



VFBV

VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

## **2 Minute Briefings February 2020**

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



February 2020

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

## DIGITAL RADIO UPGRADE PROGRESS

CFA have advised that all four outer metro districts (Districts 7, 8 13 and 14) are now operating on digital channels but are patched to the old analogue channels. Districts 7 and 8 are not currently using the digital fireground channels due to the number of observation reports received regarding poor or lack of reception particularly inside large buildings. With the aid of the observation reports received the issues were narrowed down to a combination of Telstra Network configuration and a limitation of the Tait portable radio. This demonstrates the value and use of the observation report process for reporting issues with the system and the ability to identify exactly where to look to find the potential solution. All of this occurs behind the scenes although to the initiator of the observation report it seems like nothing is being done.

The Joint Committee Delegates have queried whether the issues in Districts 7 and 8 would also affect other Districts across the State. CFA has explained that the issues stem from the increased number of cells in the outer metro area causing the radios to 'frequency hunt' more often. As the Regional locations do not require the same number of cells it is therefore not an issue for regional locations.

## SUPPLEMENTARY ALERTING SYSTEM (SAS)

Work continues for the VFBV delegates on the EMV led SAS working party reviewing and providing feedback to both Ernest & Young and the rest of the working party on the supplementary alerting system being developed. The timeline for release is still on schedule for early 2020 with discussions still taking place between Ernest & Young, EMV and ESTA to try to bring the timeline forward. Each Brigade will have a Brigade Administrator to allow for the management of members to their Brigade capcodes above those capcodes already allocated through the EAS Viper system. Brigade Members are often requested to provide feedback at various stages throughout the project and VFBV encourages as many members to participate in this process to help shape the SAS application for future CFA use.

## SPECTRUM REPLACEMENT

Spectrum is the system used by Brigades when the triple zero or paging activation systems fail. With the end of life for the existing Spectrum system due in January 2020 VFBV have sought an update. The committee was informed that the contract with the new provider, AdTec, had been finalised and are now working through the transition plan. CFA assured delegates there will be no training required as both the current and new system operates in the same manner. Users will use the same code as they do currently and all existing brigade member telephone numbers will be automatically copied across. Any requests to add modify and delete member telephone numbers will still occur throughout the transition in the same manner as currently to ensure the seamless process between both systems. This maintenance work will still be carried out by District staff as it was under the old system. District staff will receive training on a portal to allow for timely updates. The Committee will continue to monitor and provide updates.

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS REDUNDANCY

VFBV delegates have requested CFA develop comms contingency planning to be in place in the event of a power failure where NBN is installed. At the recent NECWG-A/NZ (National Emergency Communications Working Group) meeting discussions centred around how NBN would deal with outages and was advised NBN have satellite service and generators at their infrastructure sites. Any power outages affecting individual providers is the responsibility of the Service Providers (such as Telstra, Optus, and others). VFBV delegates have sought information on what work is being done about CFA systems having single source of failure by having access to only one Service Provider. The committee was advised this is a body of work that is ongoing with some options potentially becoming available in the future such as use of the Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSBM). PSBM is where a portion of the spectrum is reserved for use by the Emergency Service Organisations. The Committee will continue to monitor and suggest Brigades start building redundancy into their own comms plans while CFA explores corporate options.

# Joint Community Safety Committee

2 Minute Briefing



February 2020

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

## FIRE DANGER RATING SIGNS

VFBV delegates continue to raise safety concerns on behalf of members who are required to manually update fire danger rating signs. During the fire danger period these signs are frequently updated – sometimes multiple times a day, and many are often located on busy roadways which makes updating them a high-risk activity. Delegates have requested that CFA review their risk assessment and provide support for volunteers to more safely undertake this work. The Committee has also requested a request be made for EMV to review the location of all signs across the State, with the intent of prioritising the replacement of manual FDR signs with new electronic ones that can be updated remotely.

In related news, CFA has now completed the implementation of a new pager cap code that can be optionally added to members pagers to advise of changes to the Fire Danger Rating. This was a VFBV request to support members who have to manually update FDR signs, and follows an extended period of advocacy by VFBV delegates. Previously members had to manually check details online and determine if their signs needing changing. Under the new system, nominated members will receive a pager message twice daily, every day during the FDP at 0630hrs and 1630 hrs. The pager message will cease when the last FDP ceases for the season. VFBV delegates have thanked CFA for its support of this initiative.

The new pager Cap Code is 239295 and is called 'FDR Notifications State wide'. CFA has advised that members can request the capcode be added to their pagers through their District Office and BASO's and District Support Officers should be able to assist. Requests in writing via email are more easily tracked and actioned.

## RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLERS UPDATE

The Committee continues to support the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition and its mission to improve the uptake of residential sprinklers in domestic dwellings. The Coalition is a partnership between the Fire Protection Association Australia (FPAA) and the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC). VFBV delegates continue to encourage CFA to incorporate residential sprinkler messaging and their benefits in CFA community safety messaging.

Since the change to the National Construction Code (NCC) in May 2019, the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition has been focused on industry, including plumbers and developers, to upskill and prepare them for the uptake of the new sprinkler specifications, which now mandates sprinklers in buildings four (4) stories and above. The intent is to build capacity in the installer industry before then beginning wider community messaging to increase consumer demand for the life-saving systems in new homes, as well as information on retrofitting for older homes. Priority will be to target "at risk groups" for residential fire fatalities (i.e. over 65 years, those with mental or physical disability, habitual high-risk behaviour etc). Work has begun with two (2) major property developers who are considering installing sprinklers in all their show rooms and model housing. The aim is for major developers to absorb costs and install sprinklers as standard, so that it becomes best practice in future housing developments. Residential sprinklers will not only bring benefits to the wider community, but a major insurer is now also considering the benefits of home fire sprinklers by reducing premiums of up to 10% for homes with them installed. The Committee will continue to monitor and encourage progress.

## POWER OUTAGE AND LOAD SHEDDING COMMUNITY MESSAGING

VFBV delegates have lobbied hard for CFA to improve community messaging and advice on the importance of considering power outages in peoples fire plans. With the increased occurrence of power shedding during peak load days and pre-emptive power outages on high fire risk days, State Council have requested delegates to the Community Safety Committee take this issue up and advocate to CFA for consistent and specific messaging/advice across the sector. Delegates have observed that many peoples fire plans assume they will still have access to power for pumps and radio's etc. While VFBV delegates have agreed with CFA that a national approach would be ideal, delegates have requested CFA take the lead through its own messaging, while work is done to build national consensus. This issue was originally raised by VFBV District Council 24 and supported by State Council at their December meeting.

# Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee

2 Minute Briefing



February 2020

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

## INSUFFICIENT FUNDING FOR STORZ COUPLING CHANGEOVER

For a number of years now, VFBV has been expressing serious concerns about the dangerous situation arising from the slow and unfunded state-wide changeover from 3- and 5-thread hose couplings to Storz couplings. In reviewing the rollout, the Committee has ascertained changeover has only occurred in full in 6 districts across the State. Of the remaining 15 Districts – 2 are above 50% and 8 of them are at less than 25% changeover indicating the slow progress.

VFBV delegates has received reports from brigades reporting instances where their appliances have been unable to transfer water from tanker to tanker due to incompatible couplings and a lack of adapting pieces. Further reports have been received of volunteer brigades having to resort to community grant applications, tin rattling and other fundraising activities just to make their appliances compatible with neighbouring appliances. VFBV delegates have strongly criticised the lack of CFA State funding and rollout strategy that in some instances have left individual CFA Districts to try and manage with their limited non-discretionary budgets. Delegates have again voiced their concerns and expressed their view that volunteers having to fundraise for core firefighting equipment is untenable and immoral. VFBV continues to call on CFA to allocate urgent funding to complete the Storz project across all Districts as soon as possible and has refused to support requests that volunteer grant programs be used as an alternative to fund CFA base funding shortfalls.

## 4.4 IVECO TANKER TRANSMISSION UPGRADE UPDATE

The Iveco 4.4 Heavy Tanker transmission issues continue to be a topic of discussion in many forums. As members would recall, VFBV successfully escalated safety concerns raised by members about the automated manual gearbox (semi-automatic transmission) in the IVECO EURO CARGO 4.4C Tankers. The issue stems from how the transmission deals with a drop-in engine revs. In a semi-automatic transmission, software engages the clutch automatically during gear changes. However, when the engine revs drop below approximately 700/800 RPM, these transmissions automatically engage the clutch to prevent the vehicle from stalling – leaving the driver effectively controlling a vehicle coasting in 'neutral' and therefore without exhaust brakes. This presents a significant issue when moving down a steep decline for example, and relies on the driver to then use the accelerator to increase the engine revs – which is very counter intuitive when the driver is seeking to slow the descent of the vehicle and engage the air brakes.

As previously reported, VFBV was very pleased when CFA agreed to stop purchasing this transmission and agreed that all future builds would be fitted with an Allison automatic transmission. While this fix addresses the problem for future builds, there are still approximately 80 appliances in the fleet fitted with the older transmission. There is currently no program or budget to replace them. Delegates continue to raise this as a significant safety concern and have requested CFA develop an urgent business case and funding bid to present to Government to cover a retro fit program. In the interim, delegates continue to raise concerns that with different transmissions now spread across the Iveco fleet, CFA needs to urgently fit dashboard placards that aid in transmission identification for when these vehicles are used in campaign fires or part of strike teams, and any other occasions where drivers may not be aware of the differences. The Committee will continue advocating these measures to compliment training and education as part of CFA's risk management strategy.

## CREW CAB LIGHT TANKERS ON THE HORIZON

Many brigades across the state have been singing the praises of the Light Tankers and have asked when a new Crew Cab Version will be available. The current crew cab is no longer available from the manufacturer and CFA Fleet are investigating a body that will be suitable for future builds. The crew cab light tanker has a nominal 1,700 litre tank which includes a new space saving designed diesel-powered pump. CFA engineering have reported that the Crew Cab Chassis is currently being put out to tender and will provide the Committee with a progress report early this year. In the interim a small working party has been formed to establish if there are ways of increasing the water lighterage to 2000lt or the possibility of adding a CAFS (compressed air foam system) to enhance operational water efficiency in future builds.

# Joint HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee

2 Minute Briefing



February 2019

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

## THE WORKING MIND FIRST RESPONDERS TRAINING

CFA has briefed the committee on the roll out of 'The Working Mind First Responders' (TWMFR) and 'Mental Health First Aid' (MHFA) programs. These programs are currently offered to two (2) BMT members at Class 3,4 & 5 brigades. The training programs increase knowledge regarding mental illness, development of knowledge and tools for supporting people who may be experiencing mental health issues and also aims to create an open culture that reduces stigma.

Delegates have voiced their support for the intent of these initiatives but expressed concerns about the lack of consultation and engagement prior to roll out. VFBV has requested more information about the package so that informed consultation can begin to occur with volunteers. Initial issues raised included the need to consider offering this package to Class 1 and 2 brigades also. Given the remoteness of some of these brigades, their access to mental health services may be limited. Equipping leaders in these brigades is seen as a natural progression for this initiative going forward. At present the package is delivered in an 8-hour session and some brigades have embraced this time frame while others have indicated they would struggle to commit to that time block in one session. Delegates have expressed a need to examine the current package and consider other more flexible delivery options that is more suited to volunteers.

## CFA DISCIPLINE PROCESS

VFBV continues to advocate that CFA works with VFBV to review the discipline process and procedures and to conduct a review that is open, transparent and most importantly informed by feedback and input from volunteers. With the move to a centralised complaints management system VFBV has provided examples where the Integrity Unit has been responsible for the investigation of many minor and innocuous matters, which has subjected volunteers to lengthy periods of suspension and stressful investigations. CFA has agreed that a clear distinction needs to be made between a minor or low-level complaint compared to a more serious offence.

CFA has advised of the appointment of a new Complaints Manager who will be responsible for determining which matters are investigated by the Integrity unit, and which are more appropriately handled at District level. It is proposed this system will ensure that every complaint will be logged and strict time frames adhered to. VFBV welcomes these changes and will continue to monitor the new system closely. VFBV will continue to voice concerns around the lack of transparency and natural justice afforded to members traversing CFA's discipline system until tangible and meaningful changes are made. VFBV will continue campaigning for external oversight and will continue to explore options such as the creation of a Volunteer Ombudsman type role to act as an independent mechanism for possible oversight or appeal processes where in VFBV's view - CFA conflicts of interest cannot be adequately or appropriately managed.

## WELLBEING LINE

VFBV delegates have escalated concerns of a serious shortcoming of how calls to the CFA Wellbeing hotline are managed. The Committee received a request from VFBV State Council to investigate a request for assistance from District Council 16 who have provided examples where calls transferred from the hotline to field-based support services are not logged and therefore creates the potential for calls to go unanswered or not followed up.

CFA has confirmed the problem and advised that it is due to the current system relying on an internal telecommunications system that has been built in-house. VFBV has requested that alternate systems be investigated as a matter of priority to ensure no calls to the wellbeing line can go unanswered or missed. VFBV acknowledges that the current system may have been appropriate in the past, however delegates have advocated the system has outgrown its original intent and requires investment to ensure wellbeing and welfare requests are suitably logged and managed to help ensure cases do not fall through the cracks. The Committee has also requested more awareness is provided to Brigade leaders on how to assist members when requesting wellbeing and support services.

# Joint Operations Committee

2 Minute Briefing



February 2020

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

## NEW STRUCTURAL HELMET ROLLOUT

VFBV continues to receive positive comments from many volunteers on the new volunteer structural helmet that was selected through the competitive public tender process which included volunteer field trials as part of the selection process. This has reaffirmed the value of VFBV's advocacy for an open and transparent process that also complied with Victorian Government procurement guidelines. VFBV thanks all volunteers that participated in field and evaluation trials.

Delegates to the Operations Committee have continued to raise concerns with CFA about why only a partial roll-out of the new helmets has been funded by Government. CFA has reported that the new helmets will be distributed to eligible members with BA Search and Rescue competencies only and CFA will seek further Government funding to complete the allocation to all structurally trained volunteers in the future. Delegates have expressed a strong view that partial rollouts and partial funding introduces additional complexity to what is already a complex operating environment. From a safety and risk management perspective delegates have urged CFA adopt a stronger and firmer view to Government that projects and programs need to be fully funded before their introduction, and the increased frequency of partial rollout of programs need to stop.

To date - new structural helmet distribution is well progressed to eligible members in Districts 4, 5, 8 and 27 with another five districts to follow shortly. CFA has advised that the 12 remaining districts will be rolled out as soon as eligibility data is confirmed by brigades and districts and a handover session can be confirmed with each group. It is intended the rollout to eligible members will be completed by the end of April this year.

## TREE HAZARD ASSESSOR ENDORSEMENT DELAYED

Early last year, delegates sought an update on the progress of the Training package for Hazardous Tree Assessors for volunteers. CFA had previously advised that it had introduced a RPL process for volunteers who had significant experience and knowledge in hazardous trees while a skills acquisition package was being developed. CFA advised the package was being piloted by DELWP and a final version for CFA would be released 'shortly'.

Delegates have continued to raise concerns as another fire season approached and with the increase in near misses from falling trees. With no progress and no additional volunteer Hazardous Tree Assessors trained to assess and mark potentially hazardous trees the pool of trained and qualified members continues to stagnate. In a recent update, the Committee has learned that CFA has made the decision not to endorse the package for CFA use, and that CFA's position is now that Hazardous Tree Assessment will remain with DELWP and VicParks. Delegates will continue to seek clarification and will request CFA's reasoning be provided to inform further discussion and consideration.

## GREATER ALARM RESPONSE SYSTEM ANALYSIS

VFBV has requested CFA conduct detailed high-level analysis of GARS to identify impacts on CFA operational response and any inherent system incompatibilities that would likely arise with the expansion of a GARS type system through the proposed FRV areas. GARS is used by the MFB for initial response and escalation to incidents. It uses a highly structured approach to escalating resources via a predetermined computer assisted model. Predominately designed for a small metropolitan area where resources are very closely located and therefore a low level of resource diversity and capability exists – delegates have expressed a desire for analysis and modelling to occur to assist decision makers understand the opportunities, risks and impacts of potentially rolling out this model to the expanded FRV footprint. A lack of flexibility to delineate between structural response and bushfire response which has an obvious impact on whether the incident controller needs pumpers or tankers during escalation is an obvious concern. There are also concerns around system issues such as very dated software and mapping applications used by CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch used by ESTA) which would present difficulties and potential limitations when CAD conducts radial searches for appliances over vast geographic areas.

# Joint Training Committee

2 Minute Briefing



February 2020

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

## **THERMAL IMAGING CAMERA TRAINING FOR NON-STRUCTURAL ENVIRONMENT**

In July last year VFBV reported that following considerable advocacy by VFBV, that CFA had introduced a bushfire-themed Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC) Awareness course. As reported at the time, the Training Committee was extremely disappointed that no consultation had occurred in developing the package. After reviewing it, it was the Committee's view that the new package was not appropriate and did not meet the intended needs of Brigades.

Over the last few months VFBV has listened to member feedback and criticism of CFA's package that has reaffirmed our view that the package is inadequate and does not meet the intended use. Feedback suggests the current package still places too much emphasis on operating within the structural environment, and does not cover basics that these cameras can assist with in the bushfire environment such as during blacking out operations.

VFBV delegates to the Training Committee have once again requested CFA review and redevelop a TIC course specifically targeted for the non-structural and bushfire environment as matter of priority. At the last meeting, CFA advised they had taken on board the criticism and committed to work in close consultation with the Committee to develop a package which is better tailored to the intended need and relevance. We will keep you updated on progress.

## **LOW VOLTAGE FUSE REMOVAL – VOLUNTEER TRAINER AND ASSESSORS**

VFBV continues to advocate for the rollout of critically important 'Low Voltage Fuse Removal Training' to as many Brigades as possible following the alarming drop in qualified members across the State. VFBV has campaigned strongly for the resumption of this training – pointing out to CFA the significant risk firefighters are exposed to when electricity cannot be safely isolated early on during structural firefighting operations.

Hand in hand with this initiative is the continued advocacy for CFA to support a strong, sustainable, well trained and experienced Volunteer Trainer and Assessor pool. The need for CFA to provide training opportunities in formats, at times and at locations that make it easy for volunteers to participate continues to be one of the poorest performing areas identified in VFBV's annual Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey.

CFA has recently advised that due to recent changes in the framework, the requirement for Low Voltage Fuse Removal courses to be conducted in partnership with TAFE and using a qualified electrician is no longer required. This will allow suitably qualified and experienced volunteers and staff instructors (those that hold a Cert IV in Training & Assessment) to undertake train the trainer type courses to develop a volunteer instructor pool to assist with the delivery of this critically important training.

CFA reports that it has completed six Low Voltage Fuse Removal courses so far, with a further 14 courses scheduled this financial year. To assist with course delivery, a further four LVFR Trailers are being constructed that will finally see one trailer per CFA Region. This is in addition to LVFR props having been established at every CFA training ground. With over 450 volunteers trained so far, there is still a long way to go to reach the previous level of 5,000 members trained.

## **FIRE INVESTIGATION TRAINING PRE-REQUISITES**

VFBV delegates continue to receive and escalate volunteer complaints regarding the difficulty in accessing the pre-requisite training 'Give Evidence in a Judicial or Quasi-Judicial setting' required to undertake Fire Investigation Courses. In consultation with the Training Committee, CFA has agreed to provide a distance learning option that would use an assignment approach using the current Reference Manual and skillsPAK to facilitate volunteers resuming this pre-requisite training. This new program will see a training and assignment option created and loaded onto the Learning Management System based on the new PUA2019 updates that would then be available for members to access and undertake. This is expected to be released in early 2020 and we will keep you apprised of progress.

# Joint Volunteerism Committee

2 Minute Briefing



February 2020

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

## YOUTH CADETS

The Committee continues to explore the drop in young members transitioning from Juniors to Senior membership. Valuable feedback about some of the common reasons for this was gleaned from the “Young Members Survey” that was recently conducted to gauge experiences of youth within their Brigades and their thoughts on what is important to them.

CFA data shows that 16 and 17 year old members are resigning from Brigades at a rate 6.6 times faster than that of other Brigade members. VFBV delegates believe it is important to understand their requirements and what will encourage them to remain with brigades into the future. CFA have been progressing a Youth Cadet model with evidence gathered from the survey, brigades, schools, scouts and other organisations that engage in Youth Programs to build a best practice model for trial. One suggestion has been for CFA to provide a structured youth program where 16- and 17-year old's can undertake formal training and professional development, resulting in a final qualification that would be recognised by future employers. VFBV delegates have encouraged a pilot project be investigated and consulted on as soon as possible.

## JONES INQUIRY REVIEW

For some time now VFBV delegates have been requesting a review of recommended actions from the Jones Inquiry be conducted. This independent inquiry was conducted in 2011 into the ‘Effect of Arrangements Made by the Country Fire Authority on its Volunteers’ and was led by retired County Court Judge, the Honourable David Jones. Judge Jones told volunteers at a VFBV Open Forum that his report focused on positive moves to maintain the long-term sustainability of CFA, and the fundamental importance of the relationship between CFA and VFBV to that sustainability.

Delegates have requested CFA review Jones Inquiry actions through the lens of 2020, with a view to seizing the opportunity of CFA becoming a volunteer focussed organisation later this year. For example, the report called for more easily accessible training for CFA volunteers, proper transparency in CFA's decision making, genuine consultation and full utilisation of qualified, experienced volunteers, from the front line to instructors and specialist roles to the top-level incident management roles.

VFBV delegates have expressed a desire to work with CFA Management to continue to progress these important issues. While CFA support for this work has thus far been cautious, VFBV will continue to advocate the importance of addressing previously raised issues and following through programs to completion. Volunteers commit a lot of time and energy to these reviews, and it is critically important that this volunteer investment is respected and recognised. The best way to do this is to ensure review actions are regularly monitored and acted upon.

## VOLUNTEER EVENTS EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Delegates have raised concerns relating to how CFA advertise volunteer access to public events such as the Australian Tennis Open, Football matches and Australia Day parade. As these offers become more common place, it is important that CFA establish a fair and equitable way to make volunteers aware of these opportunities as well as a process to select members when spaces are limited. VFBV has requested CFA work towards an open and transparent method of choosing members to attend these events and also more reasonable time frames be arranged for members to indicate they are interested in participating.

Delegates have suggested a register be established within each District, with input from Brigade and Group leaders to assist with prioritising when spaces are limited. This would ensure a more equitable and merit-based process than what currently exists. CFA has agreed to explore options and has also committed to promote future events in advance. The Committee will continue to monitor.