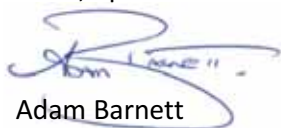


VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



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



Adam Barnett
CEO, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

Additional Resources and Updates Available Electronically

Open for Consultation Dashboard	https://tinyurl.com/vfbvDashboard
Parliamentary Inquiry into 2026 Fires Final Report	https://tinyurl.com/2026Inquiry
CFA Board Vacancies – Invitation to apply	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup56
Claim your Volunteer Rebate	https://tinyurl.com/volRebate

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

This month's enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. State Council/AGM Special Notice	Please table note
2. Editorial: Emperor's new clothes	Please table and note
3. Editorial: Choose your own adventure	Please table and note
4. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting and pin to your noticeboard
5. VFBV Newsletter Enrolment	Please table at your next meeting and pin to your noticeboard

SPECIAL NOTICE

Annual General Meeting



This year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) is to be held on the afternoon of Sunday 4th October 2026, following State Council. The AGM is scheduled for 2:30pm.

Delegates intending to attend this year's AGM are requested to register their details with the VFBV office by the 21st September. Following registration, delegates will be advised of relevant details.

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 the annual report, welcoming of new board members and annual appointment/confirmation of our auditors.



Emperor's new clothes

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' August 2026 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

The Emperor's New Clothes is a classic fairytale written by Hans Christian Anderson in 1837.

It's about a vain fashion-obsessed Emperor who considers his country's treasury is simply there to support and enrich himself. Two con artists arrive at court and claim to be expert weavers who use only the most expensive and magnificent threads that contain a magical property that make the garments completely invisible to anyone who is stupid or unfit for office. The Emperor is intrigued, believing he could use this magical clothing to expose those in his court that are stupid or incompetent, and orders they start working on his royal garments immediately sparing no expense.

During their production, he sends countless advisors and trusted ministers to check in on the weavers and report back how the garments are progressing. And while the weavers sat at empty machines pretending to work on the garments, the shocked advisors themselves seeing nothing - and so fearful of the consequences of speaking truth to power and appearing stupid or unworthy, all go along with the lie and report back to the Emperor how magnificent and splendid his new clothing was looking.

Finally, the clothing was ready for his fitting. Looking in the mirror, aghast that he could see nothing, he thinks himself alone as all his loyal advisors have told him they were magnificent. So, he too gushes about how wonderful the new clothes are, not wanting to appear stupid or unworthy.

So confident by the flattery and praise from all who saw the new garments, he orders a grand parade to show off his wonderful new attire to the town. With great fanfare, he marches through the streets accompanied by his courtiers who famously walked behind him pretending to carry the invisible train of his flowing garments. At first, the townspeople having heard the rumours that only stupid or incompetent people could not see the clothing cheered and praised the emperors new clothing.

Until a small innocent child in the crowd exclaimed that the emperor was in fact not wearing any clothing at all. Hearing the truth finally awakens the crowd and now everyone can admit that the emperor was indeed wearing nothing, breaking into laughter pointing and jeering at him.

Feeling thoroughly humiliated but not wanting to back down - the Emperor held his head high and continued with the procession, his loyal sycophants faithfully continuing to carry the non-existent train behind him.

At its core, this is a story about independent thinking, the

dangers of ego and vanity, denying reality and the importance of speaking truth to power. A fitting metaphor for current times.

With the release of the final report from the Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2026 summer fires, our goal of achieving bi-partisan support for community resilience through community embedded local fire brigades is one step closer. And while the final report rewards our discipline and diligence in pursuing ground truthed common sense solutions to improving community safety, the State Government will now need to turn its mind to its response.

It is instructive therefore to remind ourselves of the government's key messaging over the last fire season. It has variously been claimed: that CFA is better resourced than it ever has been and has been given all that it needs; CFA capital funding is adequate with CFA building more trucks now than ever; single cab tankers are safe and roadworthy; the CSBA is doing a wonderful job building new CFA fire stations; there is nothing to see about the secondment arrangements and any issues are simply administrative and have no effect on CFA's operational capability and that volunteer numbers are stable and in fact increasing in recent years with thousands wanting to join.

After six months of public inquiry, we can now judge each of those assertions using the evidence before the inquiry. The evidence shows:

CFA funding has not kept pace with inflation, and in real terms CFA grant funding has dropped 13.8% since 2020/21. Evidence shows that over the past three years CFA has only received about one-third of the funding it requested through the State Budget supplementary bidding process.

Evidence shows that CFA funding for capital works (trucks and stations) is completely inadequate, and CFA is unable to maintain its asset base with current funding. Figures confirm that even after considering recent boosts to fleet funding, those boosts still do not fund minimum replacement of fire trucks.

Pleasingly, the Committee has supported a fully funded accelerated fleet renewal program to replace aging single cab tankers, with transparent independent reporting to Parliament on progress.

Evidence has shown that CSBA's (Community Safety Building Authority) delivery of CFA fire stations costs up to 3 – 4 times the cost compared to when CFA built equivalent

fire stations. Since transitioning to the CSBA - new station builds have reduced to an average of only two per year, down from nine stations a year built under the CFA model for a quarter of the price. Curiously, a formal recommendation to hand station building back to the CFA was blocked by Labor representatives and the Greens.

Evidence from official agency records shows that in the week commencing Monday 5th January, there were nine significant fires that commenced. Over the same period, three of the five ACFO/Commander positions that should have been filled in District 22 were vacant, and a further 25 vacant/non-relieved Commander roles resulted in a 50% reduction of command staff across five districts, including District 22 and 2 (the locations of the Longwood and Harcourts fires) which were required to commence 24/7 operations.

Further, official agency records maintained since the commencement of fire service reform in 2020 show that the current financial year is projected to record the highest number of average vacancies/non-relief positions since records commenced, with on average almost 21.9 positions empty each week, with the worst weeks recording a staggering 42 vacant/non-relieved positions at its worst. The lengths the government and officials at the Department of Justice and Community Safety went to, to try and keep this data hidden was extraordinary.

While the inquiry did make a finding that these long-term vacancy and non-relief issues impacted response (Finding 63) - the committee split along party lines when it came to how to fix it.

The formal recommendation in the majority report recommends that the Victorian government engage the Fire Services Implementation Monitor to evaluate the secondment arrangements and advise how they can be strengthened within the current framework.

Curiously, this recommendation comes even after the independent monitor himself has stated that after five years of reporting - his view is that the agencies have done all they can to try and make the current arrangements work and they simply can't.

A stronger recommendation pursued by the Liberal, Nationals and One Nation representatives on the committee to abolish the secondments arrangements and return funding and the right for CFA to employ its own command workforce was blocked by Labor and the Greens, using Labor's casting vote to break the tie.

And finally on the issue of volunteer numbers. Far from being "stable," the Inquiry has made a finding that operational volunteers have in fact declined by 26% over the past decade. It further finds that despite a continued strong community interest in joining CFA, challenges remain in volunteer retention.

Pleasingly, the committee recommends that the Victorian Government develop and fund a volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention strategy. The same kind of recommendation made by the Volunteer Consultative Forum that was abolished by EMV in 2023.

If you pause and review the last dozen paragraphs, it is clear the government's previous assertions that there was nothing to see - have been overwhelmingly debunked.

I highly recommend volunteers avail themselves of the opportunity to review the Inquiries Final Report, including the appendices and minority reports. The 406 pages, 93 findings and 80 recommendations are well worth reviewing.

Given the short time available, the Committee as a whole

have done an excellent job at distilling the wide range of evidence and testimony provided to the Inquiry over the last six months. In my view, the committee have engaged constructively and maturely with the issues raised and given thoughtful consideration to the issues.

Additional recommendations made by the committee which are most welcome include findings and recommendations around; improved transparency by EMV to publish annual regional readiness statements; inclusion of employment protection for volunteers under the National Employment Standards which was first raised by VFBV during the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements following the 2019/20 fire season; improved access and consultation with volunteers on CFA training opportunities and development of level 2 and 3 incident management roles; embedding local knowledge better into IMTs and incident control centres; improved transparency on CFA fleet age and operability; improved support for private equipment; ongoing funding for strategically located water capacity; hose coupling adapter kits to be fitted on all firefighting appliances; improved risk analysis of extreme fuel risk areas; creation of escalation processes for brigades to request urgent roadside fuel reduction works; clearer authority for CFA to enforce roadside vegetation management; increased support for bushfire preparedness activities; improved warning messaging and public education; stronger telecommunication resilience in disaster prone areas; investigation of emerging fire detection technologies including AI-enabled cameras; funding for accessible mental health and wellbeing services in bushfire affected communities; improved access for veterinarians and registered firearm owners when livestock euthanasia is required and better access for wildlife responders; updates to the VicEmergency app; a review of radio communications; continued funding for CFA's elevated seasonal response initiatives; improved disaster resilience for telecommunication and energy providers with mandatory resilience standards for mobile phone towers to operate without mains power for a minimum of 48 hours; establish a rural firefighting water infrastructure fund for installation, upgrade and maintenance of water storage assets; review wire rope safety barriers to ensure they do not impede bushfire prevention; and improved recovery and relief arrangements for those affected by disaster and improved recovery support for agriculture.

A very extensive list, and one that the committee should be congratulated on.

If there is to be any criticism from members, it is likely to focus on the fact that some of the recommendations do not go far enough and whether government will actually adopt the recommendations to begin with. Which returns me to where I started.

The Victorian Government have six months to formally respond to the recommendations. Less if they wish to do so before caretaker period. And while I remain optimistic that the overwhelming evidence makes it very difficult for them to ignore, we have been here before.

With recent changes to the Victorian Premiership, we again find ourselves at a crossroads.

Much like the Emperor's new clothes, the decision to reevaluate previously held positions that fly in the face of overwhelming community evidence to the contrary is best made while the Emperor is privately peering at his new clothes in the mirror. Like the previous Premier before, the government has the rare chance to save face and reevaluate and change course. In the lead up to what is predicted to be another challenging summer, it is not only volunteers who are watching with interest, but millions of Victorians across our rich tapestry of communities that are watching also.



CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' July 2026 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

Last month I reminded members of the importance of engaging with consultation processes, and the vast opportunities for people to pursue what interest them the most. With so much going on, I thought I would use this opportunity to highlight several opportunities that will shortly be closing for feedback.

I'll start of course with our very own Annual Vol Survey. The current 2025/26 survey has been open since October last year and will close at the end of this month.

It has been conducted every year since 2012 and has become a critical tool that gives CFA and Government clear feedback directly from volunteers on what is working and what isn't with regards to their current CFA experience. It is aligned with the financial year to best influence internal CFA budget cycles and priority settings.

We run it each year so we can track and baseline volunteer thoughts and concerns and track trends in volunteer satisfaction. Ultimately the survey measures volunteer morale, and those issues that have a significant impact either on a volunteer's role, experience, the processes and systems designed to support them, and the overall culture of the organisation and its impact on their experience.

The questions have been chosen by volunteers, and each year there are two or three topical questions which are not baselined but provide a pulse check on contemporary or emerging issues.

This year's unique questions explore whether volunteers think the Victorian State Government provides sufficient funding to support the adequate replacement of CFA trucks and stations; how the CFA systems and processes that volunteers use to register for training works; impacts from the Governments new Emergency Services Tax; and feedback on the new volunteer rebate.

Historical questions that provide trend line data explores issues such as; respect and professionalism towards CFA volunteers; feedback on your role as a volunteer; how well CFA actively engages and consults with you; feedback on support provided by CFA to volunteers to help them with their role; how members access training and their views on training courses; feedback on volunteer recruitment and retention; and how people are managed at the brigade level.

With such a busy fire season, and all the other distractions, we've left this year's survey open until the end of July 2026. And while the survey takes about 10 to 15 minutes to complete,

it is one of the most impactful things an individual member can do to provide feedback that gets measured and directly influences CFA's future budget priorities and where they are going to divert energy towards. The results are studied not only by CFA and Government, but we use the results extensively to inform our advocacy.

Even if you feel nothing much has changed from the last time you completed the survey, our trend data relies on people doing the survey each year so we can track progress (or lack of progress) on the issues of concern to volunteers.

If people feel the issue they raise in previous years has not been addressed, but they stop completing the survey – the results may infer that rather than people having given up - the issue is fixed and now everything is great.

The survey is completely confidential, and your personal details are never shared with CFA with only deidentified data being used to report on trends. Complete this year's survey by going to www.vfbv.com.au/cfa

Now to the project that inspired this month's title.

Many of you might remember the popular children's series of books called 'Choose your own adventure'. The books are pitched towards 7- to 14-year-olds and allow the reader to choose their role in the adventure and sometimes influence how the story ends. There were 184 books that made up the original series.

And while they are getting a little old in the tooth, and perhaps don't compete with today's iPads - their popularity has led to the title entering common vernacular.

Choosing your own adventure however is a fitting metaphor for the CFA Contemporary Volunteer Membership Model Options Paper that has been released. After a couple of false starts over the years, this project is exploring genuine ways the CFA membership model could be tweaked in order to help the current model meet its full potential and provide greater flexibility.

The Options Paper explores 13 options that have been identified to form the basis of a potential refresh. Several options cover true tweaks, such as formalising dual memberships that allow volunteers to join two or more brigades and how this might affect voting rights, to more substantive changes such as introducing cadet or seasonal membership.



None of these options are written in stone, and the options paper explores support for not only the underlying concept but also seeks your views on any disadvantages or concerns that need to be considered if the option were accepted and implemented.

The options are grouped into three categories; enhancing what already exists; unlocking new opportunities; and refining foundational concepts that support CFA governance.

Such change has not been considered since the brigade and member reclassification projects that date back to the late 90s, and early 2010.

Early feedback already shows some significant divergence in views about some of the concepts and therefore the more people that respond the more robust the final analysis will be on what changes should be considered to the CFA membership model.

The most recent leadership of this project has exemplified model volunteer consultation by pitching concepts, options and proposals for true consideration; provided enough detail to help members understand why it is being considered; has allowed enough time for members to consider their feedback; has worked in partnership with VFBV to engage and harness the lived experience of volunteers; and has provided opportunity for open feedback for any member, BMT, GMT, DPC and District Council's to influence and provide feedback on each of the options.

Feedback on this project closes end of July. Ensure you have a say on what the future membership model might look like by visiting members.cfa.vic.gov.au/CVMM

And last but not least, I again draw attention to the large number of Standard Operating Procedures that form the basis of CFA operational doctrine.

Acknowledging it can sometimes be hard to keep up with what is being reviewed and what is not, we list all SOPs that are currently open for feedback during their formal VFBV consultation period via our consultation dashboard.

VFBV does not provide formal positions back to CFA until after we have provided an opportunity for all volunteers to review and provide feedback on the changed policies via our processes. This gives every single member an opportunity to significantly influence whether we support a draft CFA position or not, and provides a private and confidential method for you to provide feedback.

Your feedback through our processes usually results in significant change or amendment to procedures that perhaps have not always been well tested from a practicality point of view or where unintended consequences abound.

There are currently 17 SOPs open for feedback and where consultation will shortly close, including SOPs covering RPAS; Foams and Retardants; Health Monitoring; Conducting Planned Burns; Alpine; Animals and Wildlife; Community Education; Incident Handovers; and Response to Power Facilities.

Rather than expecting everyone to comment on everything, reach out to members of your brigade who have subject matter expertise or have shown an interest in a specific incident type and encourage them to get involved.

It is only through widespread volunteer testing, and feedback that this doctrine can be ground truthed and battle tested.

The dashboard is available from www.tinyurl/vfbvDashboard/

Choose your own adventure and get involved today.



VFBV

VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings September 2026

The 2 Minute Briefings are a quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

They are intended to update members on key issues that have recently been discussed. Effort is made to include any related items that may have been progressed out of session or through other avenues that are related to each committee's subject matter. Priority is given to topics where recent progress has been made. Topics where no progress has been made or where there are differences of opinion are sometimes included to ensure members are aware of VFBV efforts in continuing to advocate for progress or outcomes.

Joint Committees are formal committees between CFA and VFBV made up of VFBV delegates appointed by VFBV State Council, and CFA management representatives appointed by CFA. They are a critical loop in our consultative structures. They endeavour to work collaboratively and cooperatively on issues but may also be required to escalate issues where resolution or common ground cannot be found - requiring executive attention.

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

ASSET PROTECTION UNIT

Delegates discussed updates to the new Asset Protection Unit (APU), and reviewed the results from its first operational deployment during February's Gaffneys Creek-A1 Mine Fire. The APU was deployed in February to help protect the small township of Woods Point in District 23. Originally developed to support planned burning operations, the APU was successfully adapted for bushfire response, providing an additional layer of protection for critical community infrastructure.

The Asset Protection Unit uses portable sprinkler systems, hoses and pumps that can be rapidly deployed around key buildings and infrastructure. During the Woods Point deployment, approximately 30 sprinklers and several kilometres of hose were installed to protect essential community assets, with the system capable of expanding to around 70 sprinklers if required. A key feature of the deployment was that water was pumped directly from the Goulburn River, allowing the system to operate independently of the town's hydrant network and leaving local water supplies available for firefighting appliances.

The APU was mobilised overnight after forecasts indicated the fire could threaten Woods Point. Working alongside the Incident Management Team and local crews, the five-person deployment established sprinkler protection around the town's water pumping station, Telstra tower, CFA station, police station, general store, museum and hotel. The system was designed to complement, rather than replace, traditional firefighting by allowing crews to focus on defending homes and responding to incidents while the sprinkler network protected critical infrastructure.

The deployment demonstrated several operational advantages. By providing continuous protection around key assets, fewer fire appliances were required to remain positioned throughout the township, allowing resources to be redeployed where they were needed most. It was noted that only around half of the available equipment was used at Woods Point, highlighting the potential for the system to be deployed in larger communities with an independent water source or in remote locations where additional firefighting resources may take time to arrive.

The Committee welcomed the initiative and noted that the Asset Protection Unit is managed as part of the Planned Burn Taskforce, with any Taskforce member able to participate. Equipment is available through Members Online, with future expansion of the capability still under consideration. Delegates also discussed opportunities for interested brigades to undertake cleaning and testing of APU hoses and equipment to increase the units future sustainability. The Committee agreed the successful deployment at Woods Point demonstrated the value of adding this specialist capability to support volunteers in protecting communities during major bushfires and will continue to advocate for the units expansion.

JOINT FUEL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Joint Fuel Management Plan is jointly managed by CFA and FFMV and is intended to reduce bushfire risk through activities such as planned burning and mechanical fuel treatments to lower fuel loads. It translates long-term Bushfire Management Strategies into practical works programs delivered over one to three years. Detailed planning determines how each individual treatment will be carried out. The program supports a range of objectives beyond fuel reduction, including protecting communities, critical infrastructure and assets. The plan is developed through brigade and council nominations. Performance during the current program has been encouraging. At the time of reporting, 158 planned burns had been completed, treating more than 3,100 hectares, exceeding the Year 1 target of 138 burns covering 2,777 hectares. Brigades are encouraged to engage with their Regional Vegetation Management Officer (VMO) or Catchment Commander and use the new nomination process to help identify local fuel management priorities for future years.

September 2026

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

NEW BIG FILL DESIGN COMPLETED

The volunteer working party involved in the newly designed Big Fill have worked hard to complete the final design with manufacturing now commencing. The required chassis and pumps for the project have been received, and construction of the prototype body has commenced. The program is expected to progress to mass production once the prototype has been reviewed and endorsed by the working group. This build will assist in addressing the backlog of long-awaited units associated with VESEP grants, with the remainder of the outstanding units to be built in 2027 once final production scheduling is in place. This represents an important advancement in strengthening water supply capability and supporting improved tanker turnaround during major incidents. Rather than relying solely on fire hydrants or reticulated mains water, these units are designed to draw from static water sources, including dams, rivers, tanks and other available supplies. They are then able to boost and distribute water to refill multiple fire appliances simultaneously, helping to maintain a consistent and reliable flow of water to the fireground. This capability is particularly important in regional and rural areas, where access to mains water may be limited, inconsistent or unavailable during large-scale or prolonged incidents.

FUEL CARDS

Over the past fire season many brigades have raised concerns about the difficulty in accessing fuel out of hours. The issue particularly relates to fuel card PIN requirements at unstaffed afterhours facilities, which in many cases has prevented brigades from completing transactions late at night. The inability of brigades to create, access or modify the PIN's has been a significant barrier at unstaffed fuel locations.

If brigades are having difficulty accessing fuel out of hours, please contact your district office for assistance in registering the supplier and arranging a PIN. CFA has advised that, for all providers except Shell, PINs are generally established when a card is ordered.

In related news, delegates on the committee acknowledge the last summers Elevated Seasonal Response Initiative (ESRI) that provided CFA with bulk diesel tankers was highly successful. Delegates are continuing to seek an across-the-board solution to the broader issue of out-of-hours fuel payments for all brigades and CFA appliances, recognising the operational impact this can have when crews require reliable access to fuel to meet operational requirements outside normal business hours.

WORKWEAR

Discussions continue with CFA to address the various issues raised by volunteers with workwear, including but not limited to fit, fabric quality, durability, functionality, design and overall comfort. The CFA workwear upgrade project is intended to review the existing garments and explore design updates to better support the diverse needs and roles of members.

A recent workwear survey invited feedback from members and received 2,456 responses, validating the interest volunteers have in workwear. Feedback has provided a clear picture of members' priorities and areas where the current workwear garments could be improved. 50 volunteers have participated in a series of interactive workshops to share their experiences and ideas in greater depth, helping better understand the areas of concern with the current design and identify additional opportunities for improvement. The common themes across the survey and workshops were, breathability, comfort, colour-fastness, durability of fabric, the need to improve flexibility in workwear items to accommodate body changes and physical needs, consistent sizing, considerations of female cut options for certain items, improvement of buttons and fastenings, and a desire for an additional warm layer option (e.g. jumper).



2 Minute Briefing

Joint Member Services

September 2026

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

BRIGADE FINANCE UPDATES

Delegates have discussed the continued expansion of CFA's brigade finance projects, with a strong focus on advocating for practical support for brigade treasurers and simplifying financial administration across CFA. Following the 2025 updates to the CFA Regulations, which require every brigade and group to appoint a Treasurer from 1 July 2026, a new Treasurer induction and training module has been developed and is available on Members Online through the Learning Management System (LMS). This module aims to better support volunteers taking on these important financial responsibilities. Progress also continues on the Xero bookkeeping trial, with more than 150 brigades and groups signing up and over 70 brigades already onboarded or well advanced through the onboarding process. The Committee will continue to monitor and is keen to receive feedback from members undertaking these new initiatives.

RECRUITMENT PROGRESSION

Delegates continue to monitor CFA membership and retention data for insights into the success of recruitment activities following the 2025-2026 fire season. As previously noted, between 1 January and 28 February 2026, CFA received 3,250 membership applications, reflecting a strong community response and increased willingness to support emergency services. By mid June 2026, 1,094 of those applicants had successfully become CFA members, achieving a 36.3 per cent conversion rate for applicants. The Committee is continuing to monitor the progression of these new members through General Firefighter (GFF) training and into active service to assess retention trends and inform future recruitment approaches. The 2026 Give Us A Hand campaign, held between 16 March to 24 May 2026, generated an additional 1,205 applications across the state, with 215 applicants already progressing through the recruitment process. Ongoing brigade engagement remains essential to progressing outstanding applications and successfully integrating new volunteers into brigades.

UNDER 18 OPERATIONAL MEMBERS

Brigades in District 24 have requested CFA look at a way to visually identify members under 18 years of age when attending incidents and training activities. The proposal recognised that while CFA has policies and procedures governing the participation of junior and cadet members, there is currently no visual way for members from neighbouring or visiting brigades or incident management personnel to identify volunteers who are under 18 years of age and therefore assign them with roles that are safe, meaningful and appropriate.

It was suggested that a readily identifiable marker, such as a decal or epaulette, be considered to allow under-18 members to be easily recognised while wearing wildfire or structural personal protective clothing. The north east brigades have advised the intent of their proposal is to assist brigade leaders and incident controllers in ensuring young members are only allocated duties that align with CFA policy and age-related restrictions, particularly when working alongside members from other brigades who may not know them personally.

On considering the proposal, State Council noted the existing obligations on crew leaders of younger members and noted visual identification markers might create issues around privacy or discrimination of younger persons. State Council referred the matter to the Member Services Joint Committee to discuss further with CFA and seek subject matter expertise regarding pros and cons before progressing with broader consultation.

Having now progressed, the Committee acknowledged the importance of protecting young volunteers while supporting their participation in CFA activities. Members recognised that any identification system would need to balance operational practicality with privacy considerations and avoid unintentionally singling out junior members. The committee will now explore potential options and determine whether a consistent statewide approach would improve member safety, supervision and operational awareness across CFA as well as considering other approaches or solutions to address the concerns raised by the north east brigades. We will keep members apprised of progress.



2 Minute Briefing

Joint Operational Capability

September 2026

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

FMR TARGET ACHIEVED

In positive news, the collaboration between CFA and Ambulance Victoria to build the Fire Medical Response (FMR) program has reached a major milestone. All 50 brigades outlined in the original project brief are now online assisting AV to provide FMR response to communities across the state. AV and CFA have worked collaboratively to ensure that the 700 plus volunteers trained in FMR, are working towards ensuring that at every call the 10 min chain of survival principles are actively worked towards and the FMR operators are able to provide the best patient care to critically unwell patients while waiting for an ambulance to arrive. Victoria is reported to have one of the best cardiac arrest survival rates in the world, partially due to the fantastic work being undertaken by first responders assisting AV. Member welfare is also being closely monitored to ensure that FMR responders exposure to potentially traumatic events is carefully considered. It was noted that should additional funding from Government become available at a future date for FMR expansion, there could be an additional 20 – 30 brigades enrolled into the program based on the current AV data. Congratulations to all the brigades involved in this great program.

SPECIALIST CAPABILITY PLANS

Delegates have participated in a special workshop to explore CFA's Specialist Capability and ensure long-term strategic planning well into the future. The resulting Specialist Capability 10-year plan outlines the organisations strategic intent for the development and delivery in 7 key areas. It was noted that while there are 7 categories many are well entrenched into the CFA and some will require further investment for them to become reality. The Specialist Capability plans cover Respiratory Protection, Hazmat, Alpine, Specialist rescue, Marine, Fire Investigation and Incident Management.

One example is CFA's Respiratory Protection. The Respiratory Protection Capability plan is aimed at increasing the protections available to ensure that members health and safety is vastly improved. These protections range from maintaining P2 masks, developing new respiratory protection options for bushfire use, as well as support for Fire Investigators, continuing to build the organisations Breathing Apparatus (BA) capability and investigating and improving atmospheric monitoring capability through the use of CO monitors, gas detectors and members on-site health monitoring and rehabilitation.

While difficult to outline the full plans in such a brief article the plans will continue to evolve while CFA continues embedding processes and develop plans to feed into the CFA business planning and budgeting cycle including seeking additional government funding. We will keep members apprised as this work continues.

NEXT GEN PPC PROGRESS

The PPE&C working party is established under this Joint Committee and is made up of volunteer subject matter experts from across a variety of brigades and includes CFA staff with subject matter expertise. This working party has been recently discussing several important initiatives that will deliver outcomes over the next 12-18 months.

We wrote in the last edition of 2 min briefings about the new BR9 Chainsaw helmets which are now in stock at the State Logistics centre. Volunteers will now also have the option of new structural firefighting gloves with improved dexterity, and an improved range of sizes in firefighting boots, including the introduction of women's sizing.

The working party is finalising arrangements to greatly improve firefighter respiratory protection following the field trials of P3 respirators over the last couple of fire seasons.

Discussions for the next generation of structural PPC are also commencing which many volunteers will have a keen interest in. We will make members aware of field trial opportunities as the next round of projects begin and would value member feedback.

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

INCIDENT REPORTING BACKLOGS

Information gleaned from brigade fire reports is critical to reporting on the outcomes of CFA's community response to incidents. Consistent with increases over the past few quarters there has been a continued marked increase in operational response across the State. Quarter 3 has seen a 12% increase in incidents from the same period last year. Work continues to follow up with brigades with outstanding fire reports, including with those brigades who placed themselves offline during the passage of the new emergency services tax replacing the Fire Services Property Levy. Delays associated with larger incidents has also added to the backlog where operational demands can affect reporting being completed on time.

Delegates are continuing to advocate for better reporting on private firefighting units and acknowledge better reporting will require better data capture within fire reports. Discussions continue. Brigades are encouraged to submit any overdue fire reports at their earliest convenience to assist with post fire season data capture.

AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

While this past season saw a great response from volunteers involved in After Action Reviews (AAR) through a variety of face to face meetings, Strike Team Leader and Sector Commander surveys as well as general member input there has also been an increase in the co-ordination and co-operation from other emergency response agencies. There has been a sector wide review of the Incident Management Teams involved in the multitude of major incidents across the past summer and some areas of interest were highlighted including resource management and emergency management incident plans to name just two.

Members who attended fireground AARs should have received a copy of the final observation and insight documents for their incident. Delegates discussed the importance of districts progressing local actions arising from the findings and ensuring that as members experience more and more incidents the lessons learned from those incidents are considered and actions arising are dealt with in a timely manner in the interest of improving volunteer safety and experience. The full 2025-26 Post Season Debrief Report is available via the Members Online portal if members are interested in understanding the full suite of outcomes however members are encouraged to continue to critically and responsibly improve their evidence-based reviews of all activities from an operational performance viewpoint. Attention is now firmly focused on looking forward and ensuring that anything experienced from the past season is progressed and implemented as soon as possible.

INTERAGENCY RELATIONSHIPS

Delegates have noted that across various forums the question of Inter Agency Relationships and their effectiveness have been highlighted. Volunteers continue to express concerns with the lack of local knowledge being integrated into incident management teams, and the disconnect between centrally managed incidents and on the ground field intelligence.

While the local relationships and arrangements are best managed effectively at the district level there is the need to ensure all members of an IMT have equal access to software and systems that may be hosted by other agencies. Delegates also noted that when allocated an IMT shift in an area that is unfamiliar it would be beneficial to have a documented process to ensure local intel is available, and links to local sources of local knowledge and networks to assist visitors undertaking these roles.

On the technology side, while most agencies use common programs there is the occasion when access to specialist programs or software on another agencies platform can cause issues with IMT personnel who do have access to those agencies systems. The committee discussed the challenges of shared technology access in an Incident Control Centre and highlighted there was a need for better structure in the management of inter-agency relationships and familiarisation and the reluctance of some to use a common operating platform.

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

RESPIRATORY PROTECTION PROJECT

Following long delays, delegates have welcomed recent progress and confirmation of Government investment for additional respiratory protection options for members.

Members would recall that following volunteer advocacy, CFA committed to a review of wildfire respiratory protective devices resulting in a field trial in 2023 and 2024 of alternative respiratory protection methods to that of the current P2 disposable respirators. During the field trials, eight alternative masks were evaluated comprising half and full face configurations. 285 volunteers took part in the field trials, with 243 completing the post use questionnaire. 18% of respondents preferred the existing P2 disposable respirator, 39% preferred the full mask respirator, and 43% preferred the half mask. A further assessment of respiratory device compatibility with other CFA issued PPE was conducted in May 2026.

The committee discussed the importance of training to ensure that members understand no respirator will protect them from carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide and that prevention and caution will always be the best protection. Delegates also discussed the need for training on use, care and maintenance as well as education to support members understand the increased cardiovascular impacts that respirators place on the body, its cooling systems and fatigue as well as mask fitting requirements.

The project is now entering the procurement stages, and we will keep members updated as the project progresses to the next stages.

ALLEN AND CLARKE CULTURE REVIEW

Allen and Clarke completed an independent evaluation in December 2025 examining CFA's progress against the 10 recommendations arising from their original 2022 Culture Review. The evaluation acknowledged significant effort undertaken across CFA since 2022 and identified progress in a number of areas. The evaluation also identifies concerns with strengthening accountability, visibility and oversight of culture initiatives and highlighted the need for a more structured approach to monitoring, evaluating and reporting. The CFA Board is yet to consider the evaluation findings, and no decisions have been made regarding future implementation or broader communication of the findings. Delegates requested, once the report is released to volunteers, to be engaged, along with their volunteer networks, in consultation to offer feedback to inform future culture and inclusion planning. Some of the questions to consider, will be:-

What are the cultural strengths CFA should continue to build on? What cultural challenges have the greatest impact on volunteers? If CFA could focus on three culture and inclusion priorities over the next three years, what should they be and why? What initiatives or approaches are most likely to create meaningful and sustainable change across CFA? What would success look like from the perspective of volunteers? How should CFA measure and monitor progress over time?

COMPLAINTS PROCESS UPDATE

The committee was informed there are 82 resolution support and child safety matters under active case management as of May 2026. The People Experience team, which includes Resolution Support Team and Child Safety Adviser, have been out in the regions to spotlight their work addressing BMTs, CFA Cadet camp and Captain Peer Mentoring Group among others. Recruitment has commenced for five additional Resolution Support roles. These new roles will be based in the Regions and assist District Offices dealing with complaints/issues locally. CFA have also engaged an external provider to develop a restorative justice plan for a volunteer reintegration, post the discipline process which VFBV has been calling for - for some time. The reintegration of volunteers continues to be a contentious issue for those returning to brigades after the discipline process. VFBV hope that once a plan has been established it can be adjusted, modified etc. and utilised to better support all volunteers affected by the return of members to their brigades and districts.

September 2026

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

OUTSTANDING PAGERS

The pager replacement project has concluded its engagement with Districts. CFA is now working with EMV in relation to how to locate and process the outstanding pagers yet to be returned as part of the project. As of end of March 2026 – 13,805 (61.6%) pagers have been replaced, some as part of business as usual. The question remains - where are the missing 38.4% of pagers? As the pagers are 'owned' by EMV, CFA may have to compensate EMV for the missing pagers, a cost of approx. \$500.00 to CFA for each missing pager – this adds up to a debt that CFA hasn't budgeted for. This means less money for trucks, stations and PPC. Members, Comms Officers and BMTs have been requested to check in your bags, draws at home/office and car. If you have an old pager, please hand in for replacement to your brigade management team or District staff as soon as possible. Look on the back of your pager, and if your serial number starts with ASNP, ASNPP or ASNPS it needs to be handed back and upgraded with a new pager. You can also enter your pager serial number in Members Online to check if it needs to be replaced. Search for "pager replacement" on Members Online.

SAS UPDATES

SAS Version 12.0.1 is now available for members to use. For Version 13 and beyond – CFA, SES and AV are working with EMV to confirm development priorities and requirements for the next SAS contract update.

Have you ever sat back and wondered how many members use SAS, which device is used the most to access SAS, the busiest month for members to sign up to SAS, how many messages are sent a month? If you have had these thoughts, here are some interesting stats.

143 new users signed up to SAS in March 2026. There are 24,953 active users at the end of March 2026. Peak day for SAS usage was 10 March 2026, with 11,148 users. Top mobile device being used by members is the iPhone. Coming in at number 1 is iPhone 13 with 1,104 users, with iPhone 14 coming in 2nd with 916 users and coming in last place is the iPhone SE (3rd generation) at 491 users. Coming in at number 1 for android users is the Samsung Galaxy S25 Ultra with 381 users, coming in a close 2nd is Samsung Galaxy A35 5G with 351 users and coming in last place is Samsung Galaxy S23 with 219 users. Messages sent via SAS: December 2025 130,886; January 2026 156,858; February 2026 123,467 and March 2026 119,953.

FIELD SATELLITE TECHNOLOGY

With telecommunication issues over the past fire season publicly highlighted during the 2026 Inquiry into the summer fires across Victoria, Telstra and mobile phone coverage are high on the list of concerns. Work is currently being undertaken by CFA on how to improve connectivity to members on the fireground in the most difficult of circumstances. Currently Starlink is the only product on the shelf that is easily accessible, with other products expected to be developed and available over the next 12 to 18 months. Tests have been underway in 4 districts – this included the safety and most convenient way to mount Starlink to the vehicles. Tests were carried out in areas with black spots, terrain and smoke. This was to assist with the testing. All of CFA's FOV/MCVs now have access to Starlink. Stay tuned for our next update on what is next for Starlink.

NEXT GEN CAD

The NextGen CAD is in the early stages of design discussion and build with an internal working group within CFA and will extend out to Districts and volunteers as required. Whilst design and discussion are in the early stages, the project completion is not expected until June/July 2028. CFA will continue to keep working with a selection of volunteer SMEs and internal CFA staff on this project and we will continue to inform members as more comes to light.

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

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR OR EXTERNAL LEARNING

Members have continued to report of issues they encounter with having skills and qualifications they have gained externally being recognised by CFA. Delegates have been working with CFA on improvements over recent times to address some of these issues. There are now 3 basic pathways for members to have their externally gained skills recognised:

- **Direct recognition of National Competencies obtained from other Registered Training Organisations:** Where members have obtained national competencies (that CFA deliver) from another RTO, CFA are obligated to recognise these. However, a member may still have to undergo some extra training or a challenge test before they are allowed to fulfill an activity that the competency relates to. Eg, a member who has obtained Operate BA Open Circuit from another RTO may be required to demonstrate that they know CFA procedures and can don CFA's BA sets from their appliance in the required time before they will be endorsed to wear BA in an operational setting.
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** Members can have competencies issued based on their experience and the roles that they have carried out both inside and outside of CFA. This involves completing the RPL documentation for a particular competency showing evidence of skills that you have demonstrated in the past and any learning you may have completed. Once the RPL paperwork has been completed members may still be required to undertake practical or theory assessments to complete any elements of the Competency not covered by their documented experience. This is called gap training.
- **Matching other Qualifications to Competencies:** Members who have qualifications from organisations outside of the RTO system such as University Degrees, PhDs, etc or have completed Cert IVs, Diplomas, etc containing competencies that have elements in common with CFA delivered competencies can have the knowledge covered in these credited towards complete competencies or elements of competencies for courses they want to complete within CFA. Members who believe that elements of qualifications they currently hold may overlap with CFA courses need to compile their qualification records and identify which CFA Competencies they are looking for credit towards.

District Training is responsible for assisting members through these processes. If members are experiencing problems please contact the Training Complaints system on Members Online or by e-mailing training@cfa.vic.gov.au

DRIVING SIMULATOR

Delegates discussed and workshopped plans to introduce five mobile driving simulators to support volunteers gain driving skills maintenance across the state. The driver simulator trailers will be based within Regions and are able to be transported to enable easy local volunteer access.

The simulators are intended to provide members with a safe environment to practise and maintain driving skills, particularly high-risk activities such as Code 1 or off-road driving. Sessions will be facilitated by volunteer members trained in operating the simulator, rather than requiring driver instructors. CFA's long-term vision is to have a minimum of two volunteer driver facilitators in every Group.

Members who tried out the simulators at this year's State Championships provided very positive feedback. CFA is planning to commence a pilot program later in the year, with a statewide rollout currently targeted for early 2027.

Feedback on the simulators can be provided to Committee delegates to help inform future discussions on how this capability is further developed into the future.

VFBV Newsletter



Want to be the first to hear about important updates on new equipment, trucks and CFA policy changes?

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