



Volunteer  
**Fire**  
Brigades  
Victoria

## **VFBV Position Paper**

### **1. Establishing a unified representative body for all CFA volunteers**

This paper has been prepared to assist the process of finalising a decision on the changes required to unite the Victorian Urban Fire Brigades Association (VUFBA), Victorian Rural Fire Brigades Association (VRFBA) and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) as one body to represent all CFA volunteers.

Although we know that the changes are strongly supported by many volunteers and brigades across the State already, a formal decision is required to allow implementation of the proposed new arrangements. This paper provides an explanation of the proposed future structure and constitutional arrangements; describes some of the key changes proposed; and sets out the process required for decision to be finalised.

The proposed structure, constitutional arrangements and operating detail have been developed by a working party involving senior VUFBA and VRFBA representatives, and are the result of extensive consultation and discussion with members of both Associations.

The purpose of the changes is to provide improved influence from a higher profile united volunteer voice; to strengthen our voice by harnessing our combined numbers; and to achieve more effective use of our collective effort and resources.

The changes do not alter how individuals operate as volunteers, although they provide capacity for an improved level of representation and a stronger voice for all CFA volunteers. The changes have no impact on brigade operating rules and brigades/groups will continue to operate as they do today. Each brigade's ability to elect delegates to Regional Councils will not change, but there will be a single Regional Council in each Region, not two - most Regions are already operating in this way. The opportunity for Regional Councils to forward issues to State Council will remain, the difference being that there will be a single State Council, not two – the VUFBA and VRFBA State bodies have been meeting jointly now for 12 months. The proposed arrangements formally retain representation of both urban and rural issues at all levels.

The changes will mean that VUFBA and VRFBA will cease to operate as stand alone entities. The proposed arrangements bring the VUFBA and the VRFBA together into a single unified body, VFBV, to represent all CFA volunteers.

You are encouraged to support the proposed changes and engage in the decision making process so that we can finalise a decision and move forward.

### **2. Brief recap on the process to date**

The need to establish a more unified and higher profile representative voice for CFA volunteers has been a topic of discussion for some time. A discussion paper was issued to all Brigades, Groups and Regional Councils in September 2007, outlining options for the creation of such a body and discussing the key changes involved.

All Brigades, Groups and Regional Councils were invited to provide feedback on the discussion paper, and in addition there have been numerous formal and informal discussions about this topic since the discussion paper was released.

Feedback was received up until January/February this year, and since then the working party has been busy finalising a structure and constitutional arrangements that address the majority feedback. Feedback has been considered and discussed extensively at the VUFBA and VRFBA State level, and also at VFBV Board level.

Great care has been taken by the working party to develop a structure and constitutional arrangements that address the majority feedback, and discussion at State Council level suggests that the proposed future arrangements will be positively supported. This paper now provides Brigades, Groups and Regional Councils with an opportunity to consider the details involved with the changes, prior to a decision at the Annual General Meetings of VRFBA and VUFBA, in August and September this year respectively. Assuming the proposal is supported at each of these meetings, a final decision will be made at a Special General Meeting of VFBV to be held on 4<sup>th</sup> October this year.

During the past year, VFBV representatives have visited most Regional Councils to discuss the changes, and VFBV Board Members will be available between now and October to attend meetings of any Regional Council wishing to discuss the proposed future arrangements.

### **3. Feedback general**

Feedback confirmed that the changes are already supported by many Brigades and Regional Councils. Feedback also stressed the importance of ensuring that a unified body has the focus, structures and processes required to give due regard and representation to all CFA brigades, from remote rural to busy urban brigades. In the proposed unified body structure, the ability to maintain a strong focus on issues that have different importance or impact on rural brigades and urban brigades, will be preserved by retaining urban and rural representation at all levels of the unified body.

Feedback recognised that the existing Associations have served volunteers very well and it will be important to preserve and strengthen elements of history and tradition that already work well today.

Much of the feedback requested that VFBV stop talking and get on with this change, finalise a decision, implement the overall arrangements and then refine some of the detailed working arrangements as part of the implementation phase. There was recognition that some aspects of the new unified body will evolve and be refined over time, but the overall view is that this is the right thing to do.

A small number of responses expressed concerns about some changes and six responses indicated that they did not support the proposed changes. One message given by those that do not yet support the proposed changes, is a concern that a unified body could be too big to maintain a focus on issues affecting the minority sections of the membership. VFBV Board and the State bodies of the Associations are acutely aware of the need to ensure strong representation on all issues affecting volunteers, whether they affect all volunteers, rural areas only, or urban areas only. This is why the unified body proposal retains both rural and urban representation in each Region, at State Council, and at Board level. The proposed structure retains the ability for separate consideration of matters impacting on either rural brigades or urban brigades via the State Council Executive Committee or respective Subcommittee.

### **4. Summary of the proposed changes**

Attached to this document is the proposed 'VFBV Rules' or constitutional arrangements for the new body and a structure diagram indicating the overall structure. The proposed VFBV Rules retains most of the elements of the existing constitutions of VRFBA, VUFBA and VFBV but now consolidates these into a single constitution and single operating entity. The following is a summary of the most significant changes:

#### A single Association representing all CFA Volunteers – VFBV

- a single unified representative body (VFBV) to represent all CFA volunteers. VUFBA and VRFBA cease to operate as stand alone entities;
- a single constitution with management of the unified body vested in a single Board (VFBV Board);
- a unified decision-making process and a unified voice representing members at consultative forums and with stakeholders;
- one Association President to be known as VFBV President and one Association Vice President to be known as VFBV Vice President;

### Single State Council

- a single State Council to provide advice and make recommendations to the Board, with representation similar to that which exists today under the separate VUFBA and VRFBA arrangements. State Council will continue to play a key role in providing representation from all parts of the State and providing advice to the VFBV Board and Regional Councils;
- State Council membership maintained as status quo (25 Urban and 21 Rural) for initial establishment of the unified body. It is recognised that one of the strengths of the current numbers of State Councillors is their ability to provide advice to the CFA from a broad range of brigades across the State;
- Each Region will have two delegates on State Council as an ongoing principle. The Constitution allows for State Council to approve additional delegates if required within guidelines;
- Each Region will have a maximum of two votes (one urban delegate and one rural delegate) at State Council;
- State Council may recommend to VFBV Board to approve additional regional council delegates based on recommendations from the respective Regional Council; views of the existing delegates; size of area being serviced and support needed to adequately represent the brigades within the respective Region;
- State Council delegates will be elected by each Regional Council, one from an urban brigade and one from a rural brigade (subject to any variation in numbers as per the above dot point);
- a single State Council Executive Committee, with an urban sub-committee and a rural sub-committee to allow specific consideration of matters not common to both rural and urban brigades. The respective Urban and Rural Subcommittees of the State Council Executive will each have an elected Chairperson, to be known as Vice President Urban and Vice President Rural respectively. These two positions will have membership on the VFBV Board;

### Regional Councils

- a single Regional Council in each CFA Region, with urban and rural brigade representation to ensure both urban and rural brigade issues are addressed;
- Regional Councils operate as committees of VFBV;
- role of Regional Council included in VFBV Constitution;
- emphasis on empowering Regional Councils and strengthening the profile of Regional Councils is high priority for VFBV;
- generic guidelines prepared to assist standardised operation of Regional Councils, but capacity for each Regional Council to refine how they operate based on local needs;
- scope for transitional arrangements in the initial phase of the new organisation;

### Consolidation of resources and administration process:

- consolidation of current finances, resources, administrative systems and communication processes;
- a single leadership and support secretariat, working under the direction of the VFBV CEO, consolidating the existing resources of VUFBA, VRFBA and VFBV;
- a unified structure of committees and time-limited working parties;
- VUFBA and VRFBA will transfer assets to VFBV;

### Legislative arrangements

- formal reference to the Associations will be maintained in the CFA Act;
- specific reference will be retained in the CFA Act to VUFBA and VRFBA until legislation is updated to recognise that VUFBA and VRFBA are now united as one Association, VFBV;
- VUFBA and VRFBA will enter into a formal legal 'Deed of Agreement' with VFBV to establish and support VFBV as the single body to represent CFA volunteers and for VFBV to manage all obligations and affairs of VUFBA and VRFBA respectively;
- VUFBA and VRFBA will cease to operate as separate functioning bodies and will exist in name only;

### Age limitations

- proposal maintains the status quo for age limitations, and to establish a structured discussion and review of this issue over the next two years;
- will retain a 65 year age limit for eligibility for urban brigade delegates to be members of the State Council;
- will have no age limit for eligibility for rural delegates to be members of the State Council;

### Voting

- no proxy voting;
- process for decision making provides for input and voting at Regional Council level;
- process for making changes to Association Rules and Statement of Purposes ensures local level input via Regional Council consideration;
- process for State Council to resolve conflict about decisions made by VFBV Board if there is concern between State Council and Board;

### Role of Vice President Urban/Vice President Rural

- Chair (respectively) the State Council Executive Urban or Rural Subcommittee;
- Be a member of VFBV Board;
- Overall responsibility for respective urban or rural State Championships, including official opening welcoming remarks;
- Support the VFBV Board as the lead reference point and spokesperson on matters requiring specific representation on behalf of urban or rural brigades (respectively);
- In conjunction with VFBV President and VFBV Vice President, represent the Association at respective urban or rural dinners and at other functions as required;
- Joint Chairperson for the State Council Executive Committee;

### Championships

- Existing arrangements for urban and rural State Championships are not affected by these changes. Separate urban and rural Championship committees will continue;

### Welfare Fund

- The Victorian Government has provided funding which will allow a Welfare Fund to be created for all CFA volunteers. It is proposed to transfer the funds held in the VUFBA Welfare Fund into this new Fund upon it coming into operation. Urban brigades which are currently affiliated with the VUFBA Fund, will automatically transfer to the new Fund;

### Gold Star Award

- opening the eligibility to all CFA volunteers to a VFBV Gold Star Award, which is currently awarded by the Urban Association to urban brigade members based on defined eligibility criteria that includes 30 years support to the Associations.

## **5. Role of VFBV Board, State Council, Regional Councils**

Although the structure diagram attached to this document shows several layers, the structure is quite simple and there are distinct roles of the key layers of the structure which are the Board, State Council and Regional Councils. In simplest terms the roles of the three levels can be described as follows:

- Board – Governance, strategic direction, policy and oversight;
- State Council – is the operating level, key advisory forum and State wide representation;
- Regional Councils – allow local level input and the local operating level

The VFBV CEO and staff secretariat provide overall coordination, management, advice and support to the Association at each level.

The roles of the three key levels of VFBV are summarised below.

#### Role of VFBV Board

- Governing body, responsible and accountable for the control of the business affairs, performance and governance of the Association;
- Determine policy and direction for the Association;
- Determine VFBV policy on matters referred by CEO or State Council;
- Appoint the CEO and monitor the CEO's performance;
- Ensure the VFBV's financial affairs are effectively managed and controlled;
- Ensure adherence to the Association's Statement of Purposes;
- Ensure internal communication and consultative processes effectively engage VFBV membership;

#### Role of VFBV State Council

- Provide a forum for the expression of views from Regional Councils and ensure issues raised by Regional Councils are addressed in a timely and satisfactory manner;
- Consider matters referred to it by VFBV Board and CEO and make recommendations on action to be taken;
- Elect State Council Executive Committee;
- Select representatives to VFBV/CFA Joint Committees;
- Manage process for selection of VFBV Board members;
- Manage process to make recommendation to VFBV Board for CFA Board member nominations;
- Provide guidance to VFBV representatives on CFA/VFBV Joint Committees and be a conduit between VFBV Board and Regional Councils;
- Advise VFBV Board on the business affairs of the Association.


#### Role of Regional Council

- Provide a forum for affiliated brigades to express volunteer concerns/views;
- Help brigades resolve matters of concern at local level;
- Provide volunteer leadership and represent volunteers at CFA Regional level;
- Provide a conduit for communication and information flow between VFBV Board, State Council and brigades;
- Refer matters that cannot be resolved at local level to VFBV State Council or CEO.

#### **Process and timetable to finalise decision**

1. Brigades and Regions consider position paper between now and AGM's of the VRFBA in August 2008 and VUFBA in September 2008.
2. Annual General Meetings of VRFBA (14<sup>th</sup> August 2008) and VUFBA (14<sup>th</sup> September 2008) to consider amalgamation motions:
  - Approve Deed of Agreement between VRFBA/VUFBA (respectively) and VFBV, to cease operations as separate entities and for all affairs to be managed by VFBV;
  - Approve proposed unified VFBV constitution;
  - Approve winding up effective operations and transfer assets of Association;
  - Agree to changes to VRFBA/VUFBA respective Constitutions to cease operating as stand alone entities and for all affairs to be managed by VFBV;
  - Appoint interim office bearers pending implementation of the new arrangements;
  - Appoint working party and empower them to manage transition to the new arrangements.
3. VFBV Annual General Meeting 4<sup>th</sup> October to:
  - Adopt new constitution as circulated;
  - Sign Deed of Agreement with VRFBA and VUFBA
  - Accept Annual Report for 2007/2008
  - Appoint Board Members
  - Appoint Office Bearers; and
  - Appoint auditors;

## VFBV proposed structure

The proposed structure of the unified body including the key links and inputs to decision making levels of CFA management (as denoted by the symbol  ).-

