



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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

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



BOARD APPLICATIONS

Please refer to the advert printed on page 3 of this edition of Fire Wise for applications to the VFBV Board.

VFBV encourages any members who are interested in contributing to the Board to review the materials available on the VFBV website to understand the roles and obligations.

Volunteers from all backgrounds and walks of life are welcome to apply. In particular, VFBV is seeking greater gender diversity, and encourages women in particular to consider applying.

MANDATORY WWCC

Feedback is being sought on a CFA proposal to update its policy covering Working with Children Clearances.

This draft policy extends the requirement for all volunteers to hold a current working with children check (WWCC). The policy pro-

poses a phased approach, requiring all members of a brigade management team and various other roles to hold a WWCC by June 2024. The policy then extends this requirement to all group and deputy group officers, as well as all members of a brigade that has members under 18, requiring them to hold a WWCC from June 2025. The final phase requires every volunteer across CFA to hold a WWCC from June 2026 as a condition of membership.

VFBV is seeking feedback from volunteers to help inform a VFBV response. Feedback can be provided by individuals, brigades, groups and District Councils.

FINANCE POLICIES

Feedback is being sought on a proposed CFA Brigade/Group Finance Policy suite. The suite encompasses six draft policies that seek to clarify the processes surrounding the management of brigade and group finances.

The draft policies cover things like approvals required for purchases, restrictions on the number of bank accounts, how funds can be spent and records required etc.

Brigades and groups are encouraged to go through the policies and provide any feedback to help inform VFBV response to CFA.

Feedback from members ultimately leads to either VFBV support or non-support for a specific policy, as well as contributing to our advocacy around amendments.

FLOOD INQUIRY

Volunteers are likely to be incredibly disappointed to read EMV's submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria.

Neither VFBV or VICSESVA were consulted on EMV's submission. This fact becomes obvious upon reading the submission and the underwhelming and brief mention of the efforts made by the volunteer workforce during the four long months of the flood campaign. Of the 115 page submission, the only overall metric of volunteer contribution recorded is contained within one sentence of the whole report:

"More than 2500 volunteers from 147 VICSES units were involved in the flood response, with more than 145,000 hours collectively volunteered."

If members are looking for the section that covers CFA's significant contribution to the flood event, you will not find one. In fact, the single sentence above is the only reference to the total volunteer contribution to the event.

Given conservative reports show more than 2,700 CFA volunteers responded to flood incidents during the event, and are estimated to have contributed over 8,000 deployments to the campaign, VFBV believes these facts should have warranted coverage.

VFBV continues to remind members that EMV has been officially classified by the VFBV Board as an organisation of concern and cautions any member relying on EMV statements claiming they respect, appreciate and consult with volunteers advising these statements are likely to be disingenuous at best.

THANK YOU

Thankyou to the thousands of CFA volunteers who completed last year's VFBV survey.

We are currently analysing responses and preparing this year's report. Summary results have been provided in the June edition of Fire Wise in our Quarterly Supplement. To each of the volunteers

who took the time to complete the most recent survey, you have contributed to making CFA a better place to volunteer.

Your feedback will be used to pursue positive change and contributes to our tireless advocacy on behalf of all volunteers. We couldn't do it without you.

STRONG, SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

TRAINING REVIEW

It won't surprise anyone that training floats to the top of the list.

VFBV continues to hear from many of you about the difficulty brigades are having embracing the new general fire fighter program (GFF) that replaced minimum skills. While the new package was designed to be more flexible and modular to support a diverse range of delivery options, many continue to report difficulty in getting new volunteers through the program.

VFBV continues to pursue a review of GFF. While a review was committed to when the original program was rolled out, it has taken some time for CFA to recommit and schedule it. In fairness, the CFA Training department has had a little bit going on with other packages but given the frequency of brigade complaints - CFA has agreed to prioritise this work and are commencing a review.

Members would also recall that the Chief Officer commissioned AFAC to conduct an independent peer review into CFA Training back in 2021. That review made 14 recommendations, with CFA accepting all of them.

We along with many others have poured blood, sweat and tears behind the scenes to ensure this is not yet another review that simply adorns a shelf gathering dust. We have contributed to work groups, focus groups, steering committees and implementation plans to try and influence outcomes and results from this review.

While we remain optimistic that good work continues, both Samantha Collins and I, in our roles on the Steering Committee have continued to raise the concerns of volunteers about the lack of meaningful demonstrable progress. Volunteers tell us they should be able to touch, feel and experience improvements from this work, not just read about all the great work that has been done to date. We are told that the recommendations of the working groups are progressing to the executive and have been assured progress is not far away. While confidence is waning, we will continue to apply pressure to ensure all the good will and massive effort that has gone into addressing the report's recommendations are not lost.

One stumbling block will be the lack of additional funds to implement some of this work that makes implementation very challenging. The lack of government investment in CFA systems and technology remains a significant impediment to progress. But we are encouraging CFA to make incremental progress and communicate transparently about which initiatives cannot be implemented due to funding, and those that can - ensuring that relevant business cases and funding bids can be made for government consideration.

And while I could dedicate pages and pages on the work we are doing to progress training issues that have been

raised with us through District Councils, I will finish this section by assuring members their concerns around the ever expanding training requirements, longer courses and additional skills maintenance requirements is well heard and understood.

Delegates are working very hard to highlight to CFA the issues of concern and are offering to work with CFA to try and find solutions.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

While CFA offers multitudes of different leadership style programs, these have been inconsistent and fragmented across different organisational units resulting in no clear or formalised pathways for volunteers to access formal leadership opportunities. CFA agreed to address these gaps by forming a volunteer leadership development project back in October 2020. The project was designed to establish a strategic approach to leadership development and implement a connected suite of programs that provide deliberate pathways to build transferable leadership skills.

While COVID interrupted a lot of this work, as did significant changes to personnel across CFA's Human Resources and Training areas, progress on this project has been painstakingly slow. VFBV continues to express its disappointment in lack of progress on this project and will continue to monitor and encourage more tangible progress.

HEARING ADVOCATES

Readers of our regular 2-Minute-briefings would be well aware of the significant work we are doing to assist CFA improve its conflict and discipline processes.

VFBV remains deeply concerned about CFA's formal hearing processes that require volunteers to be self-represented or left to arrange their own representation. We continue to express how unjust this is as well as the lack of checks and balances that should assure procedural fairness and natural justice being observed during the hearing process.

We continue to highlight the significant power imbalance that exists between CFA and the volunteer member being accused of wrongdoing. Everyone deserves a fair go.

VFBV has been calling for a program of hearing advocates that would undertake the same training that CFA's hearing officers undergo but would be responsible for assisting the volunteer present their case and ensure volunteers are receiving the same duty of care and support as any other member.

The cornerstone of Australia's justice system is set on principles such as procedural fairness, justice being blind and the presumption of innocence.

While CFA has made significant progress on reforming its conflict and discipline processes, there is still much work to do. Sadly, we have approached an impasse with middle management on the



development of a hearing advocate program. Efforts are now being made to escalate internally, and we will keep you apprised of progress.

RECRUITMENT HUB

Volunteers continue to raise concerns with the new volunteer recruitment hub. While the system appears to work well when both the brigade and recruit have access to reliable internet and technology, the advantages start to fade very quickly if either party can't access or are not comfortable with doing everything online.

While there was considerable push back during early discussions, we are starting to see these concerns being heard and taken seriously. Delegates to our Member Services Committee are continuing to monitor and advocate for improvements.

HOSE TESTING

In a good news story, CFA has recently released its revised Hose Testing SOP incorporating much of the VFBV feedback that was provided. The SOP is well set out, concise and easy to follow.

Pleasingly CFA has removed the requirement to pressure test every hose after every use.

Brigades highlighted that this practice was unnecessary unless the hose had been used in a hostile environment, and that firefighters should be trusted to inspect hose for damage and make a decision on whether it needed further pressure testing or not.

In response to this feedback, CFA has modified its procedure only requiring hose to be inspected after use. Pressure testing is now only required if defects are found or suspected. Hose is still required to be tested at least once annually and each time after repair or recoupling. This is a commonsense approach and shows CFA is listening to feedback.

In closing, while hearing about some of the intractable issues we are working on may be a depressing read for some, VFBV is pursuing more than 100 of these kind of issues through our structures. To its credit, CFA is at the table and indicating it is eager to work with us on finding improvements.

Please don't lose sight of the incredible work that both CFA and VFBV achieve together, and the fact that regardless of our different approaches - each is seeking to achieve a strong, safe and sustainable CFA for all.

From a VFBV perspective, I can assure you we won't ever stop trying.