

VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



Welcome to the June edition of the quarterly VFBV feature supplement. This is the third edition and replaces the VFBV Quarterly Mailout that used to be posted separately to Brigade Secretaries. It includes relevant news, updates and information on current issues being pursued by VFBV on behalf of members.

Due to the April and May editions of Fire Wise not being printed in hard copy as a result of COVID-19 impacts, the VFBV CEO April and May editorials that are normally found on Page 2 of Fire Wise have been reproduced for this quarter's supplement. May we please ask Brigade Captains and Secretaries, Group Officers and Group Secretaries as well as VFBV delegates to please take the time to read this and future editions, and to table at your meetings for the benefit and knowledge of your members. VFBV delegates work tirelessly to advocate and represent CFA volunteers and are always seeking your feedback and views. VFBV is your association, so please stay connected and get involved.

Additional Resources and Updates Available Electronically

COVID-19 Financial Support Resources	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp7
2019/20 Bushfire History Project	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp8
National Volunteer Week	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp9
Fire Services Reform – CFA Resources Page	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp10
16 and 17-year-old members - Consultation	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp3

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

Your June enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. Broken Promises and Disappointment	For discussion & feedback
2. Reflect and Honour	Please table and note
3. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
4. Agility and Resilience	Please table and note



BROKEN PROMISES

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer
Published: June 2020

Last year when the Governments Fire Services (Reform) legislation was passed by Parliament, VFBV made a commitment. We committed to working constructively and in good faith with the government, agencies, and all stakeholders to find common ground. We committed to working hard to salvage the best possible outcomes from the changes, and to hold decision-makers to account for the structures, promises and commitments they had made.

We said we would take government at their word when they promised us that they would work and consult with all stakeholders equally and we accepted their assurances that they would engage in genuine consultation with volunteers on any matters that have the potential to impact upon them. Decision makers committed to the Volunteer Charter and committed to providing information allowing enough time for volunteers to understand the impacts and promised to provide opportunities for volunteers to have input so that alternatives or compromises could be reached before decisions were made.



I too made a promise. I said that should these promises not be kept, that I would call it out. I said that should our good will, good faith and good intentions be taken advantage of, that I would seek your assistance in putting it right.

It is now my sad duty to inform you precisely that. These promises have not been kept and have been broken.

While I have suspected it for some time, proof of this betrayal has emerged over the last couple of weeks as recent decisions have been made and communicated without any VFBV involvement or volunteer consultation. Governance and consultative structures appear to have represented the illusion of consultation at best, an elaborate and dishonest stalling tactic at worst.

We have worked incredibly hard to honour our commitment to good faith discussions, and resisted provocation after provocation. For several months now we have been escalating our growing concerns and disappointment all of which have been met with a wall of silence or indifference. And while I have great empathy for the unenviable task of working with multiple agencies and stakeholders, we cannot forgive them for stacking the deck by giving one stakeholder an unassailable veto power that is as broad as it is absolute. The fact is this power is enlivened through the consult and agree clauses this government directed the agencies agree to and therefore the fact that agreement is now withheld anytime a compromise is put forward is a mess of their own making. VFBV warned how this unprecedented power could be wielded and misused to debilitating effect, and we are now seeing that play out.

The most disappointing aspect is that we have repeatedly warned government and the agencies that should any volunteer promises, or commitments be broken, this will represent a deep betrayal of volunteer trust. We have warned these actions risk breaking the hearts and backs of stalwart CFA volunteers who despite their reservations, put the bitterness and rancour to one side and gave the government the benefit of the doubt. These are the same volunteers who put their lives on the line during this year's devastating bushfires and whom we owe so much. For many this may well be the last straw. Parliamentarians and decision makers not only risk losing the confidence of volunteers, but also risk their own reputations. How will trust in these people ever be rebuilt in the face of such intransigence?

FRV Operational Structure and Secondment Model

A few weeks ago FRV announced its operational structure. Despite the significant impact that operational staff operating at the Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Commander levels have on volunteer reporting lines and operational support VFBV has again been excluded from these discussions. The clue is found in the following quote taken directly from the FRV communique which states “Over the last six months extensive work has been undertaken by the CFA, MFB and UFU in developing an FRV secondment model that meets the requirements of the Act, ensures essential services to the community continue to be delivered, and that support to both volunteer and career firefighters is maintained.”

Peter Hunt from the Weekly Times summed it up perfectly with what he described as: *“THE Andrews Government’s claim that the CFA will become a “volunteer-only” service from July 1 has been exposed as a myth, following revelations it will still be run by 229 United Firefighters Union assistant chiefs and commanders.*

Premier Daniel Andrews and his ministers have repeatedly stated the reforms transform the CFA into a “volunteer-only firefighting service”.

But a copy of the recently released restructure model shows the CFA will have to second 229 FRV staff to run most of the CFA’s operations, including 96 commanders, 40 assistant chief fire officers, six community safety officers, plus 87 instructors and supervisors.”

...The CFA top brass will not even have the choice to select the best FRV staff for the job, with the Act stating: “the chief officer of the CFA must agree to a particular officer or employee being made available”.

Single Commissioning

In early discussions, VFBV strongly supported CFA’s position that any future model must respect single commissioning. In other words, employees cannot report to two masters. It was our united position that staff cannot be expected to be dual commissioned (perform duties for the FRV Commissioner as well as performing duties for the CFA Chief Officer) and we advised any departure from this would be dangerous and create a serious conflict of interest, not to mention a legal mine field.

Sadly, the structure announced cleverly masks occasions where CFA Officers seconded from FRV to CFA will be expected to perform duties on behalf of FRV. Every second that a CFA officer is off supporting a FRV function is lost time not spent supporting CFA and CFA volunteers. Surely, CFA as Victoria’s largest fire service is deserving of expecting its senior officers to be dedicated to CFA business and who are already busy enough meeting the demands of supporting 1,220 volunteer fire brigades without being at the whim of FRV.

Seconded Uniforms

VFBV has been inundated with volunteers raising concerns at the news that CFA seconded officers may be wearing FRV uniforms. Not only is this an insult to volunteers, but what a horrible position to put those officers in who will feel like outsiders in the very organisation they are now seconded to. How confused will the public be when they see FRV uniformed officers speaking on behalf of CFA, not to mention the terrible damage this will have on CFA’s future culture and identity.

Many would remember the very clear promise and commitment made by government and CFA that all seconded employees would continue to wear CFA uniform.

In fact, during the Minister’s visits to brigades last year, one of the most frequently asked questions by volunteers was exactly this, to which the Minister is reported to have assured volunteers that seconded employees would in fact wear CFA uniform “as they do now.”

Looking at evidence tendered under oath during the parliamentary enquiries, it is also beyond doubt what assurances had been given the CFA Chief Officer himself on this issue. Chief Warrington’s testimony was as follows: *“Obviously the secondment issue is the big issue on the table, and I think there is room for movement in that space. The point that I come from is clearly I am advocating for an independent, autonomous CFA. Having said that, I have already been assured that were an operations officer [Commander] or ops manager [Assistant Chief Fire Officer] – so senior operational people – seconded back into the CFA, they will wear the CFA uniform, they will be tasked by the CFA chief officer and they will report to the CFA chief officer, and for all intents and purposes they will pretty much operate*

as they do today.”

How any fair-minded person cannot see the humiliation and divisiveness that CFA Officers wearing another organisations uniform will create is beyond me. In following this up, VFBV have learned that CFA has not in fact agreed to accept seconded officers wearing FRV uniforms. Order forms for FRV uniforms bypassed CFA and were sent without their knowledge. However, CFA have been advised the decision has now been taken out of their hands with the matter now sitting with the Minister as to whether they will be directed or not.

Training and Transition

VFBV has been highly critical of the lack of detail or clarity that continues to leave everyone in the dark about changes proposed to operational practices with many questions remaining unanswered. Firefighters on the ground – both volunteer and career- who are expected to operate under these systems and practices in areas surrounding new FRV footprints have been left lamenting the appalling change management and lack of transition or implementation guides.

Just last week, VFBV was provided less than a day’s notice to review an online training package supposedly developed to support firefighters understand the changes expected of them. While the package is better than nothing, it was our strong view that the package does not come close to adequately preparing members who have had no previous experience operating in the current MFB mutual aid areas.

With less than 30 days to go before July 1, neither VFBV or volunteers have even seen, let alone been consulted with on any proposed joint operating procedures or joint agency arrangements. All of which mind you, are completely missing and absent from the training package that was released last week despite VFBV’s concerns.

Next Steps

I urge all volunteers to discuss and engage with us on how you wish to respond to these broken promises. Nobody wants a return to the bitter and acrimonious days of dispute, but equally we must think long and hard about whether we can continue to turn a blind eye to the continued attacks on your good will and good faith and allow volunteers to continue to be taken advantage of.

Regrettably it appears that decision makers are sending a terrible message as they return to their divisive, polarizing and exclusionary ways of old. The message being sent is that only the most belligerent and uncompromising of agendas and voices appear to be pandered to.

CFA volunteers and the communities they protect deserve so much better. They deserve to be treated with respect by those who are there to govern on behalf of all of us. They deserve for promises and commitments made to them to be honoured and kept.

The respect and gratitude of the Australian public for what volunteer firefighters endure this and every fire season when faced with unimaginable scales of natural disasters is still fresh in people’s minds and hearts. I am reminded of the famous Winston Churchill quote in his address to the British Parliament following months of defeats, in recognising the Royal Air Force “never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”

CFA volunteers now need to decide how they wish to hold decision makers to account for the promises made and the promises broken. Please make your voices heard.



REFLECT AND HONOUR

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 8 May 2020 in Fire Wise

This month marks two very special days for volunteers. The first of course was 4 May which is St Florian's day and our annual memorial, while the second event is the 18-24 May where we celebrate National Volunteer Week.

The annual CFA memorial service is held on the closest Sunday to May 4 each year to align with St Florian's day. Saint Florian is the Patron Saint of Firefighters and was an officer of the Roman army who was responsible for organising and leading firefighting brigades tasked to fight fires when Rome needed to protect itself against fire being used as an offensive weapon in the third century.

Our memorial is a time to acknowledge and remember those that have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of their communities. And while we cannot come together in person this year, we can come together in spirit and thought to acknowledge and pay respect to those we have lost.

This year we pause to reflect and honour the lives of 68 CFA members and 11 Country Fire Brigades Board firefighters (prior to the formation of CFA), who have paid the ultimate sacrifice and given their lives in service to protecting our communities.

I would encourage members to take a moment to pause, reflect and honour those who have selflessly given their lives. It is also an important opportunity to reflect on our history as we pay tribute to those lost – and reflect on the importance of the work we all do in making our communities safer.

May 4 is also the day chosen for International Firefighters Day that was established following the tragic events of Linton, with the day first observed on May 4 1999. We wear blue and red ribbons to pay tribute to our fallen. The ribbons are linked to colours symbolic of the main element's firefighters work with – red for fire and blue for water.

This year's service would have been a formal occasion to pay our respects to our colleagues from DELWP, NSW RFS and the United States who tragically lost their lives battling this summer's bushfires.

While we mourn the loss of each precious life lost as a result of these and any fires, I want to acknowledge each of the nine to whom this year we owe a special debt. Victorian firefighters Bill Slade, Mat Kavanagh and David Moresi. New South Wales firefighters Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul. And North American firefighters Ian McBeth (Montana), Paul Hudson (Arizona) and Rick DeMorgan Jr (Florida) who travelled from the United States of America to help Australia in its time of need.

To all the families and loved ones of those we have lost, we say thank-you and make a solemn promise that their sacrifice will never be forgotten.

VicPol

We were all saddened to learn of the tragic deaths of four police officers who died in the line of duty serving the people of Victoria.

VFBV has conveyed the heartfelt condolences of all CFA volunteers to the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. Along with the entire emergency management family, we stand together in solidarity and deep sorrow as we grieve

this tragic loss of life.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and loved ones of Constable Josh Prestney, Constable Glen Humphris, Senior Constable Kevin King, and leading Senior Constable Lynette Taylor. May their sacrifice be forever remembered.

National Volunteer Week

This year, National Volunteer Week is being held between the 18 May though to the 24. And while many of us may not feel especially celebratory at the moment, these uncertain times may be the most important reason of all to recognise and acknowledge all our volunteers across Australia.

This year's theme is "Changing Communities. Changing Lives." Such an inspirational theme, but especially those who contribute through volunteering in our emergency services. I can't think of a more fitting recognition of the incredible work and role CFA volunteers do in changing lives and keeping communities safe.

Please take a moment during this year's national volunteer week to reflect on the difference each of you are making and take the time to acknowledge and celebrate the incredible gift this is to the whole Victorian community. You do change lives, and our State would be so much the poorer without you.

Reform

VFBV continues to raise the concerns of volunteers on the lack of engagement, communication and meaningful consultation on reform implementation. Volunteers have been making strong representations that for an organisation that is about to transition to a fully volunteer service, the lack of respect and involvement of its volunteers on this change journey is deeply disappointing.

And just as the government has determined to press ahead regardless of COVID-19 impediments - it is equally important to remind decision makers that volunteer consultation obligations have not been suspended, nor should they be forgotten. Remember those commitments and tributes following this summer's horror bushfires and the promises of respecting CFA volunteers and the vital role CFA plays in keeping our communities safe?

Recent reform announcements indicate CFA and CFA volunteers are largely being treated as irrelevant. In fact, it is difficult to tell from anything that has been announced any benefit that is in the public's interest.

Just as galling is the complete disregard and respect for the important role that administrative and non-operational staff play in modern and effective emergency management arrangements. In a sector that relies on people working together – the approach and insensitivity in decisions and communications is most disappointing.

My fear is that these missteps will make it very hard for people to envision how these arrangements will deliver lasting positive outcomes. In fact, this continued divisiveness will likely have lasting consequences on how many perceive and regard the new entity moving forward.

To those feeling disillusioned and frustrated, I share your disappointment. But please don't stew on it or let it get to you. We are all going to have to work incredibly hard to try and fix any volunteer or community impacts that emerge. Our communities are counting on it – so I again call on each of you to focus on the things we can change and not the things we cannot.

Busy yourselves on the things that matter. Your local brigade and your local community. Continue creating positive outcomes that make a real difference to our communities. At some point the world will wake up and take stock. Let us maintain our proud record of selfless community service. It will not go unnoticed when the real impacts of this change journey finally emerge.

Vale Mick Taylor AFSM

On the day of publishing of this edition of Fire Wise, we have just learned of the passing of our great friend Michael Taylor AFSM. Mick was a stalwart of Mornington Fire Brigade and ex-Captain. He joined the Brigade in 1957. Mick was an Association Life Member, CFA life member, and Mornington Fire Brigade life member. He dedicated over 30 years of service to senior leadership roles in the Association, serving 23 years on State Council and was a former VUFBA President.

Mick's support and contribution to VFBV was immeasurable. He was a member of the initial joint Associations' Steering Committee formed to develop VFBV and was a member on VFBV's inaugural Board for nine years, serving as VFBV Vice President between 2005 – 2009.

We send our thoughts, prayers and sympathy to Yvonne, family, friends and loved ones. We also extend our thoughts to fellow members of the Mornington Fire Brigade. Mick was a true icon of the Victorian Fire Services where he spent his life tirelessly advocating on behalf of CFA and CFA volunteers. He will be very sorely missed.



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings June 2020

The 2 Minute Briefings are a quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

They are intended to update members on key issues that have recently been discussed. Effort is made to include any related items that may have been progressed out of session or through other avenues that are related to each committee's subject matter. Priority is given to topics where recent progress has been made. Topics where no progress has been made or where there are differences of opinion are sometimes included to ensure members are aware of VFBV efforts in continuing to advocate for progress or outcomes.

Joint Committees are formal committees between CFA and VFBV made up of VFBV delegates appointed by VFBV State Council, and CFA management representatives appointed by CFA. They are a critical loop in our consultative structures. They endeavour to work collaboratively and cooperatively on issues but may also be required to escalate issues where resolution or common ground cannot be found - requiring executive attention.

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Communications and Technology

June 2020

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

DIGITAL RADIO UPGRADE PROGRESS

CFA has advised delegates on the Joint Communications and Technology Committee that all four outer metropolitan districts (Districts 7, 8, 13 and 14) continue to operate on the digital channels, however due to continuing works to resolve reception issues they are still being patched to the analogue channels. Fireground channels are not being automatically allocated due to similar problems identified through observation reports.

CFA has reported to the committee that Telstra continue to focus on work dedicated on fixing the outstanding issues. Telstra have installed a new tower at Hastings which is due to come on-line shortly, and temporary works are being evaluated for Frankston. The committee will continue to monitor.

RESOURCE TRACKING SYSTEM (RTS)

In last year's May edition of the 2 Minute Briefings, members were advised of an issue with the GPS reception on mobile radios due to the re-setting of the clock system on GPS satellites. The Committee would like to again remind members with bag radios that haven't had their GPS antenna re-flashed to contact their District Office and organise to have this work completed.

Both the CFA and the Joint Committee members are also interested in hearing feedback from users about their experiences with the Resource Tracking System (RTS). Any suggested improvements or enhancements of the RTS can be forwarded to the CFA IT Service desk (03 9262 8207) or VFBV Support Officer Peter Sharman (p.sharman@vfbv.com.au).

SUPPLEMENTARY ALERTING SYSTEM (SAS)

VFBV delegates to the Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) Supplementary Alert System (SAS) working party have reported that limited tests on the latest version of the system have been underway. Delegates to the Joint Committee were informed that the mapping component of the SAS performed well, however the working party is looking forward to the use and testing of the system with actual data during the next month.

ESTA has commenced work on the data transfer component and expect to have this completed in June or July, in line with the 2020 release timeline. Once the data transfer is completed there will be some further testing by the SAS working party to ensure there is a high level of confidence before the expected rollout prior to the next fire season.

SPECTRUM REPLACEMENT – ADTEC CONFERENCING SYSTEM

The replacement of the spectrum system has occurred across the State and brigades have commenced using the AdTec conference system in its place. VFBV is encouraging members to provide feedback and would like to hear from individuals, groups and brigades who have used the new system since its introduction.

Initial feedback has highlighted problems such as when the initial caller hangs up, the line is disconnected automatically which in turns doesn't allow for Brigade members on the line to continue the discussion and plan their next step. Other issues reported are when the initial message is presented to indicate you have a conference call, it only plays the pre-recorded message once, causing members missing this message to not know when to enter their pin.

Brigade/Group Communications Officers are asked to monitor the new system and forward any difficulties or adverse changes experienced to VFBV Support Officer Peter Sharman (p.sharman@vfbv.com.au).

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

IFMP – INTEGRATED FIRE MANAGEMENT PLANNING

VFBV continues to advocate the importance of CFA volunteer representation and input into fire management planning across Victoria. In previous updates we have reported that legislation changes have removed mandatory volunteer brigade and group representation and replaced Municipal Fire Prevention Committee's (MFPC's) with new Emergency Management Planning Committee's. Pleasingly, some municipalities have chosen to keep their fire prevention committee's by making them a subcommittee of the new overarching body, but this needs to be negotiated with each individual local government area.

To assist brigades to have input into these meetings, the Joint Community Safety Committee delegates have requested CFA develop guidelines to provide consistency. Where CFA decides to only appoint a CFA employee to represent CFA in these forums, delegates have requested CFA provide a mandatory consultation process to ensure these representatives are well informed by the local brigades and groups, and that information is then also passed back from the committee to the volunteers at the local level.

CFA has now completed the draft guidelines which have now been sent to all Groups, District and Regions for feedback. The drafts include a proposed fire prevention escalation process, municipal fire management planning guideline for CFA members 2020, and a proposed guide to CFA participation in municipal fire management planning.

The committee is urging volunteers to review these drafts and provide feedback as so-on as possible. The intent of these guidelines is to improve the opportunities for group and brigade input into fire management planning and ensure volunteers feel confident to raise matters of importance to the new planning committee's. Feedback on the draft documents can be emailed to VFBV Support Officer Michelle Ryan – m.ryan@vfbv.com.au

RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLER SYSTEMS UPDATE

VFBV delegates continue to monitor the exciting progress being made to promote residential sprinkler systems. Good progress appears to have been made in our pursuit for an Australia Wide national approach. Through collaboration with AFAC and the FPAA, government regulators continue to implement changes to legislation.

The national construction code (NCC) and building codes have been updated and became effective as of the 1st May 2020. As previously reported these changes mandate effective, safe, fit for purpose sprinkler systems for medium-rise residential buildings 4 stories and over. New buildings of these heights will now be required to have working sprinkler protection systems installed.

Independent analysis of the installation of residential sprinkler systems has determined that a sprinkler system can reduce the occupants risk level by at least 67%. The introduction of sprinklers into buildings provides a significant improvement to the safety of occupants, will save lives and reduce damage to property. To date adding a sprinkler system to residential housing was seen to be cost prohibitive. New systems designed to the new FPAA101D technical specifications draw water from the existing plumbing and building water supply for residential buildings and offers significant cost savings. New systems have been tested that are designed for use with already available Watermark certified products, which comply with the standard that has been designed to test any product that comes in contact with drinking water.

The system specifications have been designed to provide enough water volume to sprinkler heads in order to achieve safe evacuation and assist with fire service intervention. Because the system is connected to the drinking water supply, water availability is regularly monitored through residents' use of existing water fixtures.

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Equipment & Infrastructure

June 2020

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

FCV PURCHASING CONCERNS

Discussions are continuing between VFBV and CFA over volunteer concerns regarding CFA's decision to not support brigades purchasing brigade-owned vehicles from local car dealerships, in particular forward command vehicles (FCV's). Brigades are reporting to delegates that CFA will no longer allow Brigades to purchase FCV's from their local automotive dealers. Concerns stem from the fact that many local car dealers are great supporters of volunteer fire brigades and often provide discounts and incentives for the local brigade as well as many of the dealerships employees being active brigade members and an important part of the local town and community as they provide employment to many smaller communities.

CFA has told the committee the cab chassis purchases particularly the Ford Ranger XL 4x4 crew cabs used for FCV's are now undertaken in accordance with Government purchasing protocols via arrangements with an external fleet provider and case-by-case local purchasing is not practical for large volume purchases that are managed centrally. Furthermore, CFA's position is that centralised purchasing of cab chassis results in a better financial outcome for CFA and brigades.

Delegates are continuing to express concerns on behalf of brigades who do not agree and have explained that many are now concerned that they may have to travel several hours to get their FCV serviced, as the local dealer may not be allowed to do this type of work at the local workshop under terms of the fleet provider. The committee will continue to discuss this matter with CFA in the hope that the many benefits of supporting local communities with the locally purchasing of FCV's can be better understood by CFA and that purchasing arrangements can be made more flexible to ensure greater support and benefit for local towns and communities.

BRIGADE OWNED TRAILER CHECK REMINDER

Brigade owned trailers continues to be a topic of significant discussion. During 2018 CFA carried out an audit of brigade owned trailers and found a number to be operationally deficient. Further checks continued during 2019, and a number of trailers continue to be found to be non-compliant. Members are urged to inspect their brigade owned trailers and check for any significant structural rust, bald tyres, blown lights or other defections that would result in the trailer being unroadworthy and unsafe to use.

During these checks CFA has also found that some trailers were also not listed as brigade assets and therefore uninsured. While disappointed that CFA has not picked up these issues as part of its annual Section 29 process, the committee is urging brigades to please ensure their brigade owned trailers are routinely checked to ensure they are safe to use and comply with VicRoads roadworthy requirements. Brigades also need to ensure the trailers are listed in the brigade assets register and that District Headquarters are made aware, so the insurance is up to date. CFA has advised an Operations Bulletin will soon be circulated to brigades outlining the maintenance and safety checks required to ensure compliance with Vic Roads and CFA policies.

FOAM MANAGEMENT

VFBV delegates to the Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee continue to regularly monitor the environmental and safety considerations of firefighting foams. Members should be aware of the potential harm that firefighter foams can have if incorrectly mixed or older non approved foams are allowed to enter the system. CFA has provided the committee with a draft Operations Bulletin for the management and disposal of firefighting foams for feedback. The bulletin covers the environmental and safety considerations when using firefighting foams and covers the approved foams, operational and safety considerations for members, appliances and the environment and the management of residual PFAS in the system. The bulletin also reminds members of the actions to take in the use, storage and safety measures required when handling all firefighting foams. Only approved foam can be used, and any non-compliant foams must be reported to the district headquarters for immediate pickup and disposal.

2 Minute Briefing

Joint HR, Welfare and OH&S

June 2020

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

COVID 19 WELLBEING SERVICES

The Joint HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee discussed CFA's plan and intention to maintain current member wellbeing services such as the member assistance program, chaplaincy and peer support services by developing additional 'opt in' services by which people can access these services over the phone during lockdown and social distancing restrictions. In addition, CFA will proactively contact any members who have contracted the corona virus, and who are required to quarantine. This will also be extended to those who are caring for others with the illness in order to offer ongoing phone support and/or referral to other services. VFBV delegates have requested additional targeted assistance be considered for the recent fire affected areas in East Gippsland and the North East, where volunteers already impacted by fire are further disadvantaged during the pandemic. CFA has agreed.

Delegates shared with CFA some practices that were working very well at the local level where regular weekly video/teleconferences are being held between Group Officers and Brigade Captains with Peers invited to attend. Delegates urged CFA to increase messaging to brigades and volunteers explaining the simplicity of teleconferencing and how to access CFA systems, as it can be perceived by some as complicated. Delegates have also requested BASOs or Operations Staff could offer to run a teleconference for those brigades who had not had any contact to date. CFA has agreed to request the CFA Pandemic Management Team to 'pulse check' across the Districts and to post on Brigades Online some examples of what is working well for some districts and brigades to make members aware of the options available.

CFA DISCIPLINE PROCESS

VFBV regularly support volunteers navigating the CFA discipline process and continue to be alarmed to learn of punitive measures enforced upon volunteers who have been suspended or stood down, in recent times. Delegates informed CFA of a recent case where a volunteer was restricted from speaking to any members of their brigade, to attend any CFA property or engage in any CFA activity. This volunteer took the letter literally and as a result did not take up a travel opportunity with their partner and son, didn't speak to family and close friends and was forbidden from attending the wake of a long serving, beloved member of the brigade. In small communities like this one, the repercussions and social isolation for this volunteer were debilitating. VFBV believe these measures encroach on a volunteer to such a degree as to deny them their civil rights and have requested urgent review. CFA has accepted the delegates view that these restrictions are excessive and that future restrictions placed upon a volunteer should only relate to specific CFA business restricted to the allegation or matter at hand. It is VFBV's view that CFA has no right to say who a volunteer can or can't talk to or where a volunteer can or can't go (with the exception of a CFA property) and these kind of punitive measures can seriously impact a members mental health and wellbeing, resulting in significant social isolation and harm.

WORKING MIND FIRST RESPONDERS TRAINING

The committee continues to discuss the differences in The Working Mind First Responder (WMFR) modules offered during the 8 hour session verses the 4 hour session. The overall consensus was although the 4 hour session was missing a key topic that delegates felt important, delegates believed the learnings were still very valuable for volunteer leaders. However, given the prevalence of suicide in the general community VFBV delegates have requested that CFA retain the 8 hour session as the preferred option, due to its coverage of this important topic.

The committee also discussed the impact COVID 19 was having on the ongoing delivery of WMFR training, as this training is not available by remote learning or electronically. CFA has explained the training package is owned by a Canadian company, which at this point in time, has not adapted an online version. Therefore, this has unfortunately resulted in this training being halted until further notice. Delegates have requested CFA approach the provider requesting an online course be developed as soon as possible.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

PLANNED BURNING TASKFORCE

VFBV is a strong advocate of planned burning and has been working with CFA to support and develop the CFA Planned Burn Taskforce project. This project has been funded under the Victorian Safer Together initiatives and draws on the feedback and advocacy put forward by VFBV through our 2013 study of volunteer attitudes towards planned burning.

The project is piloting the formation of a volunteer taskforce which would operate similar to a strike team to assist local brigades and districts when a major planned burn is requested, and local district resources are not available. In simple terms, members from across the state can nominate to volunteer to assist in a planned burn outside of their own district. Transport, accommodation and meals are made available for the duration of the burn.

The pilot was initiated in Districts 8, 13, 14 and 15 and is now being extended to other Districts. All applicants will be required to have Minimum skills competency, completed the Hazardous Tree Awareness Package and the burn-over drill and fill out an EOI form along with your Captains approval before being offered a position on the taskforce. Brigades have long recognised there are many training advantages of participating in planned burns such as allowing newer members to observe and learn fire behaviour and provide an opportunity for experienced fire fighters to pass on their knowledge and experience to others in a controlled relatively safe manner.

The committee has requested the project team improve circulation of information and expressions of interest wider than has occurred so far. The committee has also requested the project team consider attending DPC and Group meetings to explain the project and pilot. Consultation is progressing on some related matters to address minor VFBV concerns.

POST SEASON REVIEWS AND AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

The Joint Operations Committee continues to advocate on the importance of timely and inclusive after-action reviews. Delegates continue to express concern at the drop in formal post-season after-action reviews and the lack of opportunity for a broader range of members to participate, with some Districts moving to a multi-agency invite only model. VFBV encourages any members who don't believe they have been provided an opportunity to attend or participate in an AAR, or Post Fire Danger Period review to raise these concerns via your VFBV District Council meetings so that we can identify areas where there is highest concern.

A positive outcome from ongoing discussions on the committee has been the development of the learning management centre. The LMC is an online portal for information and case studies about incidents. The aim of the stories is not to apportion blame, but to allow volunteers to share their experiences so we can all learn from them. The LMC aim to publish a new case study every month and have available AAR guidelines and templates to help members conduct a structured review or debrief process for analysing an incident to help improve performance. It considers what was planned, what happened, why it happened and what can be done to improve or learn from an incident. This valuable resource will help volunteers to facilitate improvements, support learning, identify trends and share lessons from across the State.

SECONDMENT UNCERTAINTY

Volunteers have been expressing concerns with the high level of changeover and changes to Operations Managers (now ACFO's) and Operations Officers (Commanders). The frequency of changes at the local level has a significant impact on Brigades and Groups. Delegates have raised concerns that the planned changes for July 1st will cause significant upheaval in many districts. The introduction of FRV and as yet unknown makeup of the secondment model is driving concerns in many districts which are anxious they may receive less support than they currently have now, including the provision of career instructors. Delegates on the Joint Committee will continue to seek clarification around the secondment model and continue advocating the importance of ensuring that volunteers are adequately resourced and supported in the future.

June 2020

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

DRIVING STRATEGY

VFBV delegates on the Joint Training Committee are happy to report that their ongoing advocacy for an endorsed Driver Training Strategy including licencing, driving under operational conditions and off-road is now progressing through CFA.

Delegates recently met with CFA as part of the consultation process to discuss and workshop a strategy that will essentially result in a streamlined and consistent approach to new medium rigid licencing. The strategy will also include safer driving on-road and off-road and include a revised and more flexible delivery of CFA Driving Legislation and Policy aimed at Class 1 and 2 Brigades. The expectation is that the strategy will also be available on the Learning Management System (LMS) for all members to access. The Strategy also includes the provision for further educators to support delivery. It is expected this will lead to Districts having a more consistent approach and members having greater access to driver education.

DIGITAL LEARNING

The restrictions on Brigade training due to the current COVID-19 pandemic has created extra pressure and challenges for brigade and group training officers. As one of the busiest and demanding roles within a brigade, training officers are finding creative new ways to keep in touch with training during the restrictions. The new digital online courses through the Learning Management System (LMS) aim to assist brigades with training that can be done from home or by remote learning. CFA has recently finalised and uploaded further digital learning courses onto the LMS system including, protect and preserve an incident scene, provide CPR (refresher), provide first aid (refresher) and updates in the asbestos awareness package to name just a few.

Members can access a range of digital learning opportunities on Brigades Online, including both operational and non-operational topics. CFA has advised that they are investigating the possibility of providing online training seminars and conducting theory training for postponed courses to help eliminate the effect of a 'training overload' once normal activities can resume.

GENERAL FIREFIGHTER DELAYS

VFBV delegates to the Joint Training Committee were disappointed to learn that the much-anticipated release of the General Firefighter program has once again been delayed. General Firefighter is due to replace minimum skills wildfire. While some of these delays may be explained by COVID 19 restrictions, other delays have also been created by the departure and changing of key training personnel at HQ.

Delegates have requested consultation on materials as they become available to help minimise the delays and have requested a revised schedule.

During the early planning and implementation discussions, a concept of having General Firefighter champions in each of the 5 CFA regions was proposed. It is envisaged this will assist with implementing and mentoring trainers and assessors through the changes and is anticipated that the champions will receive briefings and training on how the program is designed to run, focusing on its ability to be flexible and adaptable to Brigade and Group needs.

Volunteer Trainer and Assessors are being invited to be part of this process and are encouraged to talk to District Training Coordinators if interested. CFA have provided a dedicated page on Brigades Online that has detailed information on the General Firefighter program: <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelId=gffCourse>

VFBV encourages all members to have a look at this page to familiarise themselves with the concept and view some of the completed works. It is expected that completed foundation skills drills packages including training videos will soon be made available on the Learning Management System (LMS).

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

ANNUAL BRIGADE REVIEW

District Councils and Brigades continue to raise concerns about the wide variances of Brigade Section 29 Inspections. Brigades have indicated that Section 29 inspections are quite often one way and that there should be more transparency in how CFA management can help address issues raised. A pilot of the new Annual Brigade Review (ABR) which is to replace the current section 29 process has been conducted with various Districts across the state and participating Brigades have provided feedback on questions, statements and outcomes stemming from the ABR.

CFA is currently evaluating the project with interviews of Commanders, BASO's and volunteer feedback from Brigades. Delegates to the Joint Volunteerism committee have requested to be more involved in this process and have requested further consultation. Delegates have indicated a number of items such as Brigade members being made aware of questions in advance, to allow time to correctly answer, answers should not be pre-populated, Brigade members be given adequate time to answer questions without prejudice and have opportunities for all Brigade members to participate in some of the planning work. Delegates will continue to monitor and watch closely as the ABR project develops further.

CHAMPIONSHIPS

The State Championships for 2020 at Mooroopna were cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. VFBV thanks the Host Committee and State Championships Committees for all the planning and preparation that was conducted prior to their cancellation.

Planning will continue for Mooroopna for 2021 and 2022 with regular updates on social media, CFA and VFBV web pages. VFBV and CFA will continue to work towards making this weekend a celebration of CFA. The weekend will not be just the Championships, but, also CFA displays with all directorates present, trade displays, kids entertainment, food truck festival, arts and craft market and a farmers market on the Sunday. A torchlight procession will be held Saturday night around Victoria Park Lake. The delegates will continue to track the progress towards 2021 and ideas for 2021 and beyond.

NATIONAL EMERGENCY MEDALS

On Australia Day of this year, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that the National Emergency Medal would be awarded to recognise emergency responders for service during the 2019–20 Australian bushfire season. The National Emergency Medal (NEM) was established in 2011 following the Victorian Black Saturday Fires and is awarded for sustained service during a nationally significant emergency.

VFBV delegates are working with CFA through the Joint Volunteerism Committee and are intending to review the nomination criteria, which is due to be announced later this year. As previously has been the case, the NEM is open to all emergency service volunteers, as well as fire, police, and paramedics. The Prime Minister has also announced that Australian Defence Force members may also be eligible.

The Committee is awaiting further advice from the Honours and Awards Secretariat in Canberra. In the meantime, work is underway to develop a process to support members with nominations, and review the processes used following the 2009 Fires NEM presentations and events.

The medal itself is only awarded once to an individual.

The regulations provide that if a person is awarded for additional service or nationally significant emergencies, it is done in the form of an additional clasp denoting the nationally significant emergency. For example, the Victorian Black Saturday fires were recognised by the clasp VIC FIRES 09.



AGILITY AND RESILIENCE

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 10 April 2020 in Fire Wise

I want to acknowledge the incredibly difficult and challenging period we are all working through. Without a moment to catch our breath following this year's busy Fire Season, we now find ourselves navigating an extremely complex and challenging pandemic. COVID-19 will continue to challenge us and test both our resilience and that of our communities.

Unsurprising – our brigades have stepped up and have again proven themselves to be highly effective and agile. I commend you all on the amazing work done at the local level to activate emergency plans and protocols that are maintaining emergency response continuity to our communities.

A state level Pandemic Management Team has been established within CFA and is operating similar to an IMT, coordinating state level response, communications and planning. CFA and VFBV have activated the same working protocols we use during periods of high operational activity, and are working very closely together to share and leverage off the incredible knowledge and experience that sits within both organisations to help navigate the difficult pathways ahead.

With things moving so quickly, and the need to monitor both State and Commonwealth responses, I want to recognise the difficult and dynamic environment that we all find ourselves operating in. And while I know that some would like a little more detail or specific instructions/protocols to help guide brigade planning, I urge you all to have confidence in yourselves, your abilities and your training.

The reality is, this challenge puts every single one of our brigades on the 'fireground', responding to the needs of each of our own communities and dealing with an incident that is impacting directly on each and every-one of our members, both from a CFA perspective as well as a personal one.

Through our brigades – we are ready and prepared to give our all - working together with a very stressed and anxious community. No one knows your local patch and community better than you do. No one knows your members and their unique and diverse situations better than you do. No one will be able to adapt quicker and more effectively than you can. Back yourselves, your judgement and each other.

I have every confidence that you will use your very best endeavours to adapt and respond to the upcoming challenges as best we can. The strength of our systems and model is that our brigades represent the very best of over 1200 Victorian communities across the State. We have unparalleled reach and connection with our communities, their needs and how to keep them safe.

Use your local knowledge and experience to best adapt to the situation at hand. Be guided by your knowledge and experience and approach the challenge with the same calm and professionalism that we are renowned for.

You are vital and respected leaders within your communities. During these periods of uncertainty when many citizens are feeling scared, anxious and isolated - they are looking to you for leadership and assurance. I have every confidence that you and your Brigade will continue to be a beacon of hope and calm - just as we are during campaign fires.

Please take time to prioritise your mental health and wellbeing and keep an eye on those around you. Each of us will respond differently to the current situation, so its important we don't approach it like a one size fits all.

All peer and welfare services are running as normal, 24-hours a day. The CFA Wellbeing Support line is 1800 959 232. A new confidential opt-in 'check-in' service has also been initiated whereby members can sign up to receive reg-

ular scheduled phone calls from a peer, chaplain or wellbeing team member. This service can be used for a social chat, or if you need to talk more deeply about the challenges you are facing.

You can register for this service via wellbeing@cfa.vic.gov.au or by calling (03) 9262 8939.

Welfare Fund

Priority has been given to maintaining business continuity and operations of our Welfare Fund. All processes and systems to deal with applications remain in place and are operating as normal. Email contact with the Welfare Fund secretary is preferred (rather than phone) but phone options remain available via (03) 9886 1141.

VFBV Support Officers can assist with any initial enquiries or questions on process as well, and we have procedures in place to triage member enquiries. The Welfare Fund is also aiding members experiencing hardship to assist them register for other government support and assistance. We are tracking all Commonwealth and State relief packages to support impacted members connect with all options available.

Fire Impacted Areas

It is incredibly important that members in fire impacted communities do not feel forgotten or abandoned. I am committed to ensuring support for fire impacted communities continue, and we will stand by fire impacted communities for as long as it takes. On behalf of VFBV, I commit to every brigade, group or member in these communities that we will continue to support you and walk the long road of recovery together, every step of the way. Our support for you and these recovery activities will not waiver.

Impact assessments can continue to be sent in and logged, with our work to identify members impacted by this season's bushfires continuing. VFBV Support Officer Michelle Ryan (m.ryan@vfbv.com.au) is coordinating this work in the North East Region, and Colin Booth (c.booth@vfbv.com.au) for the South East Region.

While our working bee's and recovery taskforces have had to be suspended for now – they will resume as soon as it is safe to do so.

District Council Support

State Council has approved streamlined processes to enable District Councils to continue supporting brigades and groups at the local level. Care is being taken to ensure the focus is on brigade/group operational response and logistics.

District Council executive members are being supported to keep regular contact with their brigades and groups to monitor any areas they need assistance with. Regular contact between the District Council leadership group and the local CFA management is ensuring any local issues raised by brigades can be quickly acted on and resolved at the local level.

Priority is being given to resolve any issues brigades or groups may be experiencing with accessing appropriate protective equipment and supplies. Ordering systems remain in place and stock levels are being constantly monitored. Orders should be placed and processed through the State Logistics Center as normal. Procedures to protect supply are in place, and you are requested to only order what you need.

Please work to resolve any issues at the local level first and escalate to your local District Council if you require any assistance.

Thank-you

Thank-you for the continued work you are doing in keeping our communities safe.

These are extraordinary times and will require us all to work together and support each other as we navigate the challenging road ahead. Never forget that we are well prepared and have a very robust and resilient operational response model in place. Each time our collective efforts have been tested - we have always risen to the challenge.

My hope is that just like in previous times, when we look back on this period and our response to it – that it will be remembered as a period of compassion, agility, fortitude and resilience.

A special thank-you to all members who in their other non-CFA roles continue to work within the health sector. Thank-you also to each of you contributing to essential roles like transport, logistics, and customer service/sales. There are too many sectors to mention – but we are indebted to you all.

Never forget that when we all work together, we are capable of so many extraordinary things. Don't lose sight of the tremendous 'good' that you are responsible for generating and putting into our communities. Stand tall, be kind to one another and keep your heads up. Please stay safe, take care of yourselves and each other.