



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

Address: 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East, 3151
 Email: vfbv@vfbv.com.au
 Telephone: 9886 1141
 Chief Executive Officer: Andrew Ford

Post: PO Box 453, Mt Waverley, 3149
 Website: www.vfbv.com.au
 Fax: 9886 1618
 State President: Nev Jones AFSM



CRITICAL MESSAGES FOR THE MONTH AHEAD

by Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

As we all prepare for the upcoming fire season, many are also nervous about the end of November when Victoria will elect its 59th Parliament and the fate of the CFA will be decided.

It is fair to say that for those of us involved in trying to help governments develop and implement policies that make things better, this election comes after a very challenging four years – and it's not over yet.

Members know that VFBV started lobbying the Liberal Government before the last election in 2014 for Presumptive Cancer Legislation for CFA Volunteers. As history shows, the then Labor opposition promised to deliver Presumptive Legislation if elected.

This promise was not delivered.

Earlier this year, the Andrews Government introduced extremely controversial legislation alarmingly tying a deficient firefighters presumptive cancer Bill to proposed legislation that would dismantle the CFA and further erode the CFA Chief and others' power and control. Worse still, the Presumptive Cancer component did not deliver what was promised to volunteers and perpetuated discriminatory bureaucratic hurdles applying only to volunteers.

Many Members of Parliament were in support of progressing presumptive cancer legislation but could not vote for it because doing so would have also meant the destruction of the CFA. Moves to separate the legislation and progress the cancer protection components separately were also blocked by Labor, Greens and Reason Party MPs.

VFBV always seeks to remain non-party political in that we don't "pick sides"; but we do have a very important role in making sure that any proposed policy is in the best interests of the safety of our communities and support to our members irrespective of which political party is in power.

Unfortunately just last week, Daniel Andrews confirmed he plans to pursue the same agenda to dismantle the CFA and hand the UFU even more control of Victoria's fire services if he is still the Premier after the election. However, we know there are Members of the Labor Party who disagree with Mr Andrews and Candidates from other Parties who hold strong views on the issue as well.

Given the community interest in supporting CFA Volunteers and the diversity of views among political candidates - even within the same Party - VFBV is inviting every Candidate in every Electorate to publicly commit to the pledge below.

Responses are still coming in, but I urge everyone to visit www.CFAPledge.com.au to

see if the Candidates in your electorate have taken the pledge to support CFA Volunteers or made any other comments that might help you and your family get a more clear picture of who you would like to represent you in Parliament.

Unrelated to the election, VFBV has also just launched some public messaging as part of a range of things we are progressively developing to help the public:

- better understand the range and extent of the work CFA Volunteers do to keep our community safe,
- learn about how they can help CFA Volunteers by being prepared in case of emergency, and
- have more "skin in the game" by actively engaging with us as Supporters of CFA Volunteers.

This year, we have produced two audio messages voiced by VFBV State President Nev Jones that will be played on various radio stations across Victoria until summer. We have also developed a new public-facing website called www.SupportCFAVolunteers.com.au which aims to separate news, tools and information from the technical and operational information members need from our existing www.VFBV.com.au site. Most importantly, the new site encourages visitors to register as a Supporter of CFA Volunteers which will allow us to develop a network of people who care.

It is important for all of us to remind the community about the capacity, value and essential nature of CFA Volunteers and the current CFA model.

The CFA community embedded and volunteer-based model, with volunteers and paid CFA staff working together as one team, is the best model for Victoria. As CFA Volunteers, we also know the current CFA model is the only model capable of mobilising the enormous resources required to deal with major, concurrent and long duration fires experienced almost every Victorian summer.

The fact is that all major fire services reviews, including the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, recognised the vital importance of the current CFA model, and in particular, the importance of:

- the flexibility and capacity of CFA that exists because of its fully integrated paid and volunteer model, to continually evolve and adapt to meet changing risk circumstances and growing community service demands;
- CFA's highly trained and prepared volunteer surge capacity able to be mobilised from volunteer brigades across Melbourne's outer metropolitan area, provincial towns and CFA's network of almost 1200 brigades;
- the value of CFA's major incident management experience and local knowledge



that exists within CFA's vast volunteer resource;

- the importance of the CFA model as a fundamental foundation of community capacity and resilience; and
- the importance of respecting and recognising the value and professionalism of the work performed by CFA volunteers.

Unfortunately, some politicians and others with influence over them, have spent much of the past four years repeatedly telling the public that the CFA model no longer works, is stuck in the past, is outdated and somehow second-rate compared to a paid firefighter model.

While it's obvious to us that dismantling CFA is not the answer, the repetition of this spin and political argy-bargy has left much of the public confused and with less confidence in our incredible service.

Please encourage your colleagues and friends to visit www.SupportCFAVolunteers.com.au and register as a Supporter of CFA Volunteers, and www.CFAPledge.com.au to learn more about the support your local Candidates are promising to CFA Volunteers if they are elected on 24 November.

Most importantly, I ask all volunteers to please actively support VFBV's efforts to secure from every candidate, their commitment to the following pledge:

"I commit that I will not support any action that alters the existing CFA legislative arrangements unless such changes are recommended by an expert and independent review based on proper, transparent and evidence-based feasibility/cost/benefit analysis involving thorough consultation with CFA volunteers

AND
 I commit that I will not support any action, policy or legislative change likely to impact on CFA volunteers until the obligations and commitments set out in the CFA Volunteer Charter have been explicitly and fully adhered to."

As candidates' responses to the pledge are received, it will be very important that these are made known to as wider community audience as possible, congratulating those who take the pledge and encouraging those who don't to think again.

I urge all members to personally get involved and take action to spread the word and help ensure CFA is not destroyed.



Electoral Candidates
 Electorate:
 By email: candidate@vfbv.com.au
 Text: 0438 520 114
 Or visit www.vfbv.com.au to register as a supporter of CFA Volunteers.
 The current volunteer-based CFA model has the capacity to deliver a world-leading, highly efficient emergency service for Victoria. Respectably, understood and often called 'volunteer-led' has been the great strength that has led to some 'turning the view' that the only way to reform the CFA is to have a paid firefighter model.
 This is not correct and is the goal that the Victorian Government, including the Opposition

I therefore ask you to carefully consider the pledge below then visit our candidate's website (address at the bottom of the page) to confirm your commitment and provide any personalised comments you may like us to share with your electorate about your support for CFA Volunteers.

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AND

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For more information on the support your local candidate and yourself can provide to CFA, visit www.vfbv.com.au or contact us on 0438 520 114.

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Thank you,
 Andrew Ford
 CEO

PLUMBING REGULATIONS

The Victorian Government has recently completed its sunset review of the Plumbing Regulations, and have again failed to consult with VFBV or volunteers during its review. The Minister for Planning Mr Richard Wynne has announced the new Regulations which are to come into effect on 18 November 2018. The new regulations will have an impact on any CFA brigade that is currently providing FEM (Fire Equipment Maintenance) services to their communities and currently service fire hose reels.

Under the new Regulations, 'routine servicing' has been explicitly inserted into the regulations which will have the effect of regulating the twice-yearly routine servicing of all fire hose reels that has previously been done by qualified CFA Brigades, and now requires this work to be done by a licensed plumber.

There are currently more than 300 CFA Brigades and more than 1500 CFA members currently trained and performing routine inspection and service on fire equipment to over 30,000 premises across Victoria.

The regulations sunset review was conducted by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. Despite VFBV raising its concerns directly during the review period – both DELWP and CFA have failed to engage with VFBV or volunteers on the significant impacts that the new regulations will have on CFA volunteers.

Disappointingly, DELWP ignored VFBV's requests for engagement and consultation during the review, eventually responding to VFBV correspondence advising that the "public consultation period is now closed."

Most alarmingly, over a month after the regulatory review was finalised, CFA formally advised VFBV that it had not completed work on potential impacts of the new regulations, and would advise VFBV "in due course." CFA further advised that it was CFA's view that the most appropriate approach is to wait for the legislation to be drafted and passed by government prior to formal engagement with brigades or VFBV.

As a result – the full impact of this legislative change was most likely little understood by decision makers during the Regulatory Impact process.

Current CFA recommended pricing of the six-monthly Level 1 hose reel servicing for example is \$6.50 with the annual Level 2 service provided for \$15.50

Concerns about the lack of licensed plumbers

willing to conduct this rudimentary work, especially in remote rural areas, has led many to fear market economics of supply and demand may drive large scale non-compliance and put upward pressure on costs that will inevitably be passed on to the public.

The reduction of FEM income to CFA Brigades that rely on this funding for equipment and infrastructure is also likely to create significant flow-on effects as Brigades suffer from a retraction of customers looking to consolidate their servicing if CFA is unable to offer this service.

VFBV understands that during the review, these and other concerns were consistently raised by the Fire Protection Association of Australia, Metropolitan Fire Brigade and the Country Fire Authority.

VFBV acknowledges the feedback received from volunteers on this subject to date - seeking policy reversal and will continue to pursue why mandatory consultation obligations to VFBV and volunteers is consistently not being met by Government bodies and the agencies.

In the interim, and concurrently with that advocacy, the Victorian Building Authority has convened a cross sector working group to try and reach agreement on ways to minimise the regulatory impact of the changes and implement 'transition' arrangements.

VFBV has been invited to be part of those discussions and will work collaboratively with other stakeholders to try and identify arrangements that limit or prevent the negative regulatory impacts arising from the new legislation. We will keep members apprised as this work progresses.

VFBV recognises and respects the important public value provided to Victorian Communities by CFA volunteers undertaking FEM work in their local communities. Not only does FEM servicing provide funding for important brigade owned equipment and infrastructure for the benefit of the community, but CFA FEM services play a critical role in building community safety, linking local brigades with local premises facilitating incident planning and response and ensures the front line equipment to be used for fire suppression is operational and maintained at an appropriate standard.

The new regulations take effect on 18 November. Brigades should make best endeavour to arrange any outstanding routine servicing on hose reels prior to this date whilst discussions continue.