



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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2021/22 Affiliations

Congratulations to the winners of the 2021/22 VFBV Affiliation Prize Draw!

Thank you to all Brigades who have paid their 2021/22 affiliations prior to 30th June this year thus making themselves eligible for the 2021/22 VFBV Affiliation Prize Draw.

We are pleased to announce the prize winners are: 1st – Welshpool Fire Brigade; 2nd – Yallourn North Fire Brigade; 3rd – Foster Fire Brigade; 4th – Tarwin Lower Fire Brigade; 5th – Woodford Fire Brigade; 6th – Boneo Fire Brigade.

The wining brigades are currently being notified and will choose in order of place drawing from the following prizes kindly donated by GAAM - G-Force Nozzle with Quick connect coupling; Gated Wye with Stortz Inlet and quick connect outlets; Root Soaker; TFT Break Apart Nozzle; or from Powdersafe - five Helmet Torches and carry case; or donated by CFA six Uniden Digital Scanners.

The number of Brigades affiliating with VFBV for 2021/22 is on track to match record numbers of past 5 years, a sign of continued strong support for VFBV's work on behalf of all CFA volunteers.

We understand that COVID restrictions are impacting when brigades can meet. If you are not sure whether your Brigade or Group's VFBV affiliation and Brigade's VFBV Welfare Fund subscription are up-to-date, please contact your Secretary urgently, as we encourage all those who have not yet affiliated to do so as soon as possible.

For any enquiries, contact your VFBV Support Officer, State Councillor's or call us on (03) 9886 1141.

POSITION VACANT

VFBV is seeking to appoint a VFBV Support Officer to work in regional Victoria with VFBV District Councils, Brigades and volunteers to facilitate consultation, issues resolution and volunteer engagement.

The position is a state role, with emphasis and focus on providing support throughout CFA's South West region (CFA Districts 4, 5, 6, and 7).

This is an existing position, with the incumbent moving to another Region.

In addition to relevant skills and experience, candidates will need to understand CFA and volunteerism, be good listeners; be able to facilitate good consultation; ability to establish productive networks; navigate through complex issues resolution; be self-starters and have a passion to improve arrangements that benefit the welfare and efficiency of CFA volunteers.

Extensive regional Victorian work travel is envisaged and flexible work base locations will be considered for the position, with the priority

On day of writing, Victoria has just entered lockdown #6. I don't want to dwell on the unavoidable impacts they have not just on people's livelihoods but also their mental state, other than to say I want to acknowledge the many, many thousands of community members doing it tough. Both here in Victoria and elsewhere across Australia.

Volunteer fire brigades right across the country are drawn from the very same communities we protect and are therefore intrinsically linked. When the community is going through a hard time, this often washes through our brigades.

I want to acknowledge how hard it can be to be positive with so much uncertainty around.

I repeat my message that one of the great challenges through the pandemic has been how to best maintain the social and support structures that are embedded across our network of 1,217 community fire brigades. I want to acknowledge and congratulate the innovative ways brigades are coming up with to best maintain those links and keep members as connected as can be - in new covid safe ways. While frustrating and far from ideal - the resilience on display across our network of brigades and amongst our members continues to inspire.

Please don't lose sight of the fact that your local brigade is acting as a beacon of light to many within your communities. You are setting the tone, modelling calm, professional and stable leadership, civic duty and proving that our service delivery level commitment to our communities remains steadfast and can withstand the greatest of pressures. You are there when they need you and you are doing the best you can to support your communities through these challenging times.

Despite some close shaves, brigades that have been impacted by ongoing Tier 1 and Tier 2 exposure sites and close contacts over the months have used redundancies and neighbouring brigade/group relationships to ensure members can safely isolate, while ensuring brigade coverage and operation is maintained.

The true resilience and strength of community embedded fire brigades has been on full display. You have maintained an exceptional record, and while we are not yet through it, you have every right to be exceptionally proud.

Please remember that the focus to assign a work location within the CFA South West Region.

Flexible working arrangements, to cater for extensive evening and weekend work, will be tailored to match the needs of our volunteer membership base.

This is a full time position.

Prior to applying you should familiarise yourself with the Position Description which is available from the VFBV office or website.

Applications close Tuesday 31 August 2021.

RESILIENCE AND UNITY OF PURPOSE

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

full impacts of this pandemic impact on each of us in very different ways, and often at different times. If you are struggling, or know someone who needs help, please utilise the wellbeing and welfare services available to all CFA members and their immediate families 24 hours day, 7 days a week. You can access these via 1800 959 232 or via cfa.vic.gov.au/wellbeing

Financial support resources are also available from the VFBV website, which provides some quick links to both State and Federal support, including details of our welfare fund. A reminder that this year's welfare fund subscription is being offered at a one-off 50% discount and brigade membership covers the entire brigade, all its members and even any ex-members who have served 20 years or more.

CFA Restructure

On 2 August, CFA's new refreshed organisational structure became effective, with interim executives in place while permanent recruitment is underway.

I want to congratulate CFA CEO Natalie MacDonald and Chief Officer Jason Hefferman on their commitment to seeking feedback and input from both volunteers and staff during their restructure, and most importantly sharing how that feedback was used and taken into account in final decisions. This represents a refreshing commitment to genuine and robust dialog and consultation.

Both Natalie and Jason have acknowledged that transition to the new structure is not a one-off event and there is still much work to progress. I also want to acknowledge that restructures can be challenging, especially for those staff directly impacted by reporting line changes etc. and I would ask members to please show some empathy and patience while individuals work through any changes that directly impact upon those people.

As volunteers, we have seen more than our fair share of change over recent times. And unlike this change, it has often been thrust upon us, with no opportunity to be involved or consulted. So I would ask you to please draw on those experiences as a reminder to be kind and patient to anyone who may be struggling with some of the unintended uncertainty that restructures sometimes create.

One of the largest changes to the structure is a renewed focus on ensuring service delivery decisions and leadership is provided at lower levels and those closest to the ground are empowered to lead. In other words - decisions impacting upon brigades and groups being predominately managed at the regional and district level - rather than at HQ level.

In many ways - this decentralisation logic is well supported by results from the VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency survey. It is clear from our survey, that typically the closer an "issue" is managed to volunteers - generally the more satisfied they are with the results. For example,

on consultation, volunteer satisfaction with consultation at the brigade level records the highest satisfaction, with a large jump in dissatisfaction when asked about consultation at the Region/ District level, and then an even larger jump again in dissatisfaction with consultation at the HQ level.

This in essence is why VFBV is designed by structure to empower our local District Councils as the local face of the VFBV network. Local brigades, groups and delegates all working together to solve issues of mutual interest, with clear and formalised escalation pathways to deal with those issues unable to be resolved at the local level.

This is both our strength and curse.

Strength - in that it is one of the most effective ways to resolve issues, with most issues being sorted at the local level first. It can however be a curse. If it's done well, it is likely you will never hear about most of the successes. Similarly, for those involved in the escalation process its often not particularly pleasant. A byproduct of the escalation process and structure means those at the higher levels of the structure (think Board and State Council) are often left with just the hardest and more difficult issues that no-one else has been able to solve. Often times these people are left to resolve some very difficult and complex issues, often exacerbated by a lack of consensus from the membership on preferred approaches. Let's be honest - if they were easy - they would have been solved long ago by now.

Hence why you will hear me frequently paying homage to those volunteers who choose to serve at senior levels at either District Council, State Council or the Board. These members work day and night, often with very little thanks to try and resolve issues of critical importance to our volunteers. VFBV officials are usually the first-person people go to with a problem or criticism, yet they are often the last people to hear a compliment, thank you, or praise.

On the flip side, when changes are made, when good outcomes are finally realised or achieved, there is much personal pride and satisfaction drawn from knowing that if it weren't for the hard work done behind the scenes by your officials and representatives - it would not have happened.

It's the nature of the work, and why I respect our senior

officials as much as I do, and why you should too. It can be thankless and unrewarding at times, but each person is driven by a pure and noble duty and dedication to wanting to improve arrangements for volunteers and ensure our communities are well supported and resourced to deliver a safe and effective community embedded emergency service.

The new CFA structure and focus on regional/district accountability will bring a renewed focus on consultation at the region/district level. Without careful planning, systems and processes this renewed decentralisation has the potential to feed the old beast of state-wide inconsistency and promote little fiefdoms.

We are all going to have work incredibly hard to ensure our systems and processes adapt to cater for stronger, more robust, flexible and transparent consultation occurring at the Region/District level. For our District Councils, this will mean an increased workload in local issue resolution and building productive and effective relationships with local management.

The good news, as I reported last year was I have been very encouraged to see some of the Deputy Chief Officer Regions (now called Deputy Chief Officer - Service Delivery) working hard to form structured and formalised regular meetings with their District Council Executive members and State Councillors to ensure regular dialog between the District Council and management and provide a robust mechanism to resolve issues raised by brigades and groups in a timely manner. This will now need to extend to District management, and my expectation will be to see a proactive approach taken by local management to engage with their local volunteer leadership groups, including our District Council executives.

For the wider membership, these changes will also bring an increased emphasis on helping us gather evidence to demonstrate issues of concern to try and assist with local discussions to resolve issues.

I too am working hard with Natalie and Jason to ensure we have some strengthened state level processes to help monitor consistency and equity between approaches, and am also optimistic that there are enough 'wise heads' across the CFA executive at both state and regional level that share a healthy respect and appreciation for the importance of genuine



engagement and consultation with volunteers.

The restructure is one of the most noticeable early examples of the pivot back towards a community and volunteer focussed organisation. But its success or otherwise is just as much in volunteer hands as it is in managements.

For it to work will require commitment from all sides, and I would encourage members to embrace the change as an opportunity to return to the era of more genuine and responsive engagement and participation in the leadership of one of Victoria's most trusted and respected services, our CFA.

It is a known fact that peer groups (like volunteer associations) who have strong shared goals are more likely to prioritise group needs over individual self-interest. It breeds better cooperation and collaboration and is strongly associated with feelings of belonging, solidarity and trust.

There is a fitting quote attributed to Bill Bradely, an American author, NBA basketballer, US Senator and US Airforce Reservist.

"Respect your fellow human being, treat them fairly, disagree with them honestly, enjoy their friendship, explore your thoughts about one another candidly, work together for a common goal and help one another achieve it. No destructive lies. No ridiculous fears. No debilitating anger."

I will finish this month by again encouraging you to engage with your District Council, engage with your local representatives and be part of the change. We still have plenty of land mines to avoid and step over, but our greatest strength comes from our unity of purpose. Please don't just use your District Council as a complaints box. We are at our best not only when we are working together to resolve issues of concern, but also when we are working together to pursue shared goals, aspirations and our vision for a Safer Victoria.

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