

# VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



**June 2023**

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

VFBV is your association, we encourage volunteers to please stay connected, provide feedback and get involved.

Adam Barnett

CEO, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

## Additional Resources and Updates Available Electronically

|                                            |                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| National Volunteer Week 2023               | <a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-volWeek">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-volWeek</a>   |
| VESEP Applications and VFBV Help Pack      | <a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup39">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup39</a>       |
| CFA Board Positions – Invitation to apply  | <a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup40">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup40</a>       |
| VFBV Board Positions – Invitation to apply | <a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup41">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup41</a>       |
| Open for Consultation Dashboard            | <a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbvDashboard">https://tinyurl.com/vfbvDashboard</a> |
| International Women's Day 2023             | <a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup42">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup42</a>       |

## VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

| This month's enclosures include:          | Action Required:                                       |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Editorial: EMV Own Goal                | Please table and note                                  |
| 2. VFBV Vol Survey – Summary Results      | Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard |
| 3. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's) | Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard |

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# EMV OWN GOAL

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' May 2023 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

This month I am drawing strength from a Gandhi quote – “Truth never damages a cause that is just.”

I was most unfortunate to attend the recent meeting of the volunteer consultative forum (VCF) where it was announced by the Emergency Management Commissioner that a decision had been made to disband the VCF. To say that the volunteers at that meeting drawn from the various agencies were saddened, hurt and disappointed would be an understatement.

The VCF was an initiative floated by VFBV during discussions of the Victorian Government's White Paper on emergency management back in 2012. The concept was embraced and announced by the then Minister, the Hon Kim Wells MP. The VCF was officially formed on the 18th November 2013 and was heralded as delivering on the Victorian Government's commitment to consult emergency management volunteers across the sector.

The forum was designed to provide a multi-agency volunteer feedback loop direct to the Minister for Emergency Services on issues affecting EM volunteers. It was made up of more than 20 emergency management volunteers and agency nominees drawn from CFA, SES, Life Saving Victoria, Australian Red Cross, Ambulance Victoria, VFBV, St John Ambulance, Volunteer Coast Guard, Salvation Army, VICSESVA and the Victorian Council of Churches emergency ministry.

The first meeting of the VCF was attended by Minister Wells who spoke about how grateful he was for the opportunity to consult with volunteers with regard to the emergency management sector and in particular the importance of volunteers having input in ensuring the sustainability and effective utilisation of volunteers across the EM sector. It was widely acknowledged that EM volunteers face unique challenges that deserved dedicated and focussed efforts.

Upon a change of Government at the end of 2014, the new Minister for Emergency Services, the Hon Jane Garrett MP attended her first meeting of the VCF on the 6th December 2014. Minister Garrett was a frequent attendee and echoed the importance of the VCF and acknowledged that ministerial involvement with the VCF would continue to be a priority under the Andrews Government.

On the 4th May 2016, Premier Andrews, along with Minister Garrett and the Emergency Management Commissioner signed the Emergency Management Volunteer Statement that was an agreed commitment between the State of Victoria and emergency management volunteers that committed the State of Victoria to consult with EM volunteers and their representative bodies through the VCF on matters which affect them. The statement was co-signed by each of the 11 organisations represented on the VCF, including VFBV.



Therefore it was rather surprising to learn that consultation around the disbanding of the VCF with the VCF itself had not occurred prior to the decision being made. To disband the forum and ignore the commitments made without so much as a discussion with the very volunteers affected is quite astonishing and represents a significant betrayal of trust and integrity.

Even more remarkable is the fact that the EM Volunteer Statement was a public statement of commitment signed by the Premier himself on behalf of the whole Victorian Government.

It is at times like these that I remind members why VFBV had to take the extraordinary step of giving the CFA Volunteer Charter legal effect by inserting recognition of the Charter into the CFA Act. A change it should be pointed out, that received and celebrated bi-partisan support across both houses of Parliament.

Volunteers should not have to fight for governments to simply honour the commitments they make and it is heart-breaking to have to deal with such betrayals.

VFBV has learned that the decision to disband the VCF was made after a secret briefing and recommendation was prepared by EMV and given by the Emergency Management Commissioner to the Minister.

In an effort to hold decision makers accountable for their

actions, VFBV has committed to public advocacy and formally advised the Minister of our concern that EMV has failed to acquit its obligations under the Volunteer Charter, which is a hard fought statutory obligation on not only CFA but also the State of Victoria.

In response, the VFBV Board has unanimously declared EMV to be an 'Organisation of Concern'. This decision has not been made lightly and follows the VCF's disbandment as well as consideration of recent activities such as the EMV Operating Model Review and the lack of a cross agency after action review for last year's flooding event.

The VFBV Board has taken this unprecedented step in order to highlight the serious disquiet and concern we have towards this behemoth of a bureaucracy and its recent poor record of engagement and direct consultation with volunteers and their representative bodies on several matters. We take no joy in having to take these steps but are committed to representing CFA volunteers with integrity and transparency.

We have taken no comfort from the Commissioner's protestations that EMV will conduct some future review and consider future arrangements further. If the machinery of government cannot honour the public commitments made to volunteers under the EM Statement, how can anyone expect volunteers to trust any further promises?

EMV's development since it first commenced operation on 1 July 2014 has been quite a journey. Moving from a small, dedicated team of less than 12 people who formed the Fire Services Commissioner's Office, EMV has now morphed into a bureaucracy of several hundred, with its own CEO, Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners and countless executive directors, public servants, consultants and advisors.

Despite those resources, clearly it appears unable to support the peak volunteer forum that was given "enduring effect" under the EM Volunteer Statement.

Volunteers are sick and tired of hearing leaders give speeches about how much they respect and value the contribution of CFA volunteers, to then not match these words with actions.

If we add up all the numerous committee's and working groups that EMV host across the sector filled with agency representatives and employees, it is quite an indictment that the only committee dedicated to emergency management volunteers who make up more than 90% of the workforce gets dumped. One only needs to track the poor progress of EMV's actions towards the 13 strategic priority actions developed by volunteers through the VCF back in 2015 and quietly erased from EMV's strategic action plan over consequent years to see how far volunteer priorities and initiatives have been abandoned.

EMV's recent Operating Model review is a further example of poor process. Readers would recall our concerns from the January and February 2022 editions of Fire Wise where volunteers were expected to provide feedback to their review over the Xmas and New Year period. The final report cemented EMV's position that the solution to any and every problem facing the sector was to recommend more public servants.

Any cursory review of the COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine inquiry will show you the dangers of mixing public servants with incident management. Yet, EMV's Operating model review advocates for more public sector full-time personnel to be employed to form fulltime Incident Management Teams managed by EMV. It then uses the gaps observed during their recent pandemic (Class 2) emergencies to argue for even more public servants to lead the management of Class 1 and 2 emergencies moving forward. The review even proposed a business case to train 500 public servants to form a new 'Emergency Management Corps'. Where was the recommendation to recruit, retain and encourage another 500 volunteers you ask? Good question, we asked the same thing.

To demonstrate its priorities one need look no further than the announcement in last year's State Budget of a record \$36.2 million dollars for the establishment of EMV's new fulltime State Control Centre workforce. This isn't even a new capability. It simply replaces the current workforce contributed by each of the agencies through existing surge capacity. A surge capacity that is being undermined and neglected. The lack of any real action to address consecutive drops in endorsed level 3 incident personnel across the sector over recent years is a good example of just hoping for something to fail and then rushing in with a pre-formed solution.

\$36.2M could have bought 80 brand new fire trucks.

The emergency management sector relies on trust, and a workforce that is overwhelming volunteer. EMV's actions risk it becoming more and more distant from the very people that make up the EM sector.

Advice from the ground will become more and more filtered and censored by the layers and layers of bureaucracy. Governments and Ministers will then be on the receiving end of very poor advice so distorted and disconnected to be almost useless. Current case in point.

Victoria cannot simply afford layers and layers of bureaucracy for no tangible benefit. With a cost-of-living crisis looming large, budgets will become more and more under scrutiny. Priority must be given to CFA's budget that is already under strain after decades of underinvestment, with ageing trucks, stations and hundreds of personnel transferred out of CFA under recent reforms.

If the Government is looking for savings that won't impact on front line services and the critical work that emergency volunteer first responders do each and every day to keep our communities safe, then it need look no further than this bemouth of a bureaucracy. EMV's status as an organisation of concern to volunteers represents a significant deterioration of support.

VFBV will continue to monitor and pursue meaningful arrangements that ensure genuine volunteer engagement and consultation though whatever means possible. We will continue standing up for CFA volunteers and reminding decision makers that EM volunteers contribute more than \$2.4 billion dollars every year to the Victorian economy and taxpayer. Volunteers keep doing their bit, it is time for EMV and other sector leaders to step up and do theirs.



# 2022 VFBV Volunteer Survey Summary Results



## VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT EDITION

We are pleased to present the initial summary results of the survey conducted predominately between November 2022 and February 2023.

This year, we are releasing results in two stages. The first stage will present the top level VolWEL results for each question. Next quarter we will then release the additional satisfaction results and qualitative analysis. This allows us to provide a quicker update cycle for members to see the results as they come to hand.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

The annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is an initiative by VFBV, designed by volunteers for volunteers to help capture and communicate fundamental issues as volunteers see them.

This survey connects grass root volunteers directly to decision makers and allows volunteers to influence funding, priorities and initiatives aimed at improving CFA.

Our annual survey is one of the many ways that VFBV gather evidence-based opinions from CFA volunteers on the matters important to them.

The survey remains the largest of its kind in Australia, with this being our 11th annual survey of CFA volunteers since its launch back in 2012.

The survey is a critical tool in the suite of methods which VFBV uses to gather feedback from CFA volunteers, to inform CFA and Government of what is important to them.

The longitudinal nature of the survey along with its consistent questions and themes, provides a robust snapshot of volunteer views and opinions over time and allows for trends and other analysis to be conducted.



## WHO RESPONDED?

### GENDER



## SUMMARY RESULTS

Results show that there has been improvement in volunteer satisfaction across five of the seven themes.

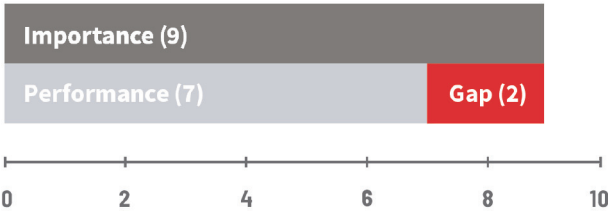
These results are evidence that the changes CFA have implemented over the last year have helped to improve volunteer satisfaction. While results have improved overall, three survey themes continue to indicate a large VolWEL gap, with the 'Cooperation' theme that looks at consultation recording a significant gap.

The worst result is the 'Training' theme which has again recorded a critical gap indicating there is a still a lot of work to do.

## HOW THE VolWEL OUTCOME IS MEASURED?

The survey measures CFA volunteer attitudes of the importance of each particular factor and their corresponding view of performance.

The gap between how closely Performance meets the expectation of Importance, is referred to as the Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Level (VolWEL).

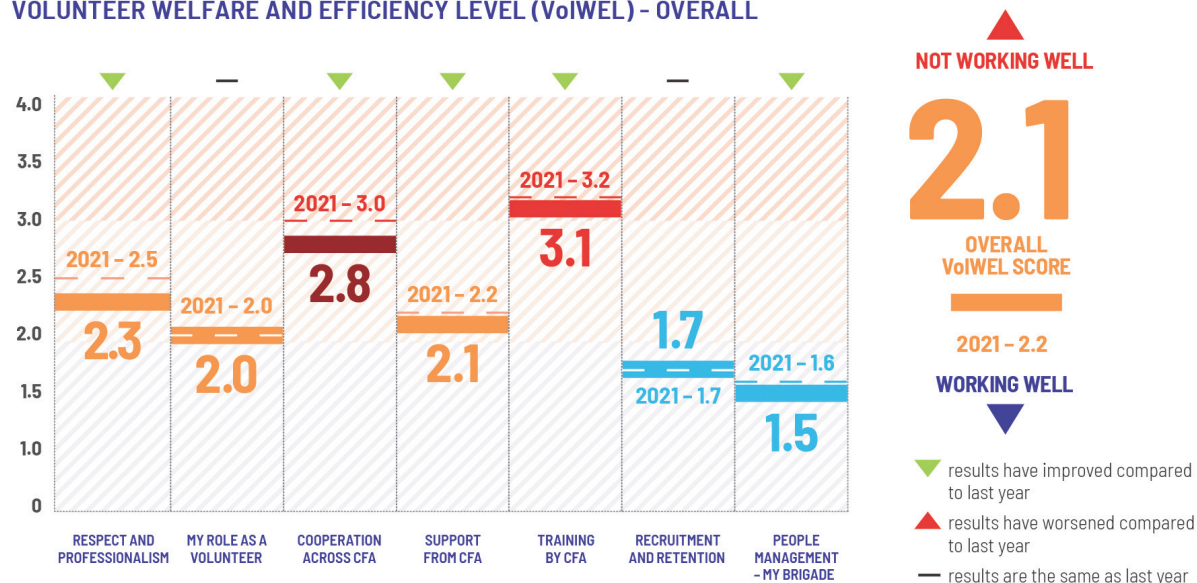


The VolWEL outcome is a simple way to illustrate where things are working well or what needs attention.



# 2022 VFBV Volunteer Survey Summary Results

## VOLUNTEER WELFARE AND EFFICIENCY LEVEL (VoIWEL) - OVERALL



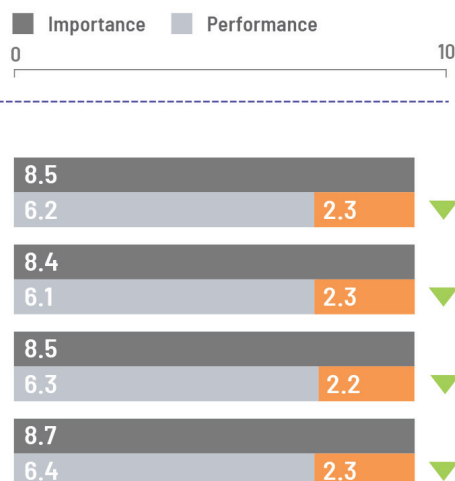
## VOLUNTEER WELFARE & EFFICIENCY LEVEL (VoIWEL) DESCRIPTIONS

|                  |                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>&gt;3.0</b>   | Critical need for priority attention           | A Gap of 3.0 or more indicates that there is a critical gap between volunteer expectations and performance and volunteers are highly dissatisfied. Priority attention is needed.                                                  |
| <b>2.5 - 2.9</b> | Significant Gap – immediate attention required | A Gap between 2.5 and 2.9 indicates there are significant issues that need to be addressed. Immediate action should be put in place to rectify areas of concern.                                                                  |
| <b>2.0 - 2.4</b> | Large Gap – remedial action to be taken        | A Gap between 2.0 and 2.4 indicates these issues are impacting volunteer welfare and efficiency and will be causing dissatisfaction with the volunteering experience. Action to address volunteer concerns should be implemented. |
| <b>1.5 - 1.9</b> | Mid-range Gap – need for improvement           | A Gap between 1.5 and 1.9 indicates that volunteer expectations are not being met and should be addressed in both action and strategic plans, in the shorter term. Volunteers are indicating lower levels of satisfaction.        |
| <b>1.0 - 1.4</b> | Small Gap – potential for improvement          | A Gap between 1.0 and 1.4 indicates longer term planning should include addressing volunteer concerns. Volunteers are reasonably satisfied.                                                                                       |
| <b>0 - 0.9</b>   | Meeting Expectations                           | A Gap of less than 1.0 indicates that on the whole, volunteer expectations are being met. These results would be evidence of high levels of satisfaction.                                                                         |

## SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS

### RESPECT & PROFESSIONALISM

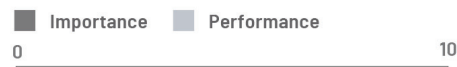
- Q** I respect and appreciate the effort made by CFA to support me as a volunteer.
- Q** The respect and value of the contribution of volunteers is evident in CFA's actions and culture.
- Q** In general, CFA staff accept and recognise the professionalism of volunteers.
- Q** CFA consistently and proactively promotes public understanding of community confidence in the role and professionalism of CFA volunteers and their brigades.



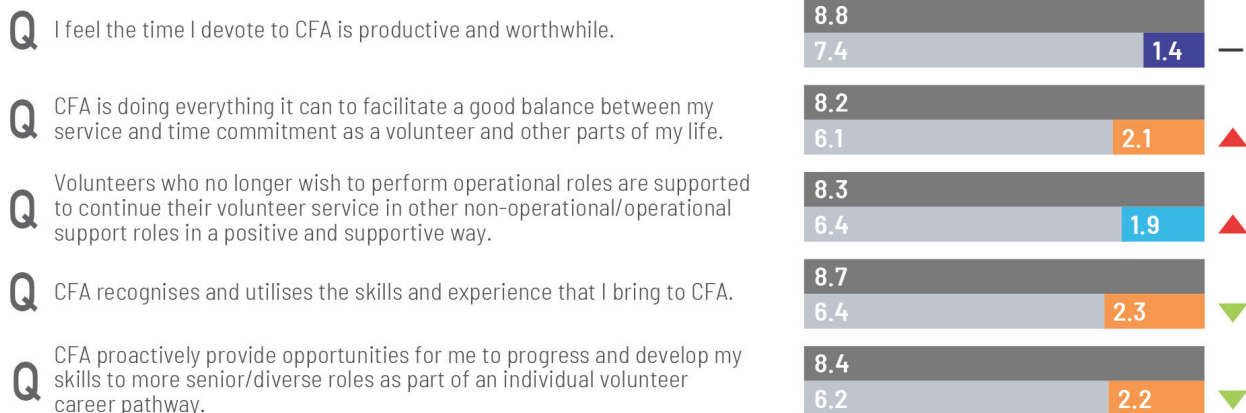
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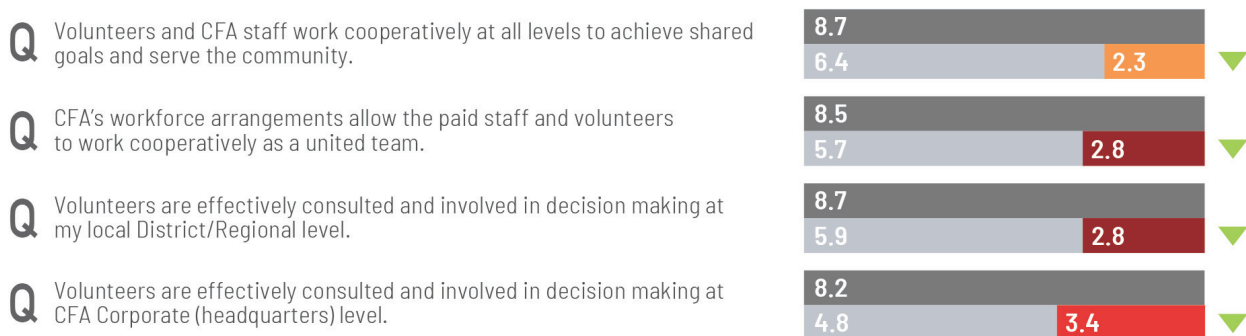
## SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS



### MY ROLE AS A VOLUNTEER



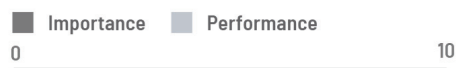
### COOPERATION ACROSS CFA



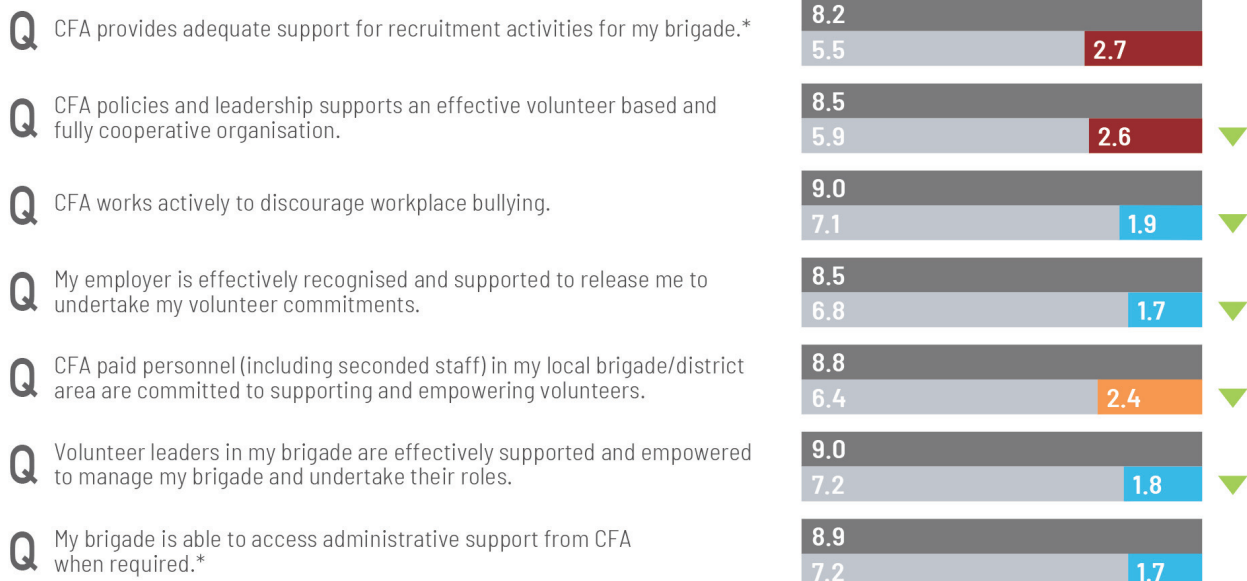
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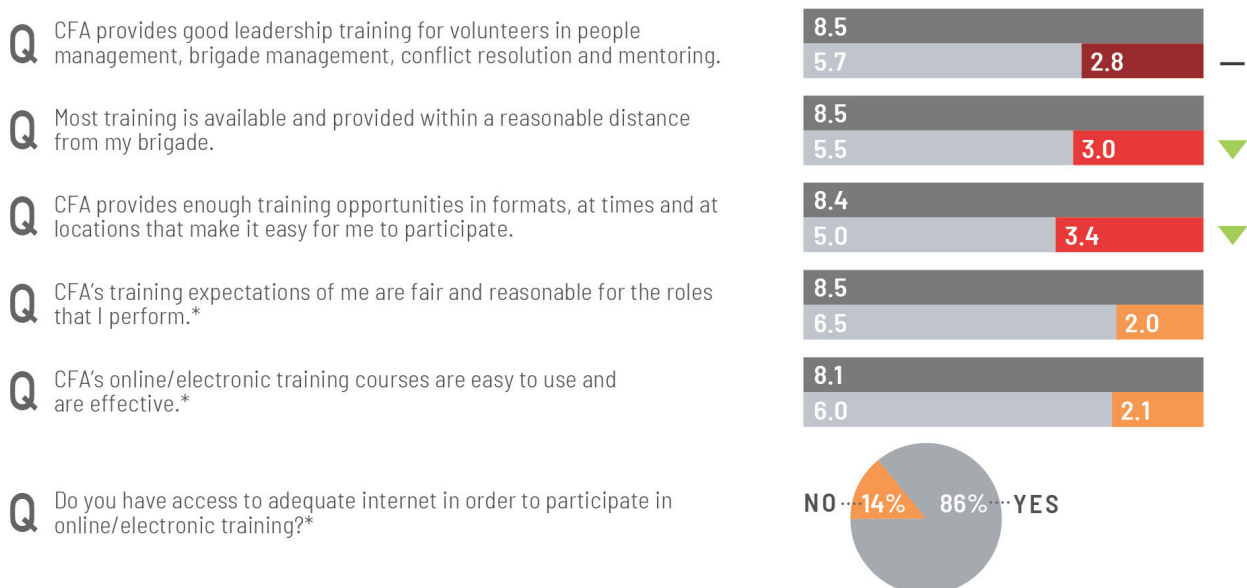
## SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS



### SUPPORT FROM CFA



### TRAINING BY CFA



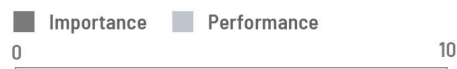
\* New question being trialled in the 2022 survey, has been excluded from the



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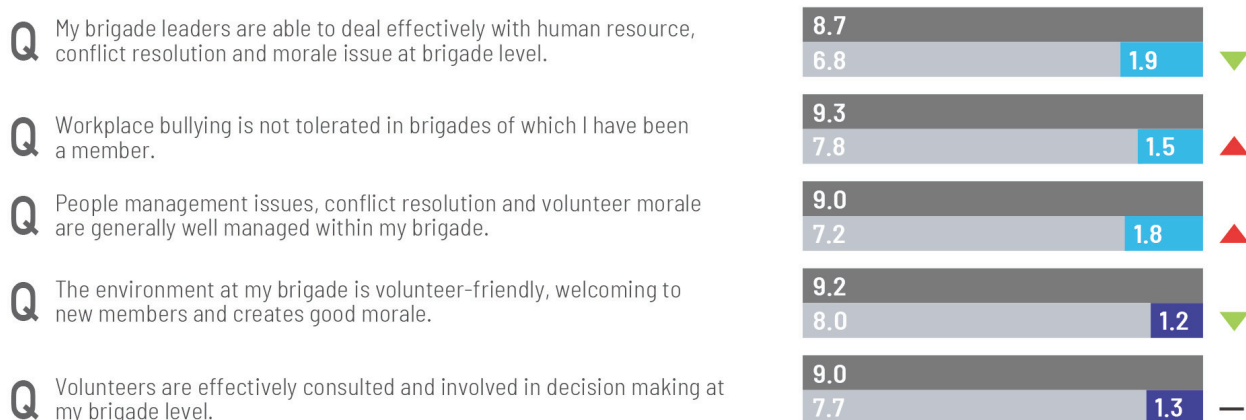
## SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS



### RECRUITMENT & RETENTION



### PEOPLE MANAGEMENT: MY BRIGADE



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

### JOINT FUEL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Joint Fuel Management Program (JFMP) is a state-wide program to manage fuel loads on private and public land and was first introduced in 2021. The program is a collaboration between CFA and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) and is updated annually to reflect changes to risk and reviews the controlled burns, mowing, slashing and maintenance of fire breaks for the next three years in line with fuel management strategies.

The program is run in consultation with communities and other key stake holders with a focus on reducing bushfire risk, flora and fauna ecological requirements, bush regeneration, land management, agricultural needs, and cultural heritage. Areas of risk are identified through a variety of methods of input, including Phoenix risk modelling, Victorian Fire Risk Register, feedback from local communities and the local knowledge and fire history from CFA members and other fire managers.

Planned burns are managed differently in different areas due to growth, flora, fauna and terrain and are sometimes carried out more frequently in places that are closer to communities. They are often conducted in multiple stages over a number of years to create a burn mosaic across the landscape.

To align practices between CFA and FFMVic, CFA is transitioning the role of 'Burn Controller' to that of 'Planned Burn Operations Officer' (PBOO). This is a person who is authorised by CFA to implement planned burns and is responsible for all field-based activities in relation to the conducting of a specific planned burn.

To assist with the transition of this endorsement, CFA members who were previously qualified as Burn Controllers will be able to update their qualifications. CFA is also in the process of developing a recognition of prior learning tool for members who have not been endorsed by CFA but have completed a national competency or are active in the planned burns delivery space outside of CFA.

Training courses for members without prior experience are also in development. At the time of writing, two pilot 'Conduct Complex Planned Burn' courses have been conducted with a third planned. These are to practically evaluate the course content before it is rolled out for members who are interested in becoming an endorsed Planned Burns Operations Officer.

Members can provide input and feedback on the JFMP at any time by speaking to your CFA Vegetation Management Officer through the CFA District Office. The full program of burns can also be viewed online via [www.ffm.vic.gov.au/jfmp](http://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/jfmp)

### DELIVERY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SERVICES IN FRV FIRE DISTRICT

In April 2023, the Chief Officer released an Operations Bulletin (2023/001) for brigades wishing to conduct community engagement activities or programs within Fire Rescue Victoria areas.

This Operations Bulletin is intended to provide guidance on the appropriate process each agency should follow when delivering community engagement services within the FRV fire district. It also aims to promote collaboration and co-ordination between the two agencies. In simple terms the bulletin highlights the approval process brigades are required to follow to conduct a community engagement activity and the notice period that needs to be provided to FRV. The bulletin also covers the procedure where FRV may plan to conduct a similar activity at the same time, to avoid duplication.

VFBV will monitor the practical implementation of this with the brigades affected to ensure that brigades are not unnecessarily impacted and sufficient community engagement services continue to benefit the community. The Operations Bulletin can be accessed via Members Online by typing bulletin 2023/001 in the search box.

If impacted brigades have any feedback, they are encouraged to speak with their local VFBV District Council representatives or by contact VFBV Support Officer Colin Booth via [c.booth@vfbv.com.au](mailto:c.booth@vfbv.com.au)

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

#### HELMET STOWAGE

District Councils have been calling for the outcome of the helmet bag stowage options that have been trialled in some districts across the state. CFA informed the delegates that they were trialling stowage options in lockers at both Horscham and Ferntree Gully brigades and this is being managed by the DMOs. The outcomes of these trials will be reported back to this committee with the findings, as brigades are increasingly concerned with the lack of current stowage options. Members with Heavy Tankers have told us of their concerns with the lack of visibility and communications between the rear and front seats due to current placement of stowage. Delegates are keen for CFA to put more consideration into stowage and incorporate the recommendations into future truck build programs. CFA is developing a draft stowage message to be distributed to brigades with additional advice on the safe stowage of helmets.

#### FORWARD COMMAND VEHICLE (FCV) FUNDING REVIEW REQUEST

Groups from across the state have told VFBV that they would like CFA to review the funding arrangements for maintenance on group and brigade owned FCV's due to the insufficient brigade and group allowances not covering these costs in full. Given it has been some time since the organisation reviewed the funding arrangements of FCV's, the delegates have agreed to call for a review. Brigades have told the committee that when they agree to purchase appliances through VESEP for example, they undertake to pay for the maintenance on the vehicle. However, with the delays in shipping and extended build time of new vehicles at present, there is concern that many brigades are missing the timeframes for the first service which is usually time critical and often provided free of charge. Subsequent services are very costly (up to \$1500) and falling earlier not due to any fault of the brigade. VFBV continues to highlight to Government the grossly inadequate funding for CFA to maintain its fleet and continues to call for fair and equitable funding that is both adequate and sustainable.

#### BIG FILL WORKING PARTY

Delegates have proposed CFA form a working party to look at the next generation of big-fills. The current big-fill appliances are built on a Toyota Landcruiser cab chassis, with an aluminium body and water-cooled diesel engine powered pump with 1800 lt per minute @ 700kpa. There are also single and tandem trailer versions also with a water-cooled diesel engine powered pump with a capacity of 2000lt per minute @ 700kpa. We look forward to providing updates as the working party begin meeting soon to progress specifications.

#### STATE CHAMPIONSHIP VEHICLE DISPLAY

Members who attended the State Championships in March will have had the opportunity to view several appliances that were on show. The ex-Tasmanian Fire Service Heavy CAFS (Compressed Air Foam System) tanker as well as a new Heavy Tanker were available for members to see, but the vehicle with the most interest was the first of the new Ultra Heavy Tankers which had been driven from Sydney specifically for the championships audience to view. CFA will be building 29 UHTs and with the first now off the production line many districts will be excited to know they should start arriving soon.

#### WILDFIRE RESPIRATORY PROTECTION

Progress is continuing with the Wildfire Respiratory Protection project. This project is intended to evaluate and research options for alternative wildfire respiratory protection methods. Members were able to self-nominate to be a part of the trial last year and many members have already received a trial kit with alternative masks to test. 300 volunteers have been chosen to be a part of the trial with over 800 applying. The trial consists of 2 alternate masks, of differing brands with one being a full face P3 mask with cannisters and the second a half face version. Trial members are asked to report on wearability and functionality via a short survey after each wear of the products. We will keep you informed of progress.



## 2 Minute Briefing

### Joint Member Services

June 2023

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

#### **'GIVE US A HAND' CAMPAIGN**

Volunteers from across the state are continuing to raise concerns via their VFBV District Councils around the effectiveness of the CFA recruitment and retention processes. While there is significant work being done in the background to gauge the effectiveness of the 'Give us a hand' campaign, many brigades are telling us they have little knowledge of the campaign or how to use it.

CFA teamed up with an external agency in 2022 to create a raft of resources to help brigades and districts with volunteer recruitment. The resources include social media tiles for use on facebook and instagram, posters that can be customized with the brigade name, email images for signature blocks and specialized images for brigades to use in their own campaigns. The toolkit can be accessed through Members Online and typing 'volunteer recruitment' into the search box.

Brigades have commented that while these resources are great for brigades in high population areas and with lots of social media and electronic exposure, they do little for the brigades in the areas with poor connectivity and internet access and low population density. Brigades in areas of rural decline tell us that CFA needs to do more to maintain current membership, reduce red tape as well as recruit new members, targeting people who move into the areas affected.

Assistance with recruiting, the new member onboard platform, training and filling BMT roles are just some of the areas brigades have highlighted they need more assistance with and areas that the Committee will continue to focus on.

#### **SUPPORT FOR BRIGADES SUFFERING REDUCTION IN MEMBERSHIP**

Brigades are reaching out to their local VFBV District Councils for support, advice and a helping hand to ensure their brigade remains viable with a reduction in membership. Many brigades go through a cycle of active membership and as members lives change and they move away for work or family reasons the brigade has to rely on a core group. Brigades are telling VFBV that in some Districts they are being given an ultimatum that if they don't fill all roles within the BMT in accordance with the CO direction they will be forced to close down, amalgamate or become a satellite station.

VFBV encourages brigades that are experiencing such difficulties to talk with the district ACFO and request assistance from the district by way of a recruitment drive, community meeting, resource sharing with a neighbouring brigade or any resources they can offer to assist to see if they can help. If you are not receiving assistance from your District office, please contact your local VFBV District Council representative so that the issue can be escalated. No brigade should be forced to navigate these processes on their own, and VFBV will continue advocating for greater support to be provided to brigades.

#### **JUNIOR MEMBERS REACHING THEIR 16TH BIRTHDAY**

VFBV continues to receive complaints from members across the state highlighting issues with the new volunteer recruitment hub. Junior members in particular have highlighted that there are gaps as to when a junior member gets notified and they are eligible to transition to the senior ranks. Juniors have told VFBV the notification process is not always working with members being unregistered automatically once they reach their 16th birthday and having to start the recruitment process from scratch rather than being notified before their birthday of their eligibility to transition to a senior member. Brigade secretaries and BMT's are also not always being notified, leaving the brigade sometimes unaware of the procedure unless the junior member makes them aware.

CFA has agreed to look into the issue and investigate how the system is letting members slip through the net and how to better link the brigade in. CFA has requested that brigades monitor their junior members transitioning to seniors as they approach their 16th birthday to ensure they are not falling through the cracks while this work is being done.

VFBV has also raised the stop-start process of the recruitment hub and is seeking for changes to be made to better streamline the process and avoid new member applications stalling in the system.

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

### FIRE MEDICAL RESPONSE

In the way of a further update to the announcement last year that CFA had entered into an agreement with Ambulance Victoria to develop a Fire Medical Response (FMR) model - a working group made up of CFA and AV members is investigating next steps. The program is not intended to be a replacement for EMR but rather as an optional service for invited brigades who wish to participate. Due to limited funding, only brigades identified by CFA and Ambulance Victoria where CFA involvement would address a current service gap will be invited to participate. It is completely optional, and brigades may choose not to participate. The initial rollout will be offered to 50 brigades across the state that will be invited to participate. There will be extra specific training involved and a regular skills maintenance schedule to ensure members remain up-to-date. A working party is being established to work through the complex issues of doctrine and response that arise from such an important role. The working party will meet monthly and has representatives from CFA, AV, VFBV as well as other subject matter experts as required. Additional working parties to involve participating brigades is planned. We will keep you advised of developments as the initiative progresses.

### INTERNAL BA HELMET DECALS

There continues to be a level of frustration across brigades with primarily a structural risk element on the very slow implementation of a simple helmet sticker to acknowledge if you are trained to enter a building as an internal BA wearer or must fight the fire externally. With CFA now going back to one type of structural firefighting helmet, the Pacific F15, members have requested easily identified helmet decals to signify internal or external BA wearers. District 15 brigades trailed a possible solution but to date members of the Operations Joint Committee have still not been involved in consultation and are still no clearer on a solution or timeframe. VFBV continues to advocate for an overarching BA Strategic plan that will help guide regions, districts, groups and brigades to plan for optimum coverage for BA.

### PUMPING PITS UPDATE

Delegates were disappointed to hear that CFA is no closer to making a decision on the long-term use of brigade pumping pits. In 2015, CFA determined that due to the possibility of harmful bacteria, chemicals and other ecoli, the use of pumping pits was to discontinue, and Safety Alert number 35 was issued. Rather than ban their use, VFBV is advocating for a regular testing and maintenance program to ensure brigades still have access to appropriate and safe facilities to train with.

It is important to note that the use of non-reticulated water supplies, including tank water, dams and rivers that CFA has requested be used instead of pumping pits can also have health consequences and all caution must be taken to ensure members wash hands correctly after the use of static water sources, use PPE correctly, ensure open wounds are dressed adequately and to thoroughly clean your hands prior to eating or drinking. The Committee will continue to pursue an outcome that ensures firefighter health and safety while maintaining critical training infrastructure that supports volunteers.

### LESSONS LEARNED - FIRE RECONSTRUCTIONS

Members of the committee were shown a detailed joint CFA and FFMVic presentation on the new Fire Reconstruction project which is aimed at improving the use of case studies, data collection and an incident database to improve lessons learned and get the best outcomes possible when dealing with fires. The case studies will be developed with more information and data availability to give a more accurate case study methodology. Fuel, weather, typography, fire service response as well as an accurate field assessment and detailed incident data analytics will be used by the model. Taking into account appliance response, aircraft containment and what other equipment and machinery may be required for the best outcome and will be fed into the evidence based state-wide risk assessment work being developed. The detailed case studies will be available for brigades and group training exercises as soon as they are complete.

## 2 Minute Briefing

### Joint Operational Performance

June 2023

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

#### PLANNING FOR 2023

As mentioned in last year's December briefings, CFA and VFBV undertook a review of our Joint Committee arrangements with the intent on strengthening the joint consultative committees. The Joint Operations Committee was split into the Joint Operational Capability committee and the new Operational Performance Committee. The new committee had its first meeting in February. The committee members spent some time discussing the topics and items they would like to work on over the course of the year and will continue to develop and refine a workplan for 2023. Apart from the items listed in the terms of reference like operational performance, service delivery and response, doctrine and standards to name just a few, members have requested reviewing the way CFA has reacted and responded to major events. Lessons learned are a key way we can communicate what worked and what needs improvement based on events brigades have responded to. Other suggestions for the committee to work through is monitoring brigade connectivity to the internet for training, BA capability and strategy as well as a better understanding of CFA's membership numbers. The enthusiasm to maintain a high level of energy and determination to achieve great outcomes for volunteers remain high on the list and delegates will continue to advocate for outcomes that benefit and support brigades, groups and volunteers.

#### BASELINE CAPABILITY PROFILING

The Baseline Capability Profiling App (BCPA) is now available to brigade management teams. Members of the joint committee have been asking CFA for a simple system where the brigade management team can review their brigade's performance across a raft of critical measures with the intent on continuous improvement. The BCPA is a mobile and desktop-accessible application that allows BMT's to fully understand their member base, skills profile, turnout data and assets, in order to use this data for capability planning.

The BCPA has been trialled in several Districts over the past 3 years and will now be available for members to better understand their brigade membership through a variety of reports. The app aligns with CFA's seven inputs of capability planning including people, organisation, information, support and facilities, training, equipment, and doctrine. The app is intended to be available to brigade and group management teams as well as local DPC's. Online mandatory learning modules and a privacy agreement will need to be completed before access to BCPA is granted. It is expected that the app will be available across every district this year.

#### SERVICE DELIVERY

With the publishing of the Fire Services Implementation Monitor's annual report and the Fire Rescue Victoria boundary review panel's initial determination, delegates have highlighted service delivery as a major topic for discussion. Members have requested an update from CFA on SDS metrics and discussions with CFA's performance improvement team as well as the team that reviews doctrine and standards. The intent is to gauge an understanding of what CFA is doing to proactively mitigate risk and plan for the future in the fast-paced environment across the emergency management sector.

Over the course of the year we will continue to update you on the role of the Operational Performance Committee and the discussions and actions that occur between the nominated delegates and CFA.

VFBV continues to respond to calls and concerns from brigades affected by the changes brought about due to fire service reform and will continue working with brigades through their District Councils to ensure matters are escalated either at the local level first, or to the joint committee for CFA action.



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

### CHANGES TO VOLUNTEER SUSPENSION PROCESS

Delegates have been discussing their concerns with CFA on the increasing indiscriminate and routine way in which volunteer suspensions have frequently been used by CFA, often before any investigation or finding of wrongdoing has occurred. With some investigations taking many months to complete, these volunteers have often not had the presumption of innocence and their wellbeing and mental state have been adversely affected by the process.

The suspension of members under the CFA Regulations is not mandatory, it is discretionary and should only be done if there is a clear safety concern or for serious matters requiring immediate action. In the past, many volunteers were suspended at the instigation of any complaint, no matter how frivolous and VFBV believe these suspensions were not always justified, especially when these members have then gone on to find themselves fully cleared of the charges. Where the safety of volunteers is compromised, VFBV agree, a suspension may be reasonably considered however, VFBV have constantly questioned the need for 'carte blanche' suspension of volunteers by Districts with little oversight or justification. CFA has agreed to refine their suspension processes to ensure a measured, mutually agreed decision will be reached between the District Office and the CFA Complaints Department as to whether the suspension of a volunteer is necessary. This will be a case-by-case consideration and will ensure there is better consistency across the state.

### WELLBEING ASSISTANCE FOR VOLUNTEERS GOING THROUGH THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

VFBV alerted CFA to a number of volunteers involved in the CFA complaints process, who upon contacting the CFA Wellbeing Line for support, were troubled to find that some counsellors were unsure if their role enabled them to deal effectively with volunteers discussing conflict matters. This caused undue distress to these volunteers at a moment of vulnerability and anguish. CFA has since begun discussions with their providers to stop this happening in the future and to better educate the services how these matters should be dealt with. The role of wellbeing services is not to solve the conflict matter but support distressed volunteers through the experience. The Committee will continue to monitor.

### IMPROVED CONFLICT CASE MANAGEMENT

Delegates have long advocated for better capturing and recording of all complaint matters, especially those that historically have not been overseen by the CFA Complaints Department but have been managed at the District level. This has been a longstanding concern for VFBV, as many less formal matters have been left unresolved, some for years, and volunteers involved have been left waiting for adequate resolution. In some circumstances, the original matter which could have been easily resolved if dealt with early have festered into a more severe conflict. As a result of this advocacy, CFA has recently implemented LawVu a 'cloud-based' contact and case management application which is secure and effectively records all complaint matters both formal and less formal. In the past CFA relied upon spreadsheets which were only as current and accurate as manual recording allowed. The new system was implemented in November 2022 and CFA concede there may be historical matters that have 'slipped through the cracks' and have not been captured. VFBV would urge any volunteer who is involved in a conflict matter that has not been resolved in full, to contact their HR Business Partner or the Complaints Department at [complaints@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:complaints@cfa.vic.gov.au) to ensure their matter has been recorded and in progress for resolution.

### HEARING ADVOCATES

VFBV is continuing to work with CFA to develop and establish the role of Hearing Advocate. The idea is Hearing Advocates will support and represent volunteers named as respondents at a CFA Hearing and ensure they have the ability to fairly present their side of the story. Currently respondents must self-represent or arrange their own representation which often makes the process unfair, adversarial and deeply traumatic for those involved. VFBV hope to correct this imbalance to ensure all volunteers have access to natural justice, procedural fairness and equally qualified and skilled representation.

## 2 Minute Briefing

### Joint Technology & Innovation

June 2023

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

#### MULTI FACTOR AUTHENTICATION

CFA advised delegates of its plans to strengthen its online security by introducing multi-factor authentication (MFA) for all CFA online systems, such as Members Online, FIRS, email and other applications. MFA is a security measure that requires members to enter two sets of identity, instead of just one, like a password. Once implemented, members will need to enter their password plus a secret code that will be sent to your phone or generated via an application or token.

By default, the system will send the code to the mobile phone number stored on your CFA record, so members are encouraged to update their records to ensure their number is correct. You can do this by logging on to Members Online, clicking on 'manage my profile' in the top right corner, and then selecting 'Contact details.'

Members also have the option to install the Microsoft Authenticator app to their mobile phone or tablet device from the Apple or Google app stores rather than using a code being sent via SMS to a mobile phone. Instructions on how to setup the authenticator app will be released by CFA shortly.

VFBV was surprised to learn that CFA was not going to provide any options for members who either don't have a mobile phone, or a device compatible with an authenticator app, meaning these members would have been locked out of the system. VFBV has lobbied very strongly to ensure no members are left behind and have convinced CFA to offer a small device (called a token) to issue to those members who for one reason or another cannot access a code via their phone. These tokens are very similar to those offered by many banks and will be a small keyring size device that can be used to generate the MFA code. This is a great outcome for members and demonstrates the value of volunteer consultation and our committee processes that work collaboratively to solve problems. More information on the rollout of MFA will be released by CFA shortly and we will keep you informed.

#### RECORDING OF PLANNED BURN ATTENDANCE

VFBV State Council has requested delegates to raise the issue of members attending planned burns not being recorded in the Fire Incident Reporting System (FIRS). Not only does this underreport activity but has implications from an insurance perspective and impacts when it comes to medical or presumptive legislation claims.

CFA has agreed that this is an oversight and have engaged a project manager to commence work on having planned burn activities more easily captured and reported into FIRS along similar lines as to that of incident reporting. The committee looks forward to seeing this important work progress and will update members with progress reports.

The committee are monitoring the trials of the new radios which have commenced in three districts across the State. Districts 5, 15 and 22 have commenced trialling the radios in three brigades in each district.

#### RADIO REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Based upon the results of this short trial, EMV will be requested to proceed to the next stage or not. The Committee have been assured that funding for the project is quarantined. However, a shortage of semiconductor supply worldwide is an identified risk that may cause some delays in delivery. When they do get rolled out - there will not need to be any transition or change over period, as the new radios are backward compatible with the existing radios. Brigades are keen for information on the progress of the project, and we will endeavour to keep you updated as more information is released.

#### DIGITAL RADIO UPGRADE PROJECT

The Committee was advised that a new radio site at Little River is due for completion around August 2023. The re-introduction of fireground radio talkgroups has also occurred in outer metro Districts 7, 8, 13 and 14. These talkgroups will be allocated and displayed on the pager message generated by the CAD system at the time of initial call.

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

### RESPOND TO URBAN PACKAGE RELEASE

After many false starts, the full release of the Respond to Urban Fire Course, formally known as 'Structural Firefighter', edges ever closer. Following a very long and interrupted period of development, CFA finally released a draft of the Respond to Urban Fire Training course in late October last year. This draft course was approximately 14 days long and encompassed not only the units of competency required under the national competency, but also added additional elements drawn from other competencies.

While the material contained in the course was quite good, the expanded course was well out of scope and added so much additional content to make the course length untenable. Feedback from volunteers during the AFAC Training review made clear that volunteers are frustrated by course creep and expect courses to be delivered efficiently and to the national standard like many other States. Volunteers frequently tell us they don't want courses bloated with additional content that just adds hours and hours to course lengths above and beyond the national framework.

Following strong advocacy by VFBV, CFA agreed to trim the course back to align only to the Respond to Urban competency with a length of approximately 9 days. This second iteration of the course was released one week before the February Joint Training meeting, with CFA unreasonably requesting delegates to endorse it that week. In good faith, several key delegates worked through the large amount of material in a very short time and concluded that the course was definitely not ready for release, with delegates highlighting errors and quality control issues with learning materials and assessments disjointed. Acknowledging that the course was already well overdue, and was a priority, delegates reached a compromise position with CFA that saw CFA agree to continue to refine the materials while they simultaneously delivered a few pilot courses in consultation with VFBV to garner broader feedback prior to the full release of the course.

Disappointing and frustratingly, CFA did not keep to this commitment nor share the updated materials with VFBV prior to the course being rolled out. Following escalation, VFBV have now secured agreement from CFA that course materials will be shared with the Committee for review and delegates will be provided an opportunity to provide further feedback. VFBV representatives will also attend some of the scheduled courses as observers, with a view that feedback garnered from these sessions will be considered by CFA for adaption into the course.

While VFBV still harbours concerns with the overall length of the course, recent changes to the public safety packages have made it difficult to streamline this specific course any further. The Committee has agreed to monitor how Districts schedule and deliver the course to ensure it is still manageable, acknowledging that volunteers give up their own time to do CFA courses. VFBV will also continue to push CFA to develop flexible methods of delivering this course that will make it accessible to the largest number of volunteers possible as the next step in its full implementation.

Special thanks to all members and delegates who reviewed and provided feedback on the course materials often under extremely tight timeframes.

### HQ TRAINING CHANGES

After approximately 16 months with the organisation, Deputy Chief Officer Jean Dyzel, Operational Doctrine and Training, left the CFA in late March to take up a position as CEO of the newly formed Public Safety Skills Australia. Until a replacement for Jean has been recruited, DCO Rohan Luke will be filling the position of DCO OD & T. While it is frustrating for delegates to lose Jean after such a short tenure, her involvement with the Joint Committee and the wider membership prepares her well for her new role and ensure she leaves having a great appreciation for volunteers in the CFA.

VFBV wishes Jean all the best in her new role and is confident the knowledge and understanding of volunteers she gained in her time at CFA will be drawn upon in her new role to the benefit of emergency service volunteers Australia wide.