



Newsletter

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2009 VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES ROYAL COMMISSION

VFBV has continued to expend a significant amount of time and effort in ensuring that the interests of volunteers remain at the forefront of evidence, advice and discussion in the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

Single Line of Control for Bushfires in Victoria

We have been particularly active in promoting the concept that CFA and CFA's Chief Officer should play a far greater role in managing bushfires in Victoria, particularly when lives and property may be at risk. To this end VFBV made an extensive submission to the Royal Commission in which we recommended that CFA should be the lead agency for all bushfires in Victoria, regardless of whether they occur on or threaten public or private land. In the process of making this submission, representatives of VFBV met with various key stakeholders including the CFA, Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner, Minister Bob Cameron and other Ministers and Parliamentarians to explain the rationale for our position and garner support.

The concept of "one agency and one person in control" during the planning, preparation and response phases of bushfire management is not new to Australia and is the position in other high risk States in the country. VFBV considers that the advantages of having one agency and one person responsible to ensure the State is well prepared and priority is given to the protection of people's lives and property is a fundamental element of improvements that can and should occur to Victoria's present bushfire management arrangements.

The position that we advocated is now well advanced with CFA's Chief Officer being appointed as the "default" State Controller for bushfires under revised state emergency management arrangements for the command and control of emergencies in Victoria. VFBV's position has been further consolidated by the signing of a formal "Heads of Agreement" between the CFA, DSE and MFB Chief Officers in mid November that appointed Chief Officer Rees as the State Controller for bushfires until further notice. However, under current legislation, this arrangement can be varied with control handed to another agency and individual.

Whilst the progress to date on this important matter is welcomed, VFBV will continue to pursue the issue in order to have CFA and CFA's Chief Officer permanently assigned legislative responsibility for all bushfire control in Victoria.

Appearance of VFBV at the Royal Commission

Recently Allan Monti, VFBV Executive Officer and Allan Small, one of CFA's most senior volunteer members, appeared before the Royal Commission to give evidence on a range of issues concerning the use of volunteers in key IMT positions, resourcing of IMT's and training for IMT members. In short our position on these matters is that CFA must continue to use experienced and competent volunteers in key IMT roles and that CFA's training and volunteer human resources management regime must improve so as to place greater emphasis on the identification, encouragement and training of more volunteers that are prepared and willing to accept command and leadership roles in our service into the future. This requires affirmative action by CFA, a task which has not been conducted as well as it could have in the past.

Payments for Volunteers

As a result of evidence provided to the Royal Commission by a number of interstate fire service executives, VFBV was asked to provide advice to the Commission on our position.

VFBV has advised the Commission that in accordance with our previously adopted policy, volunteers do not support the payment of income in return for their voluntary fire fighting services.

However, we have emphasised that volunteers should not be out of pocket for what they do as a volunteer and we have sought further consideration and dialogue on ways in which these costs can be off-set without compromising the true meaning of volunteering and volunteerism.

We have also highlighted that in many instances employers are disadvantaged when they release volunteers to attend urgent CFA business and in some instances, specialist training. Whilst we recognise that this is not a simple issue, it nevertheless requires further investigation as the employment and economic environment continues to be affected in increasingly complex ways. Accordingly, the impact on volunteers and their availability during working hours is similarly affected. If we are to maintain CFA as a viable community based volunteer fire service, we need to confront and deal with these difficult issues. VFBV will continue to pursue this matter through a number of avenues, not just the Royal Commission.

CFA BOARD VACANCY

The Association has forwarded to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services a list of four rural volunteers in priority order for he to select a member to the CFA Board, representing rural volunteers. This CFA Board position will become vacant on 24th March 2010 when the 3 year term of current Board Member Kevin Erwin expires. Kevin was eligible to re-apply and is included on the list forwarded to the Minister.

The list of names were approved by a State Council Executive panel of rural members following interviews with applicants in response to advertisements for Expressions of Interest.

VFBV BOARD APPOINTMENTS

The same Executive panel was endorsed at State Council meeting 6th December, to appoint a rural member to the VFBV Board representing rural brigades, following an advertising and interview process. This vacancy arose on the retirement of Board member Peter Downes, and the appointment of current Board member Bruce Vine as Vice President Rural – creating a casual vacancy for a rural representative on the Board.

Interviews continue to be conducted and the panel will announce the successful applicant prior to Xmas.

FIRE SERVICES LEVY FUNDING BEING EXAMINED

The Victorian Government has announced a review of the controversial Fire Services Levy. The review will determine if the current funding model is the most appropriate and consider whether all insured property owners should pay the same levy. Funding for the State's fire services comes from three sources, the State Budget, local Councils and from the insurance industry through the fire services levy. The levy funds a third of the cost of Victoria's Fire Brigades and is passed on to Government by insurers. Property owners in high risk bushfire areas pay a higher fee.

The issue of future fire service funding will be examined by the Bushfires Royal Commission in 2010 and VFBV intends to make representations on behalf of CFA volunteers. A number of reports are underway at State and Federal levels, the first published being the Parliamentary Green Paper – *'Fire Services and the Uninsured'* produced by the Department of Treasurer and Finance.

VFBV would welcome written submissions by individuals, Brigades or Groups to assist in forming a representative view in preparing our position. A copy of the Green Paper can be found on our website: www.vfbv.com.au

STATE COUNCIL RETURNS TO FISKVILLE

VFBV State Council meeting Sunday 6th December was held at Fiskville for the first time this year. Delegates from around the State heard reports from the volunteer CFA Board members, a briefing on issues arising from the Royal Commission and progress on Regional Council support programs.

NEW STATE COUNCILLORS

Newly elected members attending their first State Council meeting on 6th December were Greg Fithall (Region 2), Geoff Browning (Region 2) and Sean Brittan (Region 14).

These members were elected by their respective Regional Councils following the retirement of former members Peter Downes and John Shay (Region 2), and Ian Thomson (Region 14).

NEW VFBV LIFE MEMBERS

The Association at State Council meeting 13th September 2009, awarded Life Membership to five members having served the Association for over 10 years, these members being Tom Brodie, Peter Downes, Bob Horner, Owen O'Keefe and Ian Thomson.

At State Council meeting 6th December, former VUFBA Executive Member Bill Rodda was nominated and approved for VFBV Life Membership for providing outstanding service to the Association.

These six members will be presented with a VFBV plaque at either the 2010 State Championships or State Council meeting.

ITEMS TO BE RAISED WITH THE CFA INCLUDE:

- a State wide consistent approach to training;
- provision of reflective tape on Junior Brigade PPC;
- internet connection for CFA Brigades;
- an update of the pager system;
- re-issue and update of passes to current CFA members at Region cost, and possible use of the Memberlink Card as a CFA pass;
- after the fire season, a review of the Private Vehicles on the Fireground booklet where relevant to the fireground;
- proposed school closure procedures;
- stowage of suction hoses on new small pumpers;
- finalise the correct placement for wearing of medals and communicate clear instructions to all Brigades;
- continue to include the annotation "4WD" in Spatial Vision Map Books, and also "in dry weather only", or "4WD only" where applicable;
- operational CFA appliances be provided with GPS tracking;
- altering the terminology in future campaigns "100 Day Count Down to the Fire Season" to "countdown to fire-ready status" or "a day of readiness";
- inconsistent travel allowance rates being applied to CFA volunteers;
- new knapsacks having a single action pump, when the old ones had a double action pump which is the preferred option;
- members working at training grounds told cannot use their training ground PPC, for firefighting at their brigade;
- fire danger clocks being replaced by notice boards.

VICROADS LISTENS TO VOLUNTEERS

In a good news story VicRoads have agreed to a standard template for burnoff notification signs in response to an approach from CFA.

Last year Brigades in the Kiewa and Ovens Groups were concerned about the number of false alarms they were responding to when in fact residents were just clearing up their properties. Following a recommendation to the MFPC, 6 burnoff notification signs were distributed throughout the shire and there was an almost immediate dramatic reduction in the number of false alarms.

Several months went by then VicRoads objected to the signs and demanded that the signs not be placed on their roads. The signs were removed and placed in front of a number of fire stations however the number of calls escalated to previous levels.

The issue was raised with CFA by VFBV through the Community Safety Advisory Committee and has been pursued with VicRoads at a State level to achieve a good outcome for the Brigades in Region 24.

Any Brigades or Groups wishing to use these signs must identify the locations and number of signs they wish to install and forward this information to Leaha Campbell at CFA H/Q.

VFBV OPEN SPACE SUMMIT

VFBV's Volunteer Promotion and Development Program provided the opportunity for volunteers from across the State to meet at Fiskville on 29th November to take part in the first OPEN SPACE SUMMIT and launch of the Inaugural Leadership Scholarship in 2010.

The Summit's theme was:

How can we define, design and take responsibility for the volunteer fire brigades of 2015 in Victoria? What do we need and what must we do, to make this happen?

The agenda setting session allowed members to raise a topic and allocate it to a room and time, and they would then 'chair' the discussion, with notes/actions recorded. Members then moved between the discussions across the time periods depending on what topics interested them, and where they felt they could contribute most to the discussion.

All attendees (around 60) received a copy of the notes from each session, and these will also be prepared into a report for consideration at VFBV State Council. At the conclusion, key topics requiring some further action were listed, and interested members self nominated against the items to assist VFBV in progressing them further.

FOUNDATION VFBV LEADERSHIP SCHOLARSHIPS LAUNCHED

VFBV President Gary Lyttle AFSM announced at the October Board meeting the establishment of annual Leadership Scholarships targeting volunteer and association leaders. With funds made available from the Victorian Racing Club and Sheik Mohammed following the February fires, VFBV established the VFBV Promotion and Development Fund to make programs such as this scholarship possible.

The inaugural VFBV Leadership Scholarship Program for 2010 was launched at the Open Space Summit and information was presented to the Summit participants. The Leadership Scholarship Program will see participants complete a Certificate IV in Frontline Management, and will link to the outcomes of the summit. For further details contact Allan Monti a.monti@vfbv.com.au

2009/10 BRIGADE AFFILIATIONS and WELFARE FUND STATUS

Brigades will shortly be forwarded a statement if their VFBV affiliation for 2009/2010 is outstanding, or if the Brigade has not yet contributed to the Welfare Fund.

VFBV, as your Association, strongly recommends that Brigades consider paying these affiliations/contributions.

DRIVER TRAINING AND ENDORSEMENT CONSULTATION PERIOD EXTENDED

VFBV has received support from CFA to expand and extend the consultation with Brigades and volunteers on the Driver Training and Endorsement Strategy. This issue is of interest to all volunteers and VFBV will coordinate all responses from Groups, Brigades and individuals providing CFA with a considered position on behalf of all CFA volunteers.

In VFBV's December mailout, every Brigade has been forwarded a copy of the discussion booklet and all Brigades are encouraged to provide their feedback either individually or as part of Group or Regional discussion to VFBV by the end of February 2010.

VFBV have formed a reference panel to analyse all responses received and this panel will report a consolidated position to VFBV State Council in April 2010.

DROUGHT RELIEF FUNDS TO NORTH WEST

The trustees of the Drought Relief Fund have agreed to provide \$25,000 to the North West Area to enable them to undertake three worthwhile projects over the next month or so. Details of the projects are as follows:

- **Back to School program**

This program is to target CFA families with Pre School, Primary and Secondary students. By supporting families financially with the cost of start up in a new year of school education and excursions, this will reduce financial and emotional stress on rural CFA families. This will also support community viability by keeping student numbers up within schools and retaining teachers. If the number of students decreases, so does the viability of the school. This has a flow on effect within the community by reducing the central point of contact with all community members.

Children will also be given every opportunity to participate in school excursions to learn and develop and this will give other family members relief from everyday pressure. School camps provide a mutual benefit to parents and children, giving each other a break from the stressful environment.

Supporting Secondary students will encourage them to remain at school, therefore continuing to have the opportunity to advance to tertiary studies. Students leaving school early to seek employment may be a short term fix, but for long term employment opportunities, students need to gain good educational skills.

- **Participation Program**

This program is to target small isolated rural communities and provide bus transportation to larger populated centres, to allow CFA volunteers and their families to visit and participate in events that they may not normally consider due to financial hardship.

Victims of trauma usually have no frame of reference to make sense of what has happened, or how it is affecting them, because they have little or no experience with such events. Community events can have a powerful mediating impact on a traumatic event. This will provide an opportunity to acknowledge the impact, talk, share experiences and process emotions.

- **Christmas at Brigades**

Due to the ongoing drought conditions in the North West area, some Brigades in smaller communities find it difficult to hold social functions using Brigade funds raised by the community.

By supporting Brigades holding Christmas functions this gives the CFA members and their families time to come together and away from everyday pressures. Christmas presents are given to every child to give them the opportunity to have something new to treasure and share with their family.

VFBV is delighted to be able to assist by financing these projects and is grateful to the Brigades and Groups who have so generously provided funding to the Drought Relief Fund to enable this good and necessary work to be undertaken.

VFBV LEAVES AAVFBA

Following a recommendation from the delegates who attended this year's Annual Conference of the Australasian Assembly of Volunteer Fire Brigade Associations (AAVFBA) in Surfers Paradise, the Board of VFBV has decided not to seek membership of the Assembly in the coming year.

The delegates were critical of the direction the AAVFBA proposes to take in the future and felt it was important that in matters of a Federal nature, that VFBV should align itself with CFA and the Victorian Government.

The VRFBA and VUFBA had both been members of AAVFBA since its inception, but had expressed their misgivings at continuing their membership for a number of years.

HAVING TROUBLE GETTING MEDIA ACCESS FOR YOUR STORIES AND PROMOTIONS?

Maybe VFBV can help!

VFBV Project Officer Peter Beaton has been very busy developing media and relationship kits for Regional Councils, Groups and Brigades, these kits including 'shell media releases', tips and tools for getting your foot in the journo's door and much more. A trained journalist and media savvy player, Peter understands the business and is keen to hear from CFA members who have a story to tell or need help in getting their article in print. Peter can be contacted at our East Burwood office or email p.beaton@vfbv.com.au

VFBV MEETING DATES 2010

VFBV's approved meetings for 2010 are as follows and Regional Councils are encouraged to schedule their meetings to accord with these Meetings:

VFBV State Council	Sunday	11 th April 2010
Open Forum	Saturday	26 th June 2010
VFBV State Council	Sunday	27 st June 2010
VFBV State Council & AGM	Sat/Sund	18/19 Sept 2010
VFBV State Council	Sunday	3 rd Dec 2010

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP ITEMS:

URBAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

Seventy Three teams are entered to compete at the 2010 Urban Senior Championships at Mildura including six interstate teams from Western Australia and New South Wales. Seventy Nine teams have entered the Junior Championships at Echuca, including Esperance (W.A.) again travelling over with four teams.

Urban Championship Special Notices, together with Senior Team Sheets, Junior Registration and BBQ forms, together with other relevant information, has been forwarded separately to all entered Brigades.

SAFETY HELMETS – URBAN TRIAL

The Association has agreed to purchase 30 safety helmets to be trialed by the 3 major competition associations at their 2010 competitions. The safety helmets will be of varying types, but all at an Australian Standard.

Following the trial, the Association will consider making the use of safety helmets compulsory for all ladder events at the 2011 State Urban Championship. It is proposed that the Association will provide a quantity of helmets for use at the Championship, and encourage Brigades to purchase their own if possible once specific model/s have been identified and approved.

NEW URBAN TROPHY DONORS REQUIRED

The Association is seeking sponsors for two new 10 year Aggregate trophies for State Urban Championship events - A Section Marshall Two Competitors and B Section Marshall Two Competitors. Interested Brigades or members should advise the Association as soon as possible – the cost could vary between \$100 and \$140.

VICTORIAN TEAMS EXCELL IN W.A. JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP

Two Victorian teams represented CFA with distinction at the W.A. Junior Firefighter Championship held last month in Fremantle. Both Maffra and Pakenham junior competitors and their support teams made the long journey and tasted some wonderful success.

Maffra U/17 were placed First in the overall Aggregate and crowned Champion Brigade in the U/17 section.

Matt Wilson (Pakenham) broke the long standing W.A. Championship record for the U/17 One Competitor Marshall event in 23.93 seconds and won the Champion Firefighter trophy.

Great work Matt and to the Maffra and Pakenham junior teams. Other individual and team successes were achieved in both junior categories and a full report will appear in the January 2010 Fireman



Seasons Greetings

VFBV President Gary Lyttle and Board Members, Vice President Rural Bruce Vine, Vice President Urban Peter White and all State Councillors, and VFBV staff, wish you all a Merry Xmas and a Safe and Happy New Year