies: **Payments to Volunteers** and **Recognition of Volunteers**. These draft policies will be distributed through Associations inviting volunteer comment by 30 May 2003.

The role of VFBV, in conjunction with the Associations, is to ensure that payments to volunteers and recognition of volunteers are important issues that are given the opportunity to incorporate volunteer feedback is important to VFBV. The draft policies are released for comment.

One of VFBV's roles is to assist volunteers to formulate views on a range of matters.

The current schedule will allow feedback to be presented to the Board. VFBV will consider any recommended changes. Members can contact their Association secretariat for copies of the policies. Feedback can be provided to VFBV by e-mail ceo@vfbv.com.au or by fax to 03 9886 1618,

The Urban and Rural Association will consider an Issues Tracking procedure outlined in last month's edition of *The Fireman*. The aim of this procedure is to improve monitoring of matters raised with CFA by volunteers. Association Executives will be considering a Memorandum of Understanding on internal and external representation. This outlines how VFBV and the Associations will work together in dealing with issues of importance to volunteers and how VFBV will be involved in internal and external representation. This is consistent with the Volunteer Charter and calls on volunteer members to work through their Associations in preference to making public media comment.

If you would like a member of the VFBV Board to attend as a visitor at your next Regional Council meeting, contact Allan Woodward on 0418 506 378.

Quentin Turner
Chairman VFBV

Press Release

Embargo Details: Not to be released before 8 Feb 2003
For inclusion in February Edition of The Fireman

Review of Fire Services Levy

Ongoing funding of CFA was identified by the VFBV Board as a key volunteer issue at its October 2002 meeting. Only shortly after this, the Treasurer, Mr Brumby, announced a review of the Fire Services Levy (FSL) with a report on this issue to be handed down in March 2003. VFBV has already been proactive by holding meetings with Minister Haermeyer and the Insurance Council of Australia.

The key threats to volunteerism in any changes to the existing FSL system potentially involve changes to CFA territory and possible loss of 'appropriation' status of funds generated. Changes to CFA territory could mean a loss of important revenue and reduced flexibility in responding to fires, and changes in the appropriation status of CFA funds could weaken CFA's access to needed funds. These issues will be tackled by VFBV and the Associations through written submissions to the FSL Review Committee due in mid February.

Briefing information on this issue has already been distributed through the Associations to Brigades and Regional Councils. This material contained a form letter that can be used to inform the Treasurer about key volunteer concerns. A discussion paper has been produced and is available on request from your Association Secretary.

Issues Tracking Procedure

The VFBV Board has endorsed *in-principle* a model for tracking of issues referred to CFA and has approved it being forwarded to the Urban and Rural Associations for endorsement.

When Association reviews were conducted in 2000, many members indicated the time taken to get an issue up from brigade level, through Council, to CFA and back takes too long. The VFBV Board identified that most of the hold-ups seem to occur at CFA level and that an Issues Tracking Procedure would best focus on freeing the hold-ups.

The flow chart and summary procedure attached outlines how regions can fast track an issue for Association attention and how a register of issues will keep track of details and outcomes.

Volunteers who are interested in providing feedback on this flowchart and process can do this through their regional council delegate, the Urban Association Secretary (Peter Davis, 9775 0117) or Rural Association Executive Officer (Bob MacDonald, 5428 4005).

VFBV becoming established

With the appointment of VFBV's new CEO, the Board has been getting its administrative house in order and further developing its key issues and strategies. Allan Woodward took up the CEO position on 20 January and office space has been leased with CFA on level 2 at 4 Lakeside Drive. (Tel: 03 9886 1141, Fax: 03 9886 1618). VFBV's postal address is PO Box 453, Mt Waverley, 3149.

VFBV now an Incorporated Association

VFBV has now been registered as an incorporated association (A0043424H) following the VFBV Board's resolution to change Rule 7.1 as required by the Dept of Business and Consumer Affairs.

The amendment was minor requiring 21 days notice of a special meeting (previously the adopted rules indicated 14 days notice). The new wording appears in the inset box at right.

This outcome reflects positively on the work of the VFBV Steering Committee in that the Registrar of Associations required only one minor alteration to the Rules, accepting the rest without change.

7.1 Convening of Special General Meetings

All meetings of the VFBV, not being the Annual General Meeting of all members or General Meetings of the Board shall be called Special General Meetings of the Board. A Special General Meeting of the VFBV shall be convened as follows:-

- (i) The Chairman may call a special general meeting of the Board at any time.
- (ii) Upon sufficient cause, the Board Members may be summoned by the CEO on twenty-one (21) days notice to attend a meeting at the direction of the Chairman, the object of the meeting to be included in the notice calling same.
- (iii) The Chairman or CEO shall call a meeting at any time when requested by at least five (5) members of the Board.

Casual Vacancies

Also at the December meeting, the Board resolved that if casual vacancies arise on the VFBV Board, the agreed *selection process* as indicated in the VFBV rules should be implemented.

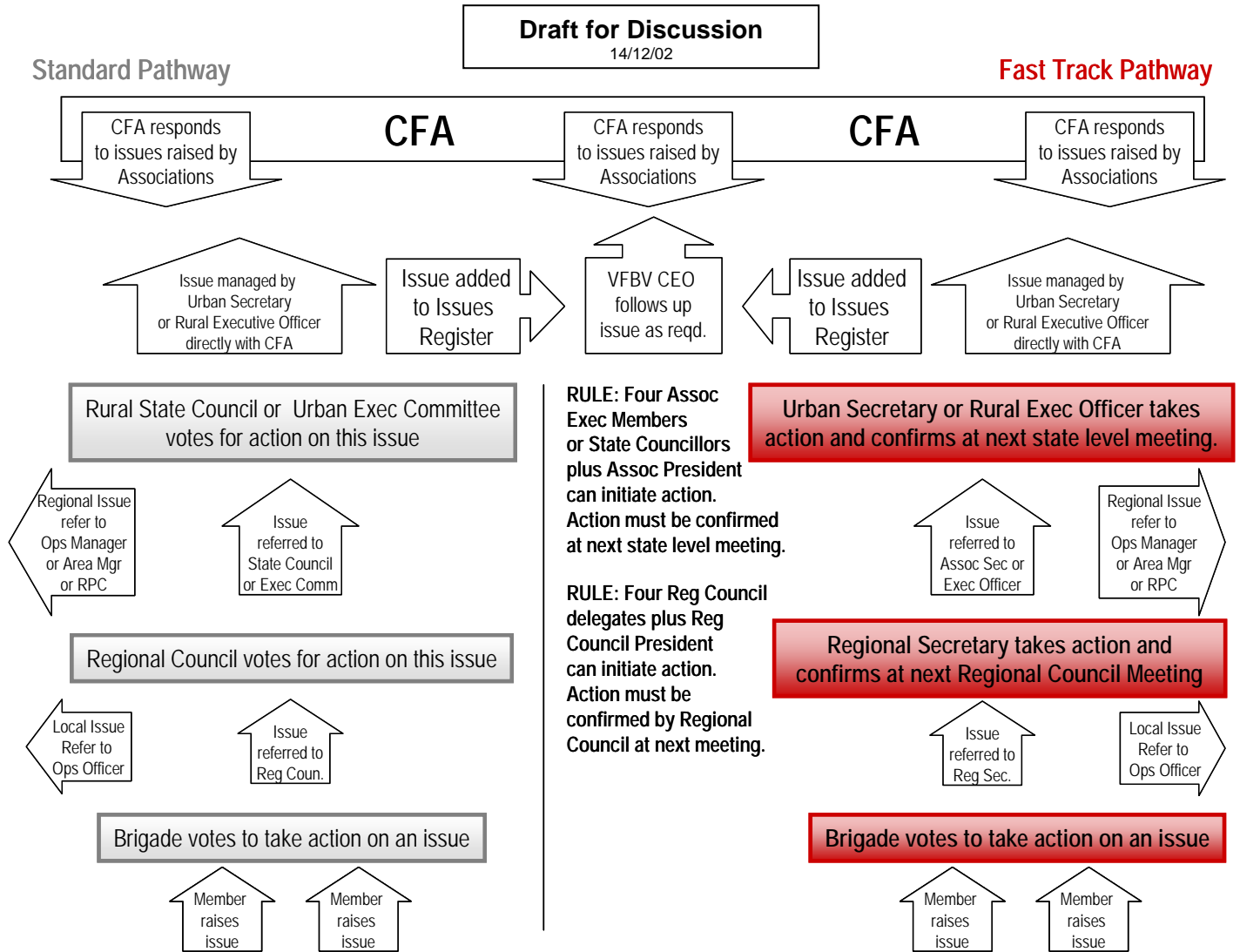
Although the rules allow for either appointment or selection following a casual vacancy, the Board opted for the selection procedure in order to keep faith with members. If a casual vacancy arises on the VFBV Board, the relevant Association will call for applications and select the best candidate to fill the vacancy.

VFBV Key Issues

The VFBV Board is in the process of finalizing its key issues document and summaries of this are scheduled for release by the end of February. If brigades or regional councils would like the VFBV Chairman, a VFBV Board Member, or the VFBV CEO to attend as a guest at one of their meetings to further explain the key issues, they should make contact with the VFBV CEO on 0418 506 378.

Quentin Turner
Chairman VFBV

Issues Management Flow Chart – Standard and Fast Track Pathways (VFBV File 9.3)



Tracking of Issues – Procedure (VFBV File 9.3)

Steps
1. Associations or VFBV (whichever organisation is the owner of the issue) take appropriate action with CFA as directed.
2. Associations and VFBV record issue details on an issues register.
3. VFBV Board reviews issues register at each VFBV Board Meeting to determine which issues VFBV will pursue with CFA.
4. VFBV CEO implements follow-up action as directed by VFBV
5. When response is achieved, matter is referred back to original owner.
6. Issues register is updated accordingly.

VFBV Submission to the Fire Services Funding Review

For the information of all volunteers, and in conjunction with the Urban and Rural Associations, VFBV has produced a submission to the Fire Services Funding Review. The Executive Summary below outlines the key points of the submission.

The Treasurer, John Brumby, announced on 1 November 2002 that a comprehensive review would examine the funding arrangements for fire services in metropolitan Melbourne and country Victoria and evaluate possible alternative models in use in other States and elsewhere.

On behalf of volunteers, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) is concerned about changes to the Fire Services Funding system because of the potential impacts on volunteers and volunteerism. In particular, volunteers are concerned about changes to CFA territory and changes to the appropriation status of contributions.

The full discussion document outlines the background to these concerns. The key requirements of VFBV are outlined below:

- *That Section 4(3) of the MFB Act be repealed*
 - *That any legislative revisions which over-ride s.4(3) include standard performance review processes: any component of a fire service which is not meeting service delivery standards is given the opportunity to improve its performance and be considered for appropriate resource allocation to assist it to do its job.*
- *That there should be no change appropriation status of the current FSL collections system.*
 - *That the Fire Authorities continue to have direct access to funds collected and the funds should not be controlled by Treasury.*
- *That the funding system be flexible enough to meet changing future requirements.*
 - *There must be no decrease in funding.*
 - *Funding must be linked to projected requirements and increases must not be less than CPI.*
 - *Any changes to the FSL collection system must provide sufficient funds for future resource requirements.*
- *Volunteers are key contributors to Victoria's fire service and as a group they expect to be consulted about matters that affect them.*
 - *Changes to the FSL system provide an opportunity to recognise volunteer contribution by arranging exemptions for volunteers from any fire levy.*
- *Insurance companies are key beneficiaries of fire services, which have a direct impact on reducing insurance claims.*
 - *Insurance companies are in the best position to determine risk and a levy system based on risk is regarded as the fairest approach.*
 - *The link between fire services and the insurance companies remains and insurance companies' role in collection of the FSL should be retained.*
- *The obligation to contribute to fire services should be equitably shared across all users of the fire service.*

- *A system that includes those who are not insured is required and this could be done by striking a levy on those who are unable to prove they are insured.*
- *If the FSL system is transferred away from insurance companies, there must be a requirement that insurance premiums are sustainably reduced and a report provided to government on compliance.*
- *If the FSL system is transferred away from some local governments, there must also be a requirement that general rates are reduced and a report provided to government on compliance.*

- *The FSL collection system must be fair and equitable to all.*
 - *There is concern that a property-based system would not allow necessary cross subsidisation of services.*
 - *An insurance-based levy with a basket of additional levies that picks up on consumers who currently don't contribute is preferred.*

- *The FSL Review must take into account the costs of establishing new FSL collection systems as part of its review.*

In the interests of supporting the ongoing contribution of the single largest stakeholder – the volunteers – the Fire Services Funding Review Committee is urged to consider and accommodate the volunteers' views.

The current volunteer view is that the linkages between the insurance system and funding of fire services should be retained but that the collection system should be expanded to include contributions from those who current don't contribute to the FSL system.

The submission was approved by the VFBV Board at its meeting on 31 January, 2003. For a copy of the full discussion document, contact the Urban Association Secretary (9775 0117) or the Rural Executive Officer (5428 4005). Further enquiries may be directed to Allan Woodward, VFBV CEO (0418 506 378)

Report from Quentin Turner, Chairman VFBV
November 2002

Fire Brigade Volunteers All....

Since the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) inauguration in October, the Board has already been active. The October meeting dealt with administrative matters and we extended the November VFBV meeting into a full day workshop where Association proposed issues were processed into a VFBV strategy document.

Forty-eight matters were prioritised into 14 key issues covering topics such as Funding, Equipment, Operational, Safer Firefighting/Training, Volunteer Issues, Political and Staffing. The Board will continue with work at the December meeting and will formulate these into action strategies. In consultation with both Associations, the scene will be set for VFBV to be proactive on behalf of volunteers.

In the view of the VFBV Board, increased CFA operational costs particularly for staffing and infrastructure will undoubtedly impact on the funds available for provision of volunteer based services. We are concerned about the sourcing of those funds which provide the services we need in our communities. A major agenda item for VFBV is CFA's funding sources, the funding mix and working towards a more equitable and sustainable funding future.

The 2005 cutoff set for minimum skills training is also a major concern. Volunteers are well on the way to meeting minimum skills targets for wildfire risk brigades, but for mutual aid brigades there is a much bigger ask which will impact not only on current volunteers but on recruitment of new volunteers. With the support of the Associations, the VFBV Board will seek to address this issue with CFA.

The brigade risk assessment model is also an identified issue. Because it is linked to the Fire Strategy for Victoria (Model of Fire Cover), it will have an impact on the way in which volunteers deliver services in both urban and rural environments. We believe a brigade risk assessment model that is simple and practical for volunteer firefighters will be a key objective.

Progress is underway to recruit a CEO for VFBV and we expect a result will be achieved early in the New Year. Similarly, we are negotiating for suitable office accommodation to establish VFBV and provide timely access to CFA senior managers. The issue of independent funding for VFBV is also an issue that will be addressed by the Board.

These are some of the emerging issues to be pursued through VFBV to advance the interests of all fire brigade volunteers in Victoria. Whilst all matters need to be formally processed through your Association, we welcome your input and comment. This can be done by fax to 5593 1159 or through a phone call to Allan Woodward on 0418 506 378.

If you need any further information on these and other emerging matters, one of the VFBV Board Members, or I as Chairman would be happy to attend as a guest at your meetings. This can be arranged through Allan Woodward on 0418 506 378. Such meetings will provide an opportunity for dialogue concerning VFBV's aims and objectives and to hear your views on these matters.

Quentin T Turner
VFBV Chairman

END

For further enquiries: Allan Woodward 0418 506 378