



Newsletter

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CHANGING TIMES

We are going into the new fire season with a very much changed landscape.

We have a new State Government, and CFA volunteers have found and made use of a united voice to benefit volunteerism, our brigades and our communities.

The fact that VFBV achieved commitments from Labor and the Liberal/National Coalition to address the concerns we had raised on behalf of CFA volunteers shows the value of our strategy, and rewards the work of the VFBV executive, local volunteers and State and District officials.

We now turn to working with the new Government, to make sure their commitments translate into practical action.

Those commitments, in a letter from Nationals Leader and Police and Emergency Services Minister Hon. Peter Ryan, included changing the CFA Act to;

- Require that VFBV be fully consulted on matters affecting volunteers (putting the *CFA Volunteer Charter* into law),
- Require that CFA volunteers be recognised, valued, respected and promoted for their contributions to the wellbeing and safety of the people of Victoria,
- Clearly state in the Act that the CFA is first and foremost a volunteer-based service,
- Require that CFA treat volunteers as core partners with people employed by the Authority,
- Recognise that volunteers serve at all levels of the CFA and require that the Authority consider volunteers for senior incident management and control roles and provide accessible training to qualify volunteers for such roles, and
- Require that the CFA develop policy and organisational arrangements that harness and build on the capacity of CFA volunteers, including the provision of administrative, training, operational and infrastructure support.

The Coalition has also committed in writing to;

- Ensure that future legislation and Government policies are designed to recognise the needs and interests of volunteers and the value of volunteer capacity in the CFA,
- Establish an independent inquiry into the impact on CFA volunteers of industrial agreements between the United Firefighters Union and the CFA,
- Investigate possible legislation to ensure industrial deals do not limit or prevent the recruitment, training, deployment, utilisation, support and activities of CFA volunteers,
- Provide once-off funding of \$250,000 to reduce the need for CFA volunteer brigades to contribute to the CFA Volunteer Welfare Fund,
- Ensure that VFBV is appropriately funded by the CFA to undertake its role and supported to develop programs of benefit to volunteers.

There is a copy of Peter Ryan's letter to VFBV on our website, www.vfbv.com.au

VOLUNTEERS WELCOMES NEW CHIEF OFFICER

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) has welcomed the appointment of Euan Ferguson AFSM as the new CFA Chief Officer who took up the appointment in November. Volunteers from across the State welcome the return of Euan to CFA and Victoria. Euan served CFA in his previous capacities as a career officer with the authority, Area Manager in the east of the State and in the role of CFA Deputy Chief Officer.

Euan's previous experience working with the old Department of Natural Resources and Environment (now DSE) prior to his CFA career, presents him with a unique set of skills, allowing him to draw on wide knowledge and experience of Victorian Fire Agencies and the landscape of fire in our environment.

The appointment of a new Chief Officer has been much anticipated by all CFA members, especially CFA volunteers who look to the new Chief Officer to continue the strong and uncompromising support for CFA as a volunteer based community embedded fire and emergency service.

VFBV President Hans van Hamond AFSM complimented CFA on an excellent appointment, saying "VFBV congratulates Euan Ferguson on his appointment to the role of CFA Chief Officer especially at a time of challenge and change for all Victorians as they respond to the inevitable change post the tragic events of the summer of 2009". The VFBV President went on to say "Euan's appointment is the right decision at the right time for CFA, a well regarded and widely supported candidate who has demonstrated most recently through his strong leadership of the Country Fire Service in South Australia a willingness to work closely with all stakeholders including volunteers." and, "we note the strong messages of support and best wishes from the South Australian Volunteers Association CEO Wendy Shirley who spoke of Euan's willingness to effectively engage with volunteers including the opportunity to consult and actively promote shared future vision and decision making."

STATE COUNCIL 5th DECEMBER

VFBV State Council meeting Sunday 5th December was opened by Emergency Services Commissioner Bruce Esplin, who resigns from this position at the end of the year. In acknowledging Bruce's commitment over the last 10 years as Emergency Services Commissioner, President Hans van Hamond thanked Bruce for his support and contribution to the Association and CFA volunteers.

The meeting also included an address by Chief Officer Euan Ferguson, and reports from the volunteer CFA Board members, a briefing on the Bushfire Preparedness Program 2010-12 and reports from several Joint Committees.

ITEMS TO BE RAISED WITH THE CFA INCLUDE:

Issues raised at State Council by District Councils which are to be raised with the CFA, or directly referred to Joint CFA/Association Committees include:

- review and overhaul of the current CFA road and rail corridor burning permit system to make it more Brigade friendly;
- clarification from the Chief Officer of the CFA PPC Allocation Policy to be enforced;
- a clear statement from the CFA of the status for the retention of black structural jackets;

- request CFA risk management investigate the safety of new diesel powered trucks with anti pollution after burner exhaust systems;
- vehicles to be delivered with the appropriate manual/training package;
- issuing as part of PPE a flame protection balaclava as has been issued to all NSW RFS members;
- issues with CFA's policy of choosing marginal cab-chassis configurations used in appliances;
- to consider including full face respiratory protection on all fire trucks;
- volunteers' access of private appliances through traffic management points.

CFA OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP BOOKLET

Soon to be distributed to all CFA Crew Leaders is an excellent soft cover booklet titled '**CFA Operational Leadership**'. Part of the CFA Leadership Development Series, the must read booklet developed in consultation with the team that delivers the highly successful **Fireline Leadership Courses** and co-ordinated by CFA's Professional Development Manager Stuart Croom the compilation document provides some excellent passages, case studies and principles of leadership in the context of fireground operations.

In the foreword then Acting Chief Officer Steven Warrington is quoted as saying "*Leadership is not something that should be turned on and off as required; it is important to display leadership at all times.*"

CFA has supported the production of this informative booklet in sufficient numbers to distribute widely to all operational members holding crew leader qualifications and above.

VFBV strongly supports the initiative, as leadership development forms a central pillar to the work the Association is undertaking in developing and encouraging volunteer leaders both on and off the fire and incident ground. We commend all to source a copy and have a thorough read!

CREW LEADER / INCIDENT CONTROLLER 1 PATHWAY

VFBV delegates to the Learning & Development Joint Committee have been considering the future advice to CFA on the elements and steps for learnings and experiences that should combine for members to seek qualification and endorsement as Crew Leaders and their progression to Incident Controller 1. In considering a stepped approach, foundation blocks for effective crew leadership are based on human factors including crew welfare and management, effective leadership and Occupational Health & Safety considerations. Building upon this core set of skills and abilities are technical competencies complemented by on the fireground experiences that equip members with the competencies in wildfire, structural and specialist response environments. VFBV will inform the Chief Officer of its position and we understand that other stakeholders are similarly providing advice to CFA. A common sense and transparent process that recognizes the skills and qualities of our crew leaders and provides surety for all that a consistent approach will be implemented across the State. Any system must ensure values, experience, people management skills and technical competence are considered as a package. VFBV delegates will continue to strongly advocate for CFA to model a robust and effective RPL/RCC process to recognize experience and competence equally where it is displayed by its members.

SPECIAL ARTICLE

BULLYING, HARASSMENT, SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

BE AWARE OF YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All CFA members have the right for a workplace that is free from bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and discrimination. It is a basic human right for members to be able to freely go about their tasks at brigade or within other areas of CFA without having to endure inappropriate behaviour by anyone.

VFBV promotes a respectful culture, we encourage members to speak up about inappropriate behaviour, we encourage members to intervene and say "stop" when inappropriate behaviour occurs and we encourage action to be taken when these inappropriate behaviours happen.

Members must also take responsibility for their own actions. No member has the right to behave in a manner that is threatening, abusive, intimidating, discriminatory or harassing to anyone.

VFBV will not support offenders in these matters, a person can be dismissed from the service plus civil and criminal action can ensue if found to be guilty.

The effect of bullying or harassing behaviour can have a devastating long term impact on the victim with the worst case scenario can lead to suicide.

In the main we have a solid and excellent membership who behave in a manner that is beyond reproach, we are respectful with each other and are respected within our communities.

However VFBV acknowledges, at times a small minority of membership ignore these principles and inappropriate behaviour does occur.

VFBV promotes "early intervention" in addressing issues at a local level, the quicker the issue is dealt with at a small scale the less chance of it festering and escalating. We promote moving issues forward to a higher level if they cannot be resolved locally or if the issue is of a nature that requires it immediate action. We do not promote sweeping issues under the carpet.

It is time now that we recognise that the minority of members behaving inappropriately need to adjust their behaviour, or are held accountable for their actions, or if need be move on and out of CFA. As an organisation we cannot afford to be carrying members who behave inappropriately and think they are beyond the law and rules, which the majority of us abide by.

Bill Watson

*VFBV Rep HR & Welfare Work Group District 13
Joint VFBV / CFA HR & Welfare Committee*

VFBV EXECUTIVE OFFICER MOVES ON

After some 14 plus years as VRFBA and VFBV Executive Officer Bob MacDonald has decided to call time for his long and dedicated journey in support for CFA volunteers. Speaking at the December State Council meeting at Fiskville, VFBV Board Member Gary Lyttle AFSM related the stories of how Bob in the early days was employed on a part time basis 3 days per week and as a condition of employment would provide his own office accommodation, phone etc. Quickly it was recognised that the job was much more than part time, yet to Bob's credit and commitment to the job, little changed in regard to entitlements or pay.

Bob has been instrumental in establishing strong networks and alliances, cementing long standing sponsorship for the Rural Championships and is widely known and respected across the State. Bob has accepted a role with CFA to work with the Project Team delivering elements of the \$44.5M Volunteer Support Package as a response by Government to the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission recommendations. WELL DONE BOB and GOOD LUCK

VOLUNTEERS HOSTED BY DSE FIRE MANAGEMENT LEADERS

Recently at the invitation of DSE Chief Fire Officer Ewan Waller, eight senior volunteers were hosted to a preseason briefing incorporating a tour of the DSE's Altona works and stores complex. Ewan Waller and senior members from the Fire Management Team provided an insightful guided tour of the impressive stores complex, newly commissioned maintenance complex and viewed the preparations and equipping of purpose designed pods /specialist equipment units that form part of the prevention and suppression capabilities that DSE is ramping up in response to recommendations from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

VFBV officials and the volunteers present were impressed with the modular design of the units, each designed for quick changeover and interchangeability for deployment on vehicles, trailers or designed for aerial deployment into remote locations. Some of the design emphasis has been influenced by the requirement for massive increases in fuel management on public land endorsed by Government in response to recommendations from the Royal Commission.

In their briefing DSE Officers introduced predictive modelling software named 'Phoenix' that will allow fire agencies to use field and modelled data gathered from historical and future works. This will allow agency commanders to have at their disposal a massive knowledge repository that produces a factual and scientific basis for managing fuels and fire behaviour across the Victorian landscape into the future.

VFBV Board Member Bruce Vine in thanking Ewan and his management team for their invitation to attend remarked on the opportunities all Fire Agencies have to work together seamlessly. The impressive stores and equipment caches in readiness for deployment from Altona will benefit all agencies. Mr Vine went on to comment that although DSE and their Networked Emergency Organisation (NEO) partners were charged with fuel management on public land, all agencies and in particular CFA brigades were an integral part of this process and the initiatives being led by DSE and its agency partners to build capability in terms of equipment and in particular planning and knowledge systems bodes well for a strong collaborative approach for the future.

RULE CHANGES JEOPARDISE TRAINING

Soon to be enacted changes to funding for Victorian TAFE Courses will have a major impact on many volunteers wishing to undertake courses and subjects aligned to their volunteer work. Funding changes for TAFE Colleges will require them to introduce on 1 January 2011 full course cost recovery, without subsidies, for course participants that have another equivalent or higher qualification irrespective of the subject or course.

From CFA's perspective, this will simply mean:

Let's say a member wishes to undertake a TAFE Course to complement their Fire Brigade activities eg. the Fire Equipment Maintenance Accreditation Course which covers 9 units from the Certificate 2 in Asset Maintenance. If the member holds a Certificate 2 or higher qualification in any field of study they will be ineligible for subsidised course places as has been possible for some TAFE courses for many years. As such the training course place for this volunteer would be only available on full cost recovery by the TAFE College concerned.

For many years now an agreement between Swinburne TAFE and CFA has allowed CFA volunteers to undertake the FEM Officer Training at greatly reduced fee schedules under the subsidised training rules.

When planning for future courses some 60% of volunteers will be impacted under the new arrangements.

Estimates from courses conducted over the last 5 years show that future courses will cost CFA somewhere between \$20,000 - \$25,000 per course (of 15 participants). CFA has not the budget allocated to continue to support up to 8 courses per year to meet the demand from Brigades in having appropriately qualified members responsible for FEM work in their brigades. With over 300 brigades conducting FEM servicing across the State, the future looks bleak for sufficient volunteers to be able to undertake the training and hold the qualifications.

Other training conducted for CFA by TAFE and other Private Providers of Training Services will also be impacted by the new funding rules including chain saw training, service fuse removal, Occupational Health & Safety and potentially First Aid courses.

VFBV and CFA officials are deeply concerned that an unintentional consequence of a review of Technical & Further Education funding in Victoria will heavily impact on emergency service volunteers who seek to attain qualifications that directly relate to their community service work. The potential loss of participation or the huge cost impacts of the changes will stifle motivation of our volunteers who will be unable to achieve their desired competencies, or would have to pay for them as well as give their time freely.

Clearly a reflection by decision makers, with some consideration to exemption from these fees for emergency service volunteers embarking on agreed qualifications and units of study would be a tangible way of showing how much Victorian's value their Emergency Service Volunteers.

BUILDING REGULATIONS TECHNICAL GROUP FORMED

Following a recommendation from VFBV it was agreed at the most recent meeting of the Community Safety Advisory Committee to introduce a Building & Planning Technical Group.

The technical group will be made up of CFA's Building regulations and land use planning experts as well as a number of volunteers who have professional expertise as building surveyors and town planners .

The technical group will consider the recommendations of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission in regard to planning matters and will report to the Community Safety Advisory Committee.

CHAMPIONSHIP ITEMS

State Urban Championships 2013 – 2015

A reminder the Association is seeking applications to host a VFBV State Urban Senior or Junior Championship during the years 2013 to 2015. Closing date is Wednesday 16th March 2011.

Australasian Firefighter Championship

Expressions of interest are sought from interested Brigades to compete in the 2011 Australasian Firefighter Championship to be held at Port Macquarie 15th & 16th October 2011.

Closing date to VFBV office is Friday 18th February 2011.

URBAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

Sixty Nine teams are entered to compete at the 2011 Urban Senior Championship at Bendigo including Harvey & South Kalgoorlie, W.A. and a combined N.S.W. team. Seventy Nine teams have entered the Junior Championship at Tatura.

Championship Special Notices, together with Team Sheets, Junior Registration and BBQ forms, have been forwarded to all entered Brigades.

Approved for Urban Championships:

- Rule 19 DRESS be amended to read - "Sponsorship is allowed, provided that it does not interfere with Brigade name or number/identification and is approved by the Association."
- Brigades running as a combined team be allowed to compete in a team shirt with their combined team name, and a new combined number starting from C01.
- Prior to the Pumper event, there be no practices or inspections on the track, but equipment will be available for inspection prior to the event.
- The following be the standard for the Marshall events and the Y Coupling, 4 Competitor event:
 - (i) The width of the white line on all male couplings on hoses shall be 25mm;
 - (ii) The white line shall be positioned in the centre of the hose when the hose is laying flat;
 - (iii) The centre of the white line on the male couplings on hoses shall be 20mm from the start of the thread;
 - (iv) The start of the thread on the male couplings on the hydrant and the Y shall remain at 32mm from the centre of the white line positioned in the centre of the outlets; the white line shall be 25mm in width.



Seasons Greetings

*President Hans van Hamond,
Board Members, Vice President Rural Bruce Vine,
Vice President Urban Bill Maltby,
all State Councillors and VFBV staff,
wish you all a Merry Christmas
and a Safe and Happy New Year*