VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings December 2025

The 2 Minute Briefings are a quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

They are intended to update members on key issues that have recently been discussed. Effort is made to include any related items that may have been progressed out of session or through other avenues that are related to each committee's subject matter. Priority is given to topics where recent progress has been made. Topics where no progress has been made or where there are differences of opinion are sometimes included to ensure members are aware of VFBV efforts in continuing to advocate for progress or outcomes.

Joint Committees are formal committees between CFA and VFBV made up of VFBV delegates appointed by VFBV State Council, and CFA management representatives appointed by CFA. They are a critical loop in our consultative structures. They endeavour to work collaboratively and cooperatively on issues but may also be required to escalate issues where resolution or common ground cannot be found - requiring executive attention.

Joint Community Safety Committee

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FIRE WEATHER DISTRICT REVIEW

Victoria is divided into 9 Fire Weather Districts (Mallee, Wimmera, South West, Northern Country, North Central, Central, North East, West & South Gippsland and East Gippsland). These Districts are the primary geographical areas used to communicate fire danger ratings and total fire ban information to the community. The current district boundaries have been in place since 2010 and align with Bureau of Meteorology forecast areas and with local government areas where possible.

CFA along with partner agencies are now undertaking a review into the Fire Weather Districts. This review will determine whether boundaries are still fit for purpose and whether they provide accurate information for people to make relevant decisions relating to risk mitigation and fire preparedness. Feedback is open until June 2026.

Many CFA members will be aware that daily conditions can vary greatly from one part of a District to another and often the official Fire Danger Rating for a District is different from what conditions are experienced locally.

The review uses two decades of data (2000–2020) on weather, terrain, fuel, and fire history to better understand what Victoria's fire climate zones are. Key variables include temperature, wind, drought factor, and the McArthur Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI). Population, industry and agriculture have also been taken into consideration.

Initial research has shown that it is not uncommon for there to be a local government area within a Fire Weather District that has a different Fire Danger Rating to the official rating issued for that day. By increasing the number of Fire Weather Districts in the state to 12 or more would reduce this from occurring significantly. Any changes to the Fire Weather Districts would require a statewide public education campaign from all of Victoria's fire agencies to educate community members about the changes before they come into effect as well as an update to all current relevant fire safety education materials. Members can learn more and participate by visiting www.cfa.vic.gov.au/fireweatherreview

PROPERTY ADVICE VISIT SERVICE

The Property Advice Visit Service (PAVS) is a program utilised by many brigades to help community members to understand their fire risk and prepare their properties for fire. It encourages people to think ahead and to create a plan for what they will do to minimise the risk posed to them from fire. Data from 3,700 PAVS visits, conducted between 2023 and 2025, are being analysed to help understand how much of a difference the PAVS program is making. This can be used to help guide future program developments. Until now there has been little collective study of what residents intend to do before a fire occurs or if their property is threatened by fire or what information source people are aware of and access when required. When completed this research will allow brigades delivering PAVS to better understand what the likely needs of their community members are and tailor their PAVS visits to have the longest lasting impact which leads to behavioural change.

AFDRS RESEARCH

CFA in partnership with the University of Melbourne has begun research into people's understanding of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS). THE AFDRS was introduced in in 2022 to be a consistent rating system across all Australian states and territories. Prior to this each jurisdiction had its own way of displaying Fire Danger Ratings.

The research focuses on three Victorian communities and aims to better understand people's experience of the new system and challenges. It will aid fire agencies to better communicate Fire Danger Ratings and fire risk to members of the general public. Members can learn more about this project by visiting www.cfa.vic.gov.au/fireratingresearch

Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee

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STATION BUILD PROGRAM PROGRESS

CFA has announced construction at the Newborough fire station is progressing well, with the external cladding completed and significant progress made on the interior work. In-ground services are developing smoothly at Wyndham Vale, Metcalfe, and Serpentine. The tender documentation for The Basin project has been finalised. Additionally, work continues on the Heathcote and Rochester Emergency Services Hub projects as they progress through town planning and detailed design, with initial reviews now completed.

In other areas, the Base Capital Station Modification Program is moving forward, with preparations underway for tender documentation for eight stations. Land and Building Services have the concept designs for twelve stations that have been approved, allowing them to move on to the schematic design and town planning stages. L&BS are also finalising the concept designs for the remaining seven stations in consultation with volunteer stakeholders. Furthermore, the Gender Diversity Program has begun construction for internal modifications at one station, and tenders have already closed for five more stations. CFA are in the process of preparing documentation for an additional five stations, which will be released soon.

SAFETY COMPLIANCE UPDATE (LOW VOLTAGE FUSE REMOVAL & SAFE WORK AT HEIGHTS)

All SWAH training props for West Sale, Longerenong, and Penshurst are complete and operational. Upgrades at Huntly have begun and are expected to be finished shortly. Seven LVFR training trailers have been completed and delivered to CFA, with an additional five currently in progress. A deployment plan and location are being discussed with OD&T and MLDs to optimise access. It is anticipated that the booking process will follow existing regional and district procedures. Alternative energy warning tape has been delivered to the districts, along with a suggested plan for its allocation to primary appliances. The responsibility for LVFR skills acquisition has been assigned to the regions and districts for delivery.

GAS FLARE OFF EQUIPMENT

After sustained advocacy by delegates, we are pleased to advise that skills acquisition courses are set to resume following the release of a new training package after an extended hiatus. A review of the equipment in use across the state is currently being conducted to seek VESEP funding aimed at modernising and standardising this equipment. A working group is being formed, consisting of representatives from each flare-off brigade, as well as a district representative. Urban Operations and Specialist Response will jointly manage this initiative.

ULT CREW PROTECTION RETROFIT

A total of 216 vehicles were scheduled for mass fit-up, and all 103 Toyota Land Cruisers have now been completed. The fit-up of all Nissan Patrols is also finished. The fit-up of the first Ford Ranger has begun, and the confirmation of designs will be completed before mass fit-ups start. Sourcing the required parts and ensuring a secure supply are ongoing processes. All scheduled ULTs are expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Delegates have raised brigade concerns about issues with quality control of the program. CFA has acknowledged existing issues related to quality and workmanship and has advised they have taken feedback on these concerns seriously. They have further advised they are currently addressing these quality issues. Additionally, the need for a centralised register for reporting issues and repairs has been identified. The Committee emphasised the importance of this register and agreed on the necessity of having a designated contact person for volunteers to reach out to with questions or concerns regarding quality assurance. Districts should be shortly informed on how to guide volunteers to the appropriate resources.

Joint Member Services Committee

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RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

After sustained VFBV advocacy on behalf of members, including the issues involving the Volunteer Recruitment Hub, CFA has completed its external review of how the organisation recruits and inducts community members into the organisation. Key groups engaged during the review include VFBV, the Young Adult Advisory Committee, brigades, staff, regional leadership teams, more than 600 survey responses and 20, 1 on 1 volunteer interviews conducted. To capture the thoughts of members and community members who have tried to join CFA over the last 12 to 24 months, 2 surveys were conducted to better understand the reasons for which some may have withdrawn from the system, and what barriers others encountered along the way. Recent and additional upgrades to the VRH are providing better data collection to tease out where in the process members may be held up, and CFA has reported a healthy drop in the amount of time applicants are kept waiting. The public report has been released by CFA, and published on CFA Members Online.

RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

Members are encouraged to make use of the newly launched Honours and Awards Search & Filter Dashboard, a tool designed to assist brigades and individuals in identifying the most appropriate award for various forms of service and contribution. This dashboard aims to increase accessibility and improve the nominations process by helping members navigate eligibility criteria and the broader CFA awards framework. The committee is continuing work to enhance the overall CFA Honours and Awards Program. An ongoing action item is for the expansion and review of CFA's awards to increase inclusivity and eligibility, with further work continuing through the Honours and Awards Committee. Updates on how eligibility criteria are applied are still in progress, and the committee has left this action open for future reporting.

The committee has also had broader discussions about recognising former members, including how other organisations track former personnel to acknowledge their passing. While not part of the formal awards program, this discussion reflects the committee's wider commitment to ensuring all volunteer contributions across a member's lifetime can be respectfully recognised. The new dashboard can be accessed from: Honours and Awards | CFA Members Online

CONTEMPORARY VOLUNTEER MEMBERSHIP MODEL (CVMM)

The Contemporary Volunteer Membership Model (CVMM) project is progressing through its formal governance processes, with draft recommendations now before the Steering Committee and further input being provided by the Project Reference Group (PRG). These bodies include broad representation from volunteers and staff across the CFA, including the Women's Advisory Committee, Young Adults Advisory Committee, VFBV, and regional members, ensuring wide consultation and diverse perspectives.

Current work focuses on developing an options paper and a high-level implementation approach to ensure the project establishes strong foundations for future changes. The committee discussed several core components of the proposed model, including police checks, Working With Children Checks (WWCCs), member transfer procedures, and medical checks. These areas are being reviewed to improve consistency, compliance, and the overall volunteer experience while reducing unnecessary administrative burden on brigades. The CVMM aims to present to members options that will improve modernise and simplify how volunteers enter, move through, and participate in CFA, while ensuring that processes remain safe, inclusive, and supportive.

The options paper will be completely open for volunteers and brigades to comment on and review, and will be promoted widely as soon as it is released. No decisions will be made on any of the options until after all the feedback has been considered. Keep an eye out for this important work.

Joint Operational Capability Committee

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SPECIALIST CAPABILITY PLANS

CFA has advised delegates that they are well on the way to developing a long term capability plan which incorporates data from a myriad of sources including the Baseline Capability Profiling App (BCPA) and other organisational areas to ensure that the organisation is developing in the ways that meets the changing community requirements, incorporating the organisations long term vision and strategy as a part of the yearly planning cycle. The Baseline Capability Profiling Application (BCPA) allows CFA to better understand their member base, skills profile, turnout data and assets, in order to use this data for advanced capability planning. With this year's fire season forecast to be challenging the Capability plan has enormous potential to assist regions, districts, groups and brigades to ensure they plan for the right training, equipment and adequate resources to meet the challenges ahead. It is hoped this increased evidence base will also show government the need to increase resourcing and provide CFA with a more sustainable base budget.

EMR CHANGES

VFBV delegates were updated on the changes to Emergency Medical Response (EMR) for volunteer brigades and have insisted that all affected brigades are consulted prior to final decisions being made. Members may remember that EMR was first introduced back in 2007 in partnerships with Ambulance Vicotria where trained CFA, EMR volunteers respond to 'Priority 0' medical emergencies at the same time as Ambulance Victoria paramedics to improve the chances of patient survival. With the rapid expansion of the very successful Fire Medical Response (FMR) program, which is seen as more sustainable and has been modified to better support Ambulance Victoria integration, CFA in consultation with the affected brigades has agreed to cease the operation of EMR within CFA. There were only 6 brigades that continued to respond to EMR incidents after Fire Service Reform in 2020 and 3 of those have agreed to transfer to fully operational FMR response brigades while the remaining 3 co-located brigades' members have agreed to no longer respond with their career counterparts under the old EMR program. Members at all affected brigades will continue to maintain their training if they wish and some participants are keen to be involved in training other FMR members with CFA and AV are ready to assist in the transition.

PPE & C COMMITTEE

After some time in recession VFBV delegates were pleased to confirm with CFA that the Personal Protective Equipment and Clothing committee (PPE&C) has resumed meeting. The PPE&C committee oversee any changes, updates or changes to PPE&C that the organisation is facing. The list of agenda items is lengthy due to the length of time between meetings and the many changes and exciting upgrades to members protective clothing and equipment are expected to be consulted on closely over the coming months. Some of these changes to PPE&C has been communicated through various forums, with the resumption of a regular meeting schedule hoped to improve the timeliness of future updates as we continue to inform the membership of upcoming changes.

SUMMER PREPAREDNESS

After CFA's successful 'GET FIRE READY' campaign - brigades are now focussed on preparedness for the upcoming fire season, while compliance with the Chief Officer's 3 mandatory requirements have been communicated to all brigades. It is the expectation that prior to the commencement of the Fire Danger Period, all operational members intending to respond will have currency in the 3 mandatory requirements, and for this to be recorded in the Learning Hub. The Regional teams are communicating to brigades and groups to continue to update communication plans to prepare for a busy summer. Pre-season briefings have been occurring across the state at a District, group and in some instances brigade level. IMT preparedness including appliance and strike team readiness as well as messaging around communities being prepared remains a critical focus for everyone. The most important message for everyone is to remain aware, familiarise yourself with local conditions and ensure every member returns home safe.

Joint Operational Performance Committee

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POCKETBOOK UPDATES

Since the release of the pocketbook app in April 2025 members have continued to provide positive and constructive suggestions and additions to the pocketbook team to enhance the first version released. CFA has committed to continuing to develop the app over time. As the Mobile Data Capability Project rolls out tablets to Pumpers and other vehicles the Pocketbook app has been placed on the home screen, allowing members to access SOP's, Health and Safety information, brigade management topics and comms information from the tablet in the truck. Other key features include Operational topics, calculators and converters, member contact information and importantly the ability to access these features even when offline and there is no internet connectivity. If you would like to download the app on your phone or tablet, or simply read about the features - or FAQ's visit Members online.

LESSONS LEARNED

As we head into another fire season, members often ask what we have learnt from previous seasons and what changes will be made to make member experiences safer and ensure continuous improvement. There have been many After Action Reviews completed across the whole state after what was a long and challenging 2024/25 season yet volunteers question what is changing, as there has been little feedback received by the hundreds of members who attended group feedback sessions, district meetings and regional discussions or AAR's. CFA's online Lessons Management Centre continues to develop new material to help members understand and learn from previous incidents through case studies, AAR's and the first on scene articles, however members have commented that little is getting back to the individuals or groups that provide valuable insights into events. CFA is developing the online Lessons Platform that will allow members to digitally submit observations from incidents and AAR's and delegates are seeking for the system to provide a link back to the member who contributes so that there is a record of their feedback being received or acknowledged. We will continue to monitor the progress of the Lessons Platform as it develops.

Delegates will also continue to pursue improvements that allow members to see how their constructive feedback has been used and acted on, which in turn should improve members confidence of participating in AAR's.

CFA FIRE RECONSTRUCTIONS

CFA's Senior Research Officer attended the meeting at the request of members who were interested in understanding what happens across the sector regarding fire reconstructions and the valuable lessons learned from past events. CFA, in collaboration with other agencies including DECCA, have been researching fires through reconstruction since the early 1960's and fires are identified as suitable for reconstruction based on the amount of scientific information and data that is collected. This information is then used to determine the spread of growth of a fire, how it spotted and what other major issues occurred through the duration of the fire.

The meeting discussed at length the Little Dessert and Yarram Gap fires through an overview of the reconstructions and from a scientific context how they developed. Members questioned whether there are any learnings or suggested changes to how the fire ground resourcing and operations are undertaken and any recommendations to travel times, water resourcing and crew resourcing had been identified from these reconstructions. In delegates minds – it's one thing to reconstruct and collected data, but the real opportunity is to use that data to inform future improvements to fireground operations.

The research is still in its early days, and behaviour models and fire simulators will continue to be developed. It is worth noting that from an international perspective CFA is considered to be one of the leaders in fire behaviour science and research across the country.

Joint People, Culture & Safety Committee

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PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS SURVEY

The committee discussed CFA's work to address psychosocial hazards within the organisation, part of which includes a survey, available to all CFA members. This survey is intended to identify areas for improvement, shape future policies and programs informed by volunteer input and create a healthier and safer CFA.

CFA partnered with Converge, their Member Assistance Program provider, to deliver the survey. The survey was confidential and did not ask for a name or any identifying information. It included 28 questions (two questions per hazard) and took about five to 10 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, volunteers were also asked whether they wished to partake in focus groups to discuss their experiences further. This process was entirely voluntary.

A number of committee delegates completed the survey and found it to be relevant and valuable and were encouraged by this important work. VFBV will continue to monitor the survey response and outcomes in the upcoming Joint Committee meetings.

SCHEDULE 1A WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECKS (WWCC)

The committee discussed CFA's communication strategy to volunteers who are required to obtain a WWCC, particularly those who fall under Schedule 1A (listed below): -

- Junior Leaders and Coaches
- Presenters of child-focused community safety programs (Fire Safe Kids and similar)
- Members playing the role of Captain Koala and Santa
- Any other person undertaking child-related work as defined by the Worker Screening Act 2020

Communications are currently being sent to any volunteers potentially performing these roles who have not yet obtained a WWCC via email and to their postal address. Delegates encouraged CFA to expand their methods of engagement with volunteers to include notifying the brigade so local follow-up can occur. CFA has agreed. It is VFBV's belief that many volunteers possibly hold a current WWCC but have not yet informed CFA that they have registered their WWCC with another organisation. It is also possible they may require assistance uploading their WWCC. CFA has created a direct email address for WWCC support via wwcc@cfa.vic.gov.au and delegates were assured that CFA will continue to reach out to these volunteers and support and assist them to comply.

COMPLAINTS PROCESS TRAINING

In response to the launch of the new CFA Regulations, which occurred on 31 July, and following sustained advocacy by VFBV for an uplift on CFA discipline processes, CFA have engaged an external provider to look at training requirements in the 'end to end' discipline process under the new regulations, including Restriction of Duties/Suspension, Referring Officer training and Hearing Officer training.

Both CFA and VFBV agree on the need for Referring Officers and Hearing Officers to be well equipped in their knowledge, to perform these extremely onerous and important roles. VFBV appreciate the level of commitment by those ACFOs and DCO's to the task, and support and encourage ongoing development and training, to ensure the highest level of expertise is provided to volunteers and brigades who find themselves traversing the CFA Complaint/Hearing Process.

Joint Technology & Innovation Committee

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MAJOR PROJECT UPDATES

Radio Replacement Program: This project is nearing completion with 9,500 portables distributed to both Brigades and Groups. Over 3,300 vehicles are now fitted with Motorola radios and with only 5 districts remaining for fitting, this project was due to completed by end of September. There is a small amount of catch up required for local base installations and bag radio delivery as focus initially was based on west of the state.

Mobile Data Capability Project: 575 vehicles have had a dock installed. For vehicles that have yet to have their Tait mobile radio removed, the docks and new radio will be installed at the same time.

Satellite Services: All FOV/MCV's will receive Satellite Services. Installation will occur as part of the Motorola radio replacement installation.

Cross-Border Interoperability POC: An exciting piece of work is currently underway with testing agreed by NSW and South Australia. The purpose for this is to ensure that there is seamless communication and interoperability across Victoria, NSW and SA. EMV are on board with this project and providing additional support and feedback.

Pager Replacement: 16 out of 21 Districts have completed the pager replacement process.

As the pager replacement process is like for like – members need to hand over their old one to receive a new one. Currently only 75% have been returned. Once all Districts are completed, CFA will then know how many have not been returned and the actual cost to CFA to cover the unreturned pagers. This may be quite costly and certainly not budgeted for as each pager is approximately $500.00, so members are reminded if they have pager that is sitting in a draw at home or on the bench in the station that is not being used please contact your District office and organise a replacement or return item.

DIGITAL STORE UPDATE

Whilst ironing out a few bugs in the system, members have embraced the use of the digital store, and the expectation is that this will continue to grow.

Version 1 of a CFA Digital Store is due for an upgrade imminently; with additional functions and user experience enhancements to occur over the course of 2026. Member feedback and suggestions can be made at digitalstore@cfa.vic.gov.au

2026 AND BEYOND

What's next for the VFBV CFA Technology and Innovation Consultative Committee?

Due to the number of legacy programs underway delegates have been very absorbed on technology projects with innovation and future looking projects taking a backseat. Radio replacement, pager replacement and tablets to name just a few, delegates are now really keen to seek more discussion and action regarding issues and actions for future innovation and the effect it can have on volunteers and CFA.

Discussion has moved onto innovation ideas such as -

- How could AI assist members? Perhaps AI can take some of the administrative burden away from members.
- Tankers of the future –What features will make the roles firefighters undertake safer, easier and more effective?

Members are encouraged to reach out to a committee member to add your ideas to the mix for future discussion.

Joint Training Committee

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DELVING DEEPER INTO TRAINING ISSUES

The responsibility for the delivery of training is spread across the 5 individual Regions. Each Region has their own Manager Learning Development (MLD) who is responsible for the scheduling and delivery of training within the Region and reports to the DCO of the Region. There is also one State MLD who reports directly to the DCO of Training and is responsible for the delivery of Statewide courses such as Driver Training and First Aid.

In an attempt to understand the issues impacting training, delegates on the training committee invited all 6 MLDs to the most recent Committee Meeting. This meeting gave members the opportunity to directly raise issues that have been brought to their attention by volunteers in their Districts and to hear from the MLDs as to what they see as the constraints to delivering training in their Region. The discussions covered many different aspects of training delivery within Regions and Districts but some consistent themes that appeared to be having the biggest impacts on the experience of members became apparent:

- Flow of information breaking down between CFA HQ Training and the Training teams, Catchment Teams and Brigades in the Districts.
- Inconsistencies in needs analysis, scheduling, administration and delivery of training across the 5 Regions and even across Districts within a Region.
- Insufficient administrative resources within District Training teams to provide the backend support to deliver more training courses
- Turnover and availability of paid Instructors and the need for better engagement with Volunteer Instructors.
- Engaging with Brigades and Groups to determine training needs, scheduling and delivery methods

Delegates will continue to work with CFA to mitigate the impact on members ability to get the training that they want and need. Brigades and members who are experiencing problems getting the training they require or have feedback on courses can log their feedback via https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/training/complaints-and-feedback/training-matters-complaints-and-feedback-hub or search Training Complaints in the Members Online portal.

LMS UPDATE

CFA's upgrade of the Learning Management System (LMS) last year has been plagued with problems with many members telling us they are experiencing significant issues accessing training, member records and Brigade reports. These disruptions have taken months of hard work to resolve and caused understandable frustration for members.

In some good news, CFA have advised that most of the issues have now been addressed and CFA is moving on to implementing planned enhancements to the system. Improvements include better reporting functionality for Brigades and Districts and the ability to match course outcomes with specific skills. Alongside the enhancements, CFA has embarked on a project to examine options for what the future of the LMS will look like. Whatever the best solution turns out to be, the JTC Members will be pushing for volunteers needs to be one of the key inputs to the decision. While this work is a step in a good direction, any replacement of the current LMS is likely to be a long term project taking 3 – 5 years.