



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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Survey last chance

The annual VFBV Volunteer Survey will close shortly.

Visit the VFBV website www.vfbv.com.au/cfa to take part in the survey today. Paper copies of the survey are also available by calling the VFBV office on (03) 9886 1141.

MEMORIAL SERVICE

On Sunday 3 May, CFA's Annual Firefighter Memorial Service was held at Central Highlands Training Ground at Ballan which recognised the sacrifice of 85 fallen firefighters from CFA and predecessor organisations. This year's service also recognised a further three historical deaths in the line of duty.

Joseph Thomas Smith from (Lilydale Brigade) passed away on 21 June 1906 returning to the station following a call at the local quarry. Joseph is now the earliest recognised line of duty death for CFA. Francis Edward Symington (Bacchus Marsh) passed away on 7 April 1937 in hospital following a bicycle accident on his way to responding to a fire call a day earlier. Walter James Anderson (Kangaroo Flat) collapsed at a fire while firefighting and died while being transported to hospital on 14 November 1961.

Each of these deaths will be added to CFA's Roll of Honour, the memorial wall at Treasury Gardens in Melbourne and they will also be honoured at the upcoming National Emergency Services Memorial Service in Canberra.

At the memorial service,

National Volunteer Week

This year from 18 to 24 May 2026, National Volunteer Week, will celebrate the contribution of volunteers to Australia. This year's theme *Your Year to Volunteer* not only highlights the important role of volunteers in our community but also encourages people across Australia to make 2026 the year they get involved and make a difference.

Already in 2026 we have seen the extraordinary response of CFA volunteers across Victoria responding to the fires which have impacted much of Victoria over the 2025-26 fire season. VFBV passes on our deep gratitude, respect and appreciation to all CFA volunteers for the work you do for your communities, not only during the fire season but 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Victorians are safer because of the work you do, and VFBV could not be prouder of you, your brigades and all those that support you in the work you do to protect lives and property.

We also acknowledge fellow volunteers across all of Victoria's emergency management volunteer workforce including volunteer first responders from VicSES, St John Ambulance, Ambulance Victoria, Life Saving Victoria, Coast Guard, Salvation Army, Red Cross and the Victorian Council of Churches Emergencies Ministry – just to name a few who all work together to contribute their time, skills and resources to make change in their communities as emergency management volunteers.

REBATE SCHEME

A reminder that the eligible volunteers rebate scheme is now open for eligible volunteers and life members to apply for a rebate on an eligible property under the Emergency Services Tax.

VFBV continues to hear misinformation about eligibility. Some members have reported they are not eligible due to the current rate freeze that paused the primary producer tax rate to last year's levels. This pause does not affect the rebate scheme, and

With the Fire Danger Period officially ending on Thursday 30 April, the last fire restrictions have now all been lifted. Capping off a busy season, I want to take this opportunity to thank all volunteers for their incredible contributions over the fire danger period. Between the 1st December to the 1 March, volunteers responded to 13,548 individual incidents, with more than 28,500 total brigade turnouts. Over the same period, it is estimated that more than 206,012 volunteer hours were contributed by volunteers on the fire-ground.

Demonstrating the criticality of volunteer surge capacity, more than 400 strike teams using more than 2,000 appliance deployments contributed by 650 brigades swung into action just during January alone.

Many thousands of others placed themselves on standby or contributed at their local brigade level to support the

wreaths were laid by Minister for Agriculture Micheala Settle MP representing the Minister for Emergency Services, VFBV State President Samantha Collins, VFBV Chief Executive Officer Adam Barnett, CFA Board Chair Jo Plummer, CFA CEO Greg Leach AFSM and CFA Chief Officer Jason Hefferman. VFBV and CFA Board members, State Councillors, sector leaders, family, friends and loved ones also paid their respects and honoured the personal sacrifices and commitment given, with a bell tolled for each name of our fallen.

Each year the annual memorial service is held on the closest Sunday to 4th May which is International Firefighters' Day and St Florian's Day, with St Florian being the Patron Saint of Firefighters.

COURAGE AND INTEGRITY

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

members deployed.

And while these are just numbers on a page, every minute contributed by volunteers represent a precious sacrifice made. It may have been time away from family and loved ones, it may have been absence from work, or loss of income from their own business or farm. Whatever the reason, and on behalf of the communities you helped – thank you.

Messages of support and appreciation to CFA crews have flooded into the Parliamentary Inquiry that is currently underway.

As we reminded the Inquiry, like all times prior, CFA volunteers have answered the call for help from the Victorian Community. They did their best with what they had. The frustration of many, is what they have is not always enough.

The brigades who are forced to turnout 37 year-old tankers know their communities deserve better. The brigades that just get tin sheds to store the bare necessities, some without even mains power or water, know that it is going to be difficult to attract the next generation of volunteers when community members take one look at the resources provided to these small volunteer fire stations and decide it is not for them.

For our part, VFBV's submission to the Inquiry was the culmination of extensive feedback received from volunteers who answered our call for feedback. I want to thank all volunteers, brigades, groups and District Councils that have either contributed to the Inquiry directly, or requested us to raise their concerns as part of our broader submission.

Given the compressed timelines, and the fact that many volunteers were still active during the call for submissions, we have used best endeavour to cover all the issues raised with us and within purview of the inquiry.

Demonstrating our peak body knowledge and experience, it has been very satisfying to see that the overwhelming majority of issues raised by volunteers during the inquiry's public hearings and by submission were in fact covered in our submission. This provides me with great confidence that our networks remain connected and active. It also ensures these issues have been able to be covered factually and professionally to ensure decision makers on the Parliamentary Committee have the benefit of volunteers' experiences and perspectives.

The importance of these perspectives has become very clear upon reviewing the whole of Government submission provided to the Committee on behalf of the Government, sector and agencies that attempts to conceal or limit any unpleasant or incriminating facts.

Given the consistent and overwhelming testimony that the inquiry has heard over the past weeks, it is confronting to observe the lack of insight or reflection that is contained within the whole of government submission that should be contributing to learnings

and improvements. Instead, it has been left to the community and first responders to honestly explain how things unfolded and the areas for improvement that need to occur in order to ensure the systems and processes that Victorians rely on during these large scale emergencies – are fit for purpose and are doing what is intended.

Included in our submission is detailed analysis of CFA funding and fleet replacement analysis to ensure decision makers develop an in-depth understanding of the magnitude of CFA's under resourcing and fiscal restraints, that in our view are being hidden from the public and setting CFA up for failure.

For example, our analysis tracks government grants over the last five years and factors in the impact of cumulative CPI inflation that has eroded CFA's purchasing power by 19.2% over those five years reflecting rising labour costs; fuel and fleet cost escalation; construction and capital cost blowouts; and increases to equipment and personal protective clothing costs.

And while the 2024/25 minuscule increase in CFA grant funding amounted to just \$22M, the real value after factoring in inflation means CFA's grant funding last year was \$48.5M below the 2020/21 baseline and 13.8% lower in real terms. In fact, the dropping real value of grants has left CFA the equivalent of an entire year of no grant funding worse off over the past five years.

The age of the CFA fleet tells the story, with 145 (67%) of CFA Pumpers aged beyond their design age of 15 years, with the oldest 33 years old. 690 CFA Tankers (41%) are aged beyond their designed age of 20 years, with the oldest being 37 years old. This leaves a total of 835 old trucks requiring replacement, with government funding announcements promising only to replace approximately 20 trucks at a time. At this rate, sustainable fleet replacement is decades away.

We also point out that over the same time period; CFA operational activity has increased year on year since 2020. For example, volunteers responded to 30,843 incidents in 2020/21, increasing to 41,925 incidents for the 2024/25 period.

In other words, CFA volunteers are being expected to do more, with less. A lot less.

One of the areas that has been extensively raised by volunteers during the inquiry has been the lack of roadside vegetation management, with volunteers explaining the impact this had on fire spread and behaviour, with major roads that once acted as fire breaks now becoming wicks that escalate fire spread.

VFBV's submission covers this issue in depth and points out the systemic issues relating to Victoria's new Emergency Management Planning frameworks and structures and the retrograde step back in 2018 which altered the CFA Act and dropped the mandatory requirement for

municipalities to prepare fire prevention plans.

Not only have we called for the reintroduction of fire prevention committees with brigade representation, but we have also called for stronger accountability for public land holders (like road and rail) and for CFA and Councils to have the power to enforce prevention works on public landholders who fail to properly maintain roadsides and other land commensurate with the requirements that already exist for private land holders.

VFBV's submission also covers:

- The importance of private equipment and appliances, with VFBV calling for greater government support for landholders who invest in private equipment – recommending rebates on registration or rebates on insurance fees to recognise the important role private equipment plays in reducing the risk of fire

- The insufficient training and professional development opportunities available to volunteers that is resulting in a reduction of qualified and experienced level 3 and level 2 incident management roles, including field roles such as Divisional Commanders, Sector Commanders and Strike Team Leaders

- Communication issues including network issues, lack of redundancies, incorrect comms planning, interoperability of channel plans between agencies and the lack of engagement between ICCs and local command and control including the failure to tap into local knowledge and local brigade Captains and Group Officers

- The need to harden critical infrastructure, and ensure telecommunication towers and community water supplies have adequate battery and generator backup to deal with the inevitable power disruptions that occur during major emergencies

- Community confusion around emergency warnings and the VicEmergency website and app. We have recommended warnings should be more granular and include fire behaviour detail and direction to better assist community members being informed

- The need to prioritise road access and hazardous tree assessments to ensure the community can quickly and safely return to care for their stock, animals and property once the fire front passes

- Improvements to Traffic Management Points to support communities with access and security following evacuations and leave early warnings, with current issues acting as a disincentive for people to leave early

- Volunteers continue to raise the consequences of reduced CFA command personnel due to systemic issues with the secondment arrangements that see volunteers having to deal with significant gaps and non-relief that cascades across entire Districts leaving volunteers without the support they require

- The poor briefing, tasking, fatigue management and



amenity provided to some volunteer crews who were left to arrange transport themselves or forced to travel long distances for basic amenity such as food and accommodation

- Inaccessible roadside barriers that impacted firefighters accessing points of ignition and fire spread – a situation VFBV predicted a decade ago with the escalated rollout of wire rope barriers and the lack of strategic breaks for emergency vehicle access

- Dropping volunteer numbers and the need for volunteer retention programs

- Low morale contributed by unilateral changes to the Fire Services Property Levy and the impact arising from the lack of consultation and engagement of volunteers, including ignoring the concerns and advice that was provided to government during the Bill's passage through Parliament

We have also taken the opportunity to remind Parliamentarians that CFA was purposefully and deliberately established as an independent statutory authority, arm's length from government due to the extreme risk of fire and the fact that Victoria is one of the most fire prone places in the world.

We reflect that this fiercely protected independence is hardly recognisable in today's CFA that in practice has been allowed to be treated as simply an extension of government.

We warn that volunteers will not volunteer for a government department, and CFA's malaise and the spectre of continued political interference will continue to hamper CFA's ability to listen and respond to the concerns of its volunteers.

We also share our reflection that volunteers have participated in a plethora of reviews over the years, with the perception of little ultimate improvement to the support of volunteers and the communities they protect.

Our hope is this will not just be yet another inquiry in the footnote of the pages of history. Volunteers have done all they can to raise the issues requiring improvement. Decisions and recommendations that make a difference will require courage and integrity. Hopefully the courage that volunteers have displayed in meeting great adversity over this and years past will inspire similar greatness. It is not only volunteers who are depending on it, but the Victorian public who will increasingly be exposed to the intensifying fire seasons ahead. The work done today will determine how well-prepared Victoria is for the future.