

VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



March 2021

Welcome to the March edition of the quarterly VFBV feature supplement. This is the sixth edition. It includes relevant news, updates and information on current issues being pursued by VFBV on behalf of members.

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-sup11
Australia Day Honours 2021	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup17
International Women's Day 2021	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup18
Mental Health Support – Provisional Payments	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup19

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

Your March enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. Editorial: Tapping into our pioneering spirit	Please table and note
2. Editorial: Black summer recovery progress	Please table and note
3. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
4. 2021 State Championships	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard

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TAPPING INTO OUR PIONEERING SPIRIT

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer
Published: February 2021

Thank-you to all members who participated in our most recent annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey.

The survey officially closed last month, and with well over 2,500 CFA volunteers participating, and over 5,500 fire service volunteers Australia wide - the survey remains one of the highest and most reliable samples of volunteer emergency service opinion and satisfaction metrics in the country.

And while analysis has only just commenced - sadly - early results indicate a continued decline in CFA volunteer satisfaction across several key areas.

The worst two performing areas contributing the most to volunteer dissatisfaction are again volunteer consultation (or the lack thereof) and training.

One of the early take-aways from the initial analysis is to consider that at the time of the survey, fire services reform implementation was about halfway through its first year and there had been significant promotion of a renewed focus by CFA leadership on the importance of volunteer engagement and consultation.

And while this work may have only just started and therefore you would not expect it to significantly affect this year's results, I would urge decision makers to reflect on the absence of any apparent 'placebo' affect whatsoever.

As expected, "reform" and the new arrangements have most certainly not provided a silver bullet, magic pudding or any discernible 'honeymoon' period thus far.

This confirms our experience that volunteers are tuning out the rhetoric and are looking for real and tangible outcomes that are proof of change, not just promises of change.

In many people's minds - deeds and actions are worth more than all the words in the land. That's not to say we shouldn't keep trying but this should act as a sobering reminder that the road to change will be measured by the mile, not the inch and there are rarely any short-cuts.

Anyone who has been involved in change management would have come across the mantra espoused by management consultants inc. who love to sell the allure of 'low hanging fruit'. The theory being that a quick SWOT analysis of any problem will normally reveal some quick wins that promises quick and easy gains for very little effort while you work on the longer-term changes.





As I remarked to an earlier CFA CEO some time ago now – you can forget that snake oil. Previous leadership picked the low hanging fruit years ago, and the orchard is now bare. You'll be lucky to find a branch let alone some fruit. There is no low hanging fruit left. Nadda, zero, zilch. Grab a ladder, roll up your sleeves and be prepared to work hard for next seasons harvest team.

Now speaking of hard work, I want to publicly acknowledge the efforts of new Chief Officer Jason Heffernan who has certainly hit the ground running.

Jason has bought a renewed passion, perspective and enthusiasm to the Chiefs office, with a healthy dose of active questioning about “why do we do it this way?” Similarly, he has prioritised talking and engaging with volunteers in the field and hearing from us firsthand about the volunteer experience of CFA but equally important - listening to volunteers hopes, dreams and aspirations. His regional tours of brigades across the State continues, and from all reports - he is leaving a great first impression.

Volunteers have embraced his unapologetic support for the volunteer ethos and his strong advocacy for volunteer empowerment, trust and respect. He is equally assertive in recognising the vital role that CFA plays in communities right across Victoria.

I have been very pleased to observe the Chief referring collectively to ‘our’ CFA, quickly graduating from interstate visitor to stalwart defender and protector of one of Victoria’s most precious resources. Thank-you Chief, well done – and keep up the good work.

But equally - we as volunteers must also embrace the change journey if we have any hope of influencing it. As volunteers we are equally responsible for the organisation’s leadership and destiny. And for those fatigued by the change journey, the bitterness and many a false start, I would ask we reflect on the proud history of volunteers being the instigators and pioneers of constant positive change and evolution of our fire service over the years. For in many ways – volunteers are in fact leading the charge in demanding change to the organisation through their feedback. If the way things are done now is causing such widespread dissatisfaction -as it clearly is - then we

must commit ourselves to a change journey of fixing it and getting behind that change.

We also must acknowledge that this is going to come very hard to those that have suffered what feels like endless change that has delivered very little tangible outcomes. Change for changes sake is no real change at all. And thought bubbles from on high will not cut it. Embracing volunteers, doing change with them instead of to them – and being respectful of the nuances required to cater to a volunteer-based organization and work force is critical. As is patience, empathy and some good old fashion decency in how people should be treated, embraced and included in discussions about what those changes should be.

Like an elastic band, CFA culture will resist any change that grass root members do not get behind and commit to. The politics of division that have played out of late should also be viewed as the aberration it is. The mantra of divide and conquer has no place in our organisation and is unworthy of the public good and service provided by CFA members and something we should play no part in.

So, the challenge for all of us is not to close ourselves off to all change but rather find a way to assess the potential pros and cons of proposed changes and then decide to either get behind it or not. We shouldn’t be afraid of driving our own change also. I know you are tired, and many of you tell me you are ‘over it’. But let us be the change we want to see. Let’s not resist for resistance sake, but by the same token, if we are not behind a proposed change or see a better way – we owe it to ourselves to speak out and contribute to the discussion.

There was a contribution from Fireman Sam in the October 2009 edition of The Fireman (Fire Wise) (no 862.) The article was titled ‘Cousin Fred’s Letter.’

Keeping in mind that CFA was still very raw after the events of Black Saturday back then, it is instructive of the kind of getting back to basics thinking that should form the genesis of any future CFA improvements. The article should be required reading for anyone in CFA that is contemplating change.



In it, Cousin Fred opines that volunteering is likely to be perceived by the next generation of volunteers as a mugs game. A couple of excerpts:

“However friendly and welcoming the local brigade may be – and I think they are generally warmly so – the recruit is confronted by an obstacle course of bureaucratic requirements and impediments. She or he joined for many and varied reasons, but they include learning a set of skills and applying them – preferably usefully and to somebody’s benefit.”

“They soon discover that most of a brigade’s business is rapid-fire exchange of paperwork with HQ, agonised head scratching about the actual meaning of directives from on high and means of complying with them but seldom any hint of why it should be so.”

“If they joined with any hope of making a difference, they soon realise that, for much of the time and in most of their CFA activities, they are small, insignificant cogs in some complex machine that works in a manner even more mysterious than that of the Almighty to perform wonders that are a public laughing matter and the butt of widespread derision.”

Cousin Fred then leaves little to the imagination in his assessment of management and CFA corporate and signs off as “not-very-cheerfully, Cousin Fred.”

The point of this is not to agonise over the organisation’s collective shortfalls but to reiterate and reinforce the blunt and sobering advice given to Cousin Fred. The gist was - don’t just write about it Fred – do something!

It is in this spirit that I want to thank every single person who has recently contributed and/or taken part in surveys, workshops, VFBV district council meeting discussions or made submissions to recent topics open for formal consultation. You have made a difference and your voice is not only being heard but is helping to shape the future.

For those who have not participated or taken part, please consider getting involved. The strength of CFA is the collective experience and wisdom that comes from within our volunteer ranks, and we have never needed you as much as we do now.

To quote Thomas J. Watson who served as Chair and CEO of IBM between 1914 – 1956 and who oversaw the company’s growth during the early computer revolution - “Once an organisation loses its spirit of pioneering and rests on its early work, its progress stops.”

We have much to be proud – but we can’t just stand still and opine for the ‘good ole days’. Please - stay connected, stay involved and help us continue to influence what comes next.



BLACK SUMMER RECOVERY PROCESS

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer
Published: January 2021

Welcome to a new year, and good riddance to the one just gone. I don't think very many of us will look back on 2020 with much fondness.

And while the start of 2021 has bought back some familiar COVID-19 challenges - let's hope the year ahead heralds the start of a rollout of an effective vaccine and the return to a relative 'normal'.

Speaking of normal, I am relieved to observe a milder season than last year, which has certainly minimised fire activity so far. Thank-you to each and every one of you who have given up time with family, loved ones and friends during the Xmas and New Year break to respond to fires and incidents across your local communities.

And while many have been unable to travel due to border controls, it is a timely reminder that should you be planning to travel locally, you are encouraged to remember those towns that were heavily impacted by last season's bushfires.

Please consider continuing to support these communities with your hard-earned tourist dollars should you be travelling within Victoria over the coming months.

Supporting local businesses in these communities is a wonderful way to support their recovery and help them get back on their feet. And like those communities im-

pacted by the Black Saturday fires of 2009, for many of these communities the road to recovery will take many, many years.

With the anniversary of last year's Black Summer fires in mind, I wish to reflect on the work of VFBV and our delegates who have worked tirelessly with Brigades and members across the State but in particular the North East and South East of Victoria to support volunteers directly impacted by the 2019/20 Black Summer fires.

The VFBV Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust has been working alongside delegates and each of the VFBV District Councils over the last year to provide support and relief grants to those most heavily impacted and requiring additional support.

As I said last year, we know from first hand experience that the journey back takes time, patience and understanding and we are committed to supporting our people for as long as it takes.





Immediately following the fires our Trust, in partnership with the VFBV Welfare Fund, provided over \$133,000 in emergency grants to support CFA volunteers whose primary residence were destroyed by the fires. These grants help supported these members re-establish their homes or relocate should the memory of their loss be too great.

VFBV delegates were on the ground within days of the fires starting and these emergency grants and application process was streamlined and expedited so that support could be provided quickly and without fuss to help those volunteers who lost their primary residence from the fires.

Over the proceeding months, VFBV worked with Captains and Group Officers to identify and reach out to others impacted. This process was made much harder by the proceeding COVID lockdown and restrictions, but we determinedly pushed through and ensured these processes continued despite the COVID challenges.

Similar to the work we conducted following the Black Saturday fires, members were supported through two main special grant initiatives. High Impact Support grants were provided to support volunteers with repairs to their damaged residences, outbuildings, machinery and help members recover from significant livestock, feed or fencing losses.

And smaller general Support and Relief grants were provided to support volunteers with minor repairs or to help replace tools, equipment, pasture and smaller stretches of fencing.

And while this work continues, as at last month the VFBV Volunteer Support & Recovery Trust has paid out more than \$255,500 in grants, on top of the \$133,000 provided in emergency primary residence relief grants representing close to \$400k in direct support to CFA volunteers arising from last season's bushfires. The Trust has now distributed over \$1.1 million dollars since it was established just over 10 years ago following the Black Saturday bushfires. This is an incredible achievement and one members and delegates should be immensely proud.

And as with our Welfare Fund, we have maintained our legacy of ensuring 100% of the money we receive through donations to our charities remains in the trust and is used entirely for grants to volunteers. VFBV covers all the administration and expenses ensuring every dollar received by us is put to good use. It goes without saying that the work of our Trust would not have been possible without the wonderful and generous support of our donors which also reached new levels during last season's bushfires.

The outpouring of support from the general public, international donors and corporate donors especially, was unprecedented. Thank-you also to those Brigades and individuals who made donations.

I wish to acknowledge the Barlow Foundation in particular. The Barlow Foundation was founded by Beverley Barlow and established in 2014. And while Beverly passed away suddenly in 2017, she left a legacy and an inspiration that carries on through her multi-generational family today as demonstrated by the foundation's generous donation last year following the fires to our VFBV Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust.

On behalf of all members I wish to provide our sincerest gratitude to the Barlow Foundations support of our work. In particular I want to thank the Chair and CEO Deborah Barlow and the whole team for their unwavering support for us and for CFA volunteers over the past year. No volunteer ever expects to be impacted by the very same fires they have routinely defended their communities against, which is what makes the work of our Trust so incredibly important when dealing with the fallout of large campaign fires that impact our own.

The VFBV Welfare Fund also notched up an important milestone in recent months, surpassing over \$2 Million dollars paid out in welfare fund grants since its inception in 1918. Last year alone the Welfare Fund recorded the highest demand ever for welfare fund grants, disbursing close to \$300k in emergency grants during 2020 to support CFA volunteers in significant necessitous circumstances. The welfare fund has not experienced anything like that kind of demand since the 2009/2010 period following Black Saturday.



And while we go out of our way to work quietly in the background and without fanfare to be cognisant of our members dignity and privacy, it is important to share these achievements and work so that members can not only share in these positive stories but also have confidence that VFBV continues to have your back and works tirelessly to support you.

Thank-you to all of our delegates that serve as either Trustees or members of the respective Committees of Management for our charities. The work you do to selflessly support our members is incredibly important and much appreciated, and I want to acknowledge the exceptionally high workload that this has bought over the past year.

And while no one ever wants these kinds of events to occur, I have often remarked that the very worst times that mother nature wreaks on us also brings out the very best in human kind.

The compassion, empathy and dedication that not just Australians showed over the last 12 months to those impacted by last summer's bushfires, but also people from across the world. It is not only humbling, but truly inspirational.

So, it is in this spirit that we approach 2021, as we focus on the now and continue to pursue the hopes, dreams and aspirations of all CFA brigades, groups and volunteers.

1000TH EDITION!

And last but by no means least, I wish to congratulate Fire Wise on its 1,000th edition.

Fire Wise (formerly 'The Fireman') has been a trusted and respected source to firefighters across Victoria for more than 70 years. Uniquely, this independent publication has always prioritised giving brigades, members and firefighters an opportunity to contribute to it and make comments on a wide range of issues of the day.

Fire Wise/The Fireman archives provide a unique and fascinating snapshot of CFA, its brigades, and its people over the course of our history.

Gordon Rippon-King, the managing editor of Fire Wise, is in fact the third generation of the King family, after founder and first editor Norman Tosh (Captain of the Warracknabeal Fire Brigade) sold the publication to Gordon's grandfather Les King in 1953.

Les was the editor for 20 years, followed by Alan King who took over in the 1970s who was then followed by the present editor Gordon King in 2001.

Gordon, thank-you for your tireless efforts and dedication in providing a trusted, independent and at times sole source of important information for the benefit of CFA, the associations and CFA volunteers.

Fire Wise is a reassuring constant to thousands of us across the sector. It's been like a dependable and trustworthy friend and has been there through all the good times and the not so good.

Here's hoping for many more pages and the many more stories yet to be told.



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings March 2021

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

March 2021

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

MEMBERS PORTAL UPGRADE

VFBV delegates have requested CFA investigate the procedure for new members accessing the CFA Member portal (Brigades On Line). Currently there is a long process for new members to access the portal where a percentage of their initial training/induction is to be completed. Delegates have requested new members be given their volunteer number and a temporary password when they receive their "Welcome to CFA" pack along with their CFA email address and how to log into the portal.

Delegates have also requested that the search function of the portal be reviewed as volunteer feedback suggests the results are often not similar to the search criteria that is typed in and are generally not sorted into any logical order, making finding the right document time consuming and difficult.

Delegates have also highlighted that access into the Learning Management System (LMS) can involve three separate steps to access the LMS which seems unnecessary and difficult. CFA has agreed to look into these requests and report back to the committee with progress.

RADIO SCANNER FILE - CHANNEL UPDATE

The latest Scanner file is now available to download from Uniden's website. You can access it from: <https://tinyurl.com/rev2update>. Simply click on the 'CFA Upgrade Channel Plan' link. The upgrade instructions can be found on the CFA Member's portal and are the same as those used for the previous update version. The list of the changes and a news article will be posted by CFA on the CFA Members portal shortly.

The default setup of the District channels is the same as the last time in that IMC channels and other fireground channels are set to "avoid" so that it doesn't slow down the scanning performance of the scanner. The 5 "primary" fireground channels are scanned however if members have a particular channel they want to monitor, you can manually "un-avoid" that channel. The "new" RMR Admin and Command Talk groups have also been included and are set to "un-avoid." If members are having difficulty downloading the scanner file please talk to your brigade communications officer or District office for assistance. Committee delegates are also happy to assist.

ICC MULTI-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION ROLLOUT

The upgrade to multi-factor authentication processes in ICC's has continued to be rolled out. This requires the user to enter both a password and a code to log into an Office 365 application. As part of the ICT Cyber Risk Mitigation Project, CFA plans to roll out multi-factor authentication more broadly across the CFA ICT environment. This will enable an app on a mobile device to authenticate when you log onto an Office 365 site if you are not connected by either Citrix or on a CFA local area network.

RADIO CONSOLE PROJECT

VFBV delegates have been advised that the existing Omnitronics 950 Distributed Radio Consoles located at ICC's are at "end of life" and do not support current P25 Digital functionality. As a result of a tender process, Zetron has been awarded the contract to supply ACOM Command & Control Radio Consoles. These are computer based and have full P25 Digital functionality including the capability to access all RMR Talkgroups and CFA Incident Management Channels. The rollout of these new Radio Consoles will continue over the next 6 months. The existing equipment will remain in place until the Zetron consoles are commissioned and appropriate training of users has been completed. The radio consoles in some LCF's are not included as part of this project but are included as part of Stage 2 that is currently unscheduled.

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

MOBILE EDUCATION UNITS (MEU'S)

VFBV committee delegates have been contributing to the Mobile Education Unit (MEU) working group. Members may recall that CFA was funded for two large Mobile Education Units in 2011 as part of the Bushfires Preparedness Program in response to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. Those MEUs were large, modified buses that allowed people to enter and walk through the vehicle. Following multiple evaluations and reviews, in 2018 these buses were found to have safety and reliability issues and were retired from service. An opportunity was identified as part of the Transformative Initiatives program that is funded from public donations received following last year's bushfire season - for an MEU project to be revisited. The emphasis this time round is for Regions to coordinate the community programs and providing a new platform that encourages increased brigade, group and volunteer engagement in their service delivery. The fully funded lease vehicles will be regionally located and managed, with 2 allocated per CFA region. The MEU lifecycle will be 5 years, with lease and annual running costs included in the project budget. The vehicle platform is initially to be built on a Toyota Hiace. This vehicle can be driven on a car licence, which was one of the key priorities identified in the initial consultation. It is expected that the vehicles will be available to each region by April/May 2021, depending on vehicle availability, and any remaining COVID-19 restrictions. Two variants are planned – with the first type being based on a standard design van with the functionality and technology identified through consultation. This model is expected to be delivered this financial year. The second variant would be a vehicle that will have a custom-built rear section and provide a more visible presence at a larger event.

Currently CFA Engineering is working with potential suppliers for the standard design MEU. CFA has told the committee it is expecting that the initial 5 vans will be delivered to Regions this financial year. With the development of the second MEU type, the intention is to build a single prototype, which will then be used for a regional roadshow and consultation, before final specifications are developed and production of the remaining 4 MEU's would commence. It is intended that the MEU vehicles will be available to all members for community engagement, recruitment and promotional activities.

CFA ROADSIDE SIGNAGE

VFBV delegates have long been concerned about the maintenance and upkeep of "CFA Roadside Signage" in the state and the danger to members working alongside busy roadways or near blind spots when updating or maintaining various fire related signage. The areas identified as high risk where in relation to the management of CFA roadside signage, including Fire Danger Rating (FDR), Fire Danger Period (FDP) and 1800 Burn off notification signage on the sides of the road.

Delegates are requesting a systemic review of locations across the State, and for a maintenance program to be initiated to review any signs deemed as being positioned in high risk zones, with the resolution being consideration of relocation to a safer or more accessible area, or replacement with electronic signage that can be updated remotely. As a result of our delegates advocacy, a working group was formed to further escalate the issue to the CFA Health, Safety, Environment & Wellbeing (HSEW) Executive committee. Delegates will continue to monitor progress towards resolution, and will escalate further should progress again stall.

YOUR SAY CFA

A reminder about CFA's online portal – yoursay.cfa.vic.gov.au – CFA's online engagement platform that is available to all members. This portal provides an opportunity, to engage and shape CFA's future while staying up to date with specific projects and getting involved by sharing ideas and providing feedback. For example, the committee has used feedback members provided on the Mobile Education Units through this portal to influence results. Simply use your CFA Member username or member number and password to login.

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Equipment & Infrastructure

March 2021

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

ULTRA HEAVY TANKER

During the 2019/20 fire season the ultra heavy tanker was engaged in the West of the state to assist brigades to cope with the extended season. There were many positive reports regarding the use of the appliance. The current UHT is built on a Hino 4Wd Single Cab chassis with a 6 cylinder turbo charged diesel engine and carries 9000 litres of water. The VFBV/CFA working party continued to meet and have completed the role statement, terms of reference and stowage list for the next version of the build with a tender process initiated late last year.

LIGHT TANKER

In past VFBV 2 minute briefings we have reported on the progress of the working party gathered to look at a replacement to the Light Tanker as the present manufacturers had indicated to CFA the current cab-chassis would no longer be available.

The Working Party is meeting regularly with CFA engineers to develop a Crew Cab Light Tanker prototype with the hope that it can increase the amount of water carried to 2000lt and possibly incorporate a compressed air foam system (CAFS) into the design. The Prototype Light Tanker Role Statement has been developed and a state-wide survey is being finalized. The role statement outlines the operational requirements of the next generation of light tanker. It is intended to build 2 Light Tankers in the initial stages, one as a suitable replacement for the current aging 2.2/2.4D fleet and the second as a prototype Light Tanker without the rear firefighting deck. Both models will have the standard safety features of crew protection, pump and roll capability as well as carrying A Class foam and optional breathing apparatus capability for those brigades with a structure risk.

RESCUE & EMR BRIGADE ADVOCACY

VFBV delegates have strongly supported the call by volunteer rescue brigades from across the state who have been requesting CFA increase their budget to allow for much needed equipment upgrades and specialist response capability. In welcome news, Committee members were recently informed of some new equipment expected to be rolled out soon.

Brigades will see an upgraded battery-operated lighting kit as a part of an aspirational target to remove 240volt power equipment from appliances to improve safety. The new lighting and other specialist equipment will help to ensure operators have a safer experience when attending rescues. New vehicle designs are progressing as well as continued trials of state-of-the-art equipment. VFBV has also supported the concerns raised by rescue brigade members who have reported that the directive to discontinue the use of winches has had an impact on the ability of rescue brigades to undertake some specialist critical work. CFA has been asked to provide an outcome that will allow the use of winches to be used safely. While there has been no outcome to date, delegates will continue to pursue.

EMR upgrades are also progressing for volunteer EMR brigades with new and improved defibrillators equipped with single pad technology, WiFi and Bluetooth data transfer built into the unit. Special training defibs, intelligent training mannequins and the creation of a state training cache for defibs and mannequins are all progressing well.

SPECIALIST RESPONSE MAPPING

CFA has agreed to a VFBV request to provide mapping of specialist vehicles, brigades and functions to assist typology planning. CFA has provided a draft set of maps that show the location of each specialist brigade and the roles undertaken. Resources of this kind and the associated data will be very valuable for future planning as it shows a clear picture of capability and highlights gaps in the response network across the Regions. It is intended that once completed the maps will be available online for BMT's to access and will be able to consult with their District Management and constructively plan for the future.

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

NEW MEDICAL SERVICES PROVIDER - INJURYNET

VFBV has for some time, been advocating for fairer, more user-friendly medical services to be offered to volunteers as volunteer feedback indicates a strong perception that previous health service providers have often failed to deliver consistent, fair and caring medical services. As a result, CFA have engaged the services of Injurynet, commencing 1st December, 2020. Injurynet currently service SES, Ambulance Victoria and Fire & Rescue NSW, and are well versed in the volunteer experience and requirements. Injurynet's Chief Medical Officer oversees a team of medical practitioners across 320 clinics state-wide. Volunteers will now have access to these services in most Districts and should they be unable to attend at the clinic(s), practitioners will call upon them in their homes. In order to ensure consistent processes and decision making, all medical programs will be managed and co-ordinated by CFA Health Services (HQ). VFBV delegates welcome these changes and will closely monitor volunteer experience and feedback.

VFBV has also been pursuing the issue of medical stand downs and concerns with the lack of process and consistency in how these are being managed. CFA have advised there are currently 99 'legacy stand downs' from CFA's previous medical provider which are now being reviewed, with CFA Districts currently following each case up. The committee will continue to monitor and have requested a regular update on the progress of the 'legacy stand downs' throughout the year.

CFA DISCIPLINE PROCESS

The Committee discussed CFA's ongoing commitment to the overhaul and improvement of the Complaints Process and has worked with CFA on a "Customer Satisfaction Survey", which will be provided to complainants and respondents to comment on their experience of the Complaints Process. Volunteer delegates welcome this initiative and believe the survey will elicit responses that address issues including timeliness, support of volunteers and updating/feedback provided to volunteers, throughout the process. Historically volunteers have told VFBV that these have been major stumbling blocks for CFA and some volunteers have been left for months, even years without support, feedback or progress reports on their case. It is hoped proposed changes will help to eliminate these concerns.

In the past, VFBV has received feedback from volunteers about their experience of investigators and much of that feedback has been very positive. In many cases volunteer's felt heard, respected, and were given ample time to prepare for interviews and meetings and were afforded time to consider and answer questions during the interview process. Conversely, VFBV has also received negative feedback. In order to monitor and measure the level of expertise and professionalism of investigators both internal and external, VFBV has requested the provision for volunteers to comment on the investigator and the interview as part of the Customer Service Survey and have requested a summary of outcomes for each quarter.

DIABETES

The Committee was addressed by the CFA's Health Services Manager who confirmed VFBV's contention, that according the AFAC guidelines, the individual's management plan and medication can vary depending on the severity of the Endocrine disorder and that the medical practitioner and / or specialist will determine the health impact on their firefighting role. VFBV welcomes this confirmation and clarification and hopes that in future there will be meaningful collaboration between a volunteer's specialist and CFA's Medical Service Provider, Injurynet to determine the safest and most productive pathway to return to CFA duties for volunteers.

This is a positive outcome, and is a direct result of VFBV's advocacy that members with diabetes deserve for their individual health to be assessed by medical professionals in consultation with their own specialist to determine their eligibility - rather than a blanket ban on them contributing to CFA's operational activities as has happened in the past.

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Operations

March 2021

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

FIRE INVESTIGATORS

Late last year, volunteer Fire Investigators were reporting little to no progress on removing the arbitrary impediments that have been introduced by FRV that limit the use of volunteer fire investigators. After strong representations by VFBV over the last couple of months, CFA has reported that a 'status quo' arrangement is finally in place and volunteer fire investigators can and must be engaged to ensure service delivery is maintained. VFBV continues to point out that volunteer fire investigators undertake the same training and skills maintenance as their FRV counterparts, so there is no legitimate reason why they cannot continue to undertake investigations, and not doing so is clearly discriminating against volunteers. VFBV will continue to pursue an outcome and will monitor progress.

LONG TERM VACANCIES

Volunteers continue to raise issues with delegates regarding the long-term vacancies and the difficulties this poses for brigades in many Districts. Members have asked if CFA can develop a simple online portal where a brigade member or BMT can quickly look up online who their respective ACFO, Commander and district personnel are for the week or month ahead. This type of transparency for brigades will help members know in advance who they can talk to at a district level to get their queries answered and for brigades to know who will be available for meetings and special occasions like medal presentations etc. Groups have similarly advised VFBV that they are now being asked to fill the gap where District staff cannot, however this has highlighted a flow on effect and that more support will then have to be given to Group resources and the need for a process to be developed for brigades to request assistance at the District and Regional level.

FIRE GROUND TABARDS

Many years ago, EMV led a review of fire ground tabards involving all response and non-response agencies and settled on a state standard. VFBV was supportive of this multi-agency approach and the colours and designs of the new tabards were approved. Despite CFA previously advising the committee back in 2019 that agreement had been received from all the agencies and tabards would be available under the new State contract from the State Logistics Centre these tabards are still not yet available and there is no confirmed date for their arrival. Delegates will continue to pursue and raise until the issue is resolved.

ASSISTANCE FOR CO-LOCATED BRIGADES

VFBV continues to strongly advocate for the co-located brigades as they continue to transform to volunteer only brigades as result of the fire service reform. VFBV Delegates on the Ops Committee have consistently requested updates on the types of support the new brigades would be afforded to help them as they transition to stand alone brigades. Many brigades have reported that the long and tedious progress on the Tenancy Agreement and asset statements has left many greatly concerned about the long term assistance that may be available and have called on CFA to provide a heightened level of support as they continue to work through reform issues. Many brigades are still unsure about assistance for administrative requirements and training. VFBV will continue to support the co-located brigades to build capacity and delegates on the Ops Committee have called on CFA to offer further assistance and support.

CFA has advised that the responsibility for brigade support is primarily through the Region and District, and ACFO's are being requested to provide and co-ordinate this front-line support for co-located brigades. VFBV urges brigades to continue to monitor and escalate issues of concern through their local chain of command in the first instance. Where this does not address the issue, VFBV will support brigades with escalation to the Deputy Chief layer for resolution.

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

INSTRUCTOR HELMETS

VFBV representatives to the Joint Training Committee have received questions from volunteers in relation to CFA's reluctance to confirm the use of blue helmets worn by volunteer trainer and assessors at training grounds to identify them as trainers. In some instances, volunteers have been told that they can no longer wear a blue helmet because of supposed EBA stipulations and CFA's concern of industrial action. VFBV are advocating strongly to CFA that fire service reform and changes in legislation were supposedly designed to stop EBA's interfering with volunteers therefore VFBV does not accept any impacts on volunteer trainer and assessors wearing blue helmets when conducting training. CFA has committed to VFBV, a status quo arrangement until further consultation concludes, which means that those who currently have been issued with blue helmets can continue to wear them when conducting training including at a training ground. VFBV urges members who are told that they cannot wear blue helmets to make a formal complaint in writing to CFA and let VFBV know of the incident so that it can be followed up in a timely manner. VFBV will not accept volunteers being mistreated and disadvantaged and expect CFA to protect them from any unlawful discrimination or harassment.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Since the inception of CFA's Learning Management System (LMS), VFBV has continually received feedback from volunteers that the system is hard to operate and confusing to utilise. VFBV has advocated extremely hard in this area for a long time and has recently been briefed on a number of improvements that CFA have made to LMS to make it more user friendly and efficient, saving volunteers time and frustration. These new changes have recently been turned on and incorporate the ability for LMS to adapt to the use on smart phones, tablets as well as computers, ensuring that entering drills and reports are more streamlined and manageable. These changes come at the same time in which CFA have formally engaged with VFBV to test and trail the capability of 4G enabled tablets, envisaged to be issued to trainers and assessors to assist them in their roles. VFBV is happy with these changes and will continue to encourage more changes as required. For further information on these changes or for assistance with LMS please contact your local Learning and Development Team.

MOBILE TRAINING PROPS

CFA has approved the use of Mobile Training Props to once again be released to Brigades for skills maintenance training, via group bookings. VFBV has been encouraging this outcome with delegates advocating strongly on advice from members for the resumption of training props to become available. VFBV has also been excited to learn that 2 new pressure vessel (LPG Bullet) props are now commissioned and available to bookings with further developed kitchen props expected in 2021. Mobile Training Props can be booked by visiting the Mobile Training Prop page on Members Online or by speaking to your local Training Coordinator.

DONOR FUNDED TRAINING INITIATIVES

VFBV delegates have recently been formally engaged by CFA to be consulted on 3 new training initiatives in which CFA were successful in obtaining donations money for. These projects include the further development of Crew Leader and Strike Team Leader courses, Increased training capacity for new members and Volunteer digital learning. Although these projects are broad VFBV is excited to enhance the training ability and capacity for all volunteers and will work collaboratively through sub-committees and other forums to ensure suitable outcomes for members. VFBV's annual Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey consistently outlines volunteers concerns with training. These results have played a major part in assisting CFA to secure additional funding to rectify training issues and improve training for the future

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

RURAL DECLINE PROJECT

Volunteers have for some time shared CFA's concern over a declining and aging population in some parts of rural Victoria and the effect this will have on the organisations ability to sustain viable community support through fire brigades. With less members available it is more important than ever for CFA to be seen as an organisation of choice to prospective volunteers. VFBV delegates are requesting CFA forward plan additional support for Brigades in these areas. The Volunteer Sustainability Team (VST) had planned a multi agency workshop during 2020 but this has had to be delayed due to the COVID pandemic. Delegates will continue to encourage this to go ahead when restrictions are lifted. VST also has a working group that will continue to work with communities on this valuable project. Delegates will continue to ensure that this remains a key priority and that volunteers are involved in the project and will continue to engage and review plans in collaboration with CFA to have best practice for affected Brigades.

BRIGADE MANAGEMENT APP

The Brigade Management App is another project from the Recruitment and Retention Team which is being scoped to improve the recording of member activities and time spent on CFA related activities. It is intended to cover all other duties and tasks completed by a member, such as cleaning, gardening, attending various meetings, maintenance and other activities not covered by FIRS, LMS or community safety (ART) and is intended to assist brigades recognise and reward all contributions to CFA activity. This is useful information for areas such as nominations for awards, applying for grants and general promotion to the public of how much commitment is made by volunteers to their communities.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Delegates have been discussing significant cultural heritage sites and what planning can be done to help brigades protect sites that are of cultural value. Cultural Heritage Advisor Michael Sherwen attended the most recent meeting of the Committee and gave delegates a very informative presentation on his role and responsibilities.

The Committee discussed and reviewed state-wide programs such as the rehabilitation of an aboriginal heritage site in Ruffy, practice notes to assist Vegetation Management Officers in their planning process, training package to help members understand cultural areas, Joint Fuel Management Programs and ensuring more members are involved with the heritage program to make sure we meet the needs of the local people. Michael acknowledges local CFA members skills and experience in protection of these sites to ensure better planning and also looking at alternative ways to protect and preserve these sites from fire.

INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

The Information for Families guide is designed to support family members and/or caregivers of new members by giving them tailored information about what experiences and impacts volunteering with CFA may have on them and their families. The guide was developed in recognition that being a volunteer impacts not only the CFA member, but also their families.

Ensuring families are informed about what it means to be a part of CFA contributes to the health, safety, wellbeing, inclusion and ultimately retention of CFA members. The Information for Families guide can be accessed on the CFA website for current members and their families. New members will receive a resource booklet, with access details, to pass on to their family members in their Welcome to CFA pack.

Both these resources have been developed through a strong collaboration between CFA and VFBV volunteer working group to support new members on their volunteer journey and connect them with the new General Firefighter training package. If you have any questions please contact the project team at: volunteers-strategy@cfa.vic.gov.au



CFA – VFBV FIREFIGHTER CHAMPIONSHIPS

- ✓ TEAM WORK
- ✓ LEADERSHIP
- ✓ HEALTH AND WELLBEING
- ✓ SKILLS
- ✓ COMING TOGETHER
- ✓ TRADITION

CELEBRATING CFA



Urban Junior State Championships

20/21 March 2021, Mooroopna

Urban Senior State Championships

27/28 March 2021, Mooroopna

Rural State Senior Championships

27 March 2021, Mooroopna

Rural State Junior Championships

28 March 2021, Mooroopna