



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

News Note

3 March 2014

CFA FUNDING FAILURE RESULTS IN OUT OF DATE FIRE TRUCKS

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV), the organisation that represents CFA's 60,000 Volunteers, says CFA needs an annual funding guarantee to bring its truck fleet back up to standard. The failure to properly fund CFA's fleet over the last 15 years has resulted in Volunteers operating one of Australia's oldest fleet of operational frontline fire trucks, depriving them of up-to-date technology which improves firefighting capability and improves the safety of firefighters.

Firefighters deserve equipment that is up-to-date, safe, complies with Occupational Health & Safety Standards and is the most effective that is reasonably available. All other fire services in Australia do this. Insufficient funding is leaving Victoria's volunteer firefighters using out-of-date fire trucks when no other comparable fire service would.

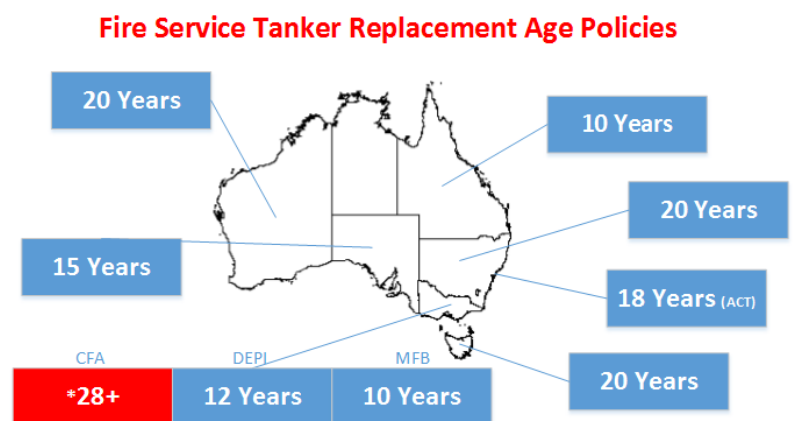
The ageing profile of CFA Fire Trucks

One in four CFA (Fire) Trucks are now over 20 years old, with Victoria continuing to fall behind almost all other State & Territories. CFA's oldest trucks are now over **28 years old**, eight years over the industry convention of 15-20 years. This year, CFA will have a staggering 24% of its operational fleet exceeding optimal maximum age limits, with a total of 520 trucks over 20 years old.

In the U.S. the National Fire Protection Association recommends any trucks over 15 years be placed in reserve status.

In the United Kingdom, Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service cites a life expectancy of just 12 years. Even CFA's paid firefighter sister agencies, MFB & DEPI have 10 to 12 year age policies for their fleet of tankers. In many communities across Victoria, newly recruited Volunteer Firefighters are being expected to operate trucks that in many cases are older than they are.

CFA operates a large fleet of 2,182 front line operational vehicles to meet its commitment of protecting lives and property across Victoria. CFA is required to keep these vehicles in a fit state, ensure availability of spare parts, comply with changes to vehicle & environment regulations, meet changing community needs, OH&S and ensure the



* Due to inadequate funding, CFA has removed all age limit replacement figures from its Fleet Management Policy. (17/06/2013)
Replacement Policies are now budget driven.

safety of its members. To do this requires a comprehensive, well developed, fleet management plan with assured funding for the replacement of appliances on an ongoing basis.

Whilst current trucks are still mechanically serviceable, they are understandably nowhere near the modern safety standards of new fire trucks. Safety features that are not in CFA's older frontline operational firefighting trucks are; 3 point sash seatbelts, fire resistant brake lines, electrically operated priming pumps, live hose reels for quick attack and fire knockdown, rear deck crew lighting, ABS, airbags, electronic stability control, improved steering, up-to-date suspension, higher torque for increased acceleration (particularly expected of emergency service vehicles operating under operational load), larger pumps, foam systems and crew cabs. The older trucks simply don't have these up-to-date attributes. Retrofitting some of these is not a viable option.

CFA's oldest Tankers were built in 1986

20 CFA tankers built in 1986 are still in service. The cassette players, film cameras and early video cassette recorders made that year are now in landfill. The cars of the day had no airbags, ABS or GPS navigation, and the analogue mobile phones of the time weighed several kilos each. Modern CFA trucks carry the whole crew inside the cabin, protected from radiant heat, smoke, fumes and the weather – in 1986, that feature was still 20 years away.

Inadequate Funding

CFA's most recent Fleet Management Strategy proposal to government was for a progressive reduction in the age profile aimed at achieving an optimal average appliance age of 20 years by the year 2027. It was calculated that annual funding of approximately \$29 million dollars is required to achieve this.

The State Government's budget allocation is significantly less than the \$29 million required, and does not provide the basic ongoing funds for CFA to maintain & replace its operational vehicle fleet. VFBV understands that even the Government's own review conducted by the Department of Treasury & Finance into CFA's budget, found that it was inadequate to cover its capital renewal requirements.

As a result, each year, Volunteers rely on going cap in hand to request special one-off, non-recurrent top-up funding. The following table illustrates the funding deficiency over recent years.

CFA/BERC Funding for Fleet (\$ million)

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
CFA Budget Allocation	10.7	11	13	13.1	13.3	13.9	14.7
Additional Gov Funding	8	12	29	1.3	22.7	11.7	0

CFA's fleet funding budget must not only cover replacement of its existing operational vehicles, it must also stretch to cater for the demands of a growing population. Victoria's population is expected to reach 6 million people by 2025, with the majority of this growth occurring in area's serviced by CFA. Population growth increases a community's risk profile & higher risks necessitate changes to the mix and capability of emergency vehicles. Think of an area such as the City of Wyndham, which includes townships like Werribee. 10 years ago it was mostly paddocks and open fields. By 2030 the city is expected to house an additional 45,000 households. These households will expect to receive a fire service matched to the increased risk.

Higher density living requires updates to the type of fire truck & equipment required. Tankers are built for area's that do not have easy access to reticulated water supplies. Therefore, they must dedicate their load to carrying as much water as possible (up to 4,000 litres) and are built for off road access. As a result, they tend to be 4WD and use smaller pumps to conserve water and carry far less equipment. Pumpers on the other hand are designed for built up areas with water mains, typically carry much less water (1,200+ litres) and more specialist equipment designed for structural & internal firefighting. For example, a Tanker built in 1998 for a brigade in the City of Wyndham and costing \$130,000 may need to be replaced now with a Pumper, which today costs \$625,000. CFA's Fleet budget does not reflect this changing risk environment that requires different equipment and different trucks to meet changing community needs. With no changes to funding to account for these changing risks, the existing fleet funding is building less and less, and resulting in trucks that

would have been retired 10 years ago, requiring to stay in service, and depriving brigades and firefighters of the significant safety and technological improvements that come with newer and more modern equipment.

Volunteers are relying on ‘top-up’ funding, by way of annual bids to supplement the funds required to run CFA’s fleet programs. The rejection of last year’s BERC bid resulted in CFA abandoning its maximum age targets from all its Fleet Policies, replaced with a policy of “fit for purpose / fit for task”. This change in policy simply masks the reality that without sufficient funding, CFA has no means in which to meet any form of maximum age profile within its fleet, nor plan for future growth.

Decades of ad hoc, hand to mouth & deficient funding

Following the Royal Commission into the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires, more than 600 operational vehicles were added to the fleet to address deficiencies. 26 years later, following the Royal Commission into the 2009 Black Saturday Fires, a smaller but similar focus and spike in production was again initiated. This sporadic funding leaves long-term legacies on Victoria that drive peaks & troughs 20 years down the track when many of these vehicles require replacement. This cycle of boom and bust must be broken if fleet strategies are to be sustainable.

New Fire Services Levy Fails to Adequately Fund Fire Services in its first year of operation

The Victorian Coalition Government introduced its new Fire Services Levy in 2013, promising a fairer & sustainable system for all. One of the key principles encouraging & underpinning Volunteer support for the proposed levy was the promise that the FSL would ensure there was sufficient funds capable of meeting requirements of modern fire services as forecast by the agencies.

Four years after Australia’s worst bushfires, the failure of successive Victorian State Government’s to meet even the most basic needs of recurrent spending for CFA’s operational fleet, announcement of government cuts to CFA’s budget in 2013/14, governments review of CFA’s base funding showing it to be inadequate for capital and asset projections, and the unsuccessful 2013/14 BERC bid for fleet funding all within the first year of the FSL’s operation leaves Victoria’s volunteer firefighters questioning their governments support for not only them, but their communities and its fire services.

Safety of Victorian Firefighters

Firefighting is an inherently dangerous job. It is paramount that appliances responding under emergency conditions have modern safety features in order to operate safely in those conditions. This does not just mean safety just while travelling to a fire or incident but also when operating an appliance when it gets there. The type of equipment provided on an appliance, its stowage and its operability are all considerations as to the optimal age of an appliance.

New equipment & vehicle designs are introduced to meet changing requirements and to improve firefighter safety. Firefighters using older trucks & equipment deserve the same safety improvements as those using newer equipment. Inadequate funding means agencies must choose which firefighters use safer equipment and those which will not. All of CFA’s trucks utilizing a rear deck seating area still only use single strap lap belts across the hips for firefighters, because they were built long before sash (two strap, 3 point) seatbelts were even introduced. Sitting outside of the cabin also exposes them to radiant heat, toxic fumes and smoke.

Safety features that are not in CFA’s older frontline operational firefighting trucks are; 3 point sash seatbelts, fire resistant brake lines, electrically operated priming pumps, live hose reels for quick attack and fire knockdown, rear deck crew lighting, ABS, airbags, electronic stability control, improved steering, up-to-date

Case Study: 7 Feb 2009 (Black Saturday)

Burnover’s are one of the dread fears of fire fighters – the situation that sees a truck caught in the midst of a blaze that overrun you and/or your equipment providing no route of escape.

On Black Saturday, 25 CFA Tankers were involved in a BurnOver. 8 of these were newer style “crew cab” Tankers which house all firefighters within the main cabin of the truck, whilst the remaining 17 were older style Tankers with single cab’s that require part of the crew to be seated outside on the back rear deck.

No firefighters were injured on any of the crew cab tankers, yet 4 Firefighters sustained injuries from older style single cab trucks.

suspension, higher torque for increased acceleration (particularly expected of emergency service vehicles operating under operational load), larger pumps, foam systems and crew cabs.

Climatic changes and industrialisation, coupled with increasing population numbers and dispersion is increasing the risk environment our firefighters operate in. Equipment that caters for this increasing risk is of paramount importance if firefighters are expected to continue to effectively protect the lives and property of Victorians. New equipment, with capabilities to meet current and emerging needs is paramount not only to the safety of firefighters, but the safety of all Victorian communities.

There is currently two equipment standards operating within CFA. Under current Victorian Occupational Health & Safety Regulations, because they do not receive payment for their services, CFA Volunteers are not classified as “workers” under the legislation, and are therefore not afforded the same protections or rights as workers.

This results in different truck & equipment standards applying to CFA Volunteers despite the fact that Volunteer firefighters do the same work, attend the same incidents, and service the same communities as their paid colleagues. Equipment that is deemed inadequate or inappropriate under Victorian OH&S legislation is routinely allocated to Volunteer firefighters servicing the same risk and doing the same job.

Equipment Interoperability, consistency & compatibility

Firefighters must train and exercise in using all vehicles & equipment they are likely to encounter on the fire ground. Volunteer firefighters providing the bulk of Victoria’s surge capacity during long duration, or high intensity incidents will often travel hundreds of kilometres across the State to join up with local tankers and crews, to assist with the firefighting effort. This requires them to have knowledge of the types of trucks, pumps and equipment that may be in use anywhere in the State. The sooner new equipment replaces obsolete equipment across the fleet, the more quickly commonality and conformity is restored which prevents firefighters having to train to use a myriad of vehicles.





Older trucks mean that Volunteers must train on a wider variety of Tankers, and use a greater amount of adapters and connectors designed to allow older trucks to be compatible & interoperable with the newer ones.

Alignment to Victorian Government Strategies

The Victorian Governments Fleet Strategy for 2011-2014 prepared by the Department of Treasury & Finance details four main policy objectives. The second objective is alignment to Victoria’s road safety strategy which aims to raise the standard of vehicle safety through various means including the introduction of vehicle safety features.

Whilst government employees enjoy the benefits of the “safest vehicle available in its class”, Governments inadequate funding of CFA’s Fleet program puts these same objectives out of reach for its Volunteer firefighters.

Scorecard

Government Fleet Policy Objectives	Improve efficiency of government vehicle fleet	Improve vehicle safety	Minimize environmental impact	Support vehicle manufacturing industry
CFA Fleet	 Not Met	 Not Met	 Not Met	 Not Met

Supporting Victorian Local Manufacturing

Victoria is a major supplier of new and reconditioned/upgraded fire trucks in Australia. However, the erratic nature of CFA annual demand for trucks and equipment impedes the potential of this important niche manufacturing industry.

The availability of a trained workforce, strong scientific and research base covering fire, automotive, engineering, materials and design all lead to the conclusion that Victoria could be a world hub of fire-truck and equipment design and manufacturing.

An essential ingredient to leverage such a growth in local industry is constancy and regularity in annual demand for fire-trucks (and other specialist emergency vehicles and equipment) by local fire-fighting agencies.

The current waves of obsolescence based fire-truck replacement (the trucks that can no longer be maintained as serviceable) exposes manufacturers to boom and bust trends which make forward planning for the private sector almost impossible.

Build programs linked only to year on year funding allocations, with no assurances of future numbers increases build programs by over 5% costing Victoria over \$8 million dollars in lost savings over the last 7 years alone. It further complicates CFA's build programs in that last minute short-term orders places Victorian orders at the back of assembly lines behind orders from other Countries & States who have secured manufacturing lines sometimes years in advance.

There are only several Australian based/owned vehicle building firms, including two in Victoria, that are capable of providing the purpose built appliances that CFA require. The 700 man hours of bodybuilding and component assembly for each CFA truck built - provides significant direct employment opportunities for Victoria, not to mention benefits to the supply chain for cab-chassis, pumps, materials and components.

One off, short-term orders negate any stability for the local vehicle building industry which need to maintain their skilled workforce to retain their presence. The loss of just one local vehicle building capability would not only mean the loss of skilled workers to this State but would add to the risk of fully imported vehicles, higher costs and would eliminate competition from the market.

Supporting Victoria's Emergency Service Volunteers

CFA is the largest emergency service in Victoria with 60,000 volunteers in more than 1,200 brigades across Victoria providing emergency services to the community 24/7, all year round. The volunteer based CFA is by far the largest emergency service in Victoria and one of the largest of its type in the world. CFA volunteers (along with allied emergency service volunteers) are the bedrock and core of Victoria's emergency management approach and capacity with a service philosophy, under which the community shares responsibility for its own safety.



CFA's 60,000 volunteers work shoulder to shoulder with the CFA's 1,000 dedicated paid staff to protect Victorians and their property from the ravages of fires and the impact of other emergencies.

They are usually the first responders in combating large or small bushfires, house and industry fires and floods outside of the inner Melbourne suburbs.

They work hand in glove with MFB firefighters providing fire and emergency response on both sides of the CFA/MFB suburban boundary to ensure a seamless service to householders, businesses and road users.

They also provide road accident rescue services at various locations throughout Victoria.

In short, CFA Volunteers form the core of our emergency response capacity for fire and other emergencies in 60% of greater Melbourne suburbs and throughout the rest of the state. Bushfire response forms less than half of the total number of incidents that CFA brigades, and Volunteer firefighters attend each year.

Where bushfires impact national parks and state reserves CFA volunteers work with their fellow firefighters from the Department of Environment & Primary Industries and Parks Victoria.

All Volunteer firefighters and other emergency responders are trained to professional standards.

Volunteer's contribution to the Fire Services is valued at over \$1.2 Billion dollars per annum, more than all of Victoria's fire service budgets combined. Despite this massive contribution & goodwill, Volunteers wonder why they are treated differently to their paid counterparts. All Victorian Firefighters should be entitled to the same level of modern and safe operational vehicles.

Volunteers do not want to be paid for the work they do, but they do want to be treated fairly and with respect; appropriately recognised for their professionalism, knowledge and experience and provided with the equipment and tools necessary for them to undertake their work.

What Volunteers are asking

For the protection of the community, the confidence of the general public in CFA and the State Government, the effectiveness of CFA and the maintenance and strengthening of the billion dollar volunteer resource, Volunteers are asking Victorian MPs to;

- Commit to forward planned base funding of CFA's emergency vehicle fleet 5 years in advance
- Have regard for the principle enshrined within Victoria's Health & Safety Legislation that workers and other persons should be given the highest level of protection against harm to their health, safety & welfare from hazards and risks arising from work as is reasonably practicable.
- In order to accommodate the above, provide sufficient funding to keep the fleet under the optimal 20 year age limit that applies to most other Australian emergency services
- Stop the practice of assuming it is reasonable to require Volunteers to use frontline operational firefighting trucks that are considered unsafe or inadequate for career firefighters doing the same work and serving the same communities.

* * *

Taken for Granted

"At National Volunteer Summits held in 2001 & 2005 and since, the most recurring theme from the volunteers has been that they feel they are taken for granted. One of the main underlying causes for this theme is the fact that a number of organisations are not adequately resourced for their roles, and the volunteers translate this problem into a lack of recognition by governments of the importance of what they do."

Source: Howard. H (2009) The Australian Journal of Emergency Management Vol 24 No 3