



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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Uniden digital scanner software update

Members would be aware from previous updates, that VFBV has been requesting that CFA provide an update for the Uniden Scanners (Listening Sets) that will update the scanners with all the new CFA/DELWP radio channel mapping, talk groups and fireground channels. Due to the high number of changes, VFBV requested if this update could be rolled into a firmware update that is required to update the scanners to overcome the 'super grouping' issue that was identified last year, to save members having to do multiple updates.

Last year's outage resulted in all scanners 'going quiet' for a couple of days when a proprietary P25 'super group' codec was unexpectedly rolled out to the network last year. We are pleased to report that CFA has worked with Uniden to release a patch that will update the firmware and includes all the new CFA/DELWP channel mapping. This patch can be downloaded from CFA or VFBV websites, along with instructions on how to install it.

VFBV delegates to the Joint Communications and Technology Committee have congratulated CFA on the simple method for the update and thanked both CFA representatives

and Uniden for their combined efforts, which has resulted in a positive outcome for members. CFA advise members they need to apply the update prior to November 1 in order to coincide with planned network updates.

In other news, CFA has this week advised VFBV that its contract with the Australian supplier for the discounted Uniden Scanners has now ended, and CFA will not be accepting any further orders. Any additional sets will now need to be sourced by members locally.

VFBV has advised CFA that there is likely to be renewed interest in additional sets with the forthcoming digital rollout of CFA digital comms to the outer metropolitan areas (District 7, 8, 13 and 14), and we will continue to monitor interest levels for additional subsidy programs in the future.

Since the joint Digital Scanner initiative was announced by CFA and VFBV back in 2015, we are pleased to report that over 11,000 digital scanners have been distributed across 970 Brigades and 80 Groups, closing a hugely successful and collaborative approach between the two organisations.

UFU BLOCKS EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION REPORT RELEASE

by Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

With both the fire season and the state election rapidly approaching, the list of important topics to discuss with members has been growing quickly.

But there was one standout issue that disappointed and frustrated many members this month - the Court's decision to stop the release of a report written by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) into Equity and Diversity in the CFA and MFB.

To quickly recap, in December 2015, then Emergency Services Minister Jane Garrett asked the VEOHRC to

undertake an Independent Review into Equity and Diversity in CFA and MFB. The Review formally began in July 2016 and a year later the United Firefighters Union (UFU) took legal action with the goal of stopping the VEOHRC from publishing its findings. Several legal events have occurred since then and on 4 October a final judgement was handed down by the Victorian Court of Appeal to forever block the release of information from the Review.

This outcome is terrible for Victoria on a number of fronts.

The first is a simple matter of concern for the people who bravely shared their stories of intimidation and discrimination under the belief that by doing so, they were contributing to a better future. There is no doubt that providing evidence would have been a traumatic exercise for some and it is clearly not in anyone's interest for that courage to have been in vain.

The next issue of concern is the sheer waste of money. The Review was an extensive piece of work that not only occupied significant government resources for more than a year, but also took the time of the thousands of people who VEOHRC Commissioner Kristen Hilton confirmed had contributed to the review in good faith. While that investment would be fully justifiable if it had returned valuable information and opportunities for improvement, the fact that taxpayer's money also had to be spent on trying to defend the right of the government to release it is deeply troubling.

Perhaps the most frustrating issue for me is the thing that successfully stopped the release of the report was based on a legal technicality - basically whether the request for VEOHRC to undertake the Review should have come from a Minister or Government Department. Of course, government process should be undertaken according to law, but there is an extremely strong argument for the greater good here. Is it reasonable to just throw out such a large body of work that presumably includes important findings and recommendations for improvement in our emergency services simply

that information and has committed to restoring member confidence that private medical information will not be misused. The Committee will continue to monitor and requests any members with concerns to please raise with your local State Councillor so follow-up can occur.



because a letter was typed on the wrong letterhead? Obviously, the answer is no which is why the VFBV has called on the UFU and VEOHRC to find a way to agree to immediately release the review's most important findings and opportunities for improvement.

And that leads me to one of the most concerning questions that arise from all this: What information could possibly be in the report to justify a member-based organisation spending hundreds of thousands of dollars in the Supreme Court to have it quashed?

Lastly, every single Victorian should be deeply worried by the way this outcome has unfolded. In response to questions about this issue, Premier Andrews quite rightly told the media that numerous other departments in his government - including Police - had successfully navigated the difficult issue of Equity and Diversity and are progressing well with reforms to improve the situation. Former Minister Jane Garrett told ABC radio that she believed everyone in her government, including the Premier and current Minister, wanted the report released and were demonstrably very strong advocates for positive outcomes regarding equity and diversity.

How then could it be possible for an external organisation to be capable of stopping one government department from doing its job and undertaking a review of other departments, with their full co-operation?

In isolation, this situation might be able to be painted as little more than a quirk in the law. However, the Premier's own words confirm that there is something fundamentally different between the way Victoria's Emergency Services are operating and other government departments such as Police. But an even scarier message Mr Andrews delivered to the press last Friday was that in this case at least, the outcome was the opposite to what his government wanted - confirming the tail is indeed wagging the dog.

Please note: I encourage anyone who needs support because of the process associated with the release of this report to contact VEOHRC on 9032 3464 or visit the VEOHRC website and follow the prompts to be targeted to the appropriate support; seek support from our VFBV network; and/or discuss your concerns with your local networks.

VOLUNTEER WORKWEAR

Members would remember that VFBV State Council formally expressed its concerns and frustration to CFA back in 2014 about the lack of progress on CFA's commitment to volunteers from its 2010 review of uniforms.

As many would also remember, for quite some time now members have been requesting an end to policies or arrangements that aim to differentiate or discriminate against volunteers.

Returning to the principle of 'One CFA' has long resonated amongst the membership as an aspiration and goal for future inclusive organisational arrangements.

Following long delays and lack of CFA progress, VFBV State Council advised the CFA Chief Officer back in 2014 that it respected his right to make a decision and wanted the procrastination around uniforms and station wear to end.

Following this escalation, CFA Chief Officer Euan Ferguson commissioned a survey in early 2015 and presented options for Dress Uniform, Work Wear and Field/Station Wear to the membership. These options were well accepted by members, with over 70% of respondents favouring the options and designs presented.

Therefore, as previously reported, VFBV was quite surprised and disappointed to learn that without explanation, CFA had withdrawn the agreed volunteer workwear specifications and tender last year.

In response to VFBV questions, CFA has now reported that it withdrew the specifications and tender due to complainants from the UFU, who alleged that CFA had now agreed to terms in the proposed 2016 EBA that requires PPC, station wear and uniforms to be significantly visually distinguishable and not available to anyone other than operational career staff.

CFA has further advised that senior CFA Officers have now met with the UFU to seek the unions feedback on

the proposed volunteer workwear. CFA alleges that the union was not happy with the design or specifications, and requested it be redesigned. CFA reports that while reluctant, it has agreed to redesign the volunteer workwear items of clothing to a level that it felt would satisfy the UFU.

Several weeks ago, CFA met with the VFBV Uniform working party, and finally presented its proposed redesigned garments. Delegates have expressed their disappointment, given its significant departure from the options presented by Chief Officer Ferguson.

The Uniform Working party acknowledged that whilst many members may welcome a polo shirt, the proposal fell way short of expectations expressed by many members that were supportive of Euan's dress up/dress down options that provided members with flexibility and catered for individual preference and role. Whilst CFA didn't preclude additional options being considered, it advised that budgetary pressures would be a determining factor in what additional options it would consider.

CFA advised that its intent was to conduct another survey to gather member feedback on the revised design. VFBV urged this process to start as soon as possible and advised CFA that it would encourage members to participate, with the understanding that CFA commit to the survey results being fully transparent and shared with the working party and communicated to all members after it closed. CFA has agreed to this request.

Whilst saddened by further delays and indecision, it is important that members have an opportunity to see and comment on CFA's proposed redesigned garments given their significant changes to what was agreed over three years ago. As soon as the survey becomes available, we will let members know.

Members are urged to review CFA's new proposal and provide feedback as soon as possible.

STRUCTURAL HELMETS

Members continue to raise concerns with VFBV over CFA's decision to issue new structural helmets only to career staff, with volunteer rollout delayed.

CFA's latest advice is that it is unable to procure helmets for volunteers before it runs an open tender process as per Victorian Government procurement guidelines. It is still unclear why the procurement of new helmets for career staff is not similarly affected.

CFA now advises that it intends to seek expressions of interest from the market, and then evaluate and run an open tender process over the coming months to select a new structural helmet for volunteers.

In new developments, CFA messaging indicates it is likely there are better helmets now on the market, and this is an opportunity for volunteers to choose, and there is nothing to prevent volunteers 'choosing' the current helmet being issued to career staff. Whilst this may be true, the overwhelming feedback from volunteers is why has this been taken so long to progress, and why do we even need to risk having different helmets for volunteers and career staff?

For the record, any suggestion that VFBV is the cause of these delays is false and misleading. VFBV advised CFA that its preference was for a singular helmet to be selected, funded and rolled out back in 2015 and confirmed again in 2016.

Even after it was suggested that VFBV be excluded from the user trials, VFBV reached a pragmatic position to support a singular helmet so as to avoid delays and avoid what we predicted would be a disjointed process that ran the risk of divergent outcomes as what occurred with structural PPC. The helmet being issued

to career staff was reportedly modified to meet Australian standards in late 2017/early 2018, with CFA only recently placing the order for career staff helmets this year - dismissing any suggestion that VFBV is the cause of the delays.

Whilst disappointed with continued delays and poor process, now that CFA has made the decision to run an open tender and field evaluation - VFBV will advocate to ensure this evaluation is transparent and open to members to participate in.

Privacy concerns

State Council has received requests from volunteers in the South West to escalate their concerns about CFA's handling of private and confidential medical information arising from the Chief Officer's volunteer 'Fit for Duty' pilot currently running in the South West Region.

Volunteers have expressed concern that CFA representatives have been sharing stories and detail about a minority of individual cases involving negative results from their medical assessment.

Whilst probably well intended, VFBV has requested that CFA protect members privacy and confidentiality and cease discussing details, cautioning that the benefits of the pilot would be quickly overshadowed if members lost confidence in the processes that aim to ensure individual members privacy and dignity is protected.

CFA representatives to the Joint VFBV/CFA HR Committee have assured delegates they will look to strengthen the Authorities handling of

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