

# VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



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

VFBV delegates work tirelessly to advocate and represent CFA volunteers, and anything we can do to improve member awareness of this important work - the better. VFBV is your association, so please stay connected and get involved.

Adam Barnett  
CEO, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria

## Additional Resources and Updates Available Electronically

COVID-19 Financial Support Resources	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup11">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup11</a>
Mental Health Support – Provisional Payments	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup19">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup19</a>
R U OK? Day – Thurs 9 <sup>th</sup> September	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup22">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup22</a>

## VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

Your September enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. AGM Postponement	Please table and note
2. Editorial: Resilience and unity of purpose	Please table and note
3. Joint Committee Expression of Interest	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
4. Editorial: Selfless, courageous and vital	Please table and note
5. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
6. 2021 VFBV Welfare & Efficiency Survey Pre-registration	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard

# **SPECIAL NOTICE**

## Annual General Meeting Postponement



After reviewing the current Victorian Health Guidelines, the Australian National Plan to Transition National COVID Response and advice from Consumer Affairs Victoria, the VFBV Board have authorised a three-month extension and postponed this year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) to December 2021.

Planning has commenced to hold this year's AGM to coincide with the December State Council meeting, currently scheduled for Sunday 5th December 2021. Further details of arrangements will be provided closer to the date.

The Board have also endorsed and approved State Council's recommendation that all Board, State Council and Welfare Fund office holder's terms that were due to expire in October 2021, will be extended through to December 2021.

# Resilience and unity of purpose

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: August 2021

On day of writing, Victoria has just entered lockdown #6. I don't want to dwell on the unavoidable impacts they have not just on people's livelihoods but also their mental state, other than to say I want to acknowledge the many, many thousands of community members doing it tough. Both here in Victoria and elsewhere across Australia.

Volunteer fire brigades right across the country are drawn from the very same communities we protect and are therefore intrinsically linked. When the community is going through a hard time, this often washes through our brigades.

I want to acknowledge how hard it can be to be positive with so much uncertainty around.

I repeat my message that one of the great challenges through the pandemic has been how to best maintain the social and support structures that are embedded across our network of 1,217 community fire brigades. I want to acknowledge and congratulate the innovative ways brigades are coming up with to best maintain those links and keep members as connected as can be - in new covid safe ways. While frustrating and far from ideal - the resilience on display across our network of brigades and amongst our members continues to inspire.

Please don't lose sight of the fact that your local brigade is acting as a beacon of light to many within your communities. You are setting the tone, modelling calm, professional and stable leadership, civic duty and proving that our service delivery level commitment to our communities remains steadfast and can withstand the greatest of pressures. You are there when they need you and you are doing the best you can to support your communities through these challenging times.

Despite some close shaves, brigades that have been impacted by ongoing Tier 1 and Tier 2 exposure sites and close contacts over the months have used redundancies and neighbouring brigade/group relationships to ensure members can safely isolate, while ensuring brigade coverage and operation is maintained.

The true resilience and strength of community embedded fire brigades has been on full display. You have maintained an exceptional record, and while we are not yet through it, you have every right to be exceptionally proud.

Please remember that the full impacts of this pandemic impact on each of us in very different ways, and often at different times. If you are struggling, or know someone who needs help, please utilise the wellbeing and welfare services available to all CFA members and their immediate families 24 hours day, 7 days a week. You can access these via 1800 959 232 or via [cfa.vic.gov.au/wellbeing](https://cfa.vic.gov.au/wellbeing)



Financial support resources are also available from the VFBV website, which provides some quick links to both State and Federal support, including details of our welfare fund. This year's welfare fund subscription is being offered at a one-off 50% discount and brigade membership covers the entire brigade, all its members and even any ex-members who have served 20 years or more.

### CFA Restructure

On 2 August, CFA's new refreshed organisational structure became effective, with interim executives in place while permanent recruitment is underway.

I want to congratulate CFA CEO Natalie MacDonald and Chief Officer Jason Heffernan on their commitment to seeking feedback and input from both volunteers and staff during their restructure, and most importantly sharing how that feedback was used and taken into account in final decisions. This represents a refreshing commitment to genuine and robust dialog and consultation.

Both Natalie and Jason have acknowledged that transition to the new structure is not a one-off event and there is still much work to progress. I also want to acknowledge that restructures can be challenging, especially for those staff directly impacted by reporting line changes etc. and I would ask members to please show some empathy and patience while individuals work through any changes that directly impact upon those people.

As volunteers, we have seen more than our fair share of change over recent times. And unlike this change, it has often been thrust upon us, with no opportunity to be in-

volved or consulted. So I would ask you to please draw on those experiences as a reminder to be kind and patient to anyone who may be struggling with some of the unintended uncertainty that restructures sometimes create.

One of the largest changes to the structure is a renewed focus on ensuring service delivery decisions and leadership is provided at lower levels and those closest to the ground are empowered to lead. In other words – decisions impacting upon brigades and groups being predominantly managed at the regional and district level – rather than at HQ level.

In many ways – this decentralisation logic is well supported by results from the VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency survey. It is clear from our survey, that typically the closer an “issue” is managed to volunteers – generally the more satisfied they are with the results.

This in essence is why VFBV is designed by structure to empower our local District Councils as the local face of the VFBV network. Local brigades, groups and delegates all working together to solve issues of mutual interest, with clear and formalised escalation pathways to deal with those issues unable to be resolved at the local level.

This is both our strength and curse.

Strength – in that it is one of the most effective ways to resolve issues, with most issues being sorted at the local level first. It can however be a curse. If it's done well, it is likely you will never hear about most of the successes. A biproduct of the escalation process and structure means those at the higher levels of the structure (think Board and State Council) are often left with just the hardest and more difficult issues that no-one else has been able to solve. Often times these people are left to resolve some very difficult and complex issues, often exacerbated by a lack of consensus from the membership on preferred approaches. Let's be honest - if they were easy – they would have been solved long ago by now.

Hence why you will hear me frequently paying homage to those volunteers who choose to serve at senior levels at either District Council, State Council or the Board. These members work day and night, often with very little thanks to try and resolve issues of critical importance to our volunteers. VFBV officials are usually the first-person people go to with a problem or criticism, yet they are often the last people to hear a compliment, thank you, or praise.

On the flip side, when changes are made, when good outcomes are finally realised or achieved, there is much personal pride and satisfaction drawn from knowing that if it weren't for the hard work done behind the scenes by your officials and representatives – it would not have happened.

It's the nature of the work, and why I respect our senior officials as much as I do, and why you should too. It can be thankless and unrewarding at times, but each person is driven by a pure and noble duty and dedication to wanting to improve arrangements for volunteers and ensure our communities are well supported and resourced to deliver a safe and effective community embedded emergency service.

The new CFA structure and focus on regional/district accountability will bring a renewed focus on consultation at the region/district level. Without careful planning, systems

and processes this renewed decentralisation has the potential to feed the old beast of state-wide inconsistency and promote little fiefdoms.

We are all going to have work incredibly hard to ensure our systems and processes adapt to cater for stronger, more robust, flexible and transparent consultation occurring at the Region/District level. For our District Councils, this will mean an increased workload in local issue resolution and building productive and effective relationships with local management.

The good news, as I reported last year was I have been very encouraged to see some of the Deputy Chief Officer Regions (now called Deputy Chief Officer – Service Delivery) working hard to form structured and formalised regular meetings with their District Council Executive members and State Councillors to ensure regular dialog between the District Council and management and provide a robust mechanism to resolve issues raised by brigades and groups in a timely manner. This will now need to extend to District management, and my expectation will be to see a proactive approach taken by local management to engage with their local volunteer leadership groups, including our District Council executives.

I too am working hard with Natalie and Jason to ensure we have some strengthened state level processes to help monitor consistency and equity between approaches, and am also optimistic that there are enough ‘wise heads’ across the CFA executive at both state and regional level that share a healthy respect and appreciation for the importance of genuine engagement and consultation with volunteers.

For it to work will require commitment from all sides, and I would encourage members to embrace the change as an opportunity to return to the era of more genuine and responsive engagement and participation in the leadership of one of Victoria's most trusted and respected services, our CFA.

It is a known fact that peer groups (like volunteer associations) who have strong shared goals are more likely to prioritise group needs over individual self-interest. It breeds better cooperation and collaboration and is strongly associated with feelings of belonging, solidarity and trust.

There is a fitting quote attributed to Bill Bradley, an American author, NBA basketball player, US Senator and US Airforce Reservist.

“Respect your fellow human being, treat them fairly, disagree with them honestly, enjoy their friendship, explore your thoughts about one another candidly, work together for a common goal and help one another achieve it. No destructive lies. No ridiculous fears. No debilitating anger.”

I will finish this month by again encouraging you to engage with your District Council, engage with your local representatives and be part of the change. We still have plenty of land mines to avoid and step over, but our greatest strength comes from our unity of purpose. Please don't just use your District Council as a complaints box. We are at our best not only when we are working together to resolve issues of concern, but also when we are working together to pursue shared goals, aspirations and our vision for a Safer Victoria.

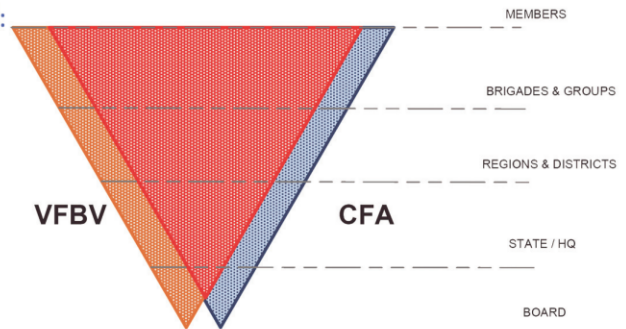


# JOINT COMMITTEE

## Expression of Interest

VFBV/CFA Joint Committees are one of the critical components of our State level consultative framework. There are seven main Joint Committees comprising of:

- Communications & Technology Committee
- Community Safety Committee
- Equipment and Infrastructure Committee
- HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee
- Operations Committee
- Training Committee
- Volunteerism Committee



Joint Committees work collaboratively with CFA, meeting and working through issues aligned to the subject matter for each committee.

Joint Committees are made up of volunteer delegates nominated by VFBV, and CFA representatives nominated by the CFA Executive. State Councillors select a Joint Committee they would like to contribute to, and in September each year, State Council initiates an expression of interest process to provide an opportunity for any volunteer to nominate to a committee as a subject matter expert.

Members considering nominating as a volunteer delegate should consider:

- the requirement to attend a minimum of 4 meetings per year at CFA HQ in Burwood, usually held on a Saturday or Sunday.
- Relevant subject matter expertise and the ability to actively contribute to the Committee's work.
- An extensive network outside their own brigade which will allow them to communicate views that are not just their own.
- A willingness to attend VFBV District Council to provide updates on the Committee's work

If you feel you can contribute and have the time, are passionate about one of the seven streams and want to be an integral part of the VFBV/CFA Joint Committee process then please talk to your local VFBV State Councillor delegates or a VFBV Support Officer for a nomination form. All nominees must be endorsed by their local VFBV District Council.

**Nominations are due to your District Council no later than 14th November 2021.**

# Selfless, courageous and vital

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: July 2021

It would not be Victoria if we didn't have the need to deal with wild and unpredictable weather throughout the year. Last month's flood/ storm event caused significant widespread damage. And while the storms peaked over 9 and 10 June, the flow on flooding and damage to electricity distribution is still being felt today.

In the 24 hours to 10am Thursday 10 June, Mt Baw Baw had recorded 280mm of rain and 119kph wind gusts were recorded at Puckapunyal. As that day developed, more than 215,000 residents were without power, with thousands expected to be without power for weeks.

By the end of June, more than 550 personal hardship assistance payments had been made by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and in excess of 3,890 residential customers were being assessed for continuing prolonged power outage payments. VFBV distributed a Storm/Flood Recovery Resource Fact Sheet to assist members understand what support was available.

The assistance of the Australian Defence Forces was well received, with the CFA State Logistics Centre acting as the main staging area for the distribution of generators, with a local sub staging area established at Olinda volunteer fire brigade.

On the Thursday morning alone, VicSES had received well in excess of 4,500 requests for assistance. Over the following days VicSES would record over 10,000 requests for assistance during the event, which is more than half of the average amount received in an average year.

I join my good friends at the VICSES Volunteer Association (VICSESVA) in congratulating all SES members on an incredible job and thank them for their tireless efforts. Emergency Management volunteers demonstrated yet again how critically important it is to have these emergency management capabilities and capacities within our communities. While these communities were cut off from the world, it was the local units, brigades and community organisations that were on the ground, serving their communities and doing what needed to be done. Often at times, on their own and doing the best they could with what they had.

I want to acknowledge the frustration felt by many and raised with me regarding the view that elements of local knowledge was again absent in the early stages of the State's control arrangements. And while there are certainly differing views on whether that was indeed a perception or fact, it is a timely reminder that ensuring local knowledge is embedded within our emergency structures is critical.



In my observation, the use of local knowledge is much more than simply designating 'locals' within our incident management structures. It is also about linking local brigades, units and community organisations with appropriate information to triage and streamline relevant information and the collecting/ transmitting of valuable operational intel and observations.

Many of our process and systems simply rely on someone occupying a position within an IMT to establish what we think are the local linkages. However, some thought on how these linkages actually operate and how information is disseminated is key. Calls for increased focus on closing the loop and not only tapping into local knowledge but sharing how it is being used and influencing arrangements would provide stronger confidence at the local level that the structures are indeed working and local intel is influencing decisions.

Anything that increases confidence and morale during the early stages of developing incidents is certainly a key focus we will be encouraging to be raised through after action reviews. 'Fog of war' is a military term I often use to explain how local brigades and units operate in the early stages of developing incidents. And while great advances have been made to provide those at the top with good intel and information, the view on the ground is they have not been so fortunate. Rather than argue for one or the other, the clear message is we need both.

The Emergency Management Commissioner has cer-

tainly indicated his willingness to sit down and discuss how systems can be strengthened with local brigades and units, and these are important conversations we will be encouraging and supporting.

These local community capabilities are not built by accident, and must be cherished, respected and protected so they are there when we need them. For them to operate safely and effectively means they must be well trained, well exercised and well utilised to keep their skills and experience at the forefront and ensure all members return safely home. This is why VFBV is so passionate about empowering communities to build volunteer surge capacity, and it is one of the central obligations of government to build and support effective community capability and resilience for a safer Victoria.

Time and time again, emergency management volunteers demonstrate their intrinsic value and critical role during emergencies, and it should not just be immediately following disasters when our politicians are lining up for their media grabs.

As one would expect CFA brigades played a critical and significant role during this event. While strike teams were tasked to assist SES, I want to draw attention to the efforts and initiatives of local brigades, and the untiring and courageous work of CFA volunteers who did not stop for weeks on end.

During the height of the storms, and for many days and weeks following – entire communities were cut off by fallen trees and debris. Many CFA volunteers were cut off from their stations – as were many stations cut off from reaching all parts of their community. Volunteers were required to operate in little cells coordinating by phone or radio to get to trapped residences. Fortunately, brigade phone trees enabled Captains, Lieutenants and Group Officers to coordinate CFA crews in their private vehicles to do urgent reconnaissance and respond to urgent requests for assistance involving rescues and danger to life.

These were systems and processes created long before computer aided dispatch and pagers, and is yet another reminder of the inherent agility, flexibility and ingenuity of volunteer brigades serving their local communities.

It was also a bit of a challenge to the way things 'are normally done' which did create some tension and stress points within the more formalised structures and management. This serves as a really good reminder of the culture shift now underway within CFA as it adapts to a fully volunteer model.

Volunteers join to serve their communities, and when our communities need us – we are there. In the heat of the moment - they are not too bothered by the typical 'whose job is this' line of thinking and CFA members constantly demonstrate they can be trusted and counted on to be disciplined, safe and professional. Bureaucracy does not traditionally support or enhance this fast and decentralised command and control, so it is unsurprising that friction points often emerge during these kinds of events.

And while this can be challenging for the organisation at times, especially when we are the support agency, there is always the dual obligation to ensure we have maintained our capacity to respond to fire. I strongly support the local view that these obligations are not mutually exclusive, and history shows we can capably deal with multiple simultaneous incidents as we do all the time and have shown great capacity to stay focussed on our primary goals without rigidly sacrificing our ability to support our peers, whether that be SES, Police, Ambulance or Defence.

The same holds true for relief and recovery works. This work often cannot just sit and wait until the emergency is over, especially when we are dealing with long protracted incidents. The line between response and recovery is not a wall of steel and often both need to be occurring hand in glove with each other.

I highlight the stories of Brigades in affected communities throwing open their doors to provide central places to coordinate relief and recovery efforts. Local brigades teaming up with the Salvos to offer hot meals for residents who had lost their power or whose homes had become unsafe while community relief centres were being established and outfitted.

Brigades running door knocks to check in and monitor isolated or vulnerable community members and ensuring they were aware of critical services as lead agencies and local councils worked on clearing roads and repairing damaged infrastructure.

This is what sets CFA and SES apart and makes local volunteer brigades and units so special and so essential. It's what attracts civic minded people to join in the first place. To actually help those in need.

For all those who think leadership is just a top-down exercise, take a long hard look at the collaboration and unity of effort demonstrated by local volunteers and crews who didn't care what colour their PPC was, or if they were from a response agency, a relief agency or a community support organisation.

These are the stories of an organisation that doesn't just put the community at the centre of everything it does because someone wrote it on a brochure or stuck it in an annual report. This isn't the work of spin doctors or PR consultants. The public knows what you do, it recognises the value of what you do. And simply put – this is why volunteers occupy and have earned such a special place in the communities' hearts and minds. You are selfless, courageous, and vital.

If Nike hadn't trademarked it, 'just do it' would make a very fitting description of what CFA brigades do each and every day.

Well done to all members and bravo on a job very well done.





**VFBV** | VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

## **2 Minute Briefings September 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

September 2021

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

#### RADIO REPLACEMENT PROJECT

VFBV has welcomed the news that the bid to Government to fund the replacement of the current redundant radio system (including radios) has been approved. The \$126 million project will introduce new radios into the service across the state. The project has a 2 ½ year timeframe and will involve EMV and ESTA to ensure continuity with current systems in other emergency service agencies. Delegates look forward to working with CFA as consultation occurs with the project planning, selection and radio allocation policy updates. It is hoped that user-pilots will be well established by mid next year.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY ALERT SERVICE (SAS)

The Supplementary Alerting Service (SAS) has now over 13,000 members currently signed up to the new app. Version 4.0 update was recently delivered with improved functionality and 'bug' fixes that have been reported by volunteers. Developers are now working on future versions which will continue to deliver a system that is fully functional with user enhancements focusing on member availability and better administration improvements. A project support member has recently been approved to continue to work with developers on current issues with SAS as well as future releases and planning for the next 12 months. The SAS volunteer work group continues to meet and highlight and prioritise updates and enhancements, as well as support material. CFA will continue to communicate with members on the expected date for the next release. Members currently signed up to SAS can access FAQ sheets, user guide, support and helpdesk via the CFA members online website.

#### MEMBERS PORTAL

Delegates were pleased to get an update regarding the changes to the members portal but still expressed concerns that changes are going ahead without proper consideration and consultation with volunteers before changes are made. CFA has agreed to better utilise the 'Your Say CFA' portal on the CFA website to better engage and get broader member's input. Delegates have expressed the importance of building systems that are based on member feedback - as the main objective of the portal is to get more members online. Members have highlighted in the past one of the key areas that needs improvement is the search area which currently is very difficult and confusing to use. Training content has also been highlighted as one of the areas that volunteers find difficult to navigate and developers have promised to ensure the training page and Learning Management System (LMS) are easier to access. The next upgrade is expected shortly.

#### FIRS UPDATE

Delegates have long advocated for changes to CFA's Fire Incident Reporting System (FIRS) - advocating that brigades require better access to enter data directly rather than relying on a paper based or phone-in type system. CFA has committed to using results from the online (support calls only) FIRS pilot to investigate and trial an expanded online system which would allow brigades to enter incident data for all calls directly through the app. The main objective of the platform will be to allow brigades to access the application and manage incident records themselves. Currently if a brigade wishes to access records they must phone into the SDRC (Service Delivery Reporting Centre) with only a very small number of brigades having direct access. The new system will allow brigades that wish to interact with the system directly to be able to do this themselves, when and where is most convenient, on an easy-to-use platform. There are a range of benefits from such an application; decreased calls between SDRC and brigades; improved incident reportability; improved compliance; more accurate data; and a technology lift up. The planned roll-out is expected to have 3 phases as it continues, rollout of the Support Report, rollout of the Primary Report and finally Reporting/Dashboard/Further Enhancements.

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

#### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

CFA has informed the committee that it is intending to launch a new revised Community Engagement Framework. The framework is expected to have 3 overarching documents and is said to be grounded by the broader CFA engagement strategy that is based on CFA values. Delegates have noted the work done to date but have requested that CFA ensure appropriate engagement and consultation occur not only with the Committee but also the broader volunteer membership. CFA has committed to providing the draft framework for comment and feedback shortly.

The updated 'Community Engagement Newsletter' is one aspect of the work created by the community engagement team to better connect with Regions. Currently the newsletter is used to inform staff across the regions but responding to feedback, CFA now wishes to extend this to all volunteer Community Safety Co-ordinators so they are better informed of issues occurring within their patch. Delegates are supportive of this approach and has requested more involvement with this important work.

#### MOBILE EDUCATION UNITS

A small working group has been meeting with the Mobile Education Unit Project team and CFA engineering to complete a role statement and equipment list for the Mobile Education Units (MEU). CFA received \$950,000 from the CFA Donations Trust to go towards 10 MEUs to be distributed across the state. The vehicles will be available to brigades to use at open days, markets, community education events and fire safety awareness days for Community Safety Officers to deliver bushfire safety education to Victorian communities, schools, public events and tourist hotspots. The vehicles will also be able to be deployed to support and educate communities during major incidents. The vans will be fully self-supported with battery management system and solar panels for events where 240 volt power is unavailable. It is proposed to build several smaller units and some larger vehicles for use at significant events. All units will be able to be driven on a standard car licence and will come fully equipped to ensure a consistent fire safety message is delivered to communities across the state.

#### COMMUNITY SAFETY CONTENT PORTAL

There have been some significant changes made recently to the Community Safety content portal as a consequence of member feedback. The content portal is a one stop shop for Community Engagement brigade members to access information, programs, and key messages for your community. Content portal videos have been developed to assist members to log in and navigate the resources available as well as easy to access tabs directing members to common areas of interest. To access the page, type CFA Content Portal into the search box of the CFA members area on the CFA website, or go to the Members online homepage and click Programs – Community Programs and the link for the portal is on the right.

#### CONTENT REVIEW

For some time now delegates have been asking to be directly involved in the publication review process, in the last two minute briefings in June delegates reported of their wish to strengthen the consultation and engagement process when reviewing publications. A new content development and review process has been developed to give greater clarity around the work that goes into content review and development and hopes to provide a consistent approach making it easier to prioritise reviews. There are currently 51 publications, animations, videos, key messages, corporate campaigns as well as web and internet content being reviewed. Delegates are excited that they can finally have greater input into the review and guidance on the key messages sent out to communities. Delegates reminded CFA that while the new content is welcome there needs to also be a quality control process to ensure that the old publications are removed from service when the new content is distributed, and to ensure sufficient time is provided to consult more broadly with the membership.

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

#### F15 STRUCTURAL HELMET STOWAGE

The stowage options in appliances for the new F15 structural helmet has provided CFA engineering with many challenges. Members would understand that this process is complicated due to the many variants in CFA's fleet of Tanker, Pumpers and specialist vehicles however work is progressing, and delegates continue to advocate strongly for appropriate stowage options. Priority was given to Pumpers (due to the higher proportion of F15 helmets) and now the DMO workshops are carrying out the changes to Tankers as required. Thanks must go to the brigades that tested brackets and bags and provided feedback to CFA to ensure the best option was chosen. There have been many challenges with consideration given to passenger safety, accessibility and compliance with OH&S regulations and vehicle limitations. Brackets and bags have been ordered and are due to be fitted to tankers in the near future.

#### FUTURE STATION DESIGN

Delegates are continuing to request CFA consider a significant review of new station designs. With innovation and technology progressing in leaps and bounds volunteer stations have not had a substantive design review since 2013. Many brigades are retrofitting stations with alternative energy sources to reduce their carbon footprint and using grant money and community funds to bring their stations up to modern building compliance. There are many brigades that are looking at OH&S concerns with ventilation and are requesting mechanical ventilation of motor rooms, separate turnout rooms, motorisation of doors, security upgrades and changeroom and toilet upgrades. VFBV is advocating for a full review of designs and broad engagement with brigades to discuss future options.

In related news, delegates have requested the close monitoring of the ACT emergency Service Agency (ESA) development of a concept zero emission hybrid electric fire truck that is in development. The intent will be to use the ACT's research and development to learn from and inform future discussions and technology options for the future.

#### MEDIUM PUMPER REVIEW

DPC's and VFBV District Councils have reported on early discussions occurring at the local levels regarding the upcoming refurbishment/replacement of ageing medium pumpers. The committee was told there are currently 50 of the NSW back pumpers that will need refurbishment or replacement in the next few years. The current medium pumper built on the Scania cab chassis is considered by many to be a very capable appliance that meets the needs of users. While CFA has no immediate plans to build any new medium pumpers - committee members have seen the upcoming future replacement deadlines as an opportunity to instigate a timely review of the current Scania type 3 medium pumpers. CFA has agreed to work with VFBV to establish a process to begin the review. We will keep you informed as this work progresses.

#### STORZ UPDATE

In a good news story for volunteer persistence, CFA has committed to fully fund the completion of the Storz coupling rollout across the state.

Members will remember there has been some resistance over the past few years for the organisation to commit to funding this program asking brigades to fund this equipment themselves by using donation funds or grant schemes. VFBV delegates have been very clear to CFA that brigades having to fundraise to buy operational and essential equipment such as fire hoses for example - is not fair nor reasonable and CFA needs to fully budget for such large programs of essential and basic equipment. While delegates have queried the funding allocated to each region, believing it is under resourced, CFA has agreed to fully fund the project and brigades will hopefully see this completed within the next 12 months.



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

#### FLU VACCINATIONS

State Council has endorsed a request from VFBV District 22 Council to pursue with CFA the provision of free flu vaccinations being made available to all operational CFA volunteers each year. Similar programmes are common across the private sector, where employers frequently cover the cost of annual flu vaccinations. Given the increased risks encountered by volunteer first responders, and the \$2.5 billion dollars of value provided by emergency management volunteers to Victoria each year - VFBV is advocating for a similar program to be made available across CFA.

Preliminary discussions with CFA have indicated that while CFA is open to discussing it, estimated costs of \$1 million per annum was prohibitive. VFBV has requested more detail on CFA's costings and assumptions, as delegates believe CFA's figures may be over-stated. The program being advocated by VFBV would be opt-in only, and if co-supported by government, would compliment the federal governments National Immunisation Program (NIP) which provides free influenza vaccines for the over 65s. We will keep you updated on progress.

#### CFA COMPLAINTS PROCESS

The Committee has discussed the latest data relating to completed and ongoing complaint cases. VFBV continues to highlight time frames as being a continual challenge for CFA and these concerns are well supported by the data. CFA has advised that in order to better case manage ongoing complaints, CFA has established a 'case tracker' to ensure all actions are captured and followed up and provide transparency on case load and progress. While VFBV welcome any tool that will assist in the timely resolution of complaints, VFBV will continue to monitor and strongly advocate the need to improve these measures and will continue to monitor time frames as systems and processes are refined.

Clayton Utz (law firm) was engaged by CFA early in 2020 to manage 66 historical 'legacy' cases. CFA has reported that to date, six of those cases have been resolved. VFBV has expressed concern with the low number of resolved cases, with CFA advising that these legacy cases were complex and interconnected. CFA has provided an assurance that many of these matters have reached a point where they are expected to be resolved shortly. VFBV will continue to monitor.

To provide stronger advocacy and address VFBV's ongoing concerns around the processes being used by CFA to manage complaints, VFBV has formed a small working party to liaise with CFA Management out of session on issues relating to the complaints process and management. This working group will provide information gleaned directly from volunteers involved in complaint matters both as complainants and respondents. It is hoped this information will further influence change and drive more timely policy around the complaints process in the future. VFBV also urge any volunteer who has been involved in the complaints process, either as a complainant or respondent, participate in the "Customer Satisfaction Survey" that is offered at the completion of the complaint process. The information provided enables CFA and VFBV to evaluate more clearly the effectiveness of independent contractors engaged by CFA as mediators and investigators; if case management is efficient and supporting volunteers with updates and welfare checks; how the overall system is improving and if not - where the challenges remain.

#### CHILD SAFETY

Delegates have highlighted several concerns around some wording in 'CFA's draft Child Safety Behaviours Statement', which required more clarity and CFA has agreed to refine those statements to address the concerns. CFA have also discussed its intent to provide Child Safety training exclusively via an online course for volunteers to complete. VFBV has reiterated our support for this important work but highlighted the increasing burden placed on volunteers with the delivery of courses only available online and are seeking a more flexible blended model that would also provide face-to-face options for those locations that would prefer. VFBV is also advocating that CFA volunteer Junior Leaders are well placed to lead and contribute to courses, including delivery. It is believed that the very sensitive nature of the subject matter and possible misinterpretations could be better addressed in some situations by face-to-face options. In further news, excellent progress is being made with over 8,500 CFA volunteers now hold Working with Children Checks.

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

### GROUND OBSERVERS

VFBV delegates continue to advocate for CFA to develop a clear pathway for members who wish to take up the role of ground observer. A discussion paper was recently sent to current ground observers with the intent on producing a volunteer role statement. Delegates have reviewed the draft role statement and provided feedback. The ground observer course is currently being updated to PUA19 with the training department advising VFBV it should be completed and courses ready to run during September, in time for this coming fire season. The intent is for CFA to roll out pre-requisite courses once they have the final sign off by the Chief Officer. CFA has also purchased 13 Panasonic tough books and six battery powered chainsaws for six of the ground observer kits in preparation for the upcoming fire season.

### TREE HAZARD AWARENESS UPDATE

Delegates were pleased to hear at their July meeting that CFA has almost completed the alignment of Hazardous Tree awareness to the 2019 AFAC guidance package. The final stages of the review are being undertaken by a Forest Fire Management Vic, CFA, and a subject matter expert group. A train the trainer workshop will ensure that instructors can train other suitable instructors to deliver the course. Alongside the tree hazard awareness package, the tree hazard awareness content has been updated to align with changes to the national tree marking system developed by AFAC. The package is close to completion and will go to the Chief Officer for final sign off.

### FIRE INVESTIGATORS

VFBV advocacy on maintaining volunteer structural fire investigators continues to result in welcome changes to the rigid and discriminatory processes attempted to be introduced since the introduction of the Fire Service Reforms in July 2020. CFA and FRV have undertaken detailed discussions which have resulted in good progress on developing more open and transparent processes that respect and utilise volunteer fire investigators. In the 12-month period since reform, 339 fire investigations were conducted by the CFA in the country area of Victoria. Over 220 of these were structural fire investigations highlighting why CFA needs this critical capacity. There is still work to be done to ensure the ongoing training and utilisation of volunteer fire investigators, however with the commissioning of the new Huntly training ground which incorporates specialised capacity for fire investigator training - there are positive signs moving forward.

### DEFIBRILLATORS

While it has taken some time, VFBV's campaign for every CFA appliance to have a defibrillator has reached an important milestone with the purchase and distribution of 426 additional defibrillators issued to brigades through the donations trust money donated during the horrific 2019-2020 bushfire season. While we still have some way to reach coverage for every vehicle, these additional defibrillators now mean almost every CFA brigade will now have a defibrillator available.

The extra defibs ensure our first responders now have access to this life saving equipment at most incidents. There are now 1700 defibrillators in CFA brigades across the state. VFBV encourages all defibs to be registered on Ambulance Victoria's public database of AED's (Automated External Defibrillator's) which can be utilised by the GoodSAM network that links trained responders to someone in cardiac arrest. Ambulance Victoria has led the use of public access defibrillators since 2002. A study in 2016 demonstrated how critical this program was, with every person during the study period who suffered a cardiac arrest at Melbourne Airport for example and was given a shock via a defibrillator, receiving it from a bystander.

In related news, VFBV is continuing to advocate for the expansion of CFA's Emergency Medical Response (EMR) program. Currently there are seven volunteer brigades participating in EMR, with members undertaking significant specialist training with Ambulance Victoria that enables the brigade to co-respond with Ambulance Victoria to specific 'Priority Zero' life threatening emergencies within their community. Work continues to try and garner government support and funding.

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

### **VOLUNTEER TRAINER AND ASSESSORS**

VFBV representatives to the committee have recently made a formal request for CFA to engage in an authentic and genuine process to further enhance the capability and recognition of Volunteer Trainer and Assessors who continue to provide an excellent service to the membership. VFBV's request is based on your feedback and includes recommendations from reviews into training and informal discussions and statements that have occurred in the past, including feedback from the annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey.

Suggested initiatives include but are not limited to, identifiable helmets to be made available to all trainers and assessors, funded workwear allocation, additional PPC and genuine promotion, encouragement, recruitment, and retention of trainers & assessors. CFA has committed to consultation on these requests and has indicated in-principle support for most of the recommendations, agreeing that the recognition and enhancement of trainers and assessors is vitally important to the success of training delivery across CFA.

### **STRUCTURAL FIREFIGHTER COURSES**

VFBV is continually receiving communications from Brigades expressing concerns that access to structure firefighting courses is increasingly difficult with CFA not running enough courses to meet the demands of our brigades. VFBV continues to raise this directly with CFA, sighting many reasons why this training is so important to Brigades and the safety of all members. CFA has reported that course and training planning/delivery is the responsibility of individual Districts with ACFOs being accountable for these activities. Although VFBV doesn't entirely accept that all the accountability sits at the District level alone (especially resourcing or IR/personnel issues that contribute to barriers), we do encourage brigades that are having issues with training plans or course scheduling to speak directly to your Districts in the first instance and escalate through your VFBV District Councils where required.

Related to the issues of unavailability of structural firefighter courses has been a failure in the past to properly engage and endorse trainers and assessors to be able to deliver structure firefighter training - resulting in only career staff being able to deliver training. CFA has committed to VFBV that where trainers and assessors hold the competencies and want to become endorsed to deliver Structure Firefighter, there will be no barriers stopping them progressing. VFBV will continue to pursue.

### **LPG EMERGENCY RESPONSE TRAINING**

Delegates continue to raise with CFA serious concerns with the lack of training available to CFA members in LPG emergency response. CFA has many brigades that provide a specialist response to LPG incidents and currently can't access the acquisition training to qualify new members or re-accredit existing members. CFA has reported to VFBV that while the current training package for LPG response is a shared package between FRV and CFA (formally MFB and CFA), CFA can't deliver the package due to complications with scoping of registration. CFA has had a commitment by FRV that they will conduct the training based on priorities and needs for CFA on a short-term basis until CFA is in a position to deliver the training internally. Brigades that are affected by this are encouraged to speak to your District Training Team who will be able to organise priority training if required.

### **CENTRAL HIGHLANDS NAMING CONVENTIONS**

VFBV would like to sincerely thank all those that took the time to submit nominations for the road naming network at CFA's new training ground - Central Highlands in Ballan. VFBV coordinated the nomination process on behalf of CFA, referring all nominations for further consideration by the CFA Executive. We were impressed with the calibre of nominations received and inspired with the work that volunteers continue to do for CFA and our communities.



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

### BRIGADE CAPABILITY REVIEW

District Councils and Brigades continue to raise concerns with VFBV about the inconsistencies of Brigade Section 29 Inspections. Brigades have indicated that Section 29 inspections can quite often be one way and that there should be more transparency in how CFA management can help address issues raised. The annual brigade review pilot has been completed with CFA and delegates looking into next steps to progress this important initiative. The objective of the annual brigade review (ABR) was to empower volunteers to develop and maintain the capability required to manage the risk in their communities. The intent was to empower volunteers to help CFA make decisions where support is required and directed in a timely manner. To better reflect both the broader context and the interdependencies between ABR, Baseline Capability Profiling Application (BCPA) and other enterprise-level priorities, the program name has been changed to 'Brigade Capability Review' (BCR). Delegates will continue to progress with CFA the importance of the program for CFA to better support Brigades in timely fashion and also meet the requirements of the Section 29 inspection.

### STATE CHAMPIONSHIP AFTER ACTION REVIEW

The Urban Junior State Championships was held on 20 and 21 March with the combined Urban Senior and Rural Senior / Junior on 27 and 28 March, both in Mooroopna. An extensive after action review has been conducted with all stakeholders contributing valuable feedback. This was the first time in the event's history that the Urban Senior and Rural Senior / Junior events ran concurrently and overall feedback during the events was overall very positive, particularly given the circumstances and challenges faced in the lead up to the event. Like anything, there is always room for improvement. The after-action review (AAR) took place with eight online focus groups (focused on their specific area of expertise) along with a survey that was provided to various members who attended the event. Delegates are keen to review the report to see what learnings there are and also help inform the future direction of Championships.

### YOUTH CADETS UPDATE

As reported last quarter, work is progressing on the cadet pilot program to develop activities and requirements for CFA youth members to participate in the pilot program. The program is being developed with input from delegates with experience in youth and school-based programs along with various CFA departments to ensure progression towards the ongoing program. The selection process is being discussed to ensure all members have access and that it is inclusive and fair.

The pilot program will investigate having a "Cadet" rank for all 16/17 year olds and better ways to engage parents/guardians and the use of a residential component along with the use of IT platforms. It is envisaged that as part of the program there will be a community project for members to participate in to ensure community connections and engagement. The program will now be expanded to forty 16 and 17 year old's across the state, this will ensure a diverse range of members, with a start date proposed of October 2021 and completed by June 2022. This pilot is being developed to encourage and develop our 16/17 year old members and will further enhance retention rates in our youth.

### NATIONAL EMERGENCY MEDAL

Delegates were pleased that the long awaited FAQ sheet and member list has now been sent to all Brigades to assist them in the nomination process for the National Emergency Medal which was announced by the Prime Minister on Australia Day 2020. The FAQ sheet will provide clarity to enable a more simplified process for nominating members along with who may be eligible based on CFA records. Brigades are encouraged to review the spreadsheet and verify this to ensure no members are missing from the list. Those members that have not previously been awarded an NEM will receive a medal and clasp with "BUSHFIRES 19-20" and those previously issued a medal (such as Black Saturday – '09 Fires) will receive a clasp to be added to their existing medal ribbon. Delegates are keen to be involved and provide assistance regarding presentations of the medal and will review the '09 Fires presentation for learnings.



## PRE-REGISTRATION

**This Year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is about to open.**

**Pre-register NOW so that you are amongst the first to be notified of this year's survey.**



Scan the QR code or visit  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2021VolWELRegister>



**LAST YEAR**  
**2693**  
CFA VOLUNTEERS  
PARTICIPATED