

Discussion Paper
VFBV 23rd September 2007
Establishing a single unified representative body for CFA volunteers

1. The aim of this paper

This discussion paper seeks to progress the establishment of a single unified body to represent all CFA volunteers. It sets out the changes proposed to unite the Victorian Urban Fire Brigades Association (VUFBA) and the Victorian Rural Fire Brigades Association (VRFBA) as Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV). The paper is intended to prompt feedback so that details can be considered and resolved before a final position paper is developed. Throughout the paper the name of the new unified body is listed as VFBV although this could change if a more appropriate name is identified.

2. A summary of the proposed changes

This paper proposes changes to structure, constitution and process. The proposed changes aim to achieve:

- a single unified representative body (VFBV) to represent all CFA volunteers, operating under a single constitution and with management of the unified body vested in a single board (VFBV Board);
- a single and unified decision-making process and a unified voice representing members at consultative forums and with stakeholders;
- 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;
- Two sub committees at State Council, one representing urban brigades and one representing rural brigades, to maintain process to deal with matters not common to both rural and urban brigades;
- a single Regional Council in each CFA Region, with appropriate local representation to ensure both urban and rural brigades are represented;
- 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;
- continuation of the separate urban and rural championship committees;
- expansion of the Urban Association Welfare fund to include all brigades; and
- broadening the eligibility criteria for the existing Urban Association Gold Star Award.

The volunteer associations have already reached agreement about changes to CFA long service awards. The associations have also put a position to CFA proposing a common CFA uniform for all CFA volunteers. These issues align some traditional differences between urban and rural brigades.

The CFA Chief Officer recently released a discussion paper proposing that brigade classification categories 'move away from the traditional urban and rural titles and

structures' to a risk-based classification approach. This change flows from discussion at the CFA 2002 Volunteer Summit, which recognised that a risk-based brigade classification structure might be more appropriate for the future. Any changes to flow from the Chief Officers discussion can be accommodated in the proposed model which provides structure and process to represent both the common and unique needs of urban and rural brigades regardless of risk classification.

3. Action required

We are interested in feedback about any aspect of the proposed changes. In particular we would like comments on:

- the proposed unified association structure and process changes;
- process detail or implementation issues; or
- any issues that you feel may have been overlooked;

Feedback on this discussion paper is due by end December 2007. Please use the content of this paper to support discussion at Brigade and Regional Council level. Feedback can be provided by brigades or Regional Councils by:

- Providing written feedback:
 - via email to vfbo@vfbo.com.au OR fax to VFBV Office 03 98861618
 - via mail to VFBV Office, PO Box, 453, Mt Waverley, VIC 3149
- Discussion at Region Council and forwarding feedback as above;

Depending on the complexity of issues raised during feedback, the aim is to have a final position paper released to brigades and Regional Councils by early February 2008 allowing for vote on the matter at the April 2008 General Meetings of the VUFBA and VRFBA.

All feedback received will be considered by the working party which is comprised of representatives from VFBV, VUFBA and VRFBA. There will be an opportunity for State Council to discuss emerging feedback at the VUFBA and VRFBA Joint State Council meeting scheduled for 25th November 2007.

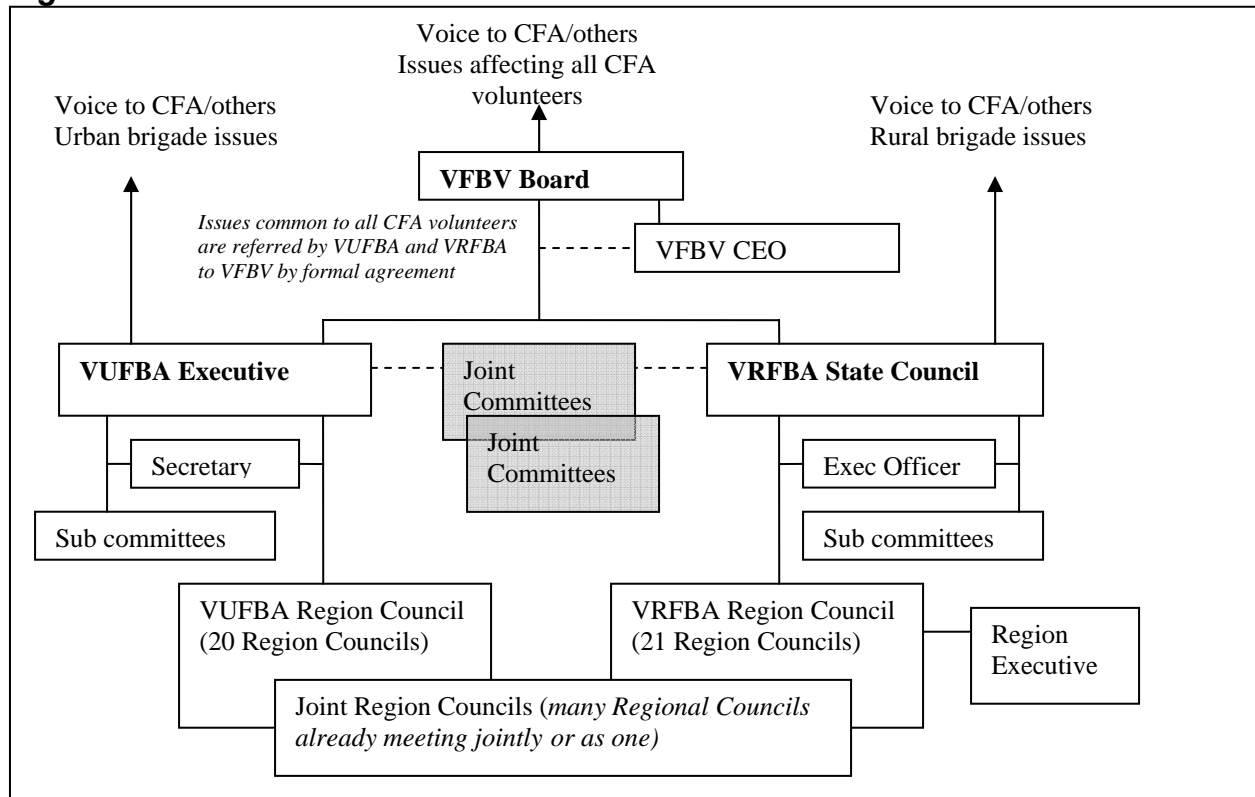
Our desire is to ensure adequate discussion so that most if not all concerns can be raised and resolved before the final position paper is released. Rural Association State Council delegates and Urban Executive Members have been briefed on the key changes proposed and will be able to lead local discussion on this matter.

4. The proposed changes - structure

4.1 A single unified representative body

Currently the VUFBA represents CFA urban brigades, the VRFBA represents CFA rural brigades, and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) operates as an overarching body to represent all CFA volunteers on matters that impact on all volunteers. As shown in Figure 1, there are already close working relationships between VUFBA, VRFBA and VFBV with formal arrangements agreed to refer issues that impact on all CFA volunteers from VRFBA and VUFBA to VFBV.

Figure 1: Current structure



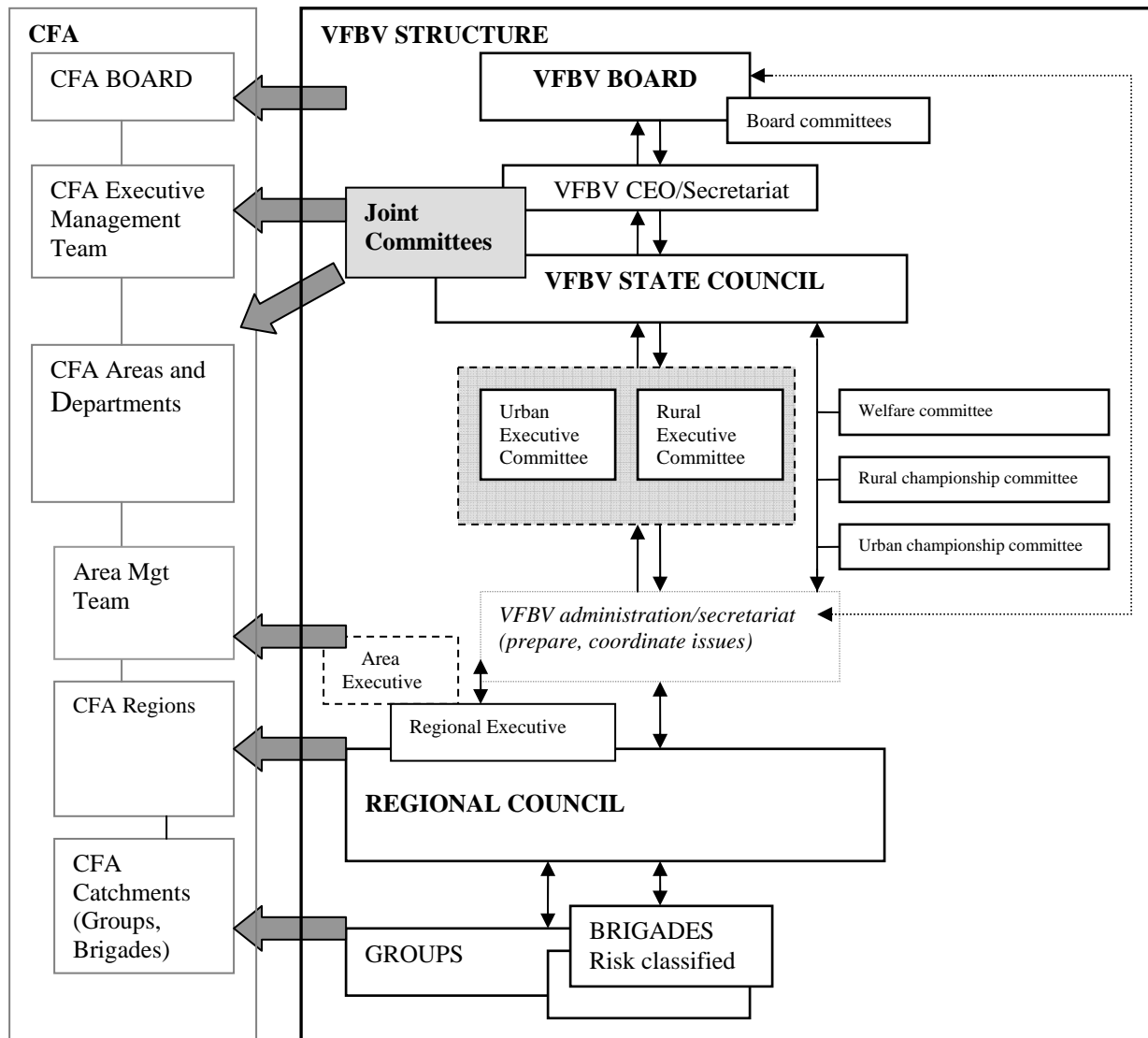
It is proposed to combine the three bodies into the one unified body representing all CFA volunteers (for the sake of this discussion this will be referred to as VFBV although the name could change). The overall structure of the new unified body will comprise:

- VFBV Board as the governing body plus Board sub-committees as required
- VFBV CEO/Administration to manage and support service delivery and performance of the unified body
- A single unified State Council to provide advice and make recommendations to the VFBV Board.
- State Council sub-committees to provide appropriate detailed consideration of key specific matters and issues specific to urban brigades or rural brigades.
- A single unified Regional Council plus a Region Executive in each CFA Region
- CFA Joint Committees

The unified structure retains representation of urban and rural brigades at all levels. Each brigade will still elect representatives to Regional Council. Each region will still elect an urban delegate and a rural delegate to State Council. At State Council level, there will be a Rural Executive Sub-committee and an Urban Executive Sub-committee to ensure adequate consideration of issues of different significance to rural and urban brigades and issues that require specific detailed attention.

Figure 2 illustrates the structure of the proposed unified body including the key links and inputs to decision making levels of CFA management (as denoted by the symbol ←).

Figure 2: VFBV structure as proposed under a unified body model



Using the overall structure illustrated in Figure 2 as a starting point, the following issues need to be discussed:

1. Composition of the State Council;
2. Role of the VFBV Board, State Council and Regional Councils; and
3. Maintaining adequate focus on urban and rural brigade issues at State Council level and preserving history and tradition;
4. Strengthening Regional Councils, establishing Regional Executive and possibility of establishing an Area Executive

4.1.1 Composition of State Council

Currently the VUFBA has 25 Executive Members at their state level body and the VRFBA has 21 State Councilors at their state level body. For most regions there is one urban and one rural delegate representing each Regional Council with additional urban

delegates in Regions 2, 7, 8, and 15. Region 2 has two rural delegates (2E and 19) and three urban delegates. Options for the future are:

- Option 1: Status quo, ie 25 urban+21 rural delegates; (46 on State Council);
- Option 2: Equal number of delegates from each CFA region, one urban representative and one rural representative; (40 on State Council); or
- Option 3: Equal numbers of rural and urban delegates on State Council: – ie Increase or decrease the number of rural or urban delegates respectively with maximum 25 delegates each.

Discussion

Preferred approach for State Council composition is initially status quo, progressing to equal numbers of delegates over a set time period (eg. 5 years).

Although this approach results in a large number of delegates on State Council it does ensure that volunteer issues continue to receive due consideration and debate by rural and urban delegates from across the state. The VFBV administration/secretariat and an Executive Committee approach as outlined in Figure 2 and discusses further in section 4.1.3 will be used as a support to the State Council to allow effective consideration of issues despite the large membership of State Council.

- Do you support the preferred approach?
- Do you have any other suggestions to improve representation of Regional Councils at State Council?
- Any other comments?

4.1.2 Role of VFBV Board, State Council and Regional Councils

Clear definition of the role of State Council relative to the role of the VFBV Board is important. The following roles are proposed:

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 members, 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 Associations statement of purpose;
- 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 timely and satisfactory manner;
- Consider matters referred to it by VFBV Board and CEO and make recommendation

on action to be taken;

- Elect State Council Executive Committee;
- Select representatives to VFBV/CFA Joint Committees;
- Manage process (via sub-committee) for selection of VFBV Board members;
- Manage process (via sub-committee) 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.

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.

A key future goal for VFBV is to achieve excellent communication, representation and links between grass roots and state level. This will require consistently strong Regional Councils, regarded by CFA management and volunteers alike as one of the key CFA forums for volunteer input and consultation. The aim is to support and empower Regional Councils to resolve local issues and to be a proactive influence on the future focus of CFA and other decision makers on matters of concern to CFA volunteer welfare and efficiency.

Discussion

- Are there any other changes that could improve the way issues are raised and dealt with by VFBV Board, State Council, Regional Councils?
- What could be done to improve influence and effectiveness of Regional Councils?
- Any other comments?

4.1.3 Maintaining adequate focus on urban and rural brigade issues at State Council and preserving history and tradition

To date the issue attracting most discussion is whether specific structures or processes are required to allow separate discussion, at State Council level, on matters not common to or of different significance to rural and urban brigades. The proposed unified body model continues the current approach of using sub committees to provide detail consideration of specific key issues. Acknowledging that additional sub committees could be established by VFBV Board if required in the future, there will be the following State Council sub-committees:

- Urban Executive Committee;
- Rural Executive Committee;
- Urban Championship Committee;
- Rural Championship Committee
- Welfare Committee

The Urban and Rural Executive Committee will each consist of 9 members, elected by the State Council. The existing CFA/Association Joint Committees and VFBV Board Committees approach will continue. There will also be a VFBV Board Finance Subcommittee and other VFBV Board Sub committees (currently Volunteer First Committee and, Strategic Direction Committee) as determined by VFBV Board. Additional working parties and small discussion forums could be established to consider issues that require specific attention beyond what can be achieved at State Council or sub-committee level.

Under the proposed model, the VFBV CEO and administration/secretariat team will coordinate resolution of issues raised by Regional Councils and ensure appropriate input to decision making via the relevant sub-committee and at State Council or VFBV Board level as occurs currently. The VFBV CEO and administration/secretariat team will coordinate and prepare issues for consideration by VFBV Board, State Council and/or various sub committees. At State Council level, the process would involve the Urban and Rural Executive Committees meeting prior to the State Council meeting to consider issues and prepare initial views for consideration by State Council. The Urban and Rural Executive Committees would meet jointly on matters that impact on all brigades and separately to consider matters that impact only on urban brigades or only on rural brigades.

During the intervening period between scheduled State Council meetings the VFBV staff support team, supported by working parties or sub-committees if required, will have the ability to deal with time critical and other specific issues within policy parameters set by VFBV Board.

In the proposed model, representation at VFBV Board level will be based on the same logic as it is today with equal representatives appointed from urban and rural brigades. Currently the VFBV Board has eight members however the Associations have recommended increasing this number to ten members in the unified Association model. It is proposed that the chairman of the respective Urban Executive and Rural Executive State Council sub-committees be automatically appointed to VFBV Board.

Discussion

- Do you support the proposed approach?
- Any other comments?

4.2 The proposed changes - constitution

A new unified constitution will be required and an initial draft has been prepared to reflect the approach outlined in this paper. The draft unified constitution is based on the original constitution of VFBV plus the elements of the constitutions of VUFBA and VRFBA that were not in the original VFBV document. All three constitutions were based on the Model Rules for an Incorporated Association as developed by Consumer Affairs Victoria and the new draft constitution, if adopted, will be subject to approval by Consumer Affairs Victoria.

Sections have been added to distinguish and clarify the respective roles powers and membership of VFBV Board, State Council and Regional Councils. The State Council is charged with the important responsibility of managing the process of the nomination of board members. It is also responsible for nominating the membership of Joint Committees and providing guidance to them if required.

Changes will reflect that management of the unified body will be vested in a single Board (currently known as VFBV Board) and the changed role of the new State Council. The role of the new State Council will be to consider issues, resolve matters raised by Regional Councils, if within VFBV Board policy, and/or provide advice to the VFBV Board about future policy.

Provision has been made in the draft for a range of membership categories including Junior Brigades, Auxiliaries and other membership approved by the Board. At this stage Groups have also been included as eligible members.

Whilst life memberships are covered in the constitution, it was felt that other awards would more properly be dealt with as a resolution of the Board, for example, Gold Star, Certificates of Appreciation and long service awards.

The key changes proposed to the previous VRFBA and VUFBA constitutions are:

- VRFBA constitution provides for groups to be members – an option is to include membership eligibility for Groups in the unified body constitution;
- VRFBA can impose a levy on members over and above membership affiliations – it is proposed that this clause be removed in the new constitution;
- VUFBA constitution applies a 65 year age limit for membership of the governing body – this issue requires further consideration and may be subject to legal advice;
- VUFBA constitution provides for two year terms of office to their governing body and VRFBA provides for one year term of office to their state council– the proposal is for two year terms of office for the unified State Council in the new constitution;
- Reference to the Welfare Fund would change to reflect the proposed arrangements to expand availability to all brigades
- VRFBA constitution allows for voting at annual and special meetings by nominated proxy – it is proposed to remove this clause.

Discussion

- Any comments on the key changes proposed?

4.3 Proposed changes – other issues

4.3.1 Welfare Fund

VUFBA currently operates a welfare fund for urban brigade members. It is proposed that a welfare fund, along similar lines to the VUFBA Urban Brigade Welfare Fund, be made available for all CFA volunteers. Establishment of such a fund requires an injection of capital and VFBV is currently looking at the options for sourcing this capital. Analysis of the capital funding required has been completed and VFBV are currently

working through options to hopefully source funding for this initiative. If VFBV is unable to secure sufficient funds to establish a welfare fund for all brigades, VUFBA have agreed to open the existing fund to rural brigades based on an entry payment and ongoing affiliation fee. The entry payment approach provides a fair contribution to the existing accumulated funds held in the Urban welfare fund.

4.3.2 VUFBA Gold Star Award

VUFBA currently have a Gold Star Award for volunteer members who have supported the VUFBA in an active capacity for 30 years. VUFBA Executive supports a proposal to open this award to all volunteers based on eligibility criteria including a requirement for 30 years support to the Associations.

4.3.3 Championships

This proposal does not cause any change to the existing urban and rural championships. Separate championship committees will be retained to maintain the required focus on the respective urban and rural championship matters.

4.3.4 Age

Under the existing arrangements VUFBA have a 65 year maximum age limit for eligibility to be a member of the VUFBA governing body, VRFBA have no age limit. VUFBA have indicated a desire to retain a 65 years age limit and retiring age for State Councilors and a 70 years age limit and retiring age for VFBV Board members. The working party have received varying advice re possible legal limitations re this matter under a newly constituted body and further work will be required to clarify an appropriate way forward.

4.3.4 Association Name

Throughout this paper the unified body is referred to as VFBV however there is strong suggestion that this name is not user friendly and should change. The Urban Association has suggested 'Volunteer Fire Brigades Association (VFBA). This issue will be considered further over the next 3-6 months. Suggestions are welcome.

5 How the change impacts on you

5.1 How does this affect you as an individual volunteer?

At an individual level there will be no change to the way you operate as a volunteer other than potential for a stronger representative body better positioned to advocate on your behalf. You will still be a member of your designated brigade and your brigade will still elect delegates to represent you at Association level.

Both volunteer associations have already agreed to pursue the same CFA long service awards and uniforms for urban and rural brigades. Whilst these changes help the transition to a unified representative body, they will happen regardless of the changes being discussed in this paper.

5.2 How does this affect your brigade or group?

In future brigades will affiliate with the one unified association. Groups can currently affiliate with the VRFBA and the proposal allows an option for Groups to be given the opportunity to affiliate with the new body. There may be some change to affiliation fees although this has not been determined yet. The total amount collected from brigade affiliations is not expected to be greater than the amount currently collected by the VRFBA and VUFBA respectively.

In the past, each affiliated brigade has been able to elect two delegates to represent that brigade at Regional Council. While this will not change, there will be one Regional Council rather than separate rural and urban Regional Councils, as discussed below.

Currently the VRFBA rules allow brigades to vote on issues by proxy vote at special general meetings and the Annual General Meeting. It is proposed to remove proxy voting under the unified representative body constitution.

5.3 How does this affect your Regional Council?

The proposal aims to achieve a single Regional Council in each region. Your brigades' ability to elect delegates to Regional Council will not change. There will be little or no change for the Regional Councils that already meet jointly or have joint constitutions.

The aim is for each Regional Council to operate under a single unified constitution with one Council Executive elected by the members of that council. Each Regional Council will elect delegates to the State Council of the new body, and several options for determining how representation on the new State Council could be structured are discussed in this paper.

VFBV's intention is to strengthen CFA management's commitment to the Regional Council forum as a place to engage CFA volunteers in discussion and decision making on matters relating to volunteer welfare and efficiency. VFBV desire is for regional Councils to proactively contribute to CFA direction, policy and strategic planning.

5.4 How does this affect volunteer representation at Region and State Council?

In the proposed model, the existing governing bodies of the VUFBA and VRFBA will combine as one single State Council. Several options to manage representation at State Council level are discussed in this paper. Whichever option is selected, the opportunity for Regional Councils to forward issues to State Council will remain.

5.5 How does this affect the VUFBA, VRFBA and VFBV?

VUFBA, VRFBA and VFBV will cease to exist as separate bodies. They will operate under a single constitution and statement of purpose. If appropriate, changes will be made to the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 to ensure formal reference to the unified body as the body established to allow members of CFA brigades and Regional Councils to consider and bring to the notice of CFA all matters affecting their welfare and efficiency.

The process for making changes to CFA legislation is slow and it may be necessary to establish interim arrangements for the new body while formal changes to the Act are finalised. Processes will need to be activated in early 2008 if changes to CFA legislation are to be completed by late 2008.

5.6 How will the new constitution differ from the arrangements we have today?

The separate constitutions of VRFBA, VUFBA and VFBV will be rationalised into one single constitution. The constitution of the new body will incorporate most clauses of the current VUFBA and VRFBA constitutions, which are already very similar, and will incorporate the relevant clauses of the existing VFBV constitution.

6. Why change?

By bringing the VUFBA and VRFBA together into one unified body representing all 60,000 CFA volunteers, we will be able to build on the combined strengths of the two bodies and remove inefficiencies of duplicated effort. The proposed changes will ensure the new organisation is well positioned, high profile and well regarded by people making decisions on matters that impact on volunteers.

6.1 Strength in numbers

Whilst the current system of separate associations for rural and urban brigades has served volunteers well in the past, our voice will be more influential if we can harness the combined strength and profile of our 60,000 strong volunteer membership base.

6.2 Improved influence from a high profile united voice

The challenges we face and the opportunities presented to us in the future will be numerous and complex, and a strong and united voice will be necessary. A united high profile body representing all CFA volunteers will have more chance of successfully influencing key stakeholders on matters that affect volunteers.

6.3 More effective use of our collective resources

Having separate representative bodies for urban and rural brigades means that our efforts are often duplicated with our finite resources often working in isolation on issues that would benefit from better coordination of our collective efforts. There is greater potential for disagreement and reduced impact of our opinion. The current overarching VFBV model goes some way toward strengthening coordination and improving advocacy, but the arrangements are more cumbersome than they need to be.

6.4 Many issues are common to both urban and rural brigades

Much has changed since the formation of the VUFBA and VRFBA. The differences between urban and rural brigades are not as distinct as they once were and boundaries have become blurred by the expansion of many townships and provincial centres or the decline of others. The need for standardised equipment, procedures and training based on risk not brigade classification means that most issues impact on all volunteers regardless of their designation. While there are some historic differences in tradition, culture and history between urban and rural brigades and issues specific to particular

geographic areas or communities, there is also much common ground. CFA volunteers operate under a single CFA policy framework, work together on the fire ground, face the same challenges and opportunities and share common expectations.

6.5 We have been talking long enough

The need to establish a more unified and high profile representative association for CFA volunteers has been discussed for some time. Since the inception of VFBV, the vision was to establish an integrated association over time as volunteers became comfortable with the idea. VFVB was formed five years ago and it is time we finalised our structure.

Many elements of the future proposal are already operating. At state level, VUFBA and VRFBA representatives already work together on joint CFA/Association committees and working parties. There is support at VUFBA and VRFBA executive level to progress to a unified structure. The majority of Regional Councils are already meeting as one and others are in the process of coming together. For many regions and brigades, the drive is to finalise the changes so that we can all get on with improving volunteer welfare and efficiency.

6.6 The change is already supported by many

There is support at VUFBA and VRFBA Executive level to progress to a unified structure.

The majority of Regional Councils are already meeting as one and others are in the process of coming together. In summary:

- Regional Councils in 12 Regions always meet jointly or as one;
- Regional Councils in 2 Regions hold some joint Executive meetings and will hold joint meetings later in 2007;
- Regional Councils in 1 Region (2 urban and 2E Rural) hold some joint meetings and plan to commence regular joint meetings from October 2007;
- Regional Councils in 5 Regions (5, 10, 11, 18 and 24) meet separately however two of these (5 Exec and 11) have planned joint meetings later in 2007;
- 6 Regional Councils have joint constitutions and 4 Regional Councils either have or are developing a draft joint constitution.

Table 1 (following page) provides a breakdown of status of Regional Council progress towards meeting as joint councils and operating under joint constitutions.

Table 1: Status of Regional Councils moving towards joint meetings and constitutions (as at September 2007)

Reg.	Regional Council Meeting Status	Single Constitution	Other comment
2/2E	Some joint meetings	NO	Recent meetings have been joint. Regular joint meetings from Oct 2007
19	Separate meetings		
4	Joint meetings	NO	
5	Separate meetings	NO	Planned for Executives to meet September/October
6	Joint Exec meetings	NO	Joint meeting planned for Oct/Nov. Plan future meetings to be 2 joint and 2 separate per year
7	Some joint Executive meetings	Executive considering	Executives have met jointly. Next meeting will be Joint (Nov). Both Councils agree to combine
8	Meet as one	YES	
9	Meet as one	YES	
10	Meet separately	NO	Each invited to attend respective meetings. Desire to progress amongst Urban Council.
11	Meet separately	NO	Have met jointly previously. Planned joint meetings later in 2007.
12	Joint meetings	Considering	
13	Joint meetings	NO	
14	Joint meetings	NO	
15	Meet as one	YES	
16	Meet Jointly	DRAFT	Constitution expected to be finalised at next meeting
17	Meet as one	YES	
18	Meet separately	NO	Support concept but haven't commenced joint meetings yet
20	Meet as one	YES	
22	Meet jointly	DRAFT	
23	Meet as one	YES	
24	Meet separately	NO	Desire to progress amongst Urban Council.