

VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



Welcome to the September 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

Open for Consultation Dashboard	https://tinyurl.com/vfbvDashboard
CFA 'Give us a hand' Recruiting Toolkit	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp43

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

This month's enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. AGM Special Notice	Please table and note
2. Editorial: Strong, safe and sustainable	Please table and note
3. Joint Committee expression of interest	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
4. Editorial: Feedback loop	Please table and note
5. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
6. 2023 Volunteer Survey pre-registration	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

SPECIAL NOTICE

Annual General Meeting



This year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) is to be held on the afternoon of Sunday 8th October 2023, following State Council. The AGM is scheduled for 3pm.

Delegates intending to attend this year's AGM are requested to register their details with the VFBV office by the 25th September. Following registration, delegates will be advised of relevant details including any health screening requirements.

The office can be reached via (03) 9886 1141 or via email at vfbv@vfbv.com.au

The normal business of the AGM includes confirming minutes from the previous meeting; tabling of a report from the CEO with audited financial statements, welcoming of new board members and annual appointment/confirmation of our auditors.



EDITORIAL

STRONG, SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

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

Speaking at an 'Every Woman Every Child' event, it was Melinda Gates who said "The world is full of what seem like intractable problems. Often, we let that paralyse us. Instead, let it spur you to action."

From a CFA perspective, it's not hard to think we are surrounded by intractable problems and challenges. On those days I remind myself that every journey starts with a single step, and as long as we keep putting one foot in front of the other then today is better than yesterday.

One of the difficulties that VFBV often faces is how to communicate progress on issues that seem intractable, or where inadequate funding or resourcing simply makes solving them next to impossible.

This month, I am updating members on some of these 'slow burn' type issues that we are working very hard on in the background but are still struggling to get traction or see results. I can however assure you we have not forgotten, nor have we given up.

TRAINING REVIEW

It won't surprise anyone that training floats to the top of the list. VFBV continues to hear from many of you about the difficulty brigades are having embracing the new general fire fighter program (GFF) that replaced minimum skills.

While the new package was designed to be more flexible and modular to support a diverse range of delivery options, many continue to report difficulty in getting new volunteers through the program.

VFBV continues to pursue a review of GFF. While a review was committed to when the original program was rolled out, it has taken some time for CFA to recommit and schedule it. In fairness, the CFA Training department has had a little bit going on with other packages but given the frequency of brigade complaints - CFA has agreed to prioritise this work and are commencing a review.

Members would also recall that the Chief Officer commissioned AFAC to conduct an independent peer review into CFA Training back in 2021. That review made 14 recommendations, with CFA accepting all of them.

We along with many others have poured blood, sweat and tears behind the scenes to ensure this is not yet another review that simply adorns a shelf gathering dust. We have contributed to work groups, focus groups, steering committees and implementation plans to try and influence outcomes and results from this review.



While we remain optimistic that good work continues, both Samantha Collins and I, in our roles on the Steering Committee have continued to raise the concerns of volunteers about the lack of meaningful demonstrable progress.

Volunteers tell us they should be able to touch, feel and experience improvements from this work, not just read about all the great work that has been done to date. We are told that the recommendations of the working groups are progressing to the executive and have been assured progress is not far away. While confidence is waning, we will continue to apply pressure to ensure all the good will and massive effort that has gone into addressing the report's recommendations are not lost.

One stumbling block will be the lack of additional funds to implement some of this work that makes implementation very challenging. The lack of government investment in CFA systems and technology remains a significant impediment to progress. But we are encouraging CFA to make incremental progress and communicate transparently about which initiatives cannot be implemented due to funding, and those that can - ensuring that relevant business cases and funding bids can be made for government consideration.

And while I could dedicate pages and pages on the work we are doing to progress training issues that have been raised with us through District Councils, I will finish this section by assuring members their concerns around the ever expanding training requirements, longer courses and additional skills maintenance requirements is well heard and understood.



Delegates are working very hard to highlight to CFA the issues of concern and are offering to work with CFA to try and find solutions.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

While CFA offers multitudes of different leadership style programs, these have been inconsistent and fragmented across different organisational units resulting in no clear or formalised pathways for volunteers to access formal leadership opportunities. CFA agreed to address these gaps by forming a volunteer leadership development project back in October 2020. The project was designed to establish a strategic approach to leadership development and implement a connected suite of programs that provide deliberate pathways to build transferable leadership skills.

While COVID interrupted a lot of this work, as did significant changes to personnel across CFA's Human Resources and Training areas, progress on this project has been painstakingly slow.

VFBV continues to express its disappointment in lack of progress on this project and will continue to monitor and encourage more tangible progress.

HEARING ADVOCATES

Readers of our regular 2-Minute-briefings would be well aware of the significant work we are doing to assist CFA improve its conflict and discipline processes.

VFBV remains deeply concerned about CFA's formal hearing processes that require volunteers to be self-represented or left to arrange their own representation. We continue to express how unjust this is as well as the lack of checks and balances that should assure procedural fairness and natural justice being observed during the hearing process.

We continue to highlight the significant power imbalance that exists between CFA and the volunteer member being accused of wrongdoing. Everyone deserves a fair go.

VFBV has been calling for a program of hearing advocates that would undertake the same training that CFA's hearing officers undergo but would be responsible for assisting the volunteer present their case and ensure volunteers are receiving the same duty of care and support as any other member.

The cornerstone of Australia's justice system is set on principles such as procedural fairness, justice being blind and the presumption of innocence.

While CFA has made significant progress on reforming its conflict and discipline processes, there is still much work to do. Sadly, we have approached an impasse with middle management on the development of a hearing advocate program. Efforts are now being made to escalate internally, and we will keep you apprised of progress.

RECRUITMENT HUB

Volunteers continue to raise concerns with the new volunteer recruitment hub. While the system appears to work well when both the brigade and recruit have access to reliable internet and technology, the advantages start to fade very quickly if either party can't access or are not comfortable with doing everything online.

While there was considerable push back during early discussions, we are starting to see these concerns being heard and taken seriously.

Delegates to our Member Services Committee are continuing to monitor and advocate for improvements.

HOSE TESTING

In a good news story, CFA has recently released its revised Hose Testing SOP incorporating much of the VFBV feedback that was provided. The SOP is well set out, concise and easy to follow.

Pleasingly CFA has removed the requirement to pressure test every hose after every use.

Brigades highlighted that this practice was unnecessary unless the hose had been used in a hostile environment, and that firefighters should be trusted to inspect hose for damage and make a decision on whether it needed further pressure testing or not.

In response to this feedback, CFA has modified its procedure only requiring hose to be inspected after use.

Pressure testing is now only required if defects are found or suspected. Hose is still required to be tested at least once annually and each time after repair or recoupling.

This is a commonsense approach and shows CFA is listening to feedback.

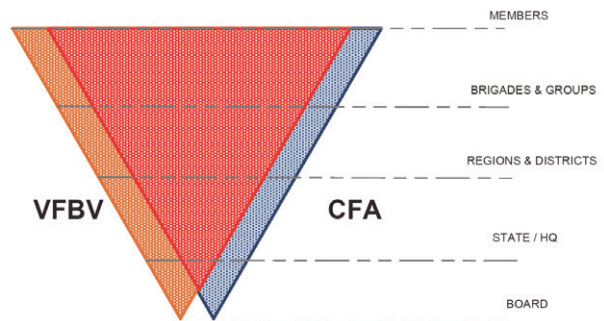
In closing, while hearing about some of the intractable issues we are working on may be a depressing read for some, VFBV is pursuing more than 100 of these kind of issues through our structures. To its credit, CFA is at the table and indicating it is eager to work with us on finding improvements.

JOINT COMMITTEE

Expression of Interest

CFA/VFBV Joint Committees are a critical component of our State level consultative framework. There are eight Joint Committees:

- Community Safety Committee
- Equipment and Infrastructure Committee
- Member Services Committee
- Operational Capability Committee
- Operational Performance Committee
- People, Culture and Safety Committee
- Technology and Innovation Committee
- Training Committee



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

Joint Committees are made up of volunteer representatives nominated by VFBV, and CFA representatives nominated by CFA. State Council initiates an expression of interest process to provide an opportunity for any volunteer to nominate to a committee as a volunteer representative.

Members considering nominating as a volunteer representative 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. (Travel reimbursement is provided.)
- Relevant subject matter expertise and the ability to actively contribute to the Committee's work.
- A network outside their own brigade which will allow them to communicate views that are not just their own and a willingness to engage with brigades and groups
- A willingness to attend VFBV District Council to provide updates on the Committee's work

If you feel you can contribute, are passionate about one of the eight streams and want to be an integral part of the CFA/VFBV Joint Committee process then please visit our website for a nomination form.

We're passionate about creating inclusive teams that promotes and values diversity. All are welcome.

Nominations are due to your VFBV District Council no later than 20th November 2023.



FEEDBACK LOOP

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

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

The last several months have seen some significant items out for broad consultation, with the two most recent items eliciting a very high number of responses.

We sought feedback on draft changes CFA was proposing to its Radio Allocation policy and procedure, and feedback on a new draft policy that CFA was proposing to cover the consumption of alcohol at social functions and other activities.

First and foremost, I wish to thank every volunteer that took the time to submit feedback and comment. Our networks are designed to provide the opportunity for volunteers from every part of the State to provide feedback.

This is important as a policy impact can be very different depending on the location of your brigade, how large or small it is, the makeup of the membership, and your own experiences which often provide different perspectives. To canvass feedback from 52,000 volunteers across 1,214 brigades takes considerable time, effort and hard work.

Our forums are also the perfect place for volunteers to discuss these impacts. Often there may be a perception of what a policy is saying that elicits strong feedback. Being able to discuss the policy in open forums such as our District Councils allows volunteers to hear feedback from their peers and often leads to a much better understanding and appreciation of what impacts may or may not occur in their own brigade.

Essentially, this elaborate and well-structured network is what drives VFBV to be determined to ensure decision makers use it, and treat volunteer consultation seriously to ensure issues are well understood, discussed and tested, with enough time for these discussions to be meaningful.

And yes, sometimes it can be difficult. No one likes hearing negative feedback, but if a draft policy has missed the mark, or has not prepared for a potential impact or other negative consequence, it is better for everyone to know that while there is still time to fix it.

In this sense, VFBV was inundated with feedback from members on CFA's draft alcohol and other drugs policy. Only 13% of respondents indicated a high level of support

for the draft policy. It was clear from going through the feedback that the draft missed the mark and underestimated many of the impacts caused by loose wording and vague scope and intent.

Without declaring what problem the policy was hoping to fix, it was left open to interpretation, of which there was many. In an organisation the size of CFA, it is important that policy writers maintain strict discipline in crafting policy language, scope and intent.

It is important to note that while there was overwhelming criticism of elements of the draft policy, we did not receive any feedback that advocated inappropriate policy settings or suggested volunteers did not support an overarching policy context that encourages the responsible use and serving of alcohol.

This is unsurprising given the extremely high trust and reputation that CFA volunteers have built and earned in their communities.

However, there was overwhelming feedback that CFA policy must first and foremost be framed in the context that CFA is a volunteer and community embedded organisation and creating six pages of red tape that sought to reach across into people's personal lives and simply tie people in knots was neither well received, nor appropriate given the very low incidence of issues. The point that many made was that the CFA behavioural standards, founded on the volunteer code of conduct that volunteers themselves designed and wrote - expressly outlines the behaviour expected of CFA members, so why the need for more bureaucracy?

The VFBV Board and State Council have considered the feedback received and have developed five high level principles to guide a future sensible policy. We have formally advised CFA that we cannot support its draft policy in its current format and have offered to assist CFA revisit its base assumptions, proposing a more effective policy that incorporates volunteer feedback.

While CFA has not yet formally responded to VFBV's feedback, I have been informed that our feedback has been welcomed and is being taken seriously, with the intent of



diligently considering the feedback provided before discussing next steps.

While we don't always have to agree, this is the mature and professional way to approach consultation. Neither side is served by digging in or ignoring the others perspective, and I remain optimistic that genuine consultation, and a culture of actively seeking, listening and acting on volunteer feedback continues, and I congratulate the CFA CEO and Chief Officer on their approach to working with us to ensure volunteer consultation is not merely lip service.

There are two further major pieces of proposed policy currently out for consultation.

Given their potential impacts, we are seeking broad feedback from all brigades, groups, district councils and individual volunteers.

The first is a revised CFA Finance Policy suite that proposes to streamline the various financial management policies and clarify processes for the management of brigade and group finances. In many respects, the new policies simply pick up elements from the brigade management manual that have been in place for some time now.

To its credit, CFA embarked on internal consultation with VFBV as it was developing its draft policies prior to their release, which has resulted in a better developed draft for broader consultation. While much of our initial feedback has been picked up, we are keen to hear from brigades and groups about the practicalities of some of the proposed changes, such as leasing arrangements, the use of brigade derived income from commercial activities such as fire equipment maintenance and the use of brigade social and welfare accounts.

The second item out for broad consultation is a revised working with children clearances policy. While CFA admits that the majority of roles in CFA do not perform "child related activities" and therefore do not require a working with children clearance under the Worker Screening Act, it is proposing to expand its policy to mandate that all members must hold a working with children clearance by June 2026.

Again, we are seeking brigades thoughts about the appropriateness of this requirement, and whether there may be any unintended consequences. In particular we are keen to gauge from volunteers their feeling about the administrative burden this may create, especially in remote and regional communities and the likelihood of maintaining such clearances in the future, and the workload of brigades to monitor and support members meeting the new requirements.

Interestingly no new funding or administrative support has been announced or proposed to accompany the modified proposal, so we are also keen to hear from volunteers on what additional support they or their brigade may require to support the proposed position.

While I suspect that every member supports CFA being a child safe organisation (of which it currently is), people may differ in how they think an organisation actually becomes child safe vs administrative processes that simply tick a box. I encourage members to have mature and robust conversations about the practicalities of the proposal, and provide your feedback, both positive and negative. It is critically important we don't only hear from those opposed, but also those who support. We are committed to representing the diversity of views that are likely to be found across the membership. But unless we hear from you, this is difficult.

We are also keen to hear your views on the timelines of each schedule, the roles contained within each, how to manage members who rarely attend the brigade and the role of brigade management teams in overseeing compliance with the proposed policy.

I often remind people that genuine consultation isn't simply about asking a question and then waiting upon a single response. It's a journey – not a destination, it takes time, involves many discussions and sometimes it is difficult and challenging. But in the end, you get good policy and the desired outcome that because of the support, is actively complied with.

Good consultation is about empowering and trusting volunteers, engaging them as equal partners in the journey and sharing the underpinning issue, challenge or opportunity that we are seeking to address. While I am not convinced we are quite there yet, I do see positive signs.

Robust and genuine volunteer consultation is achieved by the proper analysis of the issue in partnership with volunteers; consideration of alternatives; providing timeframes that are respectful and appropriate for a large dispersed volunteer-based organisation; as well as a commitment to show how feedback has been taken into account and considered before decisions or next steps are taken.

Your voice matters and will have an impact on decisions affecting the future, so please get involved. And while we will keep striving for improved consultation arrangements with CFA, your involvement in feedback requests is critical. Visit our website for the drafts and where to send your feedback.

We want to hear from you.

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

PEOPLE AT HIGHER RISK – EMERGENCY PLANNING ADVICE SERVICE

The Emergency Planning Advice Service (EPAS) is designed to support people who have a disability, are older, or have a chronic or acute medical condition and who may be at high risk of death or injury should a fire occur. This program can be delivered by appropriately trained and experienced CFA volunteers.

Findings from the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission showed it was clear that community members, who were collectively defined as ‘vulnerable people’, were vastly overrepresented in mortality figures. 44% of people who died during the Black Saturday fires were considered ‘vulnerable’. Recently a national study on preventable house fire fatalities has shown that 62% of people who died in a house fire had a disability.

In developing EPAS there has been research to explore how to better support those who are at higher risk. The program partners with other agencies, including the Red Cross, Ambulance Victoria, disability support agencies and local governments. There have been six demonstration programs in LGAs with five completed and one still underway.

Delivery of EPAS involves multiple visitations to an individual’s home to discuss fire safety and preparedness and is designed to allow people to develop a personalised plan and empower individual decision making. This allows vulnerable people to tailor emergency preparedness planning to suit their individual support needs.

The short-term outcomes for the program include the participant being more aware of their hazards/risks and what that means to them. The participant also becomes more aware of their own capabilities in preparing and responding to the risks and a greater understanding on what leaving early and what home fire evacuation means for them in their circumstances.

CFA members who would like to participate in the delivery of EPAS will need to complete the EPAS Facilitator training before delivering the program. The training program is a combination of self-guided study and group-based face-to-face or online training (over three sessions of about 6 hours each). Brigades that have members interested in delivering EPAS are encouraged to contact their CECs.

An introductory E- learning module called “Prevent, Detect, Escape” can be found on LMS and is also available to the general public. This module was co-developed with people who have a disability and has been designed for individuals at higher risk from fire. It provides resources and support for vulnerable people in the community. Short introductory videos also called “Prevent, Detect, Escape” can be found on CFA’s YouTube channel.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CAPABILITY PATHWAY

Prompted by requests from volunteers for greater clarity and personalised learning pathways, VFBV delegates continue to pursue development of CFA volunteer training pathways to delivering Community Engagement. While operational competencies are sometimes obvious, there is a need for additional pathways for those who may wish to concentrate on community education and community safety type roles. Training pathways allow members to understand what skill, learning and training is required for them to deliver various community engagement programs as well as how to advance their training into other areas should they wish to do so.

It is planned for there to be four levels of capability depending on the complexity and nature of the programs being delivered. At a basic level the capability pathways begin at brigade-based community safety programs, such as smoke alarm installation or Property Advice Visitation Services (PAVS). At the highest end of the capability pathway is training coordinated by Emergency Management Victoria for community engagement that can be delivered at a statewide level or at major incidents.

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

40KM SPEED SIGNAGE

In recent months brigades and districts have escalated to State Council concerns regarding the safety of members attending incidents on roadsides especially those with 100km speed limits. Members are finding many motorists are placing firefighters working alongside busy roadways at risk by not adhering to the law that requires drivers and riders to slow to 40 km/h when passing stationary enforcement or emergency vehicles with flashing lights. Once fully passed the emergency vehicle, the rule requires drivers not to increase speed until a safe enough distance from the roadside incident.

In the majority of incidents CFA vehicles are in attendance far in advance of Victoria police arrival on scene to deploy their electronic speed signs to warn traffic of speed limits. Until then members only have the option to block the road/lane with the appliance to enable a safety barrier for members but this creates an issue when other services such as SES or Ambulance Victoria arrive on scene creating a bottleneck for access.

VFBV is seeking in-principal support for the investigation of supply of adequate speed limit displays to Brigades/Groups that frequently attend incidences on roadways whether digital, magnetic, or foldable that could be stored and placed on the side of any vehicle that is used to block the lane/lanes of traffic.

VFBV is also requesting support for the resumption of a cross-agency statewide safety education campaign in mixed media platforms that would assist in reinforcing the need for driver caution/consideration when passing emergency workers.

FORWARD COMMAND VEHICLE LIGHTING CONCERNS

Delegates are investigating a matter raised by several groups regarding the disconnection of the factory indicators on the 2021 model Ford Ranger FCV's fitted with factory bull bars.

Members have reported that when they went to change the indicator globe on their FCV they have found that there is no wiring going into the headlight assembly and that the wiring loom now bypassed the head light and is connected to the festoon globe assembly in the bulbar.

The matter was raised locally at District level with CFA confirming that this is now standard for the current FCV builds. VFBV has been asked to investigate the fittings instructions on the Ford bull bar which allegedly indicate what wiring loom link you need to fit when installing this bar to retain the factory lighting.

Volunteers have raised two issues with VFBV; one is the depth that the replacement unit is set in the bull bar as they believe it is now barely visible from the side at the mandatory 80% where the factory unit is still clearly visible. The second issue is that in moving away from LED lights as was on the previous model to a festoon and a bulb globe, the increased propensity for the globes to stop working or jump out of their fitting position on rough roads due the vibration in the bull bar. Delegates are discussing these concerns with CFA Fleet and Engineering and seeking a resolution.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE CLOTHING (PPC) CLEANING

With the increasing risk of contaminants in turnout gear brigades have again escalated concerns about washing their turnout gear in their home washing machines.

Under the EMV safety alert when dealing with PPC made of PROBAN-treated cotton, the following actions should take place. 1. Store garments in an open, well-ventilated environment. 2. PPC should be washed regularly or when heavily soiled or dirty. 3. PPC should be washed separately from other garments. 4. Do not shake garments before washing and if they are excessively dirty, rinse before washing. Brigades are continuing to call on CFA to consider laundry options, including the provision and installation of washing machines in stations.

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

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

CFA has worked with an external agency to create a raft of resources to help brigades and districts with volunteer recruitment. The resources include social media tiles and videos for use on Facebook, Instagram, and posters that can be customised to individual brigades, email images for signature blocks and other specialized images for brigades to use. Brigades are encouraged to incorporate these materials into its own recruitment campaigns. Some brigades have commented that while these resources are great for brigades in high population areas with lots of social media and electronic coverage, they may not be as beneficial for brigades in areas with poor connectivity and low population density. This feedback has been noted, and CFA has stated materials will be reviewed to support letter drops and other offline activities.

There is also significant work being done in the background to gauge the effectiveness of the 'Give us a hand' campaign and VFBV encourages brigades to report back on if the campaign has been successful for their brigade or area. VFBV will continue to push for continued support for recruitment and retention activities. In positive news, and as a result of VFBV lobbying and extensive user feedback - CFA has also released an update to the Volunteer Recruitment Hub (VRHv4.0) to address many of the issues, with a commitment to investigate further work and updates to address some remaining issues.

CHAMPIONSHIPS

CFA is currently conducting a review of the 2023 Championships, a copy of which will be provided to VFBV for dissemination. In the meantime, the Rural and Urban competition committees are focused on making the event even more successful and enjoyable and a great deal of work is being done to ensure that the events are relevant to fire ground practices so that members gain skills they can use back in their districts to protect their communities.

If you have competed in the past or want to give it a try for the first time, you still have time to get your team back on the competition track, talk to your local competition association or VFBV District Council for information and support. The 2024 State Urban Junior Firefighting Championship will be on the 16th and 17th March 2024 and the Urban Senior and Rural Junior and Seniors on the 23rd and 24th March, 2024 at Mooroopna.

COMPLEMENTARY VOLUNTEER MEMBERSHIP MODEL

With brigades continuing to reach out to VFBV for support, advice, and a helping hand to ensure their brigades remain viable with a reduction in membership, CFA has recently agreed to examining a complementary volunteer membership model. This will be done in conjunction with the brigade classification/management model. Both reviews will involve significant consultation with VFBV and brigades across the state.

A number of brigades have approached VFBV advising that they have been given an ultimatum that if they don't fill all roles within the BMT in accordance with the CFA Regulations, they will be forced to close, amalgamate, or become a satellite station, and VFBV encourages any brigade being told this to please approach your local State Councillor or VFBV Support Officer as a matter of priority.

VFBV encourages brigades that are experiencing such difficulties to talk with their ACFO and ask for assistance from the district by way of a recruitment drive, community meeting or any resources they can offer to assist. At the same time, please engage with the local VFBV District Council so we can monitor what support you receive and help resolve any barriers you may encounter. VFBV is keen to gauge the level of assistance that brigades receive in way of helping to develop a list of case studies that may assist others into the future. Members of the committee are keen to understand what can be done to proactively assist brigades that run into difficulty and welcome any suggestions so we can advocate to CFA.

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

OPERATIONAL ENDORSEMENT PROCESS

Volunteers have communicated to VFBV the inconsistencies that occur from district to district when gaining an endorsement after they have successfully completed selected training courses. Members would be aware that once a volunteer has completed the mandated driver training units the endorsement to drive Code 1 is delegated to the Captain of the brigade, with this being consistent across the state. Once a member has completed the required driver training the captain can then endorse a member to drive code 1 or require them to do further training before the final sign off.

This is not the case in many other training endorsements with endorsement required variously from the ACFO, District office, or District Manager Learning & Development. Members have asked that a clear and consistent process be developed so that members have surety of what the process involves them to do once they successfully complete a qualification and how the endorsement process will unfold. CFA has agreed to work with the committee to develop a simple endorsement process that will provide a transparent process to ensure consistency across the State.

F15 HELMET TORCHES

Delegates have continued to escalate the concerns of members reporting helmet torch issues with CFA having now agreed to do more research into the issue of the plinth torches becoming loose on the new F15 structural helmets.

Many brigades have told VFBV that they often have trouble securing the torch back into the helmet bracket when it becomes loose. The torch becomes unattached for various reasons and the manufacturer has confirmed the torches are designed to come off to avoid neck and head injuries when the helmet gets caught on a hook hazard while in a hostile environment. Some brigades have requested that the torches be glued in or permanently attached.

CFA has agreed to look at all the options to make the torch more secure and have agreed to undertake a risk assessment should the solution be to permanently fix the torch to the helmet and also investigate alternatives that may be available to secure the torch. VFBV delegates recommend that members do not glue or permanently affix the torches until the full safety review and solution is tested and agreed on. We will keep you updated on progress of the review.

DECONTAMINATION PROCESS REVIEW

Delegates have raised concern that CFA SOP 10.03 Asbestos Incidents has not been reviewed since 2011 and while the process is still in use by brigades at incidents that have a suspected asbestos contamination there are many Districts that are reviewing or have developed their own 'add ons' to the way in which asbestos and PPE decontamination takes place, creating inconsistencies across the State.

The SOP outlines the use of a decontamination shower and copious amounts of low pressure water to wash members exposed to Asbestos contaminant during the incident and how to bag up gear for washing after the incident but it does not state where this is to be done.

While brigades are doing this at the incident this then leaves the member soaking wet and having to spend considerable time exposed to the elements in nothing more than a t-shirt and shorts, while the incident is completed, and crews can return to station. Members have asked CFA to review the SOP and consider a consistent approach across the state.

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

CFA COMPLAINTS PROCESS UPDATE

As the result of ongoing advocacy by VFBV, CFA is now actively recording and reporting on the number of less-formal complaints, with 73 less-formal cases remaining outstanding. Previously, CFA HQ only monitored serious cases, but given the number of unresolved less-serious cases that continued to fester, delegates have continued to advocate on the importance of dealing with all matters in a timely and professional manner. These matters are often resolved by mediation, facilitated discussion, counselling, training, education and changes to work environments.

VFBV has requested CFA provide de-identified statistics so the committee can review a breakdown of these outstanding cases by Region and status of complaint. It is VFBV's contention that some of these matters may be 'in limbo' and may have seen little or no movement for extended periods of time. VFBV feel better able to monitor these cases if provided with more information, including time frames, as part of an ongoing status report. We continue to urge volunteers who are involved in a less-formal complaint that appears to be stagnate or faltering, to contact their HR Business Partner or the Complaints Department at complaints@cfa.vic.gov.au. If you require any support, assistance and guidance dealing with your matter, please contact your VFBV District Council or VFBV Support Officer for advice.

Delegates were briefed on the establishment of a complaints process map, which will be available to members shortly. This map will provide resources and explain the CFA complaints process step by step, so that a volunteer (respondent or complainant) can see each particular "step" and see what to expect at that juncture of the process. VFBV is assisting with the design to ensure relevant information and frequently asked questions and answers are provided also. Delegates have commended CFA on progress of this initiative in responding to this frequent request for an easy to understand and follow process map to assist volunteers going through the process.

RESOLUTION SUPPORT SATISFACTION SURVEY

CFA has recently changed their procedure, forwarding the Resolution Support Satisfaction Survey (RSSS) to complainants and respondents upon completion of the Hearing Process. Previously, CFA was forwarding the survey quarterly and found volunteers were either not completing the survey or only part completing the survey and therefore not providing enough information to glean usable data. The format has also been reviewed ensuring the survey is more user friendly. VFBV has requested CFA include questions in the survey to capture the volunteer experience of sub-contracted investigative companies engaged by CFA to conduct investigations. The object of the RSSS survey is to gather information of how CFA handles a complaint at each juncture along the journey, including HR Business Partners' case management, wellbeing services provided, District office(s) response and service provided by external investigators. It is vital this information be provided in order to address any gaps or failures in the process. VFBV encourage all volunteers to participate in the survey and provide their valuable feedback which supports our advocacy for improvements.

MEDICAL REVIEW PROCESS

VFBV was alarmed to find CFA had updated its medical review process and self-assessment questionnaire on new member application forms without any formal VFBV consultation. Members would recall this process was last reviewed several years ago following significant volunteer backlash over intrusive and inappropriate questions being added to registration forms. The new iteration is very long and onerous for volunteers to complete, and given recent data breaches, VFBV holds serious concerns about the use and storage of private medical information and how it is used within CFA and has raised these concerns with senior management. CFA has agreed to review its Medical Clarification Report (MCR) and committed to improve this process for members and reduce onerous time constraints. Once the draft MCR is completed, we will be seeking feedback including from volunteers who have been engaged in the medical review process previously.

We will continue to monitor and update members on progress including what steps CFA is taking to securely store and handle this sensitive medical information.

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

DISTRICT PLANNING COMMITTEES

While most districts operate under a District Planning Committee (DPC), with involvement and input from senior and experienced volunteers and District staff, there is one District that continues to operate with a District Strategic Advisory Team (DSAT). The DSAT concept was a pilot that began in 2018 with three Districts and was part of the Chief Officer 5 priority projects back in 2018. While 2 of the 3 pilots have finished and the districts involved returned to the regular DPC process, one District continues to run a DSAT process. Delegates have asked CFA if there is a report that has been written from the pilot and how long the pilot is intended to go given that it is heading into its 6th year and have asked what are the outcomes of the project.

Coinciding with this are reports from some Districts that several DPC's have been changed to have less volunteer representation than in the past, as well as changes to voting rights. Given DPC structures were intended to be consistent across the State, delegates have requested the review be finalised and lessons learned posted ASAP in order to inform further discussions.

OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENTS

VFBV is aware of the concerns being raised by volunteers on the difficulties that volunteer members are experiencing being considered for international deployments. International and interstate deployments not only give volunteer members the opportunity to develop their skills in a completely different environment that they would normally work in but also allow for cross agency harmonization. Delegates have requested that CFA review its processes and seek to resolve any barriers making it difficult for volunteers to be deployed. CFA has agreed to investigate further.

FLOOD AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

The lack of a sector wide after-action review (AAR) for the 2022/23 floods was referred to the Committee by State Council following volunteer complaints. Given the number of agencies involved, delegates have requested CFA escalate these concerns to EMV and enquire why EMV did not coordinate an appropriate AAR following the flood event. CFA members provided significant and vital assistance to the SES and it is important that lessons be learned in order to ensure all members keep themselves and other members safe during these responses. It has been highlighted that in many areas that were heavily supported by CFA volunteers in response to the devastating floods there has been limited opportunity for volunteers to provide feedback or contribute to lessons learned in an effort to improve the response in the future.

Volunteers have told VFBV that many of the limited AAR sessions have been held during the day or at times that are not 'volunteer friendly' which makes it very difficult for volunteers to attend or contribute to. While CFA was not the lead agency during the flood response, CFA volunteers contributed over 12,000 FTE days alongside SES to help their communities and can provide the agencies with some valuable insights to ensure the response is enhanced in the future.

Volunteers have also asked that the CFA doctrine team revisit SOP 10.26 Supporting VICSES Flood Operations doctrine to ensure it is updated to better reflect the changes in response across the state and to consider those communities that do not have access to SES facilities and where the CFA response is the first on scene. The Victorian 'all hazards, all agencies' approach means that when the community is in need, we all contribute. The SOP was last updated in 2012 and outlines the command-and-control expectations of each event but is limited in its explanation of what CFA volunteers need to do if confronted with the need to rescue someone from flood waters.

Brigades have sought additional cross-agency training be provided, and have suggested CFA consider making specific flood training available for brigades that are frequently called upon during floods. Delegates are seeking these options be considered during the SOP's review.

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

RESOLUTION OF TRAINING DELIVERY ISSUES

A past frustration for VFBV delegates to the Joint Training Committee (JTC) has been the fact that CFA has been reticent to have training delivery issues brought to or even discussed at the JTC, despite MLD's having a representative on the committee. Given this is frequently the cause of many volunteer complaints, delegates have worked hard to overcome this barrier. But with the refresh of the terms of reference for Joint Committees and a new DCO chairing the committee, the JTC has now been clearly identified as the forum for discussion of ALL CFA training related issues. The JTC has a renewed focus on monitoring the volume, accessibility and timeliness of training being delivered by Districts in order to identify systemic issues affecting volunteers.

While the Training Department at CFA Headquarters is responsible for the production of training course materials, it is the responsibility of the Regions and Districts to schedule and deliver training to CFA Volunteers. Brigades and Groups experiencing difficulties accessing the training that they need should always try to resolve the problem through their training co-ordinators at the District level in the first instance. Where required training courses are not being provided it is well worthwhile writing directly to the District Training department and District ACFO. Identifying the members available to undertake the training and the impact on brigade capability that not having access to the training is having highlights the need for the district to accommodate the required training in their schedules. Brigades should ensure these requirements are also documented through their Section 29 process as well. CFA has now committed to supplying the JTC with data detailing training courses conducted for each District. The Committee will be looking to utilise this information to monitor the performance of training at the district level.

In a very disappointing note for members of the JTC who provide subject matter expertise on so many aspects of training, delegates have been receiving reports that District officers have alleged 'VFBV is holding up' courses being released. This is not only an insult to the volunteer SME's that provide endless hours of input and feedback but far from the truth. The last 18 months have been a frustrating period within training with significant CFA training resources focused on the RTO compliance issues to meet their obligations as a Registered Training Organisation. During this time, delegates have advocated strongly for business as usual to continue. Now that the upgrade of courses to the national PUA19 standard and responding to issues identified during the RTO audit have been completed, the JTC was pleased to receive a workplan from CFA outlining their plans for course development and release in the near future.

Crew Leader – This course was endorsed by the JTC at the meeting on the 25th June. Once CFA has completed its governance requirements, the course should be rolled out for delivery in quarter 3 2023. Until this new course is rolled out, CFA will be continuing to deliver the current crew leader course.

Drive Offroad – Was endorsed for release by the JTC in mid August. CFA has indicated that it could take until mid-late quarter 4 2023 before they have all driving instructors up to date on the new competency and the course is being widely delivered.

Strike Team Leader – Was consulted with VFBV in July with CFA planning to have it completed and ready for delivery by quarter 4 2023.

Tree Hazard Assessor, Supervise Machinery, Incident Controller 1, Monitor Hazardous Atmospheres and Operate Pumps – CFA is planning to have all these courses ready for consultation with VFBV by mid - late quarter 3 2023.

The JTC will be continuing to pursue CFA to progress important courses such as Sector Commander, Control Level 2 Incident, Control Level 3 incident, the IMT Prerequisites and Fire Weather. Members can be reassured that the delegates on the Joint Training Committee are working very hard to ensure that there are no delays in the release of training materials, and members should continue to report any instances of VFBV being used as an excuse for why something isn't available.

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

SHARED MAILBOXES

Delegates were presented with an outline of CFA's plan for the provisioning of shared mailboxes for Brigade Management Team (BMT) and Group Management Team (GMT) members. As a part of the project each brigade will be issued with a shared mailbox with 50GB of storage and an MS Teams channel included as well. A pilot was conducted with 13 brigades. The intent of shared mailboxes is for brigade officers to have an email mailbox for their portfolios in the format <BrigadeName>.<position>@cfa.vic.gov.au and will be updated based upon role changes recorded within RMS. Each successive officer will have access to the history of previous emails for that position. The shared mailbox positions available at this time are Captain, Secretary, BMT and officer being the default with options for brigades to include others such as Lieutenant, Treasurer, Comm Safety Coordinator, Comms, BTO, and FEM. At the moment access to the shared email boxes is still only available through the web version of the Microsoft 365 suite.

WORKING WITH CHILDREN DASHBOARD

At a recent District Council meeting a brigade indicated the difficulty it was having with the visibility of members Working With Children Clearances (WWCC) and seeing their currency/expiry. Delegates have raised the need for visibility of members WWCC status and expiry via a dashboard or similar to avoid members falling through the cracks. It was suggested that if the brigade officer was able to view a list of members whose WWCC was about to expire they could confidentially approach the members to ensure they renew their cards prior to expiry. CFA has given an undertaking to investigate the ability of any child safety component within the Brigade Capability Profiling Tool having consideration for privacy rules and will report back next meeting.

MICROSOFT 365 LICENCES

The Joint Technology and Innovation Committee has raised concerns with CFA about the limitations of the current Microsoft 365 Licence. If, for any reason, there is a requirement to access CFA related emails under the current licence outside of Australia - approval must be obtained prior to the member's departure although this is not widely known to members. This approval is obtained by contacting the CFA IT Help desk on 03 9262 8207 prior to your departure from Australia.

Also, volunteers have reported email have been blocked when the initiator is not known to CFA despite examples provided such as from EMV. CFA indicated this is no longer occurring and are now being forwarded on. If any member becomes aware of any instances of blocked emails, please report it to the CFA IT Help desk as well as VFBV Support Officer Peter Sharman via p.sharman@vfbv.com.au so we can monitor. Please include the from address for the blocked email and the reason given for the blocked email.

RADIO REPLACEMENT

Under the radio replacement project there is a commitment for additional portable radios being made available where operationally justified or to ensure each breathing apparatus set has an associated portable for each appliance. What has not been identified and advised to VFBV is how the portables will be securely stowed along with their spare batteries and how the charge will be maintained whilst on the appliance.

VFBV has been made aware from members of the CAD Users Group and DPC meetings that there will only be one charger per appliance and that charger will require a strap to hold the portable in place unlike the current charger where the portable is securely locked in place. VFBV representatives on the radio replacement user reference group and the Joint Technology and Innovation committee will continue to voice their concerns to the CFA and work collaboratively to ensure all components are safely secured and that the radios are able to maintain their charge whilst on the appliance.



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

PRE-REGISTRATION

This Year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey will open shortly.

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://tinyurl.com/vfbv-survey>

LAST YEAR



WE LISTENED TO

2045
CFA VOLUNTEERS