

Newsletter

Combined Newsletter of:

DECEMBER 2007



VFBV



VRFBA



VUFBA

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CFA/VFBV DROUGHT SUPPORT FUND

The growing desire at Brigade and Group level to provide support to CFA brigades and communities in severe drought affected areas of the State, has led to VFBV, with the support of CFA, arranging for the Bendigo Bank to establish a *Drought Support Fund* to enable a coordinated collection point for Brigade and Group donations.

A successful drought support strategy is already operating in the North West Area, and the Midlands Wimmera Area is also implementing a similar strategy. The *CFA/VFBV Drought Support Fund* will help to extend this support to other parts of Victoria experiencing significant impacts from drought by enabling Brigades and Groups Statewide to contribute financial support if they so wish.

This is one step towards supporting communities affected by drought, and will form part of the overall program to be consolidated by CFA with the support of VFBV. CFA, supported by VFBV, will establish a means for distributing the funds collected. This will initially be via programs already in place, and extending support to other parts of the State identified as warranting assistance. Whilst the CFA will administer the drought support fund and various support strategies, there will be volunteer involvement in the determining the most effective use of funds raised.

Donations to the Fund can be made at any Bendigo Bank branch ("*CFA/VFBV Drought Support Fund*" Account 1324-810-60) or by forwarding a cheque payable to "*CFA/VFBV Drought Support Fund*", mailed to CFA HQ Finance Section, P O Box 701, Mt Waverley, VIC 3149 marked attention Ron Fasciani. For further information, please refer to the VFBV web site or contact Bob MacDonald 03 5427 3325 or Ron Fasciani 03 9262 8221.

PPC SUBMISSION

Discussions between parties to produce a new structural personal protective ensemble began in 2002 and it has taken until 2007 to reach some finality.

Given the significant delay in this project, in October the Minister for Police and Emergency Services Bob Cameron, announced that he had requested County Court Judge Gordon Lewis to report to him on the processes to select the new PPC with a view to facilitating more timely

decision making on equipment purchases in the future. The CFA, MFESB, UFU and the three volunteer bodies were invited by Judge Lewis to make submissions to him by the end of November.

It was decided VFBV would make the submission on behalf of volunteers with the full support of VRFBA and VUFBA. We duly made our submission and in so doing, provided Judge Lewis with significant reference material which we believe highlighted the reasons for the many delays during the life of the project.

As part of our submission we also provided a statement from Brett Hume as an expert witness. Brett is now a member of Loch Brigade in Region 9 but was previously an Assistant Commissioner of the NSW Fire Brigades and in that role, oversaw their protective equipment procurement.

CFA and MFESB also provided submissions to the Judge but the UFU for their own reasons chose not to. Each of the participating parties were invited to make oral presentations to Judge Lewis in the week commencing 19th December which we each did. VFBV was represented at the meeting with the Judge by Andrew Ford, VFBV CEO, Bob MacDonald (VRFBA Executive Officer), Peter Davis (VUFBA Secretary), Peter Bishop and Hans van Hamond (Volunteer members of the structural PPC Working Party) and Brett Hume.

Judge Lewis expressed his appreciation for the assistance our submission had been to him and for the forthright manner in which his questions were answered.

GOVERNMENT'S WATER REPLACEMENT POLICY

There have been a number of questions about the Government's Water Replacement Policy in recent months, and as such the following advice has been received directly from the office of the Commissioner of Emergency Services. The Government's Policy will operate in the same way as it did in 2006-07. The Government will replenish all essential water. That is if water is taken from domestic and stock or irrigation dams and it is needed for essential use, it will be replenished.

This means that a reasonable and sufficient volume of water will be provided to sustain:

- The health of affected residences and pets;
- The health of their stock; and
- Agricultural and horticultural crops, permanent and intensive;
- Industries.

People who have water taken and require it for essential use do not need to apply for replenishment through their insurance policy. The application process will be the same as it was last year, where people applied to their local municipality.

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 2007. 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 the April General Meetings of VUFBA and VRFBA. Your feedback is important. This is a reminder for Brigades, Groups and Regional Councils to please give this issue your consideration and provide feedback to this important issue. If you are not able to provide feedback by the due date (end December) please still feel welcome to provide your comment. Although work will need to start during January on preparing a final proposal, your feedback is still very welcome, ideally prior to the end of January to give the team working on this issue a reasonable opportunity to give it due consideration. Feedback is to be forwarded to VFBV CEO Andrew Ford PO Box 453, Mt Waverly VIC 3149, or email a.ford@vfbv.com.au. If your brigade, Group or Regional Council has not discussed this important issue yet, please encourage the discussion to occur.

JOINT MEETING OF ASSOCIATIONS

On 25th November the VRFBA State Council and the VUFBA Governing Body met jointly to discuss issues raised by Regional Councils and brigades together with other items of business generated by the Associations and the CFA. Another joint meeting will be held Sunday 30th March 2008 – the day following the joint Open Forum.

Following a separate meeting with senior volunteers held on the same day as the joint meeting, the Associations 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.

CFA BOARD DECIDES ON EBA FOR CFA FIREFIGHTERS, REVERSING PREVIOUS COMMITMENT TO VOLUNTEERS

During October CFA Chairman released a communiqué advising that CFA Board had reached a decision to negotiate the long running EBA impasse between CFA and the UFU. VFBV is disappointed that the CFA

Board's decision has not addressed several aspects of the EBA that have caused significant concern for VFBV and also for CFA. In its move to progress this matter, the CFA Board has reversed its commitment to CFA volunteers not to sign the EBA while it contains sections which adversely impact on volunteers.

VFBV has repeatedly reinforced that volunteers have neither the right nor interest in interfering with the pay or conditions of CFA paid firefighters, however volunteers do have a right to expect to be treated fairly and equally, and to ensure that volunteers have a real say in matters that affect them. This means we expect decision making on matters that affect both staff and volunteers to be based on open, transparent and genuine consultation. We also expect that this consultation should be managed by CFA and that the ultimate decision making power should rest with CFA who are the organisation responsible for the outcome of these decisions.

The recent CFA Board decision fails to deliver this simple expectation and it is our fear that there is an emerging trend in the CFA Boards approach to decision making on matters that impact on volunteers that shows little respect for the concerns and views of volunteers and the long term future of CFA's volunteer based culture.

SPECIAL MEETING 25TH NOVEMBER 2007 - CFA VOLUNTEERS VOICE LOSS OF CONFIDENCE IN CFA BOARD AND CFA SENIOR MANAGEMENT

As a result of growing concerns, a special meeting was held on 25th November involving more than 100 senior volunteers from across the state to discuss the pattern of disregard for volunteer rights and a growing disconnection between the CFA Board and volunteers, and the failure of the CFA Board and senior management to acknowledge or act on these concerns. Volunteers attending the meeting included Group Officers; VUFBA and VRFBA Regional Presidents; key regional leaders; VFBV representatives, the VUFBA Executive and VRFBA State Council.

One of the key outcomes of the meeting was agreement that CFA management, CFA Board and Government need to be told that **CFA volunteers are losing confidence in the CFA Board, CFA management and Governments commitment to protecting the rights of volunteers and protecting the future of CFA as a volunteer based organisation.**

This view was very strongly supported by volunteers attending the special meeting and formally passed as a motion by Joint Meeting of VUFBA Executive and VRFBA State Council at their meeting also held 25th November.

The special meeting discussed a strong disappointment with CFA Board's about face and recent decision on the EBA which gives an effective power of veto to the UFU (by allowing UFU to withhold agreement on decisions that impact on volunteers and also restricts the ability for CFA Chief Officer to execute his duties).

The meeting expressed concerns broader than just the impacts of some clauses in the EBA and also discussed a growing concern about a pattern of disregard for volunteer rights and volunteer views by CFA Board and CFA management.

Examples included:

- CFA Board about face on ABN, a change of position without consultation with volunteers;
- CFA Board structural PPC decision and flawed decision process;
- Red tape, overly bureaucratic procedures and an approach aimed at protecting corporate CFA rather than genuine appreciation of volunteer impacts;
- Low confidence in the CFA's track record and commitment over the past few years to fix the problems flowing from EBA clauses that impact on volunteers and CFA decision making;
- Second rate communication with volunteers – disregard, lack of respect – are we just a nuisance?;
- Concern that CFA Board has forgotten or possibly fail to accept that CFA is a volunteer based organisation? Concern based on recent resistance to making clear statements about this and what it means for the way CFA should operate etc;
- Slow resolution of volunteer concerns. Examples:
 - Associations waiting for more than 5 years to get Brigade Owned Vehicle working party meeting with CFA to discuss issues including BOV policy, BOV allowance etc. – despite efforts the Associations have not been able to get CFA to meet;
 - slow resolution of single stage ladders for medium pumpers – volunteers waiting for nearly 2 years for an outcome and even now it is uncertain when the ladders will be issued.
- Volunteers involved when CFA needs their support and ignored when it suits CFA agenda. For example:
 - Volunteer involvement in final work on SOs and SOPs – volunteers devoted 100's of hours to the initial SOP development process but when the Associations requested an opportunity to be involved in later documents, we were advised the volunteers would not be required.
 - Lack of involvement in map book ground testing – map books that are core to our work and safety of both volunteers and community are worse than we had before.

At the conclusion of the meeting, those in attendance gave unanimous support to a course of action aimed at overcoming the current unsatisfactory position. Many actions will flow from the meeting, including an ongoing and concerted campaign to broadly communicate volunteers growing loss of confidence in CFA Board, CFA management and Government as a catalyst to get some action to resolve volunteer concerns.

Since the special meeting held on 25th November VFBV CEO Andrew Ford and Chairman Gary Lyttle have met with CFA CEO Neil Bibby and CFA Chairman Kerry Murphy to discuss volunteers concerns and advise CFA of the intended campaign action.

A number of ideas were put forward by VFBV as suggestions to start fixing the problem and both the CEO and Chairman of CFA were receptive to the ideas.

There will be more information provided on this important issue as progress is made. The VFBV campaign is simple, it is about protecting the rights of volunteers for today and for the future AND it is about protecting the viability and future of a volunteer based CFA.

VFBV BOARD TO CONTINUE REGIONAL MEETINGS

The Board of VFBV will continue with its process of holding some of its monthly meetings at Regional locations. The Board has agreed in the early part of 2008 it will meet at:

Lilydale Fire Station – Friday 1st February 2008
Area H.Q. Sale – Friday 29th February 2008
Region 18 H.Q. Swan Hill – Friday 2nd May 2008
Benalla Fire Station – Friday 30th May 2008

Volunteers are invited to meet with the Board members to raise any issues they wish to discuss and also to receive updates on current issues. Meetings will commence at 6.30pm following a light meal at 6.00pm. For catering purposes, volunteers intending to attend should advise VFBV, VRFBA or VUFBA by the Friday preceding the meeting.

40KPH SPEED LIMIT AT INCIDENTS INVOLVING EMERGENCY SERVICES

For some time now the Associations have been advocating to the CFA that changes to the Road Rules should be made to restrict the speed limit of vehicles to 40kph in the vicinity of emergency incidents. Initially the Associations had little support from other agencies for such a proposition.

Lately, Victoria Police has also been advocating a similar change to the Road Rules and has sought comments on two options. The Associations have advised CFA of their preferred option ie. the concept of a 40kph speed limit where emergency vehicles' warning signals are operating at an incident.

STRUCTURAL PPC

The Associations had received copies of several letters forwarded by brigades to the CFA expressing their concern at the CFA Board's decision to give volunteers a choice of two alternative structural ensembles.

Additionally, Regional Council No. 8 had requested VFBV to write to the CFA seeking to revoke the Board's decision and recommend that CFA continue with efforts to issue one form of structural ensemble to CFA members.

The joint meeting supported the Regional Council's resolutions and then took a stronger position of advising the CFA that it rejected its decision to offer a choice of 2 ensembles and insists that the volunteers be issued with the ensemble as recommended by the Structural Ensemble Working Party.

CHANGES TO CFA ACT

In our last Newsletter, we advised of proposed changes to the CFA Act. We have recently been advised by the Department of Justice that the Emergency Services Legislation Bill 2007 which incorporates the CFA Act amendments, is not being proceeded with.

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.

2008 JOINT 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. Verbal reports are given on issues currently being dealt with by VFBV and the Associations, and brigades are given the opportunity to raise directly any other issues of interest or concern. 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 to raise and discuss items of concern or interest.

The Joint Open Forum will be held at the Whitehorse Club, 298-336 Burwood Highway, East Burwood on Saturday 29th March 2008, commencing at 2.00pm. Tea and coffee will be available from 1.30pm onwards. Details of the Forum will be circulated separately to all brigades, with an RSVP for catering purposes by Monday 24th March 2008.

NEW VFBV WEB PAGE IS HERE

The new VFBV web page is now up and running. To access the site type VFBV into your search engine to find site reference or type <http://www.vfbv.com.au/> as the web address.

The new page is easier to use, has more up to date information and provides for volunteers to provide feedback on a number of issues. The new page will be progressively improved and feedback about what you want to see on the site is welcome (go to the site to access feedback mechanism to do this). The VRFBA and VUFBA sites have also been updated and all three sites are now linked and structured with a similar layout, look and functionality. You can enter all sites from the VFBV web page. Over the next year the VFBV team will be working to develop discussion forums for volunteers on key issues, polls to survey grass roots views on specific topics and Regional web space to help communication about local issues.

VOLUNTEER WEBMAIL PROJECT

Following discussions with the Associations, the CFA is looking at ways of improving communication with volunteers and will form a Working Party to consider alternative forms of electronic communication which will be suitable for an organisation as large as CFA. We are seeking volunteers who are interested in participating in this project. Interested volunteers are requested to contact VFBV or the Associations to register their interest.

The Associations have raised the following items with CFA on Behalf of Regional Councils etc.:

- extension of time for feedback to the CO's Brigade & Membership Classification Discussion Paper;
- the CFA Board's decision to give volunteers a choice of 2 structural ensembles;
- Brigade key cabinets alarmed back to Country CAD with a pager message to brigades where requested;
- procedures for the replacement of contaminated PPC;
- retention of the current structural turnout coats, pending a suitable alternative;
- developing "On the Land" book in CD/DVD format;
- allocation and replacement of uniforms;
- safety equipment for roof access work and an appropriate operating procedure;

- concerns in regard to brigade SDS;
- delays with the distribution of the armbands/ brassards for crew leaders;
- tyres fitted to Slip-on Units;
- a standard financial package for brigade financial record keeping;
- a consistent Statewide application for funding of 25mm lay flat hose for tankers;
- distribution of future CFA Media Alerts;
- pumping capacity of tankers with significant structural risk;
- preferred equipment for new Road Rescue vehicles;
- Section 29 Inspection process to be arranged with brigades;
- extension of time for feedback to the C.O.'s Standard Operating Procedures;
- a suitable cab-chassis that will accommodate super single wheels;
- Alpine resorts management authorities conducting appropriate fire prevention activities and volunteers' time not being called on to defend undefendable assets;
- imposition of restrictions on drivers passing stationary Police and Emergency Services vehicles;
- clarification of the distribution of T shirts for use under turnout coats to volunteers;
- request no further map books be produced with CFA logo, until approved by Associations;
- low volume of emergency alert tone of EAS pagers;
- CFA logo on pagers.

CHAMPIONSHIP ITEMS:

VUFBA Championships

Seventy three teams are entered to compete at the 2008 VUFBA Senior Championships at Swan Hill including five interstate teams from Western Australia and New South Wales. Seventy four teams have entered the Junior Championships at Traralgon, including brigades Harvey (W.A.) and Somerset (Tasmania).

VUFBA Junior Events

At the VUFBA Junior State Championships at Traralgon where brigades have 2 teams entered, Team B will compete immediately following Team A except for the Hydrant Race and the Wet Hose Two Competitors events.

VRFBA Championships

Brigades are reminded that copies of the Yarrambat Brigade DVD describing how each event is run are available from either the Region Competition secretary or the Association secretariat.

News from Wodonga is that the preparations for the State Championships on 4th and 5th April are progressing well and competing teams are urged to book accommodation as soon as possible to avoid possible disappointment



Seasons Greetings

VFBV Chairman Gary Lyttle and Board Members,
VUFBA President Rob Waterson and
Executive Committee members,
VRFBA President Peter Downes and
State Council members and the staff,
wish you all a Merry Xmas
and a Safe and Happy New Year