



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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REFORM

Considerable work is continuing to try and mitigate consequences from the reform implementation.

VFBV acknowledge the very difficult and negative environment that this work entails. We wish to pass on our utmost admiration and respect for all those members and delegates involved in discussions and negotiations. In particular the Captains, Captain-elects, former 1st Lieutenants and all members of the former CFA integrated brigades who are having to deal with the stress and anxiety of trying to represent their brigades and members throughout a very unfair and inequitable process.

VFBV is working closely with each of these locations to provide tailored support and advocacy for any issues as they arise. VFBV will continue to stand by each brigade and group leader and support their advocacy.

Discussions continue on the CFA/FRV allocation statement that will formally transfer former CFA assets to FRV. Each brigade has been required to work through an asset allocation process and identify brigade assets that will either remain with CFA, or transfer to FRV.

VFBV has supported any brigade that has wanted to dispute any item intended to be transferred that they don't agree with and have backed the brigade position on each occasion. We have worked with government to provide a guarantee that no equipment that was paid for by volunteers would be transferred without volunteers agreeing to it, and largely that principle has prevailed.

On the few occasions where agreement could not be reached, VFBV has successfully advocated for full reimbursement provided to the brigade to ensure the equipment can be replaced and they are not out of pocket.

Priority negotiations are continuing on the tenancy agreement, with the status quo extension due to expire on 15 August.

On day of writing, Melbourne and surrounds are entering Stage 4 COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, with the remaining areas of Victoria returning to Stage 3 restrictions. No-one should underestimate the significant impact this is having and will continue to have on Victorians.

I want to acknowledge the considerable anxiety and uncertainty that many of you are feeling. CFA volunteers, drawn from the very communities they protect not only need to adapt and make sacrifices to maintain our emergency response to our communities during this time, as well as deal with reform implementation but are also having to deal with a myriad of external pressures such as home schooling, job insecurity, and working from home arrangements. Our self-employed and primary producers are also dealing with the added pressures of interrupted supply chains, restrictions on trade and business continuity pressures.

In essence – people's livelihoods are being challenged. From a psychological perspective this starts to chip away at our most fundamental needs that are central to our health and wellbeing, and helps explain the considerable anxiety, fear and concern pulsing through our communities.

I have heard from members who are just feeling it is all getting too hard, and the collision of work and home life, diminishing job security and the like, pushing people to their limits.

No-one should be going through this alone and I encourage members to be using our brigade and group networks in addition to CFA's wellbeing support services to ensure we each look out for one another and stay on top of our mental health.

My plea to you is to give yourself some space and time and be kind to yourself and each other. You are not alone. If CFA commitments are getting on top of you at the moment, have a chat with your Captain or Group Offi-

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

cer and I'm sure they'll understand you need to take a small break. But don't cut yourself off from your brigade. No-one will judge you for taking a step back, and I'm confident you'll find members in your brigade/group are only too happy to support you in whatever way they can. We are a family. We're all just doing the best we can in what is a very tough environment. The important thing is to keep the lines of communication open.

By bringing your brigade management team into your confidence so they understand what you're going through and what you need, it will help them plan and support you as best they can. Don't feel you have to do it on your own. And if you need a hand or any additional support, please don't hesitate to get in touch with your local VFBV district council who can give you some advice and assistance if required.

VFBV has been working closely with CFA's pandemic management team to constantly review updated health guidelines and changing restriction levels and move to adapt CFA systems and processes. Not just at the corporate level but also ensure there is a focus on how best to support brigade operations and response at the local level.

The wonderful team of CFA peer support members continue to be available, and are adapting to phone and online contact to ensure members and their families have access to 24/7 support. Peers, psychologists, counsellors and chaplains are all available by calling 1800-959-232.

Supplies of disposable face masks have been secured and will provide every brigade with access to face masks. In order to protect Victoria's stock levels, brigade leaders and CFA line managers are being requested to ensure adequate stock is maintained to support current and pre-

dicted activity and to ensure the masks are only used for CFA activities. These same restrictions apply to all members – staff and volunteers – and we all need to work together to ensure our critical health workers continue to have access to supplies.

Distribution to each of our 1,200 brigades is a significant logistical exercise, but the expectation is that masks are supplied to all locations as quickly as possible. Please contact your delegate should your brigade be having any difficulty accessing masks, or any other protective equipment you need, and we'll help you sort it out. My expectation is brigades will be provided with sufficient access to whatever supplies they require.

Whatever you need you should have. But please understand that dealing with 1,200 brigades means we don't have the luxury of stockpiling for the what if scenarios. Order what you need and be confident that if you need more – then that can be arranged when and if you need it. I acknowledge there is low trust in some of the ordering systems and processes, but I want to encourage brigade leaders to discuss any concerns with CFA management early and in good faith.

From a VFBV perspective we will support and back any brigade or group having difficulty accessing appropriate supplies, so please have some confidence that you don't need to be stockpiling.

The supply systems are fragile enough without adding any additional pressure to them. I have every faith that our brigades and volunteers will more than meet the challenge.

For those brigades operating in or supporting into areas covered by the Stage 4 restrictions, you are encouraged to keep your CFA ID card on you when responding in your private vehicles to the station or CFA operational activities. Your ID card will assist you identify as an emergency service worker, and therefore exempt from curfew, providing you are responding or returning from an emergency call out.

CFA has requested VFBV support for a quick COVID related survey to be conducted across the membership. This support has been provided, and we have worked closely with CFA to tailor the survey questions for the local brigade environment. The survey will ask members how they are feeling about the arrangements and support being put in place in order to respond to the COVID environment.

I highly encourage members to participate as soon as it becomes available. It is expected to be available by the time this edition of Fire Wise goes to press. All responses will be confidential so you can participate in confidence knowing that no personal identifying information will be collected or attributed to in the results.

VFBV will work closely with CFA to review the

results. It is critical to ensure that every CFA brigade, group and member feels supported and equipped so you can continue to safely perform your roles during the pandemic.

FIRE SEASON PREPAREDNESS

We need to prepare for some of the unique challenges that this year's fire season will bring during the pandemic. Changes will need to be made to accommodate social distancing and safe work group practices to protect our operational response but also mitigate against cross contamination during large and potentially long duration fires.

Discussions have already commenced at agency levels, and I would encourage volunteer leaders and group officers to also start involving yourselves in discussions and thinking. Be proactive about identifying what you will need at the local level to have confidence in arrangements and how administrative processes and practices will need to work to best support you and your brigade/group.

There will need to be changes to strike team deployment, crew selection and screening, and base camp operations to name just a few. Many of these will require significant modification, and even after modification it will be almost impossible to eliminate every risk. Therefore, we will need to plan for additional redundancies to best manage the residual risks. This is likely to be very disruptive during what has traditionally been our peak activity period.

Please start having these conversations amongst yourselves now. Don't wait for changes to be foisted on us, start the discussions now so we can shape the discussions and decision making. No one has the background, experience or familiarity with local conditions, capacity and capability that you do, so it will be critical that volunteers and brigade/group leaders are treated as equal partners in these discussions. VFBV will continue to advocate early engagement and involvement of volunteers in these discussions so please be ready to step up when asked.

ROYAL COMMISSION

Earlier this month, I appeared and gave evidence on behalf of VFBV to the Commonwealth Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

VFBV made extensive submission to the royal commission and has advocated strongly for the respect and recognition of the fundamental importance of volunteers in disaster preparedness, response and relief arrangements across Australia. We have advocated strongly for strengthened and improved support for volunteer safety, consultation, support, training and recognition.

On the 23rd July the Commission announced that it had been granted a request to extend its reporting date from the 31st August 2020 to the 28th October 2020.

NEW CFA CHAIR

On behalf of VFBV I wel-



come new CFA Chair Mr Greg Wilson who was appointed by the government on the 21st July. Mr Wilson was a former secretary of the Department of Justice and Regulation and has also previously served as secretary of the former Department of Sustainability and Environment. He is currently chair of the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and the Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES).

On the 15th July VFBV issued a statement reporting on ex Chair Greg Smith AM sudden resignation and departure, and thanked Mr Smith for his service.

Early interactions with the new chair and acting CFA CEO Ms Catherine Greaves have been positive, and VFBV will continue to foster and nurture constructive relationships with the newly appointed leadership.

Early discussions on strengthening and improving volunteer engagement and consultation has commenced, and I am encouraged by initial discussions. We will keep you apprised of progress.

WELFARE FUND

VFBV continues to prioritise the VFBV Welfare Fund, and we have put in place processes to ensure it continues to operate uninterrupted during the current lockdown restrictions. All welfare operations and processes have been maintained and are operational, with the committee of management continuing to meet regularly through the pandemic electronically. The fund hit an important milestone recently, with welfare grants paid out since its inception surpassing \$2 million.

The fund has been operated by the association since 1913 and is a critical safety net to support members who find themselves in severe financial hardship. Its emergency grants have assisted over 1,228 members over the years and highlights the critical importance of this work.

The fund has come under immense pressure this year and I want to acknowledge the tireless and selfless work of the VFBV Board, State Council, Committee of Management, and our welfare fund secretary Jenni Laing for the incredible work done not just to assist members when they need it the most, but also the incredible foresight and management of the fund that has sustained it for more than 107 years.

This means the fund is not only supporting today's volunteers, but the thousands of volunteers in generations to come. A legacy we are all incredibly proud.

VFBV BOARD VACANCIES INVITATION TO APPLY

Closing date for written applications is 28 August 2020

VFBV advances the interests of all Victorian fire brigade volunteers and advocates on their behalf to CFA and other key stakeholders. The VFBV Board drives policy development based on volunteer input and is involved in management of issues of central importance to all CFA volunteers.

Vacancies for Four Board Members will arise when the terms of Nev Jones AFSM, Andy Cusack AFSM, Bill Maltby and Greg Walcott expire on 1 October 2020; all members are eligible for re-appointment.

The term of appointment will be to 1 October 2022 (two years) and applications are invited from interested volunteers to be considered for these vacancies.

The role of a VFBV Board Member involves contributing to VFBV direction, policy determination and monitoring the performance and governance of the Association. Also actively contributing to policy discussion at Board Meetings, networking with others about policies and issues management, and not only making decisions but being prepared to actively advocate for the benefit of all CFA volunteers and ultimately the Victorian community.

A Board Member Role Statement including the key selection criteria is available from the VFBV office or from the VFBV website.

This is an honorary position; no honorarium is paid.

If you are motivated by the prospect of making a difference for CFA volunteers, then send your written application addressing the key selection criteria in the role statement, plus an outline of your CFA activity including the names of two referees.

Applications must be lodged with VFBV by **Friday 28 August 2020** to:
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