



VFBV

VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

## **2 Minute Briefings November 2019**

The 2 Minute Briefings are a quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

They are intended to update members on key issues that have recently been discussed. Effort is made to include any related items that may have been progressed out of session or through other avenues that are related to each committee's subject matter. Priority is given to topics where recent progress has been made. Topics where no progress has been made or where there are differences of opinion are sometimes included to ensure members are aware of VFBV efforts in continuing to advocate for progress or outcomes.

Joint Committees are formal committees between CFA and VFBV made up of VFBV delegates appointed by VFBV State Council, and CFA management representatives appointed by CFA. They are a critical loop in our consultative structures. They endeavour to work collaboratively and cooperatively on issues but may also be required to escalate issues where resolution or common ground cannot be found - requiring executive attention.

# Joint Communications & Technology Committee

2 Minute Briefing



November 2019

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## PORTABLE RADIO LIFE

VFBV delegates have raised the issue of a high number of portable radio batteries no longer holding their charge for more than 8 hours, with a high number of reports of batteries failing well before then. CFA have confirmed the issue and advised that any battery older than 3 years exhibiting this behaviour should be returned for replacement through your District office. All Districts have been advised by CFA Comms of the replacement requirement. The method each District replaces batteries vary with some swapping one battery for a more recent battery whilst others will try to “recharge” the old one. CFA advises that TAIT have indicated that the current style battery will not be available after March 2020. Therefore, Brigades/groups are encouraged to check their batteries well before March next year to ensure replacements can be ordered. After the manufacturer stops making the batteries, it will be very difficult to replace, so brigades are encouraged to check their batteries as soon as possible.

Delegates have suggested the next generation of radio batteries have a mechanism to indicate battery health, which would assist replacement and diagnosis in the future.

## SUPPLEMENTARY ALERTING SYSTEM (SAS)

Two VFBV delegates from the Committee have commenced work with CFA and other emergency agencies on an EMV led working party to assist with the design and implementation of a new Supplementary Alerting System, which is expected to be released in early 2020. EMV previously announced that Ernst & Young were awarded the contract for the Supplementary Alerting System. The first meeting of the working party was on 9 July 2019 and have met several times since leading up to an initial body of works and sought feedback from end users through an online survey. The Working Party wish to thank those who participated in the survey recently and they are now evaluating the results.

## TRUNKING RADIO (SMR)

CFA have advised that Telstra has announced the end date for trunking (SMR) as at June 2020. It is CFA’s belief that due to it not being a heavy user of trunking radio the impact is expected to be minimal. CFA Comms are investigating options to upgrade some Tait radios with point to point private radio calls. Guidelines are now being developed for the allocation of this feature to determine which radios will need to be enabled and the justification required.

## CONNECTED BRIGADES UPDATE

CFA has advised the rollout of Brigade connections to the internet is currently ahead of schedule. The Committee were advised by delegates of instances where Brigade members and BASO’s were required to assist with the swapping out of modems and other equipment associated with the rollout resulting in significant inconvenience. This is not part of the contract signed between the CFA and the contractors when having the equipment installed and Brigade members are not expected to assist the contractor. Any instances of contractors requesting the assistance of brigade members in the installation of the equipment are requested to contact VFBV Support Officer Peter Sharman via email ([p.sharman@vfbv.com.au](mailto:p.sharman@vfbv.com.au)).

## SPATIAL VISION MAPBOOK

CFA is looking how they can best serve our members with the mapping products they provide. The current Spatial Vision contract has come to an end, and in the process of delivering a new map book, CFA want to involve brigade members in finding the best solutions going forward. The CFA GIS Department is conducting a survey to assist in determining the future mapping requirement option for Brigades. members are encouraged to complete it by 30 November 2019. The survey can be found at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/M3HLXKW>

# Joint Community Safety Committee

2 Minute Briefing



November 2019

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLERS UPDATE

Delegates continue to encourage CFA to work with the 'Home Sprinkler Coalition' to further promote and explore safe and cost-effective residential sprinkler systems. This important work is demystifying that residential sprinkler systems are 'ugly' or too cost prohibitive to be considered for residential use. Research on residential sprinklers continues to provide very promising results in early detection and prevention that will further reduce residential fire fatalities. The Committee discussed the outcomes of meetings between CFA and the regulator, including discussions on the **101D** specifications that have been recently developed. The main objective and purpose of these new sprinkler system standards is to significantly increase the level of safety for occupants by providing automatic fire suppression, therefore increasing the available safe egress time. We will keep you updated on this exciting work.

## AFAC NATIONAL FIRE DANGER RATING REVIEW

Following VFBV delegate criticisms that CFA volunteers had not been engaged or involved with the national fire danger rating review, CFA arranged for the Committee to be provided an update on where the national review was at.

The Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC is working with the Attorney-General's department and the various Australian states and territories to develop science to underpin a new fire danger rating system. This work commenced in 2011 and appears to still be very much focussed on the underlying science and data. The Committee was advised that the results of the national survey involving 5,430 individuals into awareness, comprehension and effectiveness of the current system is still be reviewed and not yet available.

VFBV will continue to monitor the projects progress and continues to advocate for CFA volunteers to be provided the opportunity to input directly to the project. Delegates are seeking CFA support to encourage brigade involvement in sharing their experiences with the current system, and their local community attitudes and responses to fire danger rating communications so that these important perspectives are represented in the national review.

## TFB AND ISSUANCE OF INFRINGEMENT NOTICES

VFBV delegates have lobbied hard for CFA to lead a review of Total Fire Ban (TFB) provisions and seek strengthened powers and arrangements for Victoria Police to investigate and prosecute TFB offences. Consistent Brigade feedback over the last several years indicates breaches of TFB conditions are continuing to occur, with the prevalence of these fires having a significant impact on volunteers having to respond to preventable illegal fires (including camp fires) not to mention the impact on public safety.

VFBV is advocating for Victoria Police to be provided increased powers to issue on the spot infringement notices for the lower order offences. This would have an immediate impact and send a strong message that illegal burns and fires will not be tolerated on high risk days.

CFA has agreed to support this approach and have agreed to formally raise the issue with EMV and pursue relevant legislative changes. CEO/Chief Officer Warrington AFSM has now written to the Emergency Management Commissioner on behalf of CFA and VFBV requesting EMV assistance in exploring infringement notices for lower order offences and to seek input to EMV's review of TFB provisions. The Committee is grateful for the Chief's support in pursuing these outcomes.

The committee will continue to monitor, and update members on progress.

# Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee

2 Minute Briefing



November 2019

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## PUMPER/TANKER PROTOTYPE UPDATE

In a major setback, VFBV delegates to the Pumper/Tanker working party have expressed their disappointment that CFA has awarded the tender for the prototype vehicle without addressing the concerns that the working party raised at its last meeting. The working party received good feedback from volunteers when it invited submissions earlier in the year, and there was significant alignment in submissions that have assisted the working party agree on the vehicles role statement, equipment and stowage requirements. Delegates had significant concerns about some aspects of the build including its weight, length and pump capacity which it was seeking CFA clarification on. Delegates were also disappointed that CFA had not embraced the opportunity to prototype some more innovative 'out of the box' thinking that would allow volunteers to evaluate some cutting edge technologies emerging in the industry.

VFBV delegates to the working party will now escalate their concerns with CFA. We will keep you updated as we try to bring the project back on track and restore the proactive and collaborative approach the working party was initially seeking. The working party were looking to replicate the successful model used for development of the Medium Pumper.

## ONLINE SMALL EQUIPMENT REGISTER

VFBV delegates continue to seek CFA support and priority for an easily accessible online equipment register where members can easily see a list of current approved equipment, equipment that has been withdrawn, and equipment that is currently being evaluated. While CFA has agreed to develop this register and shared good progress last year, progress appears to have stalled. Earlier in the year CFA provided an update on early concepts and delegates welcomed the progress to date. However, delegates are keen to see greater involvement from volunteers in the field, with VFBV requesting that the concept be developed further and made available to brigades and the committee to test and evaluate.

## ONGOING STATION MAINTENANCE CONCERNS

State Council has received a request by District Council 12 to escalate concerns regarding the lack of ongoing maintenance of fire stations. The lack of District funding for the cleaning of meeting rooms in particular was raised by members. It was pointed out that fire stations are a workplace for volunteers and used for Brigade meetings, functions and training. Being central to the community they are often the only remaining infrastructure in small towns. Therefore they are often shared with other community groups and not-for-profit community organisations for meetings, training and get-togethers. Members have raised concerns that the lack of funding is resulting in meeting room amenities and carpets not being cleaned regularly resulting in significant wear and tear and shortening their lifespan. Brigades have highlighted that CFA staff workplaces and District offices for example are regularly cleaned and budgeted for and that stations should have access to the same standards as CFA corporate offices simply on a less regular basis. Brigades are reporting their annual brigade allowance is not designed for this purpose and is insufficient to cover maintenance, replacement or clean carpets. As a result, they can be left uncleaned for long lengths of time unless volunteers fundraise for funds to cover the expense. State Council has agreed to raise this issue with CFA and advocate for a fairer model where stations are fully funded to ensure stations are well maintained. State Council position is that both the cleaning and replacement of worn or damaged carpets should form part of CFA's annual maintenance program.

## APPROVED LED LIGHT BARS

Brigades have been regularly reporting that standard headlights on many CFA appliances are not bright enough, especially when driving on country roads and dealing with an increased hazard of wildlife. VFBV has requested CFA update its approved list of lights so that brigades can make an informed decision when looking to retrofit appliances for better safety at night and requested that 'light bars' be considered for inclusion as a standard item at no extra cost on new builds as this would be more cost effective rather than retrofitting items. CFA has agreed to commence this work, and VFBV will continue to advocate for funding to retrofit all existing tankers based in high risk townships as phase 1.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

### PROVISIONAL PAYMENTS FOR MENTAL HEALTH CLAIMS PILOT

As previously reported, the State Governments Provisional Payments for Mental Health Claims pilot will end in June 2020. To date, no new claims have been received by CFA. VFBV emphasised the need for information about this pilot to be better promoted and requested CFA promote this out to Regions as soon as possible. To protect members privacy and dignity, VFBV have requested the claim form to also be made available online. At present members must request it through their District Office. CFA have agreed to investigate this option. In the meantime, a third party may collect the claim form from the District office on behalf of a claimant. VFBV is also happy to do this on behalf of any member.

The Committee wish to demystify and more importantly, destigmatize what mental illness is.

Beyond Blue explains it eloquently; - "Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behaviour (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities".

New research is now helping us understand the debilitating condition Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This can present as sadness, fear, anxiety, depression and even severe fatigue. Often these sufferers outwardly appear to be coping with life, continuing to work and function, but in reality, struggle to do so. Statistically, many people will suffer from mental illness but only half will seek treatment. It is VFBV's hope that any member who feels they may be suffering from any form of illness, will seek out and receive the help and care that they deserve. The provisional payment pilot will automatically cover members and will reimburse for medical and like expenses incurred whilst seeking treatment.

### CFA DISCIPLINE PROCESS

CFA recently presented to the committee an update from the Integrity Unit around the current CFA Complaints Process. The update talked about the introduction of a triage process, a case management approach, and a case logging system among other initiatives. The understanding being that these initiatives would then ensure accountability and adhere to stricter time frames. These processes would also ensure that all complaints are lodged at a central point allowing a line of sight from CFA to ensure those time frames and accountability were implemented.

VFBV robustly questioned the validity of some of those initiatives, as the information VFBV is receiving from volunteers does not reflect the information presented by CFA. VFBV deals daily with volunteers who are experiencing firsthand the discipline process and the vast majority of those volunteers are unhappy with that process. We are aware of volunteers who have been suspended and remain suspended for long periods of time because their investigations are *'ongoing'*. Some of these investigations take months and even years to complete. Many are conducted at District level and depending on the District, can be conducted in different ways. Until the discipline process reaches a point where charges are laid under Section 44 of the CFA Regulations, a vacuum appears to exist where no timelines are observed and often no 'one' process is followed. VFBV have informed CFA of these anomalies at previous committee meetings and are saddened that still no consistent procedure has been adopted. Many CFA Officers escalate minor issues to the Integrity Unit that could easily be handled with a common sense and collaborative approach. When these simple matters are escalated, the investigations become long winded, cause festering fractures in brigades and often result in harsh punitive action. However, VFBV also informed the committee that when CFA Officers follow a procedure that affords volunteers natural justice and procedural fairness, often great outcomes have been achieved. VFBV is aware of many officers committed to ensuring natural justice and fairness – but are let down by the system and lack of consistent processes and support.

VFBV continues to advocate that CFA works with VFBV to review the discipline process and procedures and to conduct a review that is open and transparent and most importantly informed by feedback and input from volunteers.

# Joint Operations Committee

2 Minute Briefing



November 2019

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## INCIDENT CONTROLLER SURVEY

Over the past few fire seasons VFBV have been notified by many members with their concerns about the lack of ongoing development and accreditation opportunities for Volunteer Incident Controller positions in particular Level 3 Incident Controllers. In response to these concerns, DCO Bushfire met with a small delegation of the committee to discuss the ongoing requirements of Incident Controller roles. This group have developed a short survey and all Level 3 Incident Controllers will shortly be asked to give feedback about what parts of the current system work well, what is not working and suggestions for improvements to the accreditation process. The committee has asked CFA to contact the Emergency Management Commissioner for any development opportunities that may be available for volunteer IC to participate in. VFBV have requested that the survey be extended to include current members involved in ICC's as well as former ICC participants. It is hoped that from the survey CFA will gather valuable information, advice and comments on simple improvements, coaching and mentoring opportunities. It is envisaged that some immediate actions will be identified and can be implemented during the 19/20 fire season.

## LESSONS MANAGEMENT CENTRE LAUNCHED

VFBV delegates have long advocated for operational lessons learned to be a core part of CFA doctrine and training materials. Following discussions with the Committee last year CFA agreed to highlight recent case studies in future editions of Brigade Magazine. The committee were pleased to see the autumn edition of Brigade Magazine ran articles including a feature on the new Lessons Management Centre. This is a valuable resource for members wishing to learn from past incidents.

You can access the Lessons Management Centre via:

<https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelD=opsReviews>

## SEASON FOCUS

CFA has agreed to the committee's request for all information relating to fire season preparedness to be located in one easy to access place. CFA has recently updated its member site with all essential operational knowledge and safety information collated in one place.

You can access this landing page at: <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelD=seasonalFocusOverview>

## TREE HAZARD AWARENESS ASSESSOR COURSE

VFBV delegates have requested an update on the progress of the Training package for Hazardous Tree Assessment. As we are now entering into another fire season there is concern amongst members that there have been no Volunteer Hazardous Tree Assessors trained to assess and mark potentially hazardous trees. Committee members have asked for an urgent update on the status of the training package and whether it is still intended to be released before this fire season.

## LONG TERM VACANCIES

The Committee continues to monitor long term OM/Commander vacancies across the State. There are currently eleven vacancies State-wide, with Districts 5 and 17 the most significantly affected. Delegates continue to explain the issues these long-term vacancies have including on fire season preparations and the impact on crucial volunteer support.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

### 'B' CLASS FOAM TRAINING MATERIALS

'B' Class Foam is an integral part of firefighting used during fires or spills of flammable liquids. In 2015 CFA conducted a review of 'B' Class foam concentrate that was currently being used, this resulted in CFA choosing a new foam concentrate in the Solberg RF ATC which is fluoride free and biodegradable. During the roll-out of the new foam concentrates to Brigades CFA conducted a Train the Trainer program for Brigades that held 'B' Class foam. VFBV has been advocating for CFA to update its 'B' Class Foam training, to bring it up to standard and adequately outline the key changes in application rates, effectiveness and duration of the new foam, including application techniques and safety/environmental considerations to be taken into account. CFA has agreed and committed to review the training materials and design a new training package in consultation with the Committee. As soon as the draft package is available, we will seek feedback from members.

### URBAN FIREFIGHTER PROGRAM

CFA has advised that it is designing a CFA Urban Firefighter program to replace the current Structure Firefighter/ Respond to Urban Fire courses that have been running for many years. CFA intends to move towards a role-based approach including competencies such as fire behaviour, suppression, search and rescue and tactical ventilation. The new course will include Suppress Urban Fire and Thermal Imaging along with the possibility of obtaining Breathing Apparatus as part of this course rather than completing this component separately. VFBV has requested that CFA provide clarification on what potential impact this will have on current qualified members, if any. VFBV has requested CFA provide a streamlined pathway for members who cannot or wish not to undertake BA training, but still require the tactical skill component for other operational pathways, such as crew leader etc.

### DRIVER EDUCATION

The Committee continues to seek clarification from CFA on progress of changes rumoured to being considered for Driver Training. VFBV understands that CFA is considering basing driver training competencies on the classification of Brigades, so for example Class 3, 4 and 5 Brigades would be required to complete one competency, and Class 1 and 2 brigades a different one. Delegates have raised concern with this approach and are seeking more information, including risk assessments.

CFA estimates that it requires approx. 2,500 additional heavy vehicle licenses for volunteers to adequately meet operational requirements. VFBV has expressed major concerns with the lack of Volunteer Driving Trainer and Assessors to meet not only existing demand but future. VFBV has requested that CFA provide further Driving Endorsement training for volunteer trainers/assessors and advertise the training more widely throughout Districts and on the LMS system. Delegates used examples of where previous courses have not been adequately advertised and cancelled due to low numbers. CFA has agreed to improve how it advertises future courses.

### LEADERSHIP TRAINING

VFBV delegates requested an update on the current progress of Leadership Training. Specifically; Team Member; and Team Leader modules that were to be presented by the Australian Institute of Management following their successful appointment following public tender. CFA reported that all agencies within the sector have now reviewed the material and these courses have progressed to pilot. As at writing, Team Member has completed its pilot, with Team Leader yet to be scheduled. The Committee requested involvement in the pilot courses to improve feedback, and CFA has agreed.

Delegates continue to raise concerns with CFA at the lack of leadership training opportunities provided to volunteers, with it now being more than two years since the highly popular FireLine Leadership program was cancelled.

# Joint Volunteerism Committee

## 2 Minute Briefing



November 2019

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

### YOUNG MEMBER SURVEY FEEDBACK

The Committee discussed the results and key findings of the 'Young Members Survey' that was recently conducted by CFA. The intention of the survey was to gauge the experiences of youth within their brigades and to get an understanding of the thoughts of younger members.

Results indicated that young members are highly engaged in Training, Fundraising and Firefighting and less involved in non-operational activities like event organising, administration and wellbeing within their brigade. Young members showed a high level of interest in activities aimed at improving their training and development with 67% of participants wanting leadership training with a blend of online and practical hands-on training.

Of concern to the VFBV delegates was the significant number of junior volunteers who do not transition into the senior ranks of their brigade. Results indicated that two areas which would make the most impact for a successful transition to senior membership would be; Brigades to include junior members in formal training activities; and for younger members to be paired up with a mentor/buddy. Data from the survey will continue to be utilised to improve the existing youth programs.

### BRIGADE MANAGEMENT MANUAL

An updated Brigade Management Manual has now been launched on CFA Online following a comprehensive review. The Committee was heavily involved in the review and delegates congratulated the CFA Volunteerism team on a good collaborative model that enabled enough time for VFBV to request feedback from members via our 2-Minute Briefing back in October last year. This ensured feedback from the field was incorporated into the review.

CFA has advised that members will have access to an online version as required, which also incorporates links to various important information such as the Act, regulations, Standing Orders and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), as well as policies, forms, and more. Each brigade will be given a paper version of the updated manual, which is expected to be available towards the end of the year.

VFBV will continue to work with CFA on updates to the manual to ensure it remains contemporary and relevant. If you have any feedback, including on content and design, please contact your local VFBV State Councillor or email CFA: [bmmfeedback@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:bmmfeedback@cfa.vic.gov.au)

### CONCERNS FOR DROP IN VOLUNTEER NUMBERS

VFBV delegates continue to express concerns about the alarming drop in volunteer numbers over recent successive years. The Committee continues to review trend lines in volunteer resignations, the VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey and results of CFA's exit surveys to try and understand the key issues contributing to the decline. VFBV has requested CFA to establish a proactive strategy to arrest the declines, including action plans to address key areas of concern raised in VFBV's annual volunteer survey.

Member feedback consistently raises the lack of specific programs to address poor results as one of the main contributors of low morale, with respect and lack of genuine volunteer consultation always amongst the top reasons for member dissatisfaction. CFA has agreed to include member satisfaction as a key KPI in this year's CFA annual plan. It is hoped this will improve accountability and direct effort to areas that will have the most impact in improving member morale.