



VFBV

VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings September 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



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

ELECTRONIC OBSERVATION REPORTS NOW AVAILABLE

Following many years of advocacy, delegates are pleased to advise that the electronic versions of the radio, EAS and ESTA observation reports are now available on Brigades On-line. These reports are developed by CFA ICT Services to enhance the ability to report faults either on their mobile phone or tablet as well as the traditional paper or online versions. The link for the three reports is <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pageId=communicationObservations>. Members are encouraged to utilise observation reports, as timely and evidence based observations are the most effective way to report and resolve issues relating to communication equipment, processes and practices.

SUPPLEMENTARY ALERTING SYSTEM (SAS)

Work continues for the two VFBV delegates on the EMV led SAS working party. Working party members have run tests on the latest version of the system but in a limited capacity. Reports to the Joint Committee indicate the mapping component of the SAS is more than acceptable however the working party is looking forward to the use and testing with replicated actual data. The timeline for release is still on target for 2020 as ESTA have commenced work on the data transfer component. Once completed there will be some further testing by the SAS working party to ensure there is a very high level of confidence for use prior to the rollout before the next fire season.

COMPUTER AIDED DISPATCH (CAD) SOP'S

The intended review of CAD SOP's that was originally planned to have occurred earlier this year has been delayed due to staff movement associated with the government's fire services reform changes. Therefore, all existing SOP's remain in place. Delegates have requested a strong engagement and consultation process to accompany any future plans for changes.

In related news, VFBV has expressed disappointment with the very poor change management process involved in replacing CFA's VICFIRE callsign with FIRECOM and the lack of any planning, consultation or training. Despite communications to the contrary, this was not an agreed or identified activity that was planned for or recognised under the fire services reform governance structure. The lack of change management, training and notice is a serious matter and resulted in a significant safety concern with its implementation being in direct conflict with operational doctrine and practice. VFBV has escalated its concerns to the operational assurance group, with the intent to also raise the issue with the independent monitor.

DIGITAL RADIO UPGRADE

Telstra have identified a number of areas in the outer metro districts that will require additional RMR sites or the potential relocation of existing sites to improve digital radio coverage concerns. These concerns have been identified by the use of Observation Reports submitted from Brigades, which is why VFBV keeps encouraging members to use observation reports to report any issues.

Proposed coverage solutions have been assessed and Telstra have been requested to provide formal proposals for CFA to consider. Additional District talkgroups have also been added to a number of existing RMR sites that do provide coverage into the District. This will assist with providing coverage impacted by building shielding and other local topography related issues. The Joint Committee was also advised that the new site at Hastings has been commissioned and has provided significant improved coverage across the Westernport Group in District 8.

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AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FIRE DANGER RATINGS - UPDATE

As reported in previous editions, a national fire danger rating system for Australia is being developed to standardise emergency warnings. This project was funded by the Commonwealth Government back in 2011. All states and territories have been working together through AFAC with the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) on the underlying science aspect of warnings. Recent social research conducted last year has been concentrating on community messaging and looking at the behaviour of, and response to how the community understands and reacts to official warnings and advice.

The social research has been done in three stages, via surveys and workshops between September 2018 to June 2019 Australia wide. The stage 1 survey collected responses from 5,430 people with the stage 2 workshops involving 2,340 people. The stage 3 surveys collected responses from 5,408 people. Survey results found most people recognise the fire danger rating system, but many don't understand it, and there is confusion over what to do and when, with results indicating that very few people would take action below the 'Severe' rating.

The survey analysis has concluded that the ratings should be simplified, optimised and contain supporting messaging to enhance the public's understanding and use. The results from the surveys show high levels of support for ratings to be compressed to four levels, with level names of low, moderate, high and extreme and a colour palette of green, yellow, orange and red. The social research is only one element of the project and further testing and introduction is not likely to occur until the 2021/22 fire season.

The committee will continue to monitor and VFBV have requested that CFA provide regular updates on the new system and provide an opportunity for volunteers to be engaged and involved as the project continues. The full social research summary is available from the AFAC website. Search under Initiatives -> Australian Fire Danger Rating Systems.

FIRE READY VICTORIA PROGRAM CHANGED TO FIRE SAFETY ESSENTIALS PROGRAM

Delegates have discussed CFA's latest update on the new Fire Safety Essentials (FSE) program that is to replace the Fire Ready Victoria community education program. The new program has been developed in consultation via an opt-in model to anyone interested, with targeted engagement of Community Education Coordinator's, Community Liaison Brigade Educators, volunteer presenters and agency staff who were asked to consider what aspects of the program were working well, what was causing problems and new ideas that could be incorporated into the new model.

The short 60 minute modular program is designed to be an entry level program, tailored to local communities and special interest groups and focuses on personalisation for action. The new updates give the program a new look and refresh the program resources to provide greater continuity.

The aim of the Fire Safety Essentials program is to challenge participants to personalise their risk and take preventive actions to protect their safety during fire. Presenters are currently being upskilled as the core programs are converted to separate modules. The new program will have a staged implementation with the program currently being adapted to online delivery, with online resources being prioritised and developed to support delivery. During this transition – the new program will be used for online delivery, with the existing program used for any of this year's face to face sessions.

IFMP – INTEGRATED FIRE MANAGEMENT PLANNING UPDATE

VFBV would like to thank all volunteers who recently provided feedback on the draft guidelines for Integrated Fire Management Planning as requested. Feedback is currently being collated and CFA are updating the draft guidelines to incorporate feedback. The Committee will continue to monitor and provide an update as this work continues.

Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee

2 Minute Briefing



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STORZ COUPLING FUNDING

VFBV has again had to express its concerns to CFA regarding the authority's refusal to properly fund storz coupling changeover. Most disappointing has been CFA's attempt to use community donations money to try and avoid its responsibility. Delegates continue to express dismay that base government funding is not being used to cover what can only be described as the most basic of fundamental equipment for a fire service – its fire hoses.

From time to time VFBV has updated members about the progress of the CFA changeover from 3 and 5 thread couplings to the Storz couplings. In 2009 CFA supported the AFAC adopted position of implementing the sole use of Storz adaptors across all fire services in Australia. NSW fire services were quick to react with a general rollout and other states have followed to varying degrees. In 2012 CFA advised delegates that they would direct districts to fund the coupling changeover and adopted the incremental approach using District funds to gradually convert brigades to Storz. Recent data from CFA proves this system has failed with CFA figures showing less than one third of brigades having converted to Storz, with only 6 of the 21 districts having completed the changeover. Districts and Regions have quite rightly pushed back to say many of them do not have adequate budgets to cover the cost and have requested more support from HQ.

In recent months, CFA has again attempted to divert this problem to volunteers and brigades by requesting they use donations money to pay for the conversion. HQ has advised that it does not have the funding, and brigades should use VESEP or donations programs to cover the cost. VFBV has again rejected this call and expressed deep disappointment at this approach. VFBV has renewed its call for storz changeover to be fully funded and rolled out as soon as possible. Delegates have requested that CFA demonstrate to the Committee that it has a fully funded plan for its completion, and evidence of previous funding requests from government have been rejected. VFBV does not accept that volunteers should have to tin rattle or divert precious community donations to cover the cost of essential and fundamental equipment.

VOLUNTEER STATIONS GOING SOLAR

Delegates have noted with great interest the progress that has been made by volunteer fire stations being converted to solar power for their energy needs. Many of these brigades have undertaken this work off their own bat and have pursued community programs and donations. Brigades like Yackandandah have reduced energy use significantly and have a goal to reduce their energy bill to zero over time. Over the past 12 months over 16 stations have converted to solar. CFA has also shown support by installing solar panels to reduce the energy use of HQ in Burwood. VFBV has requested that CFA develop a long-term plan to support other stations across the state. Delegates have requested solar power be included as an option under the standard station build. CFA has agreed to undertake further work with CFA Engineers and Building Services to investigate options and report back on available funding streams and rebates. Delegates have requested this work include options for a potential retrofit program to advise on the viability of retrofitting existing stations.

LIGHT TANKER & PUMPER TANKER - UPDATE

The committee has been advised that the current Light Tanker cab chassis is no longer available. A new Working Party has been formed within the Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee to work with CFA engineers to develop and review alternate crew cab's. It is hoped that a re-design may increase the amount of water carried to 2000lt with delegates expressing a view that a CAFS (compressed air foam safety system) may be able to be incorporated into the design.

The Pumper Tanker working party continues to monitor progress of the prototype Pumper/Tanker, with some initial delays occurring due to COVID-19 restrictions across the engineering/manufacturing sector. The committee is currently waiting to review stowage and locker configuration that has been delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Early planning for an eventual road show is underway for members to input into the evaluation stage. We will keep you updated on progress as it becomes available.

Joint HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee

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COVID 19 WELLBEING SERVICES

The committee continues to monitor the changing landscape of COVID-19 in Victoria. Provision of the Member Assistance Program (MAP), Chaplaincy, Peer support and other wellbeing services continue. The 'opt in' service, by which people receive regular support phone calls from those services, is still available but has had very little uptake. Delegates have requested that CFA outline a long-term COVID plan to adapt to a threat that is likely to remain in the community for some time. Then as circumstances within the state change, CFA can adjust the plan. Delegates have also reminded CFA the importance of monitoring messaging and communications channels when Districts are requested to provide the communication. If messaging is being fed back down through District channels, then oversight from Headquarters needs to ensure that messaging is getting through to members in a timely manner.

VFBV has supported CFA's COVID-19 Pulse survey, with results due to be discussed with the Committee shortly.

CFA DISCIPLINE PROCESS

VFBV continues to advocate for changes to the CFA Discipline Process. CFA has discussed some early improvements that are currently under review and in draft form. Delegates have requested stronger engagement and consultation to occur during this process, with the ability for volunteer feedback to be regularly received through the iterative process.

Some of the proposed changes include improvements to CFA's investigative capabilities and processes, including how investigators are selected and monitored. This may assist in the reduction of time taken to close investigations. Presently, most complaints are escalated to a formal investigation and these investigations often take a long time and are often stressful and onerous for volunteers. VFBV has requested emphasis on prevention of escalation due to early intervention and informal resolution pathways at the local level. A more neutral approach needs to be taken to assist with the understanding of mitigating issues, and 'fact finding', rather than apportioning blame. CFA has proposed a case manager or case team will be assigned to person(s) involved in a Discipline matter to better manage the process. Delegates have requested CFA review historical cases to retrospectively implement care plans and help to expedite these outstanding investigations. Also, the committee have discussed the language and restrictions currently used in "Stand down or Suspension letters". The committee was advised that these letter(s) which have previously been 'high in emotion' and often punitive, will now where appropriate advise volunteers to refrain from speaking about the current issue/investigation at hand rather than isolate the member from the entire organisation. Delegates requested that correspondence forwarded to volunteers, also advise volunteers, of their right to contact VFBV for ongoing assistance and support, which includes accompanying volunteers to any meetings or interviews. VFBV also reminds members that any volunteer who is involved in a discipline matter, and who would like support from VFBV, to contact their District Council or District Support Officer.

PROVISIONAL PAYMENTS SCHEME EXTENSION

VFBV has supported an extension of the Victorian Government's provisional payments scheme. The pilot was due to end June 2020 but has now been extended by twelve months. VFBV contributes to this pilot through the Department of Justice & Community Safety stakeholder steering committee. To date only a limited number of people have opted into the scheme resulting in an extension to ensure that adequate evaluation of the pilots objectives can be assessed. Delegates have requested fresh messaging through CFA's communication channels to get this important message out to volunteers.

The scheme allows emergency volunteers and workers to access payments for medical treatment and services while their mental health compensation claim is being determined. The pilot scheme is open to CFA, Forest Fire Fighters, FRV, VicPol, VicSES, ESTA, public sector nurses and midwives, child protection practitioners, corrections Victoria, and youth justice employees. Details of the Scheme and how to access can be found at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/provisional-payments>

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HAZARDOUS TREE ASSESSOR'S

VFBV continues to raise the concerns expressed by members on the lack of training opportunities being afforded to volunteers who wish to undertake Hazardous Tree Assessor duties. All operational members are required to complete the Hazardous tree awareness training package before being able to go on the fireground however those who wish to further their qualifications to assess hazardous trees are unable to due to the lack of endorsement process and suitable training package recognised by CFA. While a temporary process has been in place to recognise members who undertake this work in the industry, the committee continues to express its concerns about the risks of not having this base line capability within the organisation for the future and the risks this poses to crews operating in hazardous environments. Delegates will continue to request this matter be progressed.

FIRE INVESTIGATION

Delegates have requested CFA protect the role of volunteer fire Investigators. In the lead up to reform, VFBV warned CFA that an interagency Fire Investigation Unit may hinder and prevent volunteer fire investigators from being responded or recognised. Despite assurances to the contrary and the service level agreement accommodating the continued use of volunteer investigators - it is clear from the work instructions recently issued by FRV that volunteers are being cut out of structural fire investigation.

Volunteer investigators (who have the exact same fire investigation qualifications as paid investigators) have conducted this role for decades and are amongst some of the most experienced investigators in the State. Volunteer and paid investigators have worked extremely well together and frequently expressed unity during recent changes proposed to fire investigator helmets. Volunteer and paid investigators alike are distraught their good working relationships and mutual respect is being wedged apart by divisive and petty industrial positioning.

VFBV does not accept the new FRV Fire Investigation work practices and have requested the CFA Chief Officer to intervene. Delegates have reminded CFA that it has a duty and obligation to protect volunteers from discrimination and to ensure that CFA volunteers are recognised, valued and respected in all inter agency arrangements.

BUSHFIRE THERMAL IMAGING CAMERA

VFBV have requested that CFA Operations outline a rollout program and guiding principles for the rollout of the new bushfire thermal imaging camera's (TIC's) to avoid problems encountered with other new equipment rollouts. Members are keen to avoid the problems of the past where an arbitrary number of members needed to be trained in each brigade before the TIC was issued to the brigade or placed on a truck.

Additional thermal imaging cameras were a popular choice from this year's pick list program run by the CFA Donations Trust. Delegates have told VFBV that the 3M - V320 Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC) designed for its ease of use and flexible applications has been a popular choice for many brigades in this process.

Delegates have requested CFA develop a plan for the rollout of the new TIC and ensure there are no artificial barriers placed on brigades before equipment can be made operational. The plan should accommodate suitable training opportunities are offered well in advance and it is hoped that planning is in place so that brigades can be trained and operational with the new mid level TIC before the next fire season and without limitations on who can undergo the training before a TIC is released to the brigade.

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LMS UPGRADE FOR TRAINING NOMINATIONS

Delegates have recently been consulted by CFA on a new process intended to be released into the Learning Management System (LMS) to assist Brigades when nominating members for training. This new function allows a Brigade to nominate and approve members for courses based on a set priority even if there is no current course available, LMS then holds those nominations and automatically sends members options of courses when they become available. Delegates are happy with this process as it has the ability to improve training opportunities however have requested verification that the process will be subject to continued review and improvement where required and, that Groups still hold the ability to approve nominations for courses such as Strike Team Leader and Sector Commander.

SAFE WORKING AT HEIGHTS AND LOW VOLTAGE FUSE REMOVAL

VFBV continues to advocate strongly for members to access safe working at heights (SWaH) and low voltage fuse removal (LVFR) training. Both these projects are currently running behind schedule due to the COVID19 restrictions which has meant that courses were required to be postponed. This included a SWaH train-the-trainer program for volunteers. Feedback collated from SWaH pilot courses has been positive with 30 volunteers trained so far. VFBV has been assured that once able to, SWaH training including train-the-trainer will commence as a matter of priority.

LVFR continues to be a popular course with most scheduled courses being well over subscribed. CFA have trained 657 volunteers across the state to date. VFBV is continuing to request changes to how the LVFR equipment is being sent to Brigades with CFA currently only issuing the equipment once a certain number of members have been trained. CFA are continuing to make alterations including software fixes to the online Electrical Safety Awareness module which is part of the LVFR training. VFBV will continue to request further LVFR training opportunities and additional sets of equipment for Brigades who have a risk based need for additional sets.

OPERATE PUMPS QUALIFICATION

Members were notified by CFA that for several years CFA have been incorrectly awarding a National Competency, Operate Pumps - PUAFIR309 as part of Minimum Skills – Bushfire Firefighter. This has been identified as being non-compliant as part of their obligations as a registered training organisation (RTO). Non-compliance is due to Operate Pumps requiring a pre-requisite course; Prepare, Maintain and Test Response Equipment – PUAEQU001 which has not been adequately mapped in the CFA training or assessment package. VFBV has received a large amount of communication from concerned members after an initial email was sent out by CFA advising them that their training records have been changed. CFA has now replaced operate pumps with a CFA competency. CFA has agreed to a VFBV request that they release a formal plan and pathway to enable members to re-gain the national operate pumps qualification if they desire. A RPL challenge process has been established for those with the existing knowledge, and an online module for prepare, maintain and test equipment module is now being developed as an online course. Questions should be directed to District training teams.

INSTRUCTOR LOSSES

Delegates have escalated concerns about the changes to CFA Instructor numbers that have been seconded from Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV). Vacancies and other matters have resulted in a loss of approximately 5 substantive instructor positions across the State, with other losses across the districts that impact upon administration roles within the district training teams. Volunteers have contacted VFBV to express deep concerns at these reductions claiming they will have a dramatic effect on CFA's ability to provide training to volunteers. Further impacts have been experienced with the changes to operational HQ positions embedded in the training department resulting in changes of consistency across portfolios. Further employment constraints have started to emerge as FRV seconded instructors have indicated they will not support online virtual training. Clarification is being sought. Delegates are continuing to monitor and escalate as required.

Joint Volunteerism Committee

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YOUTH CADETS PROGRAM

The Committee is currently engaging on a program model for the Cadets Pilot Program. This program is about providing a framework of training (similar to Scouting) of opt in and opt out modules, weekends and other activities that are relevant to the individuals needs and also current and exciting for youth members aged 16-18 years. The committee has reviewed brigade data and member feedback that indicates that one of the most significant factors in encouraging junior members to transition to senior brigade membership is partially dependent on what the Brigade can offer as a transition pathway. It is hoped to initially pilot the program in two Regions over the next 12 months. Delegates are excited to be involved in this program and share their experience and knowledge from similar school and Brigade based programs and will also support the Training Joint Committee delegates in developing the program learning content and supporting materials.

SERVICE RECORD IMPROVEMENTS REQUESTED

VFBV has requested that CFA service records be expanded to facilitate better record keeping and assist in having a more detailed service record for members. Delegates are advocating that other categories and awards be recorded on the CFA database. Encouraging CFA to recognise not just the life skills and knowledge that volunteers bring to their roles, delegates have suggested that a member's official record details should not just be limited to joining, transfers, ranks held and CFA awards, but, also other CFA service areas such as DPC member, special purpose committees (both CFA and VFBV) and other awards including Brigade Life Membership, VFBV Gold Star Award, other Association awards and Brigade/Group awards. This will help to facilitate recording a member's service history and could also be utilised for nomination of awards such as AFSM, Order of Australia, National Medal, Spirit of CFA, etc. Early discussions indicate that these improvements may be possible via a simple CFA IT upgrade with further work continuing to explore options.

VOLUNTEER RESIGNATIONS

VFBV have again expressed concern with CFA at the continued drop of volunteer numbers over recent successive years. The Committee continues to review figures of volunteer resignations to gain a better understanding of why a member resigns and the key factors that contribute to members leaving the service. Delegates utilise VFBV's Welfare and Efficiency Survey as well as CFA data to determine if there are obvious trends and issues. Delegates have requested updated figures and that CFA work with the committee to develop strategies and action plans to address declining numbers and key areas of concern. VFBV continues to express great concern of the potential impact of losing members, experience and the ability to deal with major emergencies such as the recent 2019-2020 bushfires and the flow on effects that this may have. The Committee is seeking further detailed information on volunteer numbers, resignations, new member applications, delay between signup and training and length of service to gain a further understanding of trends and factors affecting these. Delegates have requested CFA take a more proactive approach to ensuring we have the best and most up-to-date information and strategy to maintain volunteer numbers and satisfaction in the future.

CO-LOCATED BRIGADE SUPPORT

VFBV has continued to raise concerns regarding the lack of tangible support that is required for co-located (formally integrated) brigades following the transfer to FRV of operational staff and facilities. As the volunteers at co-located brigades become "stand alone" CFA brigades the delegates want to ensure that there is the required support for them to prosper in the future. This includes short- and long-term plans that is not just limited to response and training, but other initiatives that enhances the overall support and culture change that the brigade will require. CFA has advised that the Volunteer Sustainability Team has set up a Transitioning Volunteers Taskforce to work in conjunction with the Brigades, catchment teams, Districts and Regions. Delegates have requested that this Taskforce maintain a close working relationship with VFBV and the volunteers at those Brigades to ensure not only there is adequate support, but also appropriate consultation, engagement and a commitment to the long-term viability of the co-located brigades.