



VFBV

VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings June 2021

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



June 2021

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

DIGITAL RADIO UPGRADES

The Committee continues to monitor digital radio coverage with CFA advising that Telstra has provided initial proposals to address coverage concerns in the Plenty/Diamond Creek & Little River areas. New sites have also been identified in the Frankston North, Monbulk, Tooradin and Kallista areas. Works at two other sites at Berwick (interference issues) and Mooroolbark North (Lease negotiations) are continuing. CFA has reported that there is still some ability to leverage off the Ambulance Victoria and DELWP work being undertaken to improve the network based upon reported blackspots through the Observation Report process. The Committee encourages all members to continue lodging Observation Reports of known radio blackspots to ensure future upgrades can be identified and prioritised.

FUTURE ALERTING

With the Emergency Alert Service (EAS) Contract now into year four of its five-year contract, the Committee is discussing future plans. EMV and CFA have initiated a review of the ICT across the Emergency Services Sector to inform planning. One area of focus will be 'what does an alert service look like in the future?' The reality is the EAS Network has served CFA well and has better coverage than any other provider across the State. The flip side of this is that EAS is a receive-only device, allowing only one way communication and 3 levels of messages. Delegates are eager to explore options but are resolute in advocating for the best system for members without compromising services. The Committee re-enforced to CFA that the continuing use of pagers will be required until an alternative with equal or greater level of reliability and coverage is found for operational use in CFA.

FIRS PILOT

VFBV Delegates are seeking more regular updates of the Fire Incident Reporting System (FIRS) Pilot, and better engagement to discuss user feedback and learnings. Delegates have long advocated for improvements to CFA's FIRS data entry and better access for brigades to direct enter via electronic methods. While good progress appears to be made, the Committee is seeking more involvement to ensure CFA leverages off the committee's extensive experience and ensure volunteer engagement and consultation is adequately maintained during the pilots.

MEMBER PORTAL

VFBV Delegates have expressed thanks to CFA for reducing the number of keystrokes required to log into LMS as requested. However, the Committee remains concerned at the lack of engagement and consultation both with the Committee and the broader membership on recent changes rolled out to CFA's online portals. Delegates have expressed disappointment the changes occurred without notice. Whilst referencing the recent changes the Committee informed CFA the current changes are not user friendly with the most common menu options buried under headings and those rarely used prominently displayed. CFA has committed to have the Project Manager report to the Committee next meeting in a hope to gain an understanding of the recent changes and ensure better engagement in the future.

ADVANCED MOBILE LOCATION (AML)

The Advanced Mobile Location (AML) is a new functionality available to the FireCom Operators when they receive a call from a mobile phone into the triple zero system. The AML will enable more accurate location information being passed onto the operator and displayed onto the CAD system. With this information the call taker can more quickly and accurately pin-point a caller's location then subsequently the location of the fire or incident being reported. This new functionality has recently been deployed and is now in use. In welcome news, the Committee were advised the same system has been installed in New Zealand and working effectively for the last twelve months.

Joint Community Safety Committee

2 Minute Briefing



June 2021

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

PUBLICATION REVIEW UPDATE

VFBV delegates continue to advocate for a total review of all CFA community safety publications, with recent feedback from Community Safety Coordinators confirming the need. Delegates have therefore welcomed CFA's recent advice to the Committee that it wants to strengthen the consultation and engagement process around these publications. CFA's community engagement content team is currently in the process of updating the Member Quick Reference Guide to ensure it reflects important key messages. A small working group is currently involved in providing feedback. There are changes intended for other community safety programs, including the new style guide and other key inclusions such as the Content Portal, ART and more. We will keep you informed about this process.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY REPORTING TOOL - UPDATE

CFA have updated committee delegates on the community engagement reporting tool (ART 3.0).

This is a mobile-friendly web application used by CFA members to record their community engagement activity, including details such as audience, location, activity type and Brigade involvement. Since ART was introduced on 1 July 2019, delegates have made significant improvements in the quality and timeliness of reporting on community engagement service delivery. CFA members have recorded over 6,000 activities, including delivery of programs such as Fire Safety Essentials and Early Fire Safe, and a wide range of informal engagement activity such as visits to campsites and Brigade presence at community events and shopping centres.

As a data collection tool, ART is primarily guided by whole-of-organisation requirements, with benefits flowing to regions and districts to meet local needs. With considerable organisational change over the past twelve months, it is timely to consider where ART can offer more value to CFA.

Delegates are keen to hear from members with any suggestions or feedback to better understand reporting requirements and opportunities to improve the end user experience.

YOUR SAY CFA – MONITORING EVALUATION AND REPORTING

VFBV committee delegates continue to work with and help evaluate and provide feedback for projects, with a recent focus on - Community Engagement Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER) Training Needs Analysis.

Brigades and members have been asking for a long time for more say in projects and to be able to put their ideas forward with CFA. The MER project is intended to inform users about the design and development of CFA programs and services to ensure brigade community safety coordinators make a positive difference every time they engage with communities and partners. The online survey can be found on the members portal - yoursay.cfa.vic.gov.au. If you have any questions, please contact Manoja Wickramaranthe, Project Manager at - Manoja.Wickramarathne@cfa.vic.gov.au. Delegates have requested that CFA continue to report to members the completed surveys done on this platform and will report back with any information relevant to Community Safety and Engagement.

CFA SMOKE ALARM PROJECT

Delegates on the Smoke alarm project working group updated the committee on the progress to date. Continual work is being done to improve community awareness about how important a working smoke alarm is in saving lives. It is recommended that smoke alarms be installed in every bedroom and living area, and recommended they are interconnected to ensure maximum protection. Brigade community safety officers should continue to discuss with vulnerable community groups about how they can assist community members to be fire safe at home.

Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee

2 Minute Briefing



June 2021

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

DMO QR CODE FAULT REPORTING

Delegates were briefed on an initiative developed by the Bairnsdale DMO workshop. The QR code mechanical fault reporting system has been developed to make it easier for members to report non-urgent mechanical faults. Members scan the QR code from a mobile device, a very simple online form allows faults to be logged along with vehicle type, location and contact details. The report is then sent to the DMO workshop and the workshop can quickly schedule to have the fault rectified. This type of system has many positive implications especially for running repairs at a staging area or even minor issues that occur on the fireground. The QR code mechanical fault reporting is not intended to replace fault reporting via phone or by other means that brigades currently use however it does give members another option. Once testing is completed it is intended the system will be available State-Wide.

MAINTENANCE SHORTFALL

Brigades are continuing to raise concerns with being asked to fundraise for operational equipment and maintenance that they believe should be covered by CFA's core funding. For example, VFBV has reported in previous 2 minute briefings of the struggles brigades have experienced with the rollout of Storz couplings, with many Districts well short of the full rollout.

VFBV delegates are continuing to advocate very strongly that Brigades and volunteers should not be forced to resort to VESEP and other grant schemes to ensure basic maintenance items are carried out at their stations. Replacement of worn floor coverings, curtains and blinds as well as painting and external cladding to stations are just a few of the items brigades are reporting they are having to use grants and community donations to pay for. Delegates on the committee are requesting CFA use the Section 29 Annual Brigade Review process to properly assess maintenance issues and prioritise these for inclusion in the annual District maintenance budgets.

FLEET UPDATE

As previously reported, many of the appliance builds over the past 12 months continue to be heavily impacted by the pandemic, with delays not only with the local manufacturers but also with the supply chain for many of the materials and equipment required having to come from outside of Australia.

CFA expects to complete 138 appliances this year including 43 vehicles funded by VESEP grants, 25 Heavy Tankers, 11 medium tankers and the 3 alpine over snow pumpers. A program of builds for Ultra-light Tankers and FCV's are also expected to be completed by the end of the year. Delegates along with Volunteer subject matter experts to the committee have been very busy over the past few months with working parties established for several new appliances.

The **Ultra Heavy Tanker** working party completed a role statement and stowage list last year and are now awaiting a successful tender to be announced for the appliance build.

The **Light Tanker** working party have recently completed the role statement and stowage list and are waiting for the next steps to start the build of these much-awaited trucks.

The **Prototype Pumper Tanker** has been completed and will undergo some testing by the working party before the state wide tour commences. It is planned for the appliance to visit all regions so members are advised to keep an eye out for an announcement of when it is in your area and use the opportunity to provide some constructive feedback.

CFA has also announced it has funding to develop a new Compressed Air Foam System Tanker (CAFS) and a working party will meet soon to develop the appropriate project plan and role statement to get the project underway. We will continue to update you on progress of these builds.

Joint HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee

2 Minute Briefing



June 2021

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

CFA DISCIPLINE PROCESS – VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK RESULTS

The Committee was provided with data and information from volunteers' responses to the recently introduced "Customer Satisfaction Survey". This survey is provided to volunteers who are both respondents and complainants in the Discipline process. Themes identified for improvement were the consistency in provision of wellbeing services and the updating of volunteers throughout the process. As a result, the committee have discussed a plan to offer and monitor wellbeing services during the entire process and build in regular updates to volunteers through a case-tracker system. Another major concern raised in the survey was that child related matters be dealt with by very experienced investigators due to their complexity and sensitivity. In response to this concern, CFA have engaged the services of Kooyoora to investigate these matters. Kooyoora is an independent not-for-profit investigative company providing a child focused complaint process, with considerable experience in child related complaint processes. VFBV will continue to monitor these arrangements and engage with volunteers during the process to ensure these changes are implemented and applied and result in improvement.

CFA DISCIPLINE HEARING PROCESS

The Committee have observed an increase in recent times of discipline matters escalated to a hearing process (Sections 49 - 57 of CFA Regulations 2014). This is a process whereby volunteers are called before a Hearing Officer and both CFA and the respondent (volunteer) are offered the opportunity to call witnesses and provide evidence, similar to a court proceeding.

VFBV continues to raise its concerns with the perception of an imbalance of power clearly evident between the parties in these processes and are seeking a review of the hearing process to ensure volunteers are better protected and supported with due process and procedural fairness, as well as critical welfare and personal support during what can be a very stressful and confronting process for all parties. While VFBV continues to advocate with Government for the establishment of a dedicated Volunteer Ombudsman, delegates have agreed to continue to pursue procedural improvements to the current system while our call for an independent ombudsman is at an impasse.

VFBV would urge all volunteers to appreciate the potential for matters to be escalated from a CFA Hearing to other civil forums such as the courts. Therefore, it is important all members understand evidence provided to an investigation report is serious and could eventually be subpoenaed to these forums. It is imperative that records of Interview and/or signed statements and documents be true and accurate accounts and VFBV provides assistance, advice and support persons if required to assist volunteers during these processes. Please contact a VFBV Support Officer or State Councillor if you require assistance.

CHILD SAFETY

A small working party has been formed to discuss CFA's interim negative notice procedure resulting from a working with children card application. Discussions are continuing, and it is hoped a draft revised procedure will shortly be available for comment and feedback.

WELLBEING HOTLINE

VFBV delegates have requested that CFA reinstate the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) contact number to the Wellbeing Hotline in view of recent complaints of impropriety. Delegates believe CASA provides critical support to assist members with complaints of this nature and should be a primary option included for referral. While we await CFA's response, concerned members can contact the Centre Against Sexual Assault directly on **1800 806 292**.

Joint Operations Committee

2 Minute Briefing



June 2021

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

CO-LOCATED BRIGADE SUPPORT

VFBV has continued to strongly advocate for Co-located brigades across the state, with an opportunity provided recently for co-located brigade delegates to discuss and address issues of concern with the CFA Chief Officer directly.

Brigades are still reporting concerns about the lack of support and communication between Districts and the brigades with some requiring additional assistance to work through tenancy agreement related issues with instances reported where the agreed status quo is not being observed. VFBV continues to advocate for more direct engagement and support to be provided to these locations.

In recent news, CFA have agreed to a request by co-located brigades for some additional support and direction for the future and working on plans for the brigades into the near, medium and long term. CFA have reported that co-located brigades should now raise issues with their local district office and escalate to their DCO should they have further concerns, with each District now required to engage with each co-located brigade directly in their patch and support the development of brigade specific forward looking support plans.

LONG TERM VACANCIES UPDATE

Delegates were very disappointed to hear that the number of ACFO and Commander vacancies across the state are increasing rather than decreasing. Delegates were informed at the meeting in November last year that there were 9 commander vacancies and 2 ACFO positions unfilled. The latest figures available has seen a disturbing increase in Districts without their full allocation of staff. Figures supplied indicate that there are currently 2 ACFO vacancies and 15 Commander vacancies as well as 3 other district training positions vacant. VFBV have again explained how these vacancies have a flow on effect by putting more pressure on other District staff to fill the workload void and ultimately more work having to be done by brigade captains and BMT's.

RESPONSE TABLE AMENDMENT REVIEW

VFBV has worked with CFA to input and review CFA's response table amendment process to ensure the mandatory consultation process with brigades is met and documented when changes are proposed that impact upon brigade response tables.

Work on a broad response table review and a new review guiding principles document has been developed over recent months and is now awaiting final Chief Officer review. Briefings on the new amendment process are planned to be delivered across the state with presentations already delivered to most of the regions and some DPC's. CFA will be circulating the principles document, flowchart and change forms to all brigades.

The new process includes support documents, the response and review guiding principles outline and an agreed signoff process for brigade management teams to have input to any changes. This will ensure any proposed amendments are transparent and the consultation process has been clearly documented as part of the approval process.

It is important for brigades who have concerns about changes to their response tables without their knowledge to contact their district commanders and ACFO to discuss the matters of concern as early as possible.

Due to the delay in processing amendments while the approval process was under review, CFA have advised there is a backlog which is currently resulting in some delays. Brigades are reminded to allow plenty of time with any changes to take effect.

Joint Training Committee

2 Minute Briefing



June 2021

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

AFAC TRAINING PEER REVIEW

VFBV has provided considerable background information covering extensive volunteer feedback from both the Garnock Training Review (2009), the Jones Inquiry (2011) and data collected through our Annual Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey to help inform the recently commissioned independent AFAC Peer Review into CFA Training. Recently, we also offered to facilitate and coordinate volunteer focus groups for the review team. AFAC accepted this offer and the review team met with approximately 60 Volunteers from a diverse range of Brigades and Districts. Representatives from AFAC and similar volunteer organisations including SA CFS and NSW RFS have been conducting the review, and were present during the focus groups where volunteers strongly and passionately advocated for improvements to CFA's training arrangements. The Review is intended to operate at a strategic level and its aim is to make positive recommendations for how CFA training can be best delivered going forward in the new environment. The Review team have advised that the report that the Review team writes is not intended to be a list of things that don't work, but rather a list of observations and recommendations for how training should be managed and delivered in future.

Thank-you to all volunteers that contributed to the focus groups and well done on a very productive and constructive day.

NEW TRAINING GROUND

VFBV representatives to the Joint Training Committee recently had an opportunity to visit and meet at the newly built 'Central Highlands' Training Campus at Ballan. Central Highlands was built after the de-commissioning of the Fiskville Training Campus. Delegates were impressed to see that CFA has planned the layout of the facility well with lots of room for expansions and additions as required. Central Highlands Campus is still in construction stage and is yet to be formally handed over to CFA with the expectation that it would be formally opened and commissioned later this year. Central Highlands is an exciting step forward for CFA and will provide outstanding training facilities, training support and a high level of safety including water and onsite treatment facilities. Commissioning of this long-awaited training ground will finally restore the much needed capacity that has been absent from the system since the closure of Fiskville and the ongoing problems that have led to the inability of CFA and volunteers to access the Craigieburn training campus.

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

VFBV delegates have been engaged by CFA to assist in the process and development of RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) packages for both Prepare, Test and Maintain Response Equipment – PUAEQU001 and Operate Pumps - PUAFIR309. Prepare, Test and Maintain Response Equipment is currently available for nomination through LMS with Operate Pumps still being worked through. However, pre-nominations are available for this course through LMS. VFBV have been requesting RPL packages to be made available for quite some time and are happy this has finally eventuated, although less than impressed about the circumstance that has eventually led to CFA developing and prioritising these packages.

COURSES CURRENTLY IN REVIEW

VFBV have received many complaints by concerned members regarding some courses that cannot currently be delivered. VFBV has contacted CFA regarding these matters and will continue to raise the concerns on a case-by-case basis as they arise. A trending theme of some course delivery is the upgrading of National Competencies which was required in 2019, upgrading PUA12 to PUA19 standards. This has included mapping of courses, validating the course materials and assessment packages and where required changing packages to bring them in line with the revised national standard. This is required by AQF (Australian Qualifications Framework) to maintain currency in the delivery of courses as an RTO (Registered Training Organisation). VFBV is continually working with CFA to ensure that courses are validated and updated in a timely manner so not to cause disruptions to the training schedules and members. We will continue to pursue.

Joint Volunteerism Committee

2 Minute Briefing



June 2021

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

YOUTH CADETS

Committee delegates are progressing a pilot program for 16- and 17-Year old's in conjunction with CFA for a Youth Cadet Program. The youth cadet program is developing best practice models and is close to being finalised with the pilot to commence in the second half of this year. There will be a mix of online, face to face and residential components with the aim to facilitate a pathway through the organisation with a focus on leadership and team building skills. Other skills will relate to firefighting and how experienced members can support youth and vice versa. VFBV delegates have held concerns for some time relating to the drop in young members transitioning from Juniors to Senior membership in Brigades, and 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. Delegates are keen to progress this issue and further enhance youth retention rates. Brigades are encouraged to support any young members interested to participate in this pilot program once launched.

NATIONAL EMERGENCY MEDAL

On Australia Day 2020 the Prime Minister announced that the National Emergency Medal would be awarded for members who meet criteria for the 2019/2020 Australian Bushfires. Since this time members have been requesting clarity of information on eligibility and process for the Medal, with delegates asking CFA to ensure processes are open and transparent in line with the criteria. CFA have been working to review and update the process from the 2009 Fires and also produce a FAQ sheet regarding eligibility and conform with the Honours Secretariat in Canberra. Delegates have requested that this information be presented to members within a timely manner. For those previously awarded the medal and are eligible for recognition for the 19/20 fires, a clasp will be added to their existing medal "BUSHFIRES 19-20".

Other areas of recognitions are 19/20 Bushfire Recognition Pins, with approximately 10,000 members and support staff being eligible, along with a \$2 commemorative coin plaque that will be presented to each CFA Brigade. The pins are due to be sent shortly, with the plaques being coordinated by your District office and catchment team. VFBV continues to work closely with CFA to ensure distribution to all eligible members and Brigades.

FLEXIBLE VOLUNTEERING PROJECT

VFBV delegates are working closely on the design, development and implementation of CFA's flexible volunteering models. Delegates have raised concerns regarding the drop in overall Volunteer numbers and requested CFA to investigate various models to assist with recruitment and retention with the understanding that a single model may not fit every brigades' requirements. Workshops were conducted across the State with very positive results and a Reference Group established to determine flexible approaches to help recruit and retain members within Brigades. Volunteers will have input into the various models and pilots to be identified with CFA completing research over various agencies across Australia.

From the workshops and discussion so far, some of the barriers to a flexible volunteering options discussed were; resistance to change; cultural barriers; lack of resourcing and support required; service delivery standards; rural decline; internal brigade expectations; lack of appropriate HR training for BMTs; policies need reviewing; members holding BMT roles for long periods impacting succession planning; and the lack of stability across the organisation.

Some of the ideas of what 'flexible volunteering' means may include varying training activities, flexibility in times/days of training, recognition of prior learning, remote learning, engaging with community, promotion of roles, how to manage spontaneous volunteers, a more flexible membership model to better enable connecting with youth. Delegates will continue to work in collaboration with CFA to develop pilot projects to trial and develop and seek feedback from members.