VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT

VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

June 2025

Welcome to the latest edition of our quarterly feature supplement. The supplement includes relevant news, updates and information on current issues being pursued by VFBV on behalf of members.

Adam Barnett
CEO, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

Additional Resources and Updates Available Electronically	
CFA 80th Anniversary	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp49
State Championship Results	https://www.vfbv.com.au
Open for Consultation Dashboard	https://tinyurl.com/vfbvDashboard

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures	
This month's enclosures include:	**Action Required:**
1. VFBV Board Positions	Please table and note
2. Editorial: Valuing Volunteers	Please table and note
3. Editorial: Trojan Horses	Please table and note
4. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting and pin to your noticeboard
5. National Volunteer Week - Thankyou	Please table at your next meeting and pin to your noticeboard

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Board Positions

INVITATION TO APPLY

CFA Volunteers are invited to apply for upcoming Board positions.

Vacancies for four board members will arise when the terms of four VFBV Board members expire on 1st October 2025. All are eligible for re-appointment.

Terms on the VFBV Board are for two years, and these are honorary positions with no honorarium paid.

The role of the VFBV Board is to manage policy determination, performance and the governance of the Association and working with State Council and our District Council network to engage and consult with volunteers.

The VFBV Board typically meets six times a year and usually on a Friday. Travel reimbursement is provided.

VFBV is seeking applications from gender and culturally diverse candidates, in addition to a diverse range of skills and experience including applicants from a broad range of brigade type and classifications.

Prior experience on a not-for-profit board is not required but is highly regarded, as to is background or experience in volunteer advocacy. Applicants must be a current CFA volunteer.

Closing date for written applications is Monday 1st September 2025.

Scan the QR code or visit
https://www.vfbv.com.au for more information.

VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

EDITORIAL

VALUING VOLUNTEERS

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' May 2025 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

This month, the Victorian Government has the opportunity to demonstrate the value it places on its emergency service volunteers, with this year's National Volunteer Week being celebrated across the country between the 19-25 May, 2025.

In last month's edition I reported on the inequities of the proposed changes to the Fire Services Property Levy. Since then, the government's proposed Emergency Service and Volunteer Fund amendment Bill has stalled in the upper house, with debate expected to resume on 13 May.

With a number of the cross-bench parties yet to declare their voting intentions, the government's amendments are still very much within reach, with them requiring the support of six of the eleven cross-benchers to pass its legislation.

To recap: the current Fire Services Property Levy was introduced following a recommendation from the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission, who concluded the old insurance levy was not equitable and lacked transparency. The government of the day then went through exhaustive public and stakeholder consultation with a green paper released in 2010, and an options paper in 2011 to provide best practice consultation and an opportunity for Victorians to contribute to the fire levy's design and identify any issues or unintended consequences. The start date was timed for two years later in order to ensure all the necessary supports and processes were in place.

Contrast this with how the current government has arrived at its proposal being rammed through Parliament as we speak.

Rather than being a recommendation from a Royal Commission, this proposal was cooked up in secret and announced via media release by the outgoing Treasurer Tim Pallas a couple of weeks before Christmas. No consultation, no research, no public discussion or enquiry and no stakeholder engagement. Zip, zero, zilch. The cherry on the cake is a planned rushed start date of July 1 this year. The fact the government has been unable to find a single stakeholder to speak in support of its new tax speaks volumes, with Councils opposed, municipal and rate payer associations opposed, the farmers federation opposed, multiple community action groups, firefighters and their representative bodies all opposed and raising concerns.

Just sit with that paragraph for a minute or two. Does this sound like good governance or process to you?

If this new levy was such a boon for emergency service volunteers as they say it is – why did the government not work with each of the volunteer associations early on and build their support? One wonders if the government had retained its ministerial volunteer consultative forum a commitment made under its Emergency Management Statement, if some of the obvious problems with its legislation may have been known well before it was announced.

The Budget Update Paper issued by the previous Treasurer settled all doubts that what was being spun as supporting and sustaining emergency services was an out-right deception.

Those papers show an extra $610.9M will be collected in the first year of its operation, rising to an extra $765M thereafter. Of this extra, the budget has only allocated $50M in new funding for CFA and SES. In other words, for every $1 of new extra tax collected, only 7 cents will flow to emergency service volunteer agencies.

So where does the other 93% of the new money collected go?

According to the government's own media releases, the extra money will go to funding up to 95% of 7 government departments, public servants and other entities including - EMV, Emergency Recovery Victoria, Triple Zero and Forest Fire Management Victoria and the support functions within the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

Given each of these are already funded through consolidated revenue, and with no commitment that government is not reducing its current contributions to agencies and departments - the government will be able to pocket this money as "savings" from its consolidated revenue, to redirect to its other budget black holes. There is certainly no other new output spending for emergency services identified in the budget papers which makes a mockery of the government's statements about supporting emergency services.

Which takes us to the sustainability promise. We are told that this new levy will make emergency service funding sustainable. Well, that is exactly what was promised from the current Fire Services Property Levy that has been in place since 2013 and is only intended to fund CFA and FRV. Last year the government collected an extra $186M in fire levies by hiking the primary producer rate up 70%, and still reduced its grant to CFA!

This government has had 10 years to demonstrate sustainable funding for CFA. CFA's annual reports clearly show its budget allocation from government grants has actually dropped consecutively for the last five years in a row. If CFA is treated this poorly when it competes with just one other paid agency, what will happen when there are 10 entities

supposedly funded from this new tax instead of just two as is the case now?

The real travesty is revealed when we look at where the extra revenue will come from.

The new tax sees the residential variable rate increase 99% and commercial rates increase by 100%. The industrial rate goes up 64% and the rate for primary producers goes up a whopping 189% which is almost a threefold increase.

To put those increases into perspective, the Government's media release of 23rd December last year heralded its "Fair Go Rates System" which capped Council rate increases to 3% as "continuing the Allan Labor Government's drive to reduce pressures on household budgets." Minister for Local Government Nick Staikos MP said "This rate cap will mean local councils are able to raise necessary revenue for the services they provide, without adding cost of living pressure on households."

If 3% is a 'fair go', what do they call a 189% increase?

Which then gets us to the name of the new levy, which they have cynically rebadged as the "Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund" implying that volunteers are somehow separate to emergency services or a convenient scape goat for a very unpopular tax grab.

VFBV has been flooded by calls from volunteers outraged over the prospect of this new tax being called a Volunteer Fund and misusing their hard-earned good name to sell a rotten tax hike especially when less than a quarter of total revenue from the levy is actually going to fund volunteer involving agencies such as CFA and SES with the rest being shuttled off to Melbourne bureaucracies.

I am pleased to report that upper house member Jeff Bourman MP of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party has staunchly stood up for volunteers by demanding an amendment calling for Parliament to reject the 'Volunteer Fund' part of the new levy name and instead simply refer to it as the "Emergency Services Levy".

This addresses key volunteer feedback that the proposed name of the levy was misleading and would damage the morale of volunteers, impact their fundraising, and expose them to abuse and blame for an increased tax that does very little to support them or their agencies. We commend Jeff on his loyalty and support of emergency service volunteers and his impressive voting record of support to CFA volunteers over the years.

Amendments have also been proposed and tabled by the Opposition to restrict the new levy to only funding CFA, FRV and SES which would significantly reduce the rate increases, and a second amendment to ensure annual transparency of where the funds are distributed and to what agencies.

At April's meeting of State Council, volunteers representing each CFA District across the State unanimously voted in favour of the VFBV Board's position that we do not support the government's proposed legislation in its current form, and endorsing the three amendments so far proposed. State Council has also endorsed that we formally express our concerns for the disproportionate impact the proposed levies will have on primary producers and the unfair burden being placed on regional communities.

I simply cannot understate the real concerns I hold about the mental health impact the government's proposals and plans is having on regional and rural communities. The pain and anguish are real, and the consequences devastatingly serious. We must stand up for them.

And while we appreciate the sentiment behind the volunteer rebate, State Council has formally passed a motion of censure against the government's lack of consultation on the design and development of the proposed levy changes prior to the government forming its position, which is a statutory obligation under the Volunteer Charter.

Members are reminded that crossbench MPs will decide how they vote after hearing from their constituents. Given the numbers, the government will require the support of the Greens to pass their legislation, so members are urged to make contact with their local Greens MP to ensure your views are known prior to debate resuming.

And with National Volunteer week commencing on the 19th May, CFA volunteers will be looking towards the government's 2025/26 State Budget which is due to be delivered on Tuesday 20 May to assess what value the government places on emergency service volunteers.

We will look with interest for what commitments are made to address CFA's ageing truck fleet. With 35-year-old fire trucks that belong in a museum - not on our firegrounds, and 700+ tankers that still require volunteer firefighters to ride on the outside with no protection from the toxic smoke or fumes, CFA requires $55M per year in fleet funding to just stop the age of the fleet from getting any older. An injection of almost $400M will be required to replace all current overage trucks.

Time and time again, volunteers have heard the empty words of support from MP's touring fire affected areas after devastating fires. They are looking for material commitments that will address the inequity of CFA's budget that sees them having to fundraise to buy their own equipment and fight fires in Australia's oldest fire trucks.

And with the $2.5 billion dollars of economic value that Victoria's emergency service volunteers already contribute to Victoria each year, volunteers will be watching the governments next steps closely. If the government decides not to proceed with its levy changes and withdraws the volunteer commitments already made, proof of volunteers being used as hostages to bank in hundreds of millions of dollars of additional revenue for public servants and bureaucracies will be on show for all to see.

Rather than prioritise propping up the budgets of other government departments and entities, CFA volunteers are looking for CFA and the communities they protect to be made a priority. Not just in words or media releases, but actual deeds and actions. The upcoming budget will be a litmus test of whether these words of support for CFA volunteers is real or just double speak.

VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

EDITORIAL

TROJAN HORSES

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' April 2025 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

The Trojan Horse is a timeless symbol of deception. A legendary military strategy born from Greek mythology dating back to 12th or 13th century BC.

The story goes that after 10 years of battle, the Greeks remained frustrated at their inability to breach the walls and conquer the city of Troy. According to legend, Odysseus, the king of the island of Ithaca devised the plan to construct a giant hollow horse that was disguised as an offering to the gods, but large enough to hide 30 or 40 skilled warriors concealed inside. The Greek army then engaged with the City of Troy, feigning retreat, and leaving their prized offering behind as a subterfuge.

As the horse was a revered symbol in Troy, the unsuspecting Trojans, believing the horse to be plunder hastily left behind by the retreating Greeks, pulled the horse into their city, and celebrated their great victory. During the night, as the Trojans slept - the hidden warriors crept from the insides of the horse, dispatching the guards and opening the gates for the returning Greek army who then conquered the city, winning the Trojan war.

And henceforth why today's generation call computer hacking software that masquerades as something less sinister - a trojan horse.

A fitting metaphor for the Government's new Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, a new tax to replace the existing Fire Services Property Levy that is due to be debated in the upper house tomorrow (Thursday 2nd April).

The government media release heralded the creation of this new levy as a way to make sure "our hardworking emergency services have what they need to keep Victorian's safe – with a massive funding boost for new trucks, equipment and technology."

Fantastic we thought. Later that day, the Budget update papers laid out the clever deception.

As I outlined for members back in January, the original Fire Services Property Levy was due to collect $1,038 million dollars in the 2025/26 fiscal year. ($1.04 billion)

The budget update shows us that the new levy is expected to raise an additional $610.9M. Combining those two numbers, we can calculate the new levy is expected to raise $1.65 billion in the first year.

In the second year (2026/27), the Budget tells us the old levy would raise $1,035M and the budget update tells us they estimate the new levy will raise an additional $765M. That tells us revenue for the second year grows to $1.8 billion.

Now we calculate 95% of CFA's budget last year would be $320M and SES would be $71M. So $391M or just 22% of $1.8 billion going to volunteer agencies. You would hardly think so by reading all the government's justifications for the new hike.

Ok, so with all this extra money, where does the budget say they intend on spending it? The media release goes on to say "…more frequent natural disasters and population growth mean Victorians are asking for more from our volunteers than ever before."

Yep. That's certainly true, so let's look for this "massive funding boost".

In Table A.8 of the Budget update paper, under output initiatives for Justice and Community Safety, we find a single line item called "Supporting our emergency services and volunteers." And this line allocated just $50M from that extra $610.9M to "help support those hardworking volunteers", repeated for years 26/27, 27/28 and a foot note saying it will extend to the 28/29 financial year also. So, let's get this straight. The new levy will raise an additional $610.9M in the first year, and an extra $765M in the second year, and CFA and SES receive just $50M extra each year split between them. That's just 8% of the extra in year 1, and just 6.5% in the second year. Hence why I refer to only 7 cents in the dollar actually going to boost CFA and SES's budgets.

And unpacking the $50M, only $10M of that is for CFA's annual fleet program to replace new trucks. This will buy just 20 tankers. Given CFA need $55M per year to replace 100 trucks to just stop the age of the fleet going backwards – this is far less than what CFA needs just to maintain current ages. This means, our trucks will continue to get older. How much older can we get with some trucks now more than 35 years old? If we can't get rid of aging fire trucks with their definition of "a massive funding boost" I'm not sure how else to describe the job at hand just to bring CFA's truck fleet up to scratch. So, moving money from consolidated revenue onto land holders to fund government agencies is more important than actually investing in a genuine plan to replace aging fire trucks over 20 years old? Apparently, we must be waiting for an ultra-ponderous- massive funding boost.

Another $15M of the $50M is for the doubling of VESEP, which requires volunteers to match $1 of their money for every $2 of government funding. So, while the government takes a bow for the extra $15M they are providing, the silence is deafening on the $7.5M that most volunteers will need to

provide to get their grant in the first place doing - you guessed it – fundraising. Sausage sizzles and tin rattles. How much more difficult will fundraising be with a new tax called a "Volunteer Fund" being posted to all property holders. VESEP also covers four other organisations, so CFA's cut is closer to $10M.

That leaves $30M which has been allocated to the SES. A welcome injection for sure, and not one that we object to.

So where is the rest of the money going? Well, if the $50M represents just 8% in the first year – that leaves 92% allocated to others. Looking for any other additional spending in the budget update we find estimates in Table C.1 of concessions and exemptions attributed to the new levy. The note explains that the amounts for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 years remains unchanged from the estimate provided under the previous budget for Fire Service Levy concessions, but is adjusted by $6M for each of the 2026/27 and 2027/28 years.

To put this into perspective, $21.5M is the cost for concessions for pensioner and department of veteran affairs cardholders, $9.5M for the exemption for municipal single farm enterprises, which leaves us $6M for the volunteer exemption which is now described as an offset or rebate. In other words, you will pay your full levy, and then apply to an unknown government department, using an unknown form, of which only some volunteers deemed to be 'active' are eligible to apply to have your money paid back at some time in the future that is currently unknown. The $6M 'gift' accounts for less than half a cent, for every dollar raised.

As your representative body, and with the government having a statutory obligation under S6 of the CFA Act to consult with VFBV on all matters affecting CFA volunteers, it should be very telling that I cannot tell you how any of this will work. Municipal Councils have slammed the lack of consultation with themselves also and the Victorian Farmers Federation is also demanding further consultation occur.

As predicted, volunteer feedback to the exemption has been broad and diverse. From those that don't want it at all, to those who object to the cap and point out they will still be paying more even with the capped exemption in place. Then there is the mine field of how we determine who is eligible, is it equitable and how it will be managed at brigade level to avoid disputes.

Which puts VFBV in a very difficult position. How can we possibly support an initiative, that while it sounds like it might be a good thing, has not been consulted on with us or CFA volunteers, and when we do not know any of the detail, and have no idea how it will all work. We simply cannot support something we have no detail on.

And for those that might like to characterise this as looking a gift horse in the mouth, if you recall the Trojan Horse metaphor at the start, the trusting Trojans were in fact warned by a Trojan priest named Laocoon, as they came upon the Trojan Horse and were debating on whether they would bring it back to the city. He exclaimed to his people that it was all a trap – and said "Trust not this horse, o countrymen, whatever it may bring! I fear the Greeks, even when they bring gifts." The Trojans ignored his warning.

An issue as important as an exemption, and all its complex workings and sensitivities upon a volunteer ethos deserved robust and careful consideration in full consultation with emergency service volunteers. We have not been part of those discussions, and volunteers have not had an opportunity to weigh the pros and cons. Councils did not have a say and the people affected the most – the ratepayers of Victoria have certainly not had a say.

Many volunteers have contacted me in recent weeks to make it clear that if their exemption comes at the cost of ripping the plate from farmers dinner tables, or the house over their heads – then how in good conscience can that be ok. What a horrible position to put volunteers in. The notion that the only way we can support volunteers is to support a $765M tax hike and throw volunteers a few scraps along the way is deeply offensive.

And while the government points to the fact that the Fire Services Property Levy was recommended by the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission, they forget that the then Government went through an exhaustive green paper in 2010 and options paper in 2011 with full public consultation and transparency to arrive at the current Fire Services Property Levy in the first place. To think you can make fundamental changes to a levy without any consultation or due process is just incredulous.

Which leads us to the poor ratepayer, who is expected to cop a near doubling of their current levies, some in the tens of thousands of dollars. And knowing how hard a sell it would be to try and convince Victorians in a cost-of-living crisis that the government needed to fleece $610-765M in extra revenue to cover cost overruns elsewhere in the budget – they came up with the bold PR plan to call it a "Volunteer Fund" – thinking this would surely protect them from any criticism.

When I talk about the need for governments to respect emergency service volunteers, I wonder how anyone in their right mind could think that using volunteers as a human shield to sell your outrageous tax hike on the Victorian community even remotely qualifies. How could this possibly be considered as paying due respect to our hardworking volunteers? Can you remember any time that governments have called for a new staff levy to raise funds from the taxpayer for each of the enterprise bargaining deals they sign each year? How insulting would that be to employees. Well, the same holds true for volunteers.

To call their new levy an "Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund" is the most outrageous and despicable act since they labelled their reform bill after sick firefighters calling for presumptive legislation. VFBV has been publicly demanding the words 'Volunteer Fund' be dumped since December last year.

Astute volunteers have pointed out that the Government does not pay the levy on crown land. Previously, the argument was that because the government contributed money to each of the fire agencies through consolidated revenue and funded FFMVic, that that was how their contribution was made. But now the government wants to transfer 95% of the costs of FFMVic and support functions from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to landholders - they are in effect saying to Victorians - you must pay more for your own private land, but by the way – you can now pay for the protection of our crown land also.

We support funding arrangements that will provide CFA and SES with a fair, equitable and sustainable means to ensure that every community in Victoria is entitled to a strong volunteer emergency service that is fit for purpose with modern trucks and equipment. This bill isn't it. We do not support the government trying to add seven government bodies to the levy, and abdicating its responsibilities and pretending it is doing this all for volunteers. We certainly do not support regional and rural communities being asked to absorb an unfair proportion of the pain, asking regions to cross subsidise cost overruns of city services and bureaucracies that will drive many farmers to the brink.

If you haven't yet contacted your local upper house MPs, and especially cross bench MPs such as the Greens, your time is running out. As volunteers - we put the community at the centre of everything we do. Surely our elected representatives to Parliament must do the same.

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2 Minute Briefings June 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.

VFBV VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Community Safety

June 2025

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

FIRE WISE KIDS

As we reported last year, work has been underway to redevelop CFA's school-based education program. The previous program 'Fire Safe Kids' of which was developed in 2011 and has remained unchanged since, will be replaced by three new offerings. The three offerings consist of a classroom-based program Fire Wise Kids, a separate hands on fire truck experience called Truck Time, and a suite of online resources for teachers, families and children. These resources include a number of videos, lesson plans, and activities.

Development of the three offerings has been led by a project steering committee who have developed the programs in consultation with the Joint Committee, a member's testing group, a regional staff group as well as input from other parts of the organisation such as OH&S and child safety. Fire Wise Kids is designed for children 4 years of age through to Year 4. The program consists of five 30-60 minute lessons with topics such as basic hazards at home, calling triple zero and outdoor fire safety. Draft lesson plans were developed and trialled in Doreen and Phillip Island. In addition, new logos and style guides and new CFA characters have been designed. Following this, presenter support materials and training have been developed.

Testing of the lesson plans was completed in mid-March with two additional trials being conducted, one being a kinder in Ferntree Gully and a high bushfire risk trial in Belgrave South. The lessons were then updated based on the experiences during those trials. The feedback from stakeholders has been overwhelmingly positive.

Phase two of the project (2025/26) will begin with the launch of both new programs, Fire Wise Kids and Truck Time and the release of new stickers and resources for brigade open days (colouring in sheets and activity sheets). Work will then begin on expanding the online resources library as well as exploring specialised resources for students with disabilities and English as an additional language.

Truck Time is a standalone program designed to support brigades in engaging children in and around fire trucks and equipment safely. In addition to school settings this program is well suited to delivery at open days, fetes, or any other community event. Members who wish to deliver Fire Wise Kids or Truck Time will need to have a current Working With Children Check (WWCC) and complete the e-learning modules on LMS as well as attend an in-person observation session to practise and demonstrate skills.

POMONAL FIRE RESEARCH

CFA has partnered with RMIT to conduct research into the community's response to the 2024 Pomonal Fire. The project aims to better understand behaviour of residents when faced with evacuation because of bushfire or other emergencies.

36 community members agreed to be interviewed which included 8 CFA members. It is hoped that this research will help better understand what gaps there are in emergency planning and information both before and during an emergency.

17% of respondents said they had a written plan. 60% of respondents indicated they have a verbal plan only. Of those respondents who did not have a written plan, 52% indicated it was not necessary. 93% of those surveyed accept it is their responsibility to prepare their property for fire, most focus on 'easy to do' preparation such as general garden maintenance, rather than having a comprehensive plan. 50% believe that should a fire occur it is CFA's responsibility to protect them.

Only 30% of respondents indicated that they would leave an area during a bushfire event. 14% of people indicated they would wait and assess the situation and 16% would wait until they were instructed to leave by emergency authorities. 12% of respondents would stay and actively defend their property. Reassuringly, the survey indicated that the community's trust in CFA remains high, and the community understands the importance of staying connected with CFA and their local brigade.

VFBV VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Equipment & Infrastructure

June 2025

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

STORZ

It has been some time since the committee last reported on the Storz coupling rollout across CFA. Delegates have continued to seek updates from the organisation on the snail pace progress of converting the fleet to Storz. While there has been some progress there was a glaring detail in the data provided that indicated that while many districts had completed 100% Storz conversion to all brigades and appliances, there appears to be some districts that are reporting 100% of the 'brigades nominated' for conversion are completed. Delegates are concerned that some districts are not nominating every brigade or appliance for the program despite the funding was clearly being provided for all brigades. As highlighted in previous articles the Storz conversion started in 2009 with funding for a 100% conversion to all brigades and appliances. Delegates have requested an understanding as to who makes the decision that a brigade does or does not receive Storz as the funding provided to date was clearly marked for all brigades and all appliances for the whole of the organisation.

ONE FUEL CARD

During the very busy summer fire period there have been reports of members having trouble accessing fuel for appliances during peak period, particularly when trying to refuel while out of area on deployment and particularly out of hours. CFA is investigating an expansion to provide 'fuel pods' for areas that have difficulty accessing fuel when the local store has closed and this will be managed by the District office. In some instances members have had to pay for the fuel themselves as they did not have the right fuel card when on a strike team out of their area. Members are able to be re-imbursed for the fuel, however this can take some time to organise and becomes yet another burden on a brigade or member. Progress is being made on CFA having a single fuel card for all appliances across the state, negating the need for brigades to have several fuel cards, dependant on what supplier is operating in the district. Delegates will continue to seek updates and look forward to the 'one card' solution.

BUILD DELAYS

Delegates have queried the inconsistencies reported for the appliance builds over the past few meetings. CFA has advised that the reporting metric has changed to now show appliances actually delivered to brigades rather than the previous method of reporting on appliances completed.

Some of the reasons for appliance build delays are flow-on's from the COVID era, there are many that are outside of CFA's control, for instance, manufacturers labour shortages and supply change issues. Added to this are the expected delays while overseas manufacturers navigate expected Euro 6 emissions changes and the effect this will have on Australian Design Rules. CFA continue to brief the Government on changes to the supply chain and its impact on Emergency Services builds.

BA CYLINDER EXCHANGE

The BA Cylinder exchange working party continues to meet regularly to seek ways of improving the member experience when dealing with BA cylinder exchange and refilling. The working group has recently been discussing a mapping process and identifying contact points when a cylinder is exchanged. While the physical aspect of the cylinder exchange appears to be an uncomplicated process - the tracking of cylinders so that testing and quality requirements are met is proving challenging. There is at IT component that also needs to be tested so that the adopted system is somewhat future proofed. We will continue to update you as the project nears an announcement and implementation.

VFBV VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Member Services

June 2025

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT HUB (VRH)

Delegates continue to raise issues with CFA regarding the Volunteer Recruitment Hub (VRH). The release of Version 5 of the VRH will see changes that are hoped will ultimately reduce barriers to members and applicants along the way as well as giving brigades better visibility of where members and applicants are at in the process. Volunteers continue to raise application delays that occur due to CFA's medical review process with the People, Culture and Safety Joint Committee pursuing changes to CFA's medical processes. If you have recently joined CFA or transferred from one brigade to another please keep providing feedback to volrecruithub@cfa.vic.gov.au so that issues we can continue to document issues and advocate for improvements to be made.

VOLUNTEER RETENTION

VFBV continues to highlight the issues with volunteer retention, that see additional signups from CFA's recruitment campaigns dwarfing the number of volunteers exiting the system. Delegates continue to express concern at the quarterly reports showing a continuing reduction in volunteer numbers, despite the 'Give us a Hand' campaign that reportedly showed an uptick in expressions of interest during October 2024. Delegates have continued to highlight the importance of retention of current members requesting CFA establish stronger reporting mechanisms that track why members are leaving in such large numbers. Delegates have called for stronger support for volunteer exit surveys to ensure they reach every member that resigns, and the information collected from the surveys is available.

EFTPOS TERMINALS

CFA have now distributed EFTPOS terminals to all District Offices. The terminals can be 'loaned' to Brigades for BBQ's, Open Days and other authorised fund-raising activities. Delegates will continue to seek an update from CFA Financial Services on the success of these mobile terminals and the trailing of different providers and charging mechanisms. Brigades are requested to provide feedback to our Joint Committee delegates so we can gather feedback on the long-awaited provision of these terminal(s).

CHAMPIONSHIPS

Delegates congratulate the 2025 Mooroopna Host Committee and all judges, officials and competitors for another successful State Championships. Our competition committees are focused on making the event more successful and enjoyable and a great deal of work is being done to ensure that the events are relevant to fire ground practices so that members gain skills they can use back in their districts to protect their communities. Next year's State Championships will be held in Stawell.

If you have competed in the past or want to give it a try you have a year to get your team back on the competition track, talk to your local competition association or VFBV District Council for information and support.

BRIGADE MANAGEMENT MANUAL (BMM)

The Brigade Management Manual (BMM) is currently under review in order to ensure it remains contemporary and reflective of current practice.

A working group is evaluating the topics set out in the BMM to confirm if certain parts are still relevant, require amendment or can be removed. Further communication regarding this will be made available soon. If there are parts of the BMM that you consider needs attention or areas where information is missing - please ensure you provide feedback to the working group via your district council representatives or State Councillors.

VFBV VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Operational Capability

June 2025

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

ARDUOUS FIREFIGHTING TRIAL

Delegates are assisting the Chief Officer consider a new capability of an Arduous Firefighter (AFF) role within CFA. The role of an arduous firefighter will require members to have a heightened level of fitness and medical while also requiring additional qualifications to operate in remote bush and forest areas within a 45 minute walk from a suitable extraction point. Arduous firefighting can be physically demanding and requires high levels of physical exertion over extended periods in dynamically changing environments. The AFF role may be required to operate a range of equipment in both emergency and non-emergency situations in a variety of challenging environments, including off-road conditions. The new capability is being piloted by a small cohort of volunteers in the Corio Fire Brigade as a specialist response. Once trials are completed, we are requesting other areas of the state to train for the role. The intent of the pilot is to have an initial crew of AFF ready for the start of December 2025.

WHOLE OF LIFE ASSET PLAN (WOLP) UPDATE

It has been some time since we last reported on the Whole Of Life Asset Plan (WOLP) but work has continued to develop over the past 18 months. The WOLP is a resource to risk model that is designed to create a baseline process for the allocation of appliances and resources. The process of moving and allocating appliances while taking into consideration growth, activity, station modifications and vehicle lifecycle and District priorities continues to evolve. Last year's announcement of 25 new pumpers into the fleet is an example of where the WOLP helps inform where the new trucks will go and the expected 52 cascades that will eventuate - with 7 locations expected to receive a cascaded pumper based on growth and risk. The WOLP is being designed to guide the asset management requirements of the organisation, and a new service risk delivery model has been developed that identifies the environmental risk for each brigade, which will then inform the base service delivery classification. Like everything, volunteer consultation is a key element in the allocation of resources and delegates continue to push that District Planning Committee's across the state need to remain heavily involved in forming the Districts priorities.

BOOT AND GLOVE TRIALS

The Personal Protective Equipment & Clothing subcommittee have been busy over the past few months with new trials of structural boots, structural gloves and flash hoods taking place. The committee would like to particularly thank all of the volunteers involved in the trials at the various training grounds and their continuous commitment to the evaluation process. Tenders will be called for over the next few months with the preferred protective equipment available later in the year. Volunteers are reminded that fit for purpose PPE can be custom made by talking to your District office for a special made to order measure and fitting. We will keep you updated on progress.

SUMMER DEBRIEF

Delegates continue to impress on CFA the importance of ensuring grass root volunteer involvement in fire season debriefs. Many members will have been very active over the Fire Season in many parts of the state. It has been a busy season with an increase in activity across the state and there have been some significant fires that dragged resources from all areas that contributed to the State's volunteer surge capacity.

The Kadnook Fire in November, The Grampians National Park fire in December and the Little Dessert Fire in January were all major incidents that required significant volunteer resources to contain. Other incidents at The Gurdies in the South East, the Bullengarook fire west of Gisborne, the Creswick fire and The Sheffield/Montrose fire also kept firefighters busy during the season. VFBV would like to thank all volunteers for their continued support and commitment to the communities of Victoria over the whole of the year but particularly during the busy festive and holiday periods. Please ensure members provide feedback on deployments into CFA's AAR reporting system.

VFBV VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Operational Performance

June 2025

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

FIRE DISTRICT REVIEW PANEL

Members will by now have heard or read about the outcomes of the first Fire District Review Panel (FDRP) under the fire service reforms. The Minister has announced that after receiving the report prepared by the Fire District Review Panel under section 4L of the Act on 28 June 2024, she has determined that no change be made to the Fire Rescue Victoria district. This will be a relief to members of the 13 initial brigades targeted, and affirms VFBV's strong representations to both the Government and Fire District Review Panel but also highlights that there are still no clear or transparent guidelines or process that brigades can work with to determine how the first round of brigades were chosen or how brigades will be chosen into the future. Some districts have held after action reviews to assist brigades in understanding the process to date and while the brigades are very pleased with the sensible outcome from the Minister many are disappointed that there has not been more clarity around how the morale sapping process will work in the future. CFA has undertaken some changes to capability in line with assisting the affected brigades. Delegates continue to call for greater support to the affected brigades to help them with the 'what's next' as they continue to support their communities.

AFTER ACTION REVIEW IMPROVEMENTS

Many volunteers have reported over time that they have little confidence that when they provide feedback after attending significant or campaign fires that there will be any action taken from the feedback or improvements made and that in some instances what they have reported in the AAR and what is formally submitted can differ. Further to this it is reported that in some instances there is little confidence that the After-Action Review (AAR) facilitators have the necessary skill level to engage and get the best outcomes from the AAR process. Delegates have suggested that if adequate training was provided to senior volunteers or leaders within the volunteer ranks so they can also be involved in the formal AAR processes the outcomes of the AAR process may be significantly improved. Delegates also commented that there is no ability for them to see whether their feedback has been received and or taken into consideration as there is no closure of the feedback loop or notification that the feedback has reached the target. Members are reminded that feedback from any incidents, large or small can be forwarded to AAR@cfa.vic.gov.au

FIRS ONLINE

Members have reported an increased utilisation of the FIRS Online Help Guides and have acknowledged that the guides have provided simple instructions on how to fill out the fire reports. The Service Delivery Reporting Centre (SDRC) has provided 12 online guides specific to incidents that are designed to assist members to fill out the reports and can be downloaded with clear instructions on all sorts of incidents and can be used as a great training resource for brigades on those wet wintery indoor training nights.

Members have requested that CFA investigate further the opportunity for the FIRS to remain open outside of standard business hours for those members who work 9-5 and have questions regarding filling out the forms correctly. Delegates have suggested even a single weeknight and Sunday morning slot would cater to peak times where volunteers are usually attending stations for maintenance activities. CFA have agreed to investigate how this can be achieved.
All FIRS related enquiries can be made to firs.online@cfa.vic.gov.au or via 1800 628 844 (0900 - 1700 hrs Monday to Friday excluding public holidays).

VFBV will continue to pursue extended hours for FIRS reports lodged via the Service Delivery Reporting Centre.

VFBV VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefing

Joint People, Culture & Safety

June 2025

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

CONFLICT AND ISSUE RESOLUTION

Delegates continue to monitor recent changes to the complaints process. An Issue Resolution team, based at Burwood, is now dedicated solely to dealing with complaints, and is assisting Districts where necessary, in resolving complaints, both formal and informal. VFBV has begun to see improvements by this approach and the work of the issue resolution team. The new approach appears to be less punitive driven and a more common sense and restorative approach which we have long argued for. Long time frames are still a concern to volunteers and to VFBV, and some volunteers still have a less than satisfactory experience. It is hoped that CFA's evolution to now viewing complaints through a lens of 'resolving a dispute and finding a solution", rather than identifying a victim and a villain will lead to better outcomes and assist brigades experiencing interpersonal conflict. Throughout committee discussions, CFA has come to appreciate the importance of both parties, complainants and respondents, being treated equally, with respect, fairness and natural justice. VFBV continue to meet regularly with key people within the Issue Resolution team and continue to monitor closely, the number of outstanding complaints, the time frames required to resolve those complaints and the outcomes for all volunteers involved.

WORKING WITH CHILDRENS CHECKS (WWCC)

As members may recall, CFA had previously proposed a December 31st, 2024 cut off for volunteers included in Schedule 1A of its WWCC Policy to attain a working with children check. However, following broader consultation on their policies and the significant feedback received from volunteers, it was clear there may be significant unintended consequences.

Under Schedule 1A it was originally proposed that all CFA employees, 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, Trainers, Assessors, Instructors (non-FRV), members participating in the Emergency Medical Response or Fire Medical Response programs and any other persons undertaking child-related work were to obtain their WWCC as a priority.

VFBV has indicated that based on volunteer feedback received during our WWCC survey, there was support for Schedule 1A as a reasonable and appropriate level, as all these positions are very closely aligned to the requirements under the legislation. Volunteer opposition and discomfort only started to emerge when considering CFA's proposals to start departing quite significantly and more broadly from what are the legal requirements.

CFA has advised they are now considering a revised date and have discussed the idea of launching a campaign to promote the requirement for compliance of this group. Delegates suggested CFA needed to increase support and assistance to these people, as feedback suggests a myriad of reasons why volunteers have not done so to date. Many have reported they are challenged by the process of obtaining a WWCC, especially for those not technically savvy, and many of those volunteers may in fact have their WWCC for a different role and have not added CFA to their card.

Both CFA and VFBV encourages those volunteers who are experiencing any problems to contact wwcc@cfa.vic.gov.au for assistance.

VOLUNTEER EXIT SURVEYS

VFBV would urge any volunteer who has transferred brigades or who makes the decision to leave CFA, to complete the exit survey provided by CFA. This is a tool crucial to CFA understanding why volunteers leave or move around the organisation. It is vital that CFA understands these circumstances and it also assists the committee who study these results to be able to respond and suggest improvements accordingly. Currently the response rate of people who actually fill out the exit survey is very low, which makes it difficult to record with statistical accuracy the real reasons people leave. We urge brigades to encourage members resigning to please use the exit survey so their reasons are recorded.

VFBV VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Technology & Innovation

June 2025

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

CFA INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) UPDATES

Delegates have for some time been discussing with CFA proposals for improvements in the organisations ICT Strategy, noting that historically - changes have been very slow and improvements for members minimal. We can now report that due to some careful planning and ongoing discussions there are some very positive changes to the CFA ICT Strategy. CFA has in the past taken an ad hoc approach to systems of technology by adapting and building onto current IT platforms to make them do roles that they are not really designed to do. Sometimes the adjustments can mean that the systems are operating outside their capability and when a system is changed in one area there is often a flow on effect further down the line that didn't exist and rendering the system more problematic than before. But in a very positive development CFA IT has communicated that they are now looking to invest in more 'off the shelf' type systems that are specifically designed to perform a specific task. The best example is the SAP/4 HANNA system that has allowed the finance department to operate much more efficiently and works alongside the new Finance CONCUR platform. Concur is available for member reimbursements, noting that it will provide a quicker process for members to claim reimbursement for approved items that they purchased out of pocket. While many will understandably be sceptical, delegates believe there are already changes happening and while they will take some time to land - it is pleasing to hear CFA confirm that the strategy will continue to be developed in consultation with volunteers who in many cases are the end user.

RENEWABLE ENERGY INNOVATIONS

In planning for the future delegates have requested CFA's Specialist Risk and Fire Safety Manager to provide updates on CFA's Renewable Energies projects. Delegates were provided a very comprehensive overview of CFA's legislative role in ensuring the organisation is keeping up with changes across the state in the very fast-moving renewable energies space. CFA's role is to provide support to brigades, operators and others regarding fire safety at renewable energy facilities including wind, solar and battery storage facilities. CFA has developed a set of nationally recognised design guidelines and requirements for operators for planning, design and operating renewable energy facilities. Design Guidelines and Model Requirements for Renewable Energy Facilities can be downloaded from members online. Of greatest concern to members is to ensure accurate information is provided to members on how to fight fires around renewable energy facilities, transmission lines and bulk energy storage systems and there are several videos now available online that will help members to understand the risks involved and actions to take when confronted with this fast-paced sector. If your brigade has a facility in its area or is aware of one being planned for the future we encourage the brigade be proactive and develop a rapport with the facilities management team so that you can be prepared should the brigade be required in an emergency situation.

WORKING PARTY UPDATE

The uptake of the Supplementary Alerting System (SAS) continues to grow with thousands of volunteers now logged into the system. Release 10 is now available from IOS and Android app stores. The new release has a range of bug fixes including the option to enable a colour-coded timer that can be used by brigades to track their event response times, ability to search for members by email address and other minor enhancements. There are many changes still to occur to the system over time, but many volunteers are reporting that it meets the needs of most who use it. The app is available to download on both Apple and Android devices and a web version and desktop version is also available. You can find the app by searching for Supplementary Alerting Service in the relevant app store. Members are reminded that the EAS Pager still remains the primary means of alerting members to emergency incidents due to the built in redundancies.

Radios continue to be rolled out across the state under the State Government Radio Replacement Program (RRP) with the project on track to be completed by October 2025. CFA has over 18,000 radios to be replaced and at the time of the last meeting over 6700 radios had been delivered covering 11 districts with 1600 appliances fitted. Members are reminded that if they have not yet completed the CFARRPAWE Radio Replacement Program Training Course it can be accessed in the LMS system and takes about 1.5 hrs to complete.

VFBV VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefing
Joint Training

June 2025

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

IMPROVED ACCESS TO TRAINING GROUNDS

The Joint Training Committee (JTC) has been receiving regular updates from CFA regarding their ongoing commitment to increase the usage of the eight Victorian Emergency Management Training Centres (VEMTCs) across the State. Delegates have raised feedback from some Brigades who have expressed frustration at what was deemed to be quite convoluted means for them to organise a training session at one of these centres. Based on this feedback, CFA has committed to undertake work to make it easier for Brigades to organise, book and attend a training session for their members.

Recently, delegates have been pleased to start receiving reports from Brigades that the processes for organising training at these centres has been made significantly easier and centre management have been very supportive in helping Brigades create a session that suits them. Brigades that in the past have rarely, if ever, used these centres have reported that a training session at one of them was a great learning experience for their members and they plan to utilise the facilities on a more regular basis going forward. Where individual Brigades have struggled to get enough members to have a training session conducted for them, there have been many examples of several Brigades coming together for a session at a centre. Brigades and Groups, especially those whose members may not have been to a VEMTC for training in the past, are highly encouraged to reach out via their District to their closest VEMTC to see what can be organised for them.

TRAINING COMPLAINTS FEEDBACK

VFBV has long advocated for more effective mechanisms for volunteers to raise concerns and provide feedback about their training experience. JTC members have therefore welcomed the fact CFA has now implemented a formal feedback and complaints system specifically focused on training issues. This system provides a means for members to submit feedback about how training courses can be improved and report issues that may be preventing them from receiving the training they need. It can also be used by members to raise concerns relating to obtaining Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or the recognition of qualifications and competencies obtained from external organisations; areas where volunteers have reported ongoing challenges and inconsistencies across Districts. The system can be accessed by all members and is most easily located by searching for “Training Complaints” in Members Online. The JTC will be receiving regular updates as to the number and types of feedback lodged in this system and pursuing CFA to address the issues being raised.

LPG FLARE OFF TRAINING

Brigades with LPG flare off capabilities have been extremely frustrated at the inability of CFA to deliver training in this field for the last few years after there were problems with the training props.

JTC Delegates share this frustration, having continually pursued CFA to get the props rectified and the course updated appropriately.

CFA have now informed the JTC that both the Course Materials and three sets of Training Props are both finally ready for Brigades to use. The Props have been designed to be transportable and can be situated at any VEMTC, or indeed can be used at a Brigade’s own station if suitable space is available. Initially the props will be deployed to Central Highlands, Bangholme and Huntly. CFA has advised that it undertook to contact all Brigades with Flare Off capabilities to notify them that the training is available. However, any Brigades requiring this training that have not heard from CFA should make contact with their District Training departments to organise for it to occur.

Delegates look forward to receiving feedback form brigades to provide us confidence that this issue has now been fully resolved.

National Volunteer Week
19-25 MAY 2025
Connecting Communities
Thank you
VFBV
VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA