VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings
June 2026

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 Community Safety Committee

2 Minute Briefing

VFBV

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AusALERT

Australia's new national emergency warning system, AusAlert, is expected to be operational by October 2026 following a series of community and national tests. Developed by the Australian Government for use by emergency services across the country, AusAlert uses cell-broadcast technology to send emergency warnings directly to compatible mobile phones (devices running Android 11+ and Apple iOS 12+ software) that are located within a defined geographic area. Unlike SMS-based systems, alerts are sent based on a device's physical location rather than a billing address, allowing warnings to reach people travelling through or visiting affected areas.

The system was developed following recommendations from the 2020 Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, which identified the need for improved public warning capabilities during emergencies. AusAlert will be capable of delivering warnings within seconds and is designed to continue functioning even when mobile networks are congested. Authorities will be able to target alerts to very specific areas and continue broadcasting warnings so that people entering an impacted area later can still receive alerts.

Two alert levels will be available; **Critical Alerts**: for imminent threats to life and property; and **Priority Alerts**: for lower-level risks and awareness messaging. Critical alerts will use a distinctive sound and cannot be disabled by users. Priority and test alerts can be configured or opted out of through device settings.

Testing of the system has already commenced, including community-based trials and a planned national test. All test alerts will be clearly identified and accompanied by public awareness campaigns to ensure community understanding prior to full implementation. A community test will occur in Geelong on 18 June, and a nation-wide test will take place on Monday, 27 July at 2PM. Critical alert will be used for all tests.

Brigades are encouraged to familiarise themselves via https://www.ausalert.gov.au/ in case of any community questions.

FIRE WEATHER DISTRICT REVIEW

As reported last year, the Fire Weather District (FWD) Review is examining whether Victoria's current nine (9) fire weather boundaries still accurately reflect modern fire risk, climate and operational needs. The review is the first major reassessment of FWD boundaries in around 15 years and is being led by CFA on behalf of the sector.

The review has involved consultation with the Bureau of Meteorology, emergency services, government departments and industry stakeholders including agriculture, forestry and tourism. Feedback has consistently supported the need for fire weather districts to better reflect local weather, climate and vegetation conditions to improve the accuracy and relevance of fire danger messaging. Following the review, CFA is now recommending creating an additional five (5) fire weather districts including a realignment of the existing nine, to create a total of 14 fire weather districts across the state.

Major changes recommended are to split the current large Central district into smaller, more locally aligned areas, and create new districts such as Southern Mallee, Midlands and High Country.

The review is now moving into final discussions and approval processes, alongside development of future governance and implementation arrangements. The project team are aiming for the new boundaries to be in place for the 2027/28 fire season. Discussions with the Bureau of Meteorology continue re alignment of weather forecast boundaries.

VFBV is requesting that CFA advise any brigade or group who is impacted by the changed boundaries to ensure they are made aware and invited to provide feedback as a matter of urgency. Delegates are requesting a change management process including analysis to identify if any group boundaries are intersected by the proposed changes to weather districts, though this is likely to be minimal due to alignment with LGA's. We urge brigades to familiarise themselves with the project via cfa.vic.gov.au/fireweatherreview and the new map showing the revised boundaries to inform discussions.

Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee

2 Minute Briefing

VFBV

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

RADIATOR VEGETATION BUILD UP

There have been many reports to the District Mechanical Officers across the summer of appliances being disabled and damaged due to vegetation buildup in the radiators and other areas of the appliance causing the appliances to overheat and, in some instances, catch fire and stop. The occurrence of such incidents led to CFA issuing an Operations Bulletin 001/2026 Appliance Vegetation Accumulation. The bulletin explains the areas that build up commonly occurs and how to monitor and prevent the large build-up of fuel accumulation. It also suggests ways of reducing the occurrence of vegetation buildup by suggesting adhering to standard fireground practices and only operating from the burnt area, maintaining situational awareness and making sure you are familiar with the appliance you are driving.

DMO's in the west of the state are trialling an air cleaning system that brigades are able to clean out debris from radiators in the station or on the fireground.

In a related issue CFA reported that the ratio of vehicles damaged is significantly higher this year due to the increased operational activity. Members are reminded to ensure the safety of everyone remains high when operating in difficult terrain and heightened fire conditions, conduct frequent vehicle checks, maintain strong situational awareness, and uphold radio discipline at all times and report any issues with the DMO's as soon as an issue is found.

STATION WORKING PARTY

We reported back in March 2025 that CFA had finally stepped up the urgency in getting the Station Design Working Party up and running after repeated requests from committee delegates. The new Working Party was scheduled to have its first on site meeting until operational activities put a stop to any meeting. Delegates are very keen to re-focus and ensure there is volunteer input into what our stations of the future look like. If members have any feedback or ideas for the committee to consider, please let us know. The working group is aware that the type of station for a class 5 brigade differs from a Class 1 brigade however there are some fairly basic items that are a must for all regardless of size. Turnout rooms, toilets, standard engine bays are just some of the items that the working party will consider. If members have any ideas or suggestions regarding the Stations of the Future please send them into m.dryden@vfbv.com.au.

SAFETY INITIATIVES

Fleet builds continue to progress at a slow but steady pace, influenced by rising costs and limited manufacturing availability. Despite these constraints, the Equipment & Infrastructure (E&I) Committee remains strongly focused on improving safety, design consistency, and operational efficiency across the fleet, As part of this commitment, two key operational guidelines are currently under review. The Tyre Management Guideline for Operational Response Vehicles (2020 v2.0) is being updated and is scheduled for presentation at the next E&I meeting. At the same time, the Lights and Sirens Guideline (Emergency Service Vehicle Warning Devices – 2020 v2.0) continues to be refined to ensure best practice in the use of audible and visual warning systems. Work on cab chassis modifications has been temporarily paused to align with the ongoing development of the National Tanker Specification.

Significant progress has also been made on the Ergonomic, Noise and Lighting Guidelines, with an external benchmarking review now complete. A working party is undertaking its final review prior to submission to committee at the next meeting. These guidelines are expected to deliver improvements in crew safety, comfort, and alignment with contemporary industry standards.

DMO's continue to deliver both proactive and reactive maintenance services. While minor delays have occurred due to parts availability - these impacts are being actively managed. Fleet is also exploring the procurement of additional diagnostic tools for the European fleet. This initiative is expected to improve fault identification, reduce downtime, and support more efficient repair processes.

Joint Member Services Committee

2 Minute Briefing

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XERO BOOKKEEPING

CFA is progressing with a centralised bookkeeping initiative using Xero to better support brigade treasurers and modernise financial management. This comes as a way to support brigade treasurers, a role which has been made mandatory in the CFA Regulations 2025. The project is an option for brigades to move away from manual processes and toward a secure, cloud-based system. Moving to Xero allows for improvement in consistency, efficiency and reporting. Participation in the project is optional for brigades, so brigades are able to continue using existing system if preferred. CFA will fully fund the Xero subscription for brigades that opt in, with no costs to brigades during and after the pilot. The pilot includes implementation within 30 to 40 brigades, followed by broader onboarding and later roll out to be delivered in phases. There have been over 140 expressions of interest received so far. Key benefits of the program include automated bank workflows, standardised reporting, and streamlined reconciliation processes. There is training, onboarding and ongoing support available to brigades. As there is no one size fits all, various practical considerations such as IT access and support needs are considered in the program with CFA seeking feedback to refine solutions and ensure financial options support brigades' diverse needs

RECRUITMENT SURGE

CFA provided delegates with an update on Volunteer recruitment since the beginning of the year. It was reported that more than 3,400 expressions of interest (over 1,200 for Class 1 and 2 brigades) had been received, and this converted to 443 approved recruits. Brigades are encouraged to prioritise contacting applicants to engage early. The Committee noted that there are limited options to engage applicants before they become members and briefly discussed some options, such as induction nights or out of business hours community sessions, as well as keeping new members engaged by inviting them to training nights while they undertake GFF. It was noted that members can be sized for PPC before completing GFF training. Brigades are reminded to engage with the District office and Group to ensure they can get new members onto a training course as soon as they have completed the VRH requirements to become a member.

CONTEMPORARY VOLUNTEER MEMBERSHIP MODEL (CVMM)

The Contemporary Volunteer Membership Model (CVMM) continues to progress as a key initiative aimed at strengthening how CFA attracts, onboards, retains and supports volunteers. The model is focused on developing a more flexible and inclusive membership framework that reflects evolving and varying needs of brigades and communities.

The current priority is on engagement across the state, with broad statewide consultation and outreach into brigades, groups, DPCs, VFBV District Councils and other leadership groups. Engagement and consultation ensure members at all levels have the opportunity to provide feedback and contribute to shaping the future model.

For this reason, the Member Services Joint Consultative Committee participated in a working group session to review the CVMM Options Paper and contribute to the volunteer leader survey. Members were guided through the survey and key options, allowing for detailed discussion, clarification and collective input from members across the state in various roles.

The Committee's involvement reflects a strong commitment to collaboration, ensuring volunteer perspectives are entrenched in decision making. Feedback from with Committee and beyond will assist in refining the CVMM and support the next stages developing a volunteering model that is practical, sustainable and responsive to CFA's needs.

Members are encouraged to engage with the CVVM options paper and provide feedback at their earliest opportunity.

Joint Operational Capability Committee

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ELEVATED SEASONAL RESPONSE INITIATIVE

The Elevated Seasonal Response Initiative (ESRI) 2025-26 has seen some positive enhancements to Brigades ability to respond to incidents. The extra funding provided was an initiative to provide an enhanced firefighting capability through the strategic allocation of mobile bulk water units, static water tanks, and diesel fuel support.

CFA has engaged the services of 2 bulk fuel tankers comprising of a 6000lt diesel tanker and a 4000lt diesel tanker. The fuel supply initiative was used extensively during the Woods Point/Gaffneys Creek fire and provided a central point for appliances to fuel up without having to drive great distances away from the fireground to refuel.

Other initiatives provided through the ESRI were static water supplies strategically placed in areas of high need, open topped water storage units that had a capacity of 25,000 litres and could be accessed by helicopters with a bucket setup as well as two closed top 16,000 litre tanks available for tankers to fill from and CFA also purchased 2 mobile bulk water units with approximately 20,000 litre capacity.

The final aspect to preparedness for this year's fire season was the Get Fire Ready initiative that ran through October in many brigades across the state. Over 500 brigades elected to take part in The Get Fire Ready campaign that was aimed at getting brigades to engage with their community through a series of Brigade open days and community barbeques. The campaign encouraged community members to take action and called on local brigades to assist them with their fire plan and general property preparedness.

While the season has been very busy from a response point of view we can be confident that the exceptional effort put in by brigades and communities leading up to the FDP had a positive influence on outcomes for the communities involved.

CHAINSAW PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND CLOTHING

In 2019, CFA introduced new chainsaw Personal Protective Clothing (PPC) mandating standardised Proban covered chainsaw chaps, as a part of the changes there was also a new type 3 chainsaw helmet. Standards have now changed and while the current helmet meets the Australian Standard requirements, they will be replaced whenever they are damaged or come to end of life. CFA has recommended the Pacific BR9 Standard style helmet as the replacement chainsaw helmet moving forward. The Pacific BR9 helmet is fitted with helmet mounted earmuffs and mesh visor and can have a neck protector fitted as is available on the wildfire helmet now.

SPLASH SUITS UPDATE

Back in September 2024, VFBV reported on the advocacy from delegates on the need to replace CFA's older splash suits.

The new blue coloured splash suits have been chosen after a long testing period and have many benefits such as the hood having a neoprene rubber face grommet to ensure there is a safe seal around the SCBA mask. The suits have also been tested to provide protection against type 3 liquid chemicals and agents. The protective gloves are welded to the suit material and have an integrated sock foot to be used with rubber splash suit boots.

The suits have been trialled by brigades in District 8 and 9 and will begin rolling out as soon as the manufacturer completes the supply. The new suits will be distributed through SLC.

Joint Operational Performance Committee

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SOP CONSULTATION

CFA continues to work internally on updates to many SOP's, and there are many that are still available for members to provide feedback on. There are currently 10 SOP's available on the VFBV website for feedback. To assist members with comparisons between the old and proposed SOP's VFBV has provided a comparison document that gives members the critical points that need to be reviewed and comments provided. In the past 12 months volunteers have generously reviewed and provided feedback on over 25 SOP's.

Members are reminded when giving feedback to an SOP feedback should be as detailed as they are comfortable providing. CFA will continue to update its SOP library as is updates are approved.

SERVICE DELIVERY

While the data relating to service delivery is inherently difficult to obtain since the implementation of Fire Service Reform, CFA is reporting a large shift in the volume of calls across all districts, however there is no data to suggest an uplift of any type of calls as the spread is evenly distributed across all the call types. There has been a notable impact on the data accuracy and SDS due to some brigade actions following the introduction of the Emergency Services Volunteer Tax.

Brigades are reminded that Fire Reports and SDS data is used to inform future planning and resourcing decisions, and gaps in data may negatively impact a brigade's ability to demonstrate capacity for new stations or new appliances in the future. CFA will continue to try to analyse the data available to ensure brigades are not negatively impacted but there is only so much that can be done.

FIRE SEASON SURVEYS

The Committee undertook a structured After-Action Review (AAR) following this year's fire season. The purpose was to demonstrate how fireground AARs are conducted and to explore what has worked well, as well as what could be improved, throughout the fire season to date.

Observations captured during the Statewide AAR's, along with subsequent insights are identifying several recurring trends. These insights will support leaders in strengthening their ability to manage large-scale events in the future. Key areas of discussion included Command and Communications, Operations, Resources, and Community.

Delegates have sought clarification on what changes have been implemented to ensure that identified issues and observations lead to meaningful action. CFA has advised that all responses are being recorded in a central action register. These will be validated and then referred to the appropriate business units.

Delegates are optimistic that, once all AARs have been completed statewide, a comprehensive set of learnings will be available for members to access and apply in future operations.

Members who participated in strike teams or local responses were encouraged to complete one of three available surveys:

- Strike Team Leader Survey
- Sector/Division Commander Survey
- General Observation Survey (for all other members)

The 2025–26 Post Season Debrief Program page on Members Online will continue to be updated as the program progresses and as additional themes emerge. Delegates are keen to review and discuss the survey results once the data has been compiled and analysed.

Joint People, Culture & Safety Committee

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PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH REGULATIONS

New Victorian Psychological Health Regulations took effect on 1st December, 2025. These Regulations create more prescriptive obligations to identify and control hazards. This means CFA must not simply respond to concerns but to proactively attempt to identify and mitigate problems early, ensuring a safe environment without risks to health. CFA has engaged an external provider to conduct an organisational wide psychosocial hazard risk assessment. This assessment was an online survey involving 28 questions. Over 1662 responses were received, 1210 of which were from volunteers.

Focus groups were conducted, and the report identified three major hazards:

(1) Poor Organisational Change which includes managing the introduction of new technologies and implementation poorly, members not being given enough information about change and a lack of meaningful consultation before major changes.

(2) Poor Organisational Justice, which includes inconsistent application of policies and procedures, unfairness or bias in decisions about allocations of resources and work, poor management of harmful behaviours, including not taking action in reasonable time frames, hiring and promoting people for reasons not related to work.

(3) Poor Workplace relationships, low level incivility which is sarcasm or mocking, conflict between members and managers, hostile or isolated environments.

As part of CFA's review, CFA will analyse Member Assistance Programs looking at numbers, what services are accessed face to face, via telehealth and why? It will also review how internal teams are operating, proactively versus reactively, and consulting on what further actions CFA can undertake to improve results.

CFA will develop an Action Plan initially focusing on these three priority hazards. Part of this plan is the establishment of a cross functional working group which will include VFBV delegates and other volunteers to add valuable input and feedback to this critical work. VFBV will closely monitor this work and update volunteers in coming months.

CAPTAINS PEER MENTORING PROGRAM

The Captains Peer Mentoring Program (CPM) forms an integral part of learnings available to volunteers through the Volunteer Leadership Development Program. The CPM program first began in 2014 and has grown from being utilised in one District to currently being utilised in 18 Districts. The program involves experienced Captain's partnered with newly appointed Captain's. Recent feedback from the program has highlighted the consistency of content offered by the program with CFA advising that all modules are available but are set by District and tailored by each District. Given the length of time since the program was first initiated, CFA has agreed it is timely to conduct a full review of the program with a review working group to be informed to progress out of session.

COMPLAINTS PROCESS UPDATE

The committee continues to monitor CFA's Complaints Process and the work the Issue Resolution Team is currently doing in training for Referring and Hearing Officers, the five additional team members who will be placed in Regions and the development of many Complaint Process supporting documents online. Delegates have provided positive feedback with the level of detail of the supporting documents, which they believe will be beneficial to many volunteers who finds themselves within the Complaint Process. Delegates requested those same documents be available in hard copy and proposed the development of a booklet or 'Brigade Pack' for distribution to Districts and/or Brigades. CFA advised that while this work is ongoing, and updates are continually being made to the documents, a basic booklet could certainly be considered and made available.

Joint Technology & Innovation Committee

2 Minute Briefing

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RADIO REPLACEMENTS

All planned radios have now been installed with the project closure report presented to the steering committee. This has been the first full fire season using the new radios. While there has been much commentary on perceived issues with the radios during this year's fires, less than 10 observations reports were filed with Comms making issue investigation very difficult. Members are reminded that radio issues should be reported. Observation reports can be access from Members Online.

MOBILE DATA CAPABILITY

This project is now completed with the delivery and installation of 975 tablets and docks completed. Positive feedback from users was received following the January fires.

Installation issues raised with the team have been addressed and rectified under warranty. The project closure report provided to the Steering Committee includes a recommendation that all new build vehicles come with the tablet dock which has been endorsed.

DIGITAL STORES

Members are noting that the use of the new Digital Stores to purchase items has been positive and early bugs seem to have been ironed out. If members have any feedback or ideas on items you would like to see added to the Digital Stores you can send an email to digitalstore@cfa.vic.gov.au. Delegates will continue to monitor the changes to the Digital Stores as they happen and report back to the membership on any improvements and changes.

DIGITAL VOTING

Since the change to the CFA regulations in 2025, brigades are now able to offer digital voting via digital platforms. Echoing VFBV's earlier concerns raised when CFA proposed the Regulation changes, CFA has yet to endorse specific platforms that meet the requirements under the regulations to maintain voters privacy and the integrity of the results. Delegates have again called for CFA action to resolve this gap. Delegates will continue to work with the CFA team to find a suitable platform and ensure it undergoes User Acceptance testing before being made available to members. VFBV urges caution for brigades implementing their own systems which may not comply with all the requirements under the regulations and recommend waiting for an approved CFA system.

INNOVATION AWARDS

Delegates have been listening to members across the state who have requested CFA re-introduce the CFA Innovation Awards. The last Innovation awards were run in 2015 when the Volunteer designed Medium Pumper built by SEM won the Fire Awareness Awards - Winner of the Innovation and Design Award.

While the current CFA service and honours awards system does allow for innovation in some of the criteria, these do not allow for recognition of a whole team or project.

Delegates would like to see more recognition and attention given to the myriads of ideas, inventions, research and innovation that volunteers are involved in across the fire service and will continue exploring alternate ways this work and innovation can be better recognised and celebrated.

Joint Training Committee

2 Minute Briefing

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GENERAL FIRE FIGHTER TAILORED TO MEMBERS NEEDS

One of the key messages from volunteers during CFA's review of the General Fire Fighter(GFF) program was that a "one size fits all" approach does not work for Brigades or new members. Providing District Training teams can maintain compliance requirements, they have many options to structure and schedule GFF courses in a way that best suits participants and local delivery capacity. These methods can include options like fully face-to-face courses; online theory combined with face-to-face practical courses; or compressed delivery models such as intensive three-day courses designed for smaller groups of new members who already have some familiarity with firefighting equipment and concepts.

To take advantage of this flexibility Brigades and Groups can work together to organise new recruits to ensure the program is delivered in a way that best suits the volunteer needs and availability. This could involve several Brigades "pooling" their recruits such that they, collectively, can have multiple GFF courses delivered by District in different formats that suit the differing member needs.

It is vital that Brigades and Groups actively engage with their District Training teams to ensure appropriate delivery models scheduled to enable the most efficient and effective pathway through GFF for this influx of new members.

DRIVER LICENCING EXTENDED

Following long advocacy, in 2024-2025 CFA initiated a program where driver licencing would be funded on a Statewide basis. Following the strong uptake last year, CFA's Heavy Vehicle Licence Program will be extended, with funding allocated for a further 520 members to obtain their licence this coming financial year. This program works by paying for members to undertake an externally delivered heavy vehicle licencing course. The external provider takes them through the full process of training and assessment required to obtain their licence.

While the program provides a pathway for members to gain their licence, Brigades continue to play a critical role in developing driver skill and experience. Prior to obtaining their Heavy Vehicle licence, members are still able to build practical skills locally by being accompanied by a qualified driver and displaying the appropriate Driver Under Instruction signage. This remains an important part of preparing members for both assessment and operational driving. Brigades with members interested in obtaining their heavy vehicle licence by contacting their Catchment Team to discuss access to the program and next steps.

SECTOR COMMANDER / LEVEL 2 OPS TRAINING NOW AVAILABLE

A couple of years ago CFA made the commitment to members that they would deliver all required IMT training internally. Currently this training is delivered through Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) and courses are often scheduled at times and locations that did not suit volunteers, limiting participation and creating barriers for members seeking to step into key IMT leadership roles.

VFBV have been pursuing CFA to get development of these courses completed and made available to members. Therefore, Delegates were pleased to be informed that the Sector Commander / Level 2 Ops course has been released and is available for delivery by the District's.

Delegates are frustrated that it appears Districts are sluggish in scheduling courses but encourage members interested in completing it to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) via the LMS and their Brigades/Groups should engage with their District Training Department to support planning and scheduling.

VFBV will continue to monitor the development and rollout of the rest of the IMT suite of courses and push CFA to make them available to members as soon as possible.