

# VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



Welcome to the December 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	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbvDashboard">https://tinyurl.com/vfbvDashboard</a>
CFA 'Give us a hand' Recruiting Toolkit	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup43">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup43</a>

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures	
This month's enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. Annual Volunteer Survey Reminder	Please table and note
2. Editorial: You don't need to be Einstein	Please table and note
3. 2024 State Championships entries now open	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
4. Editorial: Policy should help not hinder	Please table and note
5. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
<a href="http://www.vfbv.com.au">www.vfbv.com.au</a>	



**VFBV** | VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

# Annual Survey



We want to know your views on your CFA experience, good and bad.

Our annual survey gives you the opportunity to provide feedback confidentially, but in a form that allows us to use your feedback to effect real change.

Tell us about CFA Training, your brigade, how well consultation is working, and whether you feel adequately recognised and respected by CFA and the Victorian Government.

Last year, more than 2,000 volunteers participated. Make your opinion count and take the survey today.

Scan the QR code or visit  
<https://www.vfbv.com.au/cfa>





# YOU DON'T NEED TO BE EINSTEIN

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

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

Honestly, there are days that an eye roll emoji just doesn't cut it.

I refer to a gathering in Canberra of "key stakeholders" for a national disaster preparedness summit held on the 25th September. It is at this juncture I should inform you that judging from the invite list, apparently emergency service volunteer representatives are not considered by the Federal Government to be key stakeholders, even if they do represent 90% of Australia's fire service workforce.

One therefore cannot be too surprised that one of the early announcements from this summit was that the Federal Government was considering a national paid "seasonal firefighting" force that would pay people to help out during national disasters.

Apparently, this Canberra thought bubble was in response to the "worrying" decline in emergency service volunteer numbers across the country.

Quick memo – perhaps instead of thinking about band-aid solutions to fix declining volunteers, time would be better spent actually addressing the things making volunteers leave in the first place. Sprinkling precious tax payer funds on more wages when all volunteers want is a bit of respect and modern fire stations, trucks, clothing and equipment aptly fits Einstein's definition of insanity.

Given I quoted Einstein last month, I am reminded of his quote: "Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe."

If emergency service volunteer representatives had of been invited, perhaps they would have said something along the lines of; well if you stopped treating us so badly, stopped suffocating us with all your bureaucracy, stopped starving us of funding and actually listened to us - maybe we would stop leaving.

Is it really that hard to figure out what is causing volunteers so much dissatisfaction?

Let me make it really simple; State Governments are doing emergency service volunteering on the cheap, and rather than the Federal Government holding them to account or supporting volunteers directly with some benchmarking, key performance indicators or backing us up with some much-needed funding, they distract with the usual shenanigans of summits and conferences.

For some politicians, volunteers are out of sight out of mind until they need us, and then when there are smoke plumes in the air, they fawn all over us like the second coming as they pose for their selfies while telling constituents how much they support volunteers.

Sorry, but talk is cheap.

A review of volunteer fire service budgets across the country shows the appalling state of support given across the country to our volunteer emergency services when compared to the billions of dollars sunk into their paid services. CFA's budget was \$807 million prior to fire services reform in 2020, dropping to \$347 million last year. To put that into perspective, FRV's overtime budget alone is now purportedly almost the equivalent to one-third of CFA's entire annual budget.

Imagine if FRV needed to run 1,214 CFA fire stations instead of the 85 they do currently.

Yet volunteers are forced to fundraise just to scrape up enough money to buy the very equipment and infrastructure they need to do the job they are being asked to do for free. All while paying the taxes that fund the other paid services. So please don't fall for the whole declining volunteerism mantra that some people try to spin as a self-fulfilling prophecy, as if it's all these external factors and the decline is somehow inevitable.

Rather, it has everything to do with how volunteers are treated. You don't need to be Einstein to figure out volunteer organisations rely on high morale to attract and retain volunteers.





This is exactly why CFA was setup as a statutory authority in the first place. Back then, even Parliament knew getting the government to run a volunteer fire service would be a complete mess. If it's well accepted that governments should not run private enterprise because they are just not any good at it – why do we think they would be any better at running a volunteer based emergency service? But over time, as the autonomy of a statutory authority has been whittled away, politics has been allowed to interfere, and public servants have been allowed to bring their forms and procedures and all the other things that stifle community innovation, can anyone be really surprised this might in fact be making volunteering unattractive?

If governments actually treated its emergency service volunteers with respect, funded them to the same levels as their paid services, provided them all the equipment and personal protective clothing they needed, built modern and functional fire stations, maintained and cleaned them, provided them with modern fire trucks that were not the oldest in Australia, and then shielded them from needless government bureaucracy, while providing them adequate instructors and training that could be delivered at times suitable for volunteers, well gee, maybe that might send the message that government actually supports emergency service volunteers and restore morale.

VFBV will continue to monitor fire service budgets and watch for any government cuts. We have recently become aware of some Districts and Regions claiming to cut programs due to budget cuts. At this point in time, we are not aware of any HQ mandated cuts, so please ensure you respond to any claim of cuts with a please explain, so we can track down who was responsible.

VFBV is not against efficiencies, or programs being redirected to try new things or bolster other programs where needs have changed. But as always, this should be done in consultation with volunteers.

If District Planning Committees were not involved in these decisions – it is time to ask why not?

### **Summer Preparedness**

Due to Victoria's climate, flora and geography, we are one of the most fire prone places on the planet and therefore don't need bad conditions to have a bad fire season. Even our mild seasons can be fairly ferocious. With this in mind, members are reminded that part of our commitment to safety and ensuring every volunteer arrives home safely, members are re-

quested to complete their burn-over drill and ensuring your tree hazards awareness is up to date.

For the sake of your families and loved ones, even if you have decades of experience, please commit to completing the Chief Officer's minimum requirements for the fire season ahead. Even if you know how to radio a mayday and activate the crew protection systems perfectly, perhaps you could assist the less experienced members of the crew by doing the burn over drill with them. It's a small price to pay for peace of mind that every person on the crew has refreshed their safety and survival skills for the season ahead.

### **Presumptive Legislation**

VFBV is encouraging all political parties to support the expansion of Victoria's firefighter presumptive legislation scheme.

Currently Victorian firefighters are only protected by presumption for 12 cancers, with the Commonwealth Government now recognising 20. Western Australia and the ACT have already introduced legislation to expand their schemes to 20, and Tasmania will be the first State to recognise 21. As at writing, the Victorian Government has only committed to expanding our scheme to include three additional cancers.

Members are reminded to please write, call and ask your local member of parliament where they stand on expanding Victoria's presumptive legislation. A key way politicians can support their volunteer firefighters is to ensure that when they fall sick from the countless chemicals and hazards we face on our firegrounds, they are protected by presumptive legislation. Ask your local MP where they stand.

### **Vale**

It was with a heavy heart that on September 5th we farewelled former District 14 Council President ex-Captain Chris Maries of Doreen Fire Brigade.

Chris commenced with Yarrambat Fire Brigade in 2002 before moving to Doreen, and amongst his many contributions to our fire services, Chris championed presumptive legislation for firefighters long before governments started accepting the scientific evidence from international jurisdictions. This was a cause he advocated fiercely for, long before its personal relevance became apparent in his later years.

To Chris' family, friends, loved ones and fellow firefighters, I pass on our deepest condolences on behalf of the Association, as we fondly remember his distinguished service to his community and the people of Victoria.



## STATE FIREFIGHTER CHAMPIONSHIPS 2024 TEAM ENTRIES NOW OPEN

In 2024 Mooroopna will again play host to the CFA-VFBV State Firefighter Championships for the fourth consecutive year. Across the two weekends there will be displays of teamwork, camaraderie and friendly competition between brigades from across the state.

State Urban Junior Championship	16 and 17 March 2024
State Urban Senior Championship	23 and 24 March 2024
State Rural Senior Championship	23 March 2024
State Rural Junior Championship	24 March 2024

To register your team entry or for judge and official nominations please visit [tinyurl.com/2024-entry](https://tinyurl.com/2024-entry) or scan the QR code.

**Entries will close on Sunday 18th February 2024.**

Any questions about the Championships or want more information?  
Please contact [championships@vfbv.com.au](mailto:championships@vfbv.com.au) or call the VFBV office on (03) 9886 1141.





# POLICY SHOULD HELP NOT HINDER

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

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

It is clear from the fire seasons being experienced in Queensland and NSW so far this spring that this year's fire season here in Victoria is more likely than not to be a return to a longer and busier season ahead.

Given any fire season in Victoria has the potential to be ferocious, preparation and planning is as always – key.

And while our community facing messaging is focussed on ensuring communities and residents focus on making their fire plans, it is a timely reminder about the importance of our own planning as volunteers to ensure we are at full operational readiness for the season ahead.

Now is a great time to refresh your plan for your own family outlining what they are going to do if you are called away. Also now is a good time to have those discussions with your employer about what flexibility you might have to be able to respond during the fire season. And from a brigade perspective, now is a great time to ensure all operational members have completed their Chief Officer's mandatory requirements and burn over drill. Get it over and done with before the silly season to ensure you're not trying to balance holiday commitments with fire season preparedness activities.

It is also a busy time from a consultation perspective, with multiple items open for feedback. Don't forget to regularly check our consultation dashboard on the VFBV website.

Last month we closed the feedback on CFA's draft proposals to update the brigade/group financial governance policies with CFA proposing six new policies. State Council spent considerable time considering the feedback and studying volunteer responses.

It is clear from the feedback that volunteer morale continues to be significantly impacted, and volunteer feedback was dominated by complaints about additional bureaucracy and aspects that some described as petty. From an overall perspective, the policy suite only enjoyed a very low 37% satisfaction score.

The difficult part for us when we are confronted with such overwhelming negative feedback is navigating the subsequent conversations with CFA and trying to convince them to

revisit their base assumptions. While CFA has been known to shoot the messenger in the past, I do have confidence that there is a maturity among the new executive team to take the feedback constructively and work through the issues.

The feedback reinforces my view that CFA volunteers are not opposed to change but are deeply cynical about constant changes floated without any analysis or evidence quantifying the problem that is trying to be fixed. The case for change, or more succinctly the complete lack of a case for change to accompany the proposals does not help. I suspect volunteers would be far more open to change if they were let in on how the proposed changes will actually result in a demonstrable improvement.

As I was going through the hundreds of individual items of volunteer feedback, I was reminded of the famous quotes attributed to American author Mark Twain and American poet Robert Frost "A bank is a place where they lend you an umbrella in fair weather and ask for it back again when it begins to rain."

Volunteer feedback continues to highlight the disconnect between CFA policy and what brigades and groups think the organisation should be doing to better support them where and when they need it.

The fact of the matter is CFA is chronically underfunded, and it is its volunteers who not only donate their time to provide CFA's services to their communities, but at the same time give up even more of their precious time to have to fundraise to purchase and upgrade the very same basic equipment, trucks, stations and protective clothing that the government routinely provides to its paid services.

Now this lack of funding isn't the fault of CFA management. That responsibility falls squarely on government. However, it does provide important context on how volunteers are going to react when CFA proposed policy starts reaching across and trying to control the very things brigades are being forced to do just to survive.

At the end of the day, brigades will do what they can to ensure their communities have the resources and equipment needed to protect themselves from fire and other emergen-





cies. CFA should either help, or at the very least get out of the way.

It is not until you look at CFA's proposed finance policies from this perspective, that you start to appreciate the pent-up anger and frustration volunteers express towards CFA policy that just makes things harder.

I have yet to meet a brigade that does not believe in strong financial governance, and the importance of ensuring community funds are used responsibly and to best effect. But to think that this would be better achieved by pages and pages of policy and red tape just fails to pass muster.

The most frequent criticism by volunteers to the draft policies was the perception that CFA is trying to treat its volunteers as public servants.

Many volunteers were perplexed at why it was so remarkable to think that policies written for a large government bureaucracy like the VPS, who spend hundreds of millions of taxpayer funds may look and be different to small community fire brigades that do their own fundraising and in of themselves generate more than \$2.6 billion dollars of public value to the State of Victoria through their volunteer efforts alone. They are not a drain on the public purse, in fact they are one of the very few that actually add value back into the system.

Is it really such a foreign concept to state the obvious and ensure CFA volunteers are not treated like Victorian public servants? There are no government departments I am aware that pass around a hat to all its employees so the staff can donate their own money to buy the pens, paper and photocopier used in their government funded workplace. I don't recall ever seeing a public servant giving up their personal time to fundraise for public donations so they could replace their government issued fleet vehicle. I don't recall seeing police officers requested to buy their own guns or fundraise for their highway patrol cars.

When were paramedics asked to buy their own first aid kits, defibrillators let alone their own ambulances? I also can't remember seeing defence force personnel being asked to purchase their own dress uniforms. So why on earth would anyone think it is ok that volunteer firefighters should have to fight and fundraise to buy their own fire trucks, fire stations and protective equipment?

The volunteer feedback was littered with these comparisons and pointing out the tone deafness in some of the proposed

policies. Volunteers must fund their own welfare account and annual awards nights. Excuse me? These examples start to illustrate and explain the depth of anger and frustration evident in the volunteer feedback to the draft policies. Not all the feedback was bad mind you, and many aspects of the policies were seen as common sense and practical, yet there were a handful of positions and policy statements that simply incensed volunteers, and fair enough too.

VFBV has now formally submitted its feedback to CFA and have requested the policies be reconsidered, and that the tone and language used throughout is less condescending. For example, rather than "permitting" brigades to apply for grants or sponsorship, we have suggested brigades should be empowered by being "authorised."

VFBV has also reinforced its long-held position of desiring a minimally effective regulatory regime. In other words, we believe CFA policy to be more effective if red tape and bureaucracy is minimised, and that policy contains only the fewest number of rules, requirements, obligations and procedures to achieve the desired outcome.

Additional obligations should only be imposed where there is a clear need, and a measurable benefit to justify its impost.

Volunteers have asked for greater flexibility, and for rules to better cater to the diverse range and size of brigades, rather than simply thinking a one size fits all will work for everyone. For example, a brigade financial plan for a large brigade is likely to look very different to a small brigade whose only income is their \$350 annual brigade allowance.

Similarly, volunteers have opposed a ban on brigades being able to donate to worthy community causes such as a bush-fire relief funds, especially from brigade income derived by volunteers providing their services under commercial arrangements, such as business paying for fire equipment maintenance and servicing of extinguishers.

This income is generated by volunteers on a fee for service basis, and its expenditure should remain at the discretion of the brigade. CFA often benefits from the community's generosity, is it so hard to think brigades may want to pay that forward?

We will attempt to work constructively with CFA to revise the policies and will keep you informed of progress. We can't do it without you though, and I again thank all those that provided their feedback. It has made a big difference and is being used to help affect real change.

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

#### ACTIVITY REPORTING TOOL (ART) UPDATE

In early 2021 VFBV reported that CFA had custom designed an application to be used by CFA members who plan, co-ordinate and report on community engagement activities. ART was developed by CFA in consultation with the Joint Community Safety Committee and has recently undergone some major upgrades.

Previously ART could only allow brigades to record community engagement activities once they had been completed. Version 3.0 of ART recently went live on members online to give brigades a more comprehensive tool for them to record their community engagement activity. The recently released update will allow brigades to use ART to help plan, promote and track the progress of their events as well as being able to view upcoming events in their surrounding area. One improvement is that new activities can now be entered into ART as soon as the date and location of the community activity is confirmed, with more details added as the plans progress and more information becomes available. Information about the event or any updates to the event can be viewed by other brigade members. An inbuilt email and chat function allows event details to be easily shared directly from one member to another.

Further updates to ART are expected to be made in the next 12 months, some of these will include an improved mapping tool to make it easier to locate and plan an event and bringing the reporting of completed Property Advice Visitations (PAV) and the Smoke Alarm Installations directly into ART. The Activity Reporting Tool Section of Members Online also includes a range of resources for members to access, these include user guides, frequently asked questions and a section on making community engagement more effective. If you are the Community Safety Co-ordinator for your brigade and are having difficulty navigating the new improved ART 3.0, please contact your district Community Engagement Coordinator at your District office.

#### NEW FIRE SAFETY EDUCATION PROGRAM

Fire Safe Kids is a face to face program aimed at educating primary and pre-primary school children in personal fire safety and fire safety preparedness. The purpose of this program is to educate children on the basics of fire safety such as dialling triple zero in an emergency, having a fire escape plan and knowing how to prevent a fire starting at home. Older children will learn about the basics of fire science and preventing bushfires.

Work is underway to develop a new program that will replace the Fire Safe Kid's program with an updated program that is modern, evidence based, engaging to students, suitable for the needs of schools and tied into the current curriculum. Consideration is underway to ensure that this program can be delivered by brigades.

The new children's fire safety program will be aimed at students aged from Pre-primary to Year 4. Before the program can be implemented there will be further consultation completed with key stakeholders such as educators, CFA members, VFBV, Department of Education and parent groups.

It is anticipated that a prototype of the new program will be in place by April of 2024 and training be made available to members before the new program is rolled out. Fire Safe Kids will continue to be delivered until the new program is made available. Members can visit the Fire Safe Kids information through the members online portal.



## 2 Minute Briefing

### Joint Equipment & Infrastructure

December 2023

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

#### SLOW MOVEMENT ON STORZ

As we head into another fire season, delegates continue to express concerns about the continual stalling of the Storz retrofitting program. VFBV delegates first highlighted the need for all vehicles to be fitted with the CFA preferred Storz fitting in 2009, following CFA's endorsement of the new AFAC standards in 2008. AFAC designated the Storz type fitting as one of the common Australia-wide fittings that facilitates better interagency cooperation. Despite multiple retro fit programs being funded, 12 years on, CFA data still shows that the program is not complete, with half a dozen Districts yet to be fully converted. Delegates continue to request accountability for completion of the project and have requested CFA develop a plan to give this work its highest priority, with reporting and efforts to complete the program immediately.

#### NEXT GENERATION PUMPERS MOVE AHEAD

In late 2021, CFA asked delegates to form a Next Generation Pumper working party. The working party was to look at what the next iteration of a CFA pumper would look like after the very successful Scania type 3 medium pumpers built in 2016/17. While the working party has met many times and developed a role statement there was no agreement from CFA as to when or how many Next Generation Pumpers would be built. The failure of the prototype Pumper Tanker and the age of many of the light pumpers has meant the need for a replacement pumper is critical to CFA's Structural firefighting capability and as many of the state's aging Medium and light pumpers are becoming problematic their replacement has become more urgent. Members of the working party welcomed the CFA Board's recent approval to begin the tender process to build an initial 10 new pumpers, this is on top of the already funded 6 Mercedes refurbished pumpers that are already underway. CFA will appoint a project manager to work closely with the working party and we will update you as this exciting project progresses.

#### WORKING PARTIES STALL

VFBV delegates have had a long collaboration of working with CFA in the areas of appliance design and safety but over the past 12 months there has been a distinct lack of movement in the Equipment & Infrastructure space due partly to the increased amount of CFA staff movements both leaving the organisation or through redeployment, with some working parties not meeting for over 12 months.

The Equipment and Infrastructure committee has numerous working parties at various stages from concept, terms of reference laid out and partial completion. It takes numerous people from different organisations, backgrounds, diversity and experience, VFBV delegates, State councillors and volunteer subject matter experts who have given their own unpaid time attending afterhours online meetings, travelling to locations for concept viewing and long hours of research to achieve a desirable outcome for volunteers.

VFBV has continued to raise this issue of lack of meetings and movement forward of these working parties at each quarterly meeting since late last year and is continually told by CFA that they will be restarting soon, or there are problems due to lack of budget. With volunteer time to commit to afterhours activities at a premium delegates have requested CFA to commit to a genuine and achievable timeline for working parties so that volunteers can forward plan.

#### ULT CREW PROTECTION

The prototype Ultra-Light Tanker Crew Protection system project has taken a significant amount of work from all involved and has some very important safety impacts for volunteers by providing the ULT with similar protection to a tanker in a burn over situation. The system uses radiant heat curtains internally and external compressed air foam gel to protect the occupants rather than water. The prototype has undergone live fire testing by the CSIRO. It is intended that 245 vehicles will be fitted with the system in the initial rollout and it is hoped this will become standard to all new ULTs in the future. Ordering of components is underway now and it is hoped to start retrofitting vehicles later this year.

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

#### **VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT HUB UPGRADES**

Volunteers are continuing to raise concerns around the effectiveness of the Volunteer Recruitment Hub (VRH). As a result, and following VFBV lobbying, CFA has developed new releases to update the Volunteer Recruitment Hub with v4.1 by Christmas 2023, and v4.2 by middle of 2024.

This includes better Brigade Secretary/Captain visibility and better email advice to keep people updated on where the application is up to. There are also improvements to ease progression of an application past the current 'blockers' like applications being stalled at the working with children check stages which then hold up all the other steps. The new updates will also have better handling of transfers between Brigades.

Recent updates already implemented included a streamlined junior transition to senior ranks, to better ensure junior members about to turn 16 years of age do not fall between the cracks. Additional email notifications and reminders have been created to prompt both the junior member as well as notifying the brigade. Captains and Secretaries are requested to monitor these modifications and let us know if they have improved the process or not.

#### **VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP TRAINING**

Historically, volunteer leadership programs have been inconsistent and fragmented across different organisational units across CFA 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 using donations made to the CFA Public Fund during the 2019/20 bushfires. 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.

Delegates continue to express their disappointment in lack of progress on this project. While the project has continued existing programs such as the captains peer mentoring program and the women in leadership mentoring program, there has been very little tangible progress that meet the objectives of providing a connected suite of programs that provide deliberate pathways for leadership training. These lack of pathways was made more evident by a group of CFA members who recently attended the NSW Fire Line Leadership course in Dubbo. Delegates continue to raise the lack of Leadership training available for volunteer members and will continue to pursue.

#### **VICTORIAN CONTAINER DEPOSIT SCHEME**

Earlier in the year, delegates requested CFA investigate what opportunities the Victorian container deposit scheme might present to brigades as a fundraising opportunity. Unfortunately, the Committee were advised that CFA did not support brigades to operate as collection points but would work with the scheme coordinator to register CFA as a donation partner which would allow the public to direct their rebate to a brigade. CFA Financial Services have been negotiating on behalf of CFA with the Government Agency responsible for the scheme. To date they reportedly have had little success with current advice that the three contract providers (Tomera, Visy, and Clean Away) offer different access to the distribution of the refunds. CFA has sought legal advice as to how to collect the 'donated' funds from the scheme with current advice that any moneys may have to be centrally collected. This continues to be a work in progress and the committee will continue to advocate for stronger CFA support.

#### **CREDIT/DEBIT CARD MOBILE TERMINAL TRIALS**

Delegates continue to seek an update from CFA Financial Services on the results of the pilot of mobile terminals to support brigades accept credit/debit card tap and go payments and donations. Given the length of time this pilot has been underway, delegates are seeking results, so that permanent arrangements can be established to support brigades.

## 2 Minute Briefing

### Joint Operational Capability

December 2023

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

#### F15 HELMET TORCH PLINTH

Delegates have continued to work with CFA to highlight an issue with the F15 Structural Helmet plinth torch. Volunteers have reported on how easy it is for the torch to become detached from the helmet while doing even the most basic tasks and keeping the torch secured can sometimes be challenging. CFA agreed to engage the manufacturer to find a resolution to ensure that the torches are secured more effectively. While there is some further testing to take place the manufacturer has developed a small bracket to secure the torch to the helmet. The small clip is easily attached to the helmet by the volunteer through heavy-duty double-sided tape which will solve any lengthy delays of members returning their helmet. First testing shows that the proposed solution works well but CFA has asked the manufacturer for a small supply of clips so that it can be tested through a short trial before sending out to all members with F15 Pacific helmets. If the solution is found to be suitable then all new helmets will be fitted with the new clasp. 15 volunteers are currently trialling the solution.

#### WHOLE OF LIFE ASSET PLAN

The Whole of Life Asset Plan (WOLP) is a body of work being undertaken by CFA to ensure that there is a clear consistent understanding and reporting system for the replacement and maintenance of CFA's vast infrastructure and appliance assets. The WOLP is designed to set out the asset management requirements of the organisation for the next 10 years. A new service risk delivery model has been developed that identifies the environmental risk for each brigade, which will then determine the base service delivery classification. Due to urban development, demographics and population growth many brigades are experiencing rapid changes to their turnout areas. The Chief Officer's Guidelines will determine the areas of change that CFA will take into consideration when allocating resources to an area. The service capability will address terrain, typography, rural isolation and weight of attack to determine the best resourcing and where to position those resources. CFA is also developing a weight of attack model for the country areas of Victoria which will be modelled on the time taken to deliver 15,000 litres of water to all areas of the state within a 30 minute timeframe. This is a very ambitious project and the delegates on the committee are very keen to be involved as the project develops more.

#### PPE/C UPDATES

Under the restructure of the Joint Committees the Operational Capability Committee now also manages personal protective equipment and clothing issues for consultation. CFA has reported on several projects that are being refreshed across the PPE/C portfolio. The committee was informed of new trials about to commence for a replacement structural fire fighting boot, it is expected some of the VEMTEC training grounds will hold the trials and volunteers will be heavily involved in the consultation process. Similarly, CFA is also looking broadly for new structural firefighting gloves. The dexterity and size of the current structural gloves has been a topic of discussion for sometime and it is hoped that by going to market for a new structural glove these issues can be resolved. Finally there is also a project starting for an updated structural flash hood. CFA has agreed to the Committee's request for all trials to involve volunteers in all aspects of the trials for these items and we look forward to having genuine volunteer engagement.

#### BA PRIORITY

Delegates to the committee have been asking CFA for some time to update CFA's BA strategy with the existing BA strategy document being out of date post fire services reform. CFA has reported there have been some very positive movements in this space. CFA has developed a detailed map of BA cylinder locations, filling stations and BA support vehicles which will assist the working party. The CFA donations trust has funded 234 BA Sets and 468 cylinders for brigades across the state. An additional 53 cylinders have been ordered to overcome shortages from the equipment transfers that occurred in predominantly co-located brigades after fire service reform. Orders have also been placed for 36 cylinders for each of the VESEP built BA support vehicles and a project manager has been appointed and consultation has begun with stakeholders on a concept statewide 'swap and go' system should that be determined to be the best way forward.

## 2 Minute Briefing

### Joint Operational Performance

December 2023

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

#### PRE SUMMER BRIEFING PACKS

CFA reported to the committee that the pre summer capability assessments have been completed for each district and the finishing touches were being finalised for the briefing packs before they are distributed ahead of the fire season. The packs contain mandatory information as a template for the districts and regions to add in their area specific information as required. The southeast of the state has already seen significant fire action in early October and Districts are reporting they are well prepared for the season ahead. VFBV members reminded CFA that the distribution of the Pre Summer packs is very important and are very keen to ensure that the mistakes of the past seasons where the packs were distributed very late are avoided.

#### PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS

CFA has reported that there has been higher than normal activity this year in the community prevention and preparedness activity reported through brigades and commented there was a large increase in fuel management activities in Q3 2023 compared to the previous year. While the main reason for the increase needs some further investigation one reason could be that it was too wet to burn last year with many areas experiencing higher than average rainfall and some serious flooding across many areas. Delegates commented it is pleasing to see that communities are taking the preparedness aspect fire prevention seriously. Delegates were particularly interested to understand if there has been any research that has been undertaken into whether there are more appropriate measures of performance other than what is currently reported on. Delegates will continue to question CFA on the prevention and preparedness of communities across the state.

#### DECLINING VOLUNTEER NUMBERS

Delegates continue to raise declining operational volunteer numbers as a significant risk, and one that CFA needs to be addressing and developing proactive plans on how the downward trend can be stopped. Delegates to the committee will continue to monitor and suggest ways that CFA can increase volunteer numbers and improve volunteer satisfaction.

#### COMMANDER/ACFO VACANCIES

VFBV continue to monitor Commander and ACFO vacancies across the state as CFA districts continue to struggle to fill long term vacancies as well as short term leave requests. Volunteers are consistently telling VFBV that there are vacancies that go unfilled for extended lengths of time. As we enter what is expected to be a busy fire season, volunteers are uncomfortable with the possible lack of resources at the district level due to long term vacancies not being filled. CFA did not provide an update on vacancies for this meeting however delegates will continue to pursue this as we head into fire season.

#### LESSONS MANAGEMENT

Delegates are very keen to see CFA improve the communication, distribution and development of the lessons learned project. CFA's Lessons Management Centre (LMC) is available to members through the members online portal and provides valuable insight from volunteers experience before, during and after incidents. The lessons learned examples or case studies are aimed at improving the volunteer experiences by capturing, analysing and implementing lessons to improve performance. The LMC has a lessons library, real case studies, after action reviews and debriefs, operational resources, hot debriefs, lessons analysis, videos and an extensive library of operational topics as well as a research section. The operational side of the LMC has extensive information on service delivery reporting, specialist response, operational awareness and project updates. To find out how you can contribute there is also a section dedicated to assisting members to navigate and have input into lessons learned.



## 2 Minute Briefing

### Joint People, Culture & Safety

December 2023

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

#### CFA COMPLAINTS PROCESS (INFORMAL LOCAL COMPLAINTS)

Members of the committee have requested that CFA provide local complaints data for delegates to better understand the extent of complaints at a local level. CFA has provided data that reflects matters added/closed and overall totals from January through August 2023. As expected the data shows over 20 more open matters than last reported. These matters come about as the result of complaints from the public, inappropriate social media comments, breach of policy or procedure among others, but most prominently, as the result of interpersonal conflict between members. VFBV is aware of cases that are over 12 months old whereby the complainant is still to hear from the complaints department. VFBV believes these are not isolated cases. CFA explained that these informal cases were not tracked like formal cases and not case managed like formal cases. VFBV argued these informal cases, when left to languish, fester into more serious conflicts for the members involved and potentially will be escalated to formal matters. It is also understood that dealing with informal matters is often complex and as they are not guided by the CFA Regulations, which prescribes a set process. Delegates stressed that although CFA may not be delivering good news or an ideal outcome to members, making a decision and making some contact is more helpful than leaving members in a vacuum. It is this 'not knowing' that causes members undue distress. The committee will form a working group of delegates to work with CFA to examine a consistent process which will help CFA to address some of these informal matters and hopefully bring them to a close. In order to proceed with this important work, VFBV urges volunteers who are involved in an informal complaint that is long term and/or has not progressed, to contact CFA Complaints Department at [complaints@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto: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.

#### DISTRICT OH&S COMMITTEES

Based on feedback from brigades across the state VFBV has advocated strongly for the re-invigoration of District OH&S Committees. Some Districts have been holding infrequent meetings or no meetings at all through the year. CFA data recently identified only 8 Districts that are active in the OH&S area and are holding regular meetings. The purpose of OH&S committees is to facilitate high level OH&S consultation and cooperation between district management, district volunteers and to provide feedback to the DPC, monitor district health and safety, recommend, review and distribute doctrine and practices relevant to the health and safety of volunteers. Joint committee delegates are working closely with CFA to establish a Terms of Reference for OH&S Committees which is aimed at bringing a consistent approach to OH&S across the state.

#### HEALTH WATCH PROGRAM

The CFA Health Watch program is a voluntary program available to all brigades to support the health and wellbeing of members. The goal of the Health Watch Program is to provide volunteers the opportunity (within a brigade setting) to access health checks with the emphasis on cardiovascular health. CFA stressed that these checks are 'one on one' with providers and are private and confidential, the results known only to the member. CFA is not provided any results and keep no records. Delegates raised the issue of programs not going ahead unless a 10-person quota was achieved. CFA agreed this may be difficult at times for some brigades, therefore, consolidation with training, other meetings or behavioural standards, could be considered. If your brigade is considering adopting the Health Watch Program more information can be found on members online or talk to your District Health and Safety officer.

#### MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY PROGRAM

There has been some very positive volunteer feedback to the online e-learning programs currently available to leaders and other members regarding mental health wellbeing. The learning includes videos of volunteers telling their personal stories. This has proven to be a powerful tool with volunteers 'seeing themselves' and better relating to the overall content of the program. Face to face learnings are also currently being developed and will be available soon.

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

#### CFA TELEPHONE CHANGES

CFA has briefed committee delegates of the upcoming project to replace the existing wire based telephone system with internet connected call ability at all CFA Stations. The project has been working with Telstra to develop a solution to replace the copper-based telephone systems in fire stations and local command facilities (LCF) with IP handsets. Under the project DISPLAN and fax lines will be removed as each LCF will have a number of lines available with at least one for the Brigade telephone number and one for the LCF telephone number. Brigades will maintain their existing incoming and outgoing telephone numbers with up to three handsets.

The new System does require electrical power to operate however this also applies for computers in general. The use of uninterruptable power supply (UPS) as supplied by Districts is provided for up to one hour redundancy for rack mounted equipment to allow for a generator to activate. When questioned by the committee about the redundancy requirements of the project, CFA advised that failover for NBN will be like today's practices including the failover to mobile phones as the final option. Members of the committee relayed recent examples where the loss of power and the eventual loss of telephony left communities exposed as there was no NBN, mobile phone coverage or radio communication for several hours. CFA advised this has been raised with Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) and at the national level but to date no alternative solutions have been proposed.

Under the project Brigades will not receive an initial site visit but will be contacted by the Project co-ordinator and required to answer a series of questions. CFA propose to have around 10 to 12 sites completed before the end of this calendar year. CFA connected Brigades or where it exists, the CFA corporate systems will be used for the internet connection. This allows for the organisation to increase the bandwidth should it be necessary in the future.

#### RECORDING OF PLANNED BURNS

Volunteers have been highlighting the inability for members to record through FIRS their involvement in planned burns for some time. The committee was informed by CFA that the long-awaited ability to record brigade activities into FIRS is in its final testing and is due for release early next year. Delegates were informed it is anticipated this release will include the ability to record the activities of all those who participate in planned burns to ensure actual time involved and protection associated with this type of activity is accurately and properly recorded. Although the details are still unknown, members would agree that at least this is a step in the right direction and volunteers are looking forward to the outcome. Also included in the update is to move the more common selection options to the top of the list. Any feedback on FIRS can be directed to Meghann Ripper at [meghann.ripper@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:meghann.ripper@cfa.vic.gov.au).

#### CONNECTED BRIGADES

The committee raised the issue of brigades that are not part of the connected Brigades project or are but do not have any or marginal connection to the Internet. CFA advised if there are issues with internet access at fire stations to contact the IT Helpdesk. Some Brigades have been flagged as requiring external antennas installed on their stations and these are currently on order and expected to be connected soon. Brigades can check with their catchment officer to see whether this applies to them. Brigades that originally indicated they didn't want internet connectivity but have now indicated they would like access are requested to contact the District office or your catchment officer.

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

### GFF REVIEW

Brigades and Groups are continuing to express their frustrations with the current General Fire Fighter (GFF) course. Members are commenting on the difficulties that some members face in accessing and completing GFF. The delegates to the training Committee have been pursuing CFA for a long time to conduct a wide-ranging review of the GFF Program. CFA has agreed to a review into the program which started earlier this year. CFA plan for the review to encompass all areas of GFF from the initial enrolment, scope of the course, material delivered, delivery models and the administration and record keeping in their Learning Management System.

The committee was heartened by the update received at the last meeting noting both the progress made and the scope of the work undertaken. So far, CFA has consolidated the feedback from participant and trainer surveys conducted at the end of each course and taken detailed feedback from the Joint Training Committee members. If you have completed GFF recently and have not been offered the ability to provide feedback please talk to your District training co-ordinator. CFA is now engaging directly with Volunteer Instructors and CFA staff involved with delivery and administration of the GFF course, as well as Brigades and Groups with a view to understanding where improvements can be made. As GFF is one of the most critical courses delivered by CFA, VFBV will be maintaining an active involvement in review to ensure that volunteers interests are at the forefront of any changes that are made to the program.

### CATCH UPS FOR MISSED TRAINING SESSIONS

The Training Committee has been receiving reports of concerned members who are enrolling for courses and being told by their District that if they miss even a single session of a training course, they will have to repeat the entire course. With courses generally becoming longer and held over multiple weeks, delegates are of the view that this is completely untenable. Volunteers are encouraged to commit to the course they are seeking to complete, but, a member should not be forced to repeat a course because they had an unforeseen personal, family or work issue that prevented them from attending one of their sessions, and effort should be made by both the student and trainer to arrange a catch-up.

Fortunately, CFA Training at HQ has agreed, and has committed to documenting a process for distribution to Districts outlining what instructors should do if a member has to miss a session of the course they are undertaking due to genuine family, work or medical reasons. Delegates have asked for this information to be included with the course joining instructions so that everyone is aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Any member who cannot attend a session of their training course should contact their instructor as soon as possible to discuss how they can catch up on the material they will be missing. If they are told that they cannot continue with the course, they should contact the Manager Learning and Development in their Region to discuss and seek resolution to their issue.

### FORMALISED CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR TRAINING COURSES

Delegates on the Training Committee continue to work hard to get volunteer input into the development of training courses. The value of this was soundly proved with the Respond to Urban Fire training package. While the length of the course remains an item of great concern the package that has now been released by CFA for trials is far superior to the draft that was proposed to be released in February this year.

In a sign of good faith CFA has advised they will now commit to having volunteer representation through the development of all training packages. In many cases it's the volunteers who are the subject matter experts in the field that the package is being developed for and certainly have the best insight into how the training can best be delivered to suit the diverse needs of our members. While this does create a lot of work for the volunteers that are called upon to give feedback during the development process this commitment can only lead to better training results for all members.



**VFBV** | VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

## **SURVEY OPEN**

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

**Be part of improving CFA and help us make a difference.**

**Your views are important - we want to hear from you, please have your say.**

**Scan the QR code or visit  
<https://www.vfbv.com.au/cfa>**

