

VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



November 2019

As you will read on the front of this month's 'Fire Wise', Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) has partnered with 'Fire Wise' to launch this new quarterly VFBV supplement.

The supplement will be included with 'Fire Wise' four times a year, and you will now receive a copy of 'Fire Wise' with it at no additional charge. Our easy to read supplement will replace the VFBV Quarterly Mailout that used to be posted separately to Brigade Secretaries, and included separate pages with relevant news, updates and information on current issues being pursued by VFBV on behalf of members. I am hopeful that this new format will be easier to read as well as providing the information all together in one place.

Under this arrangement, VFBV has arranged for each brigade to receive a free copy every month of 'Fire Wise' to both Captain and Secretary and each Group a free copy for the Group Officer and Group Secretary as a benefit of their paid VFBV affiliation fee.

I am hopeful that these free copies which are intended to be tabled at Brigade and Group meetings and made available to members will supplement any existing paid 'Fire Wise' subscriptions. I'd also encourage individuals to continue any existing subscriptions to 'Fire Wise' which relies on your paid subscriptions to support the publication and printing costs. To broaden the reach of the VFBV Supplement, all existing subscribers to 'Fire Wise' will now also

receive a copy as well, significantly improving the communication flow between the association and members.

Managing Editor of 'Fire Wise' Mr Gordon King and myself have worked very hard on this new initiative, and I'm thrilled with the result. In my mind it demonstrates the strong bonds that have always been enjoyed by the two organisations since the publication's inception and shows VFBV's strong support and commitment to 'Fire Wise' now and for the future.

May I ask Brigade Captains and Secretaries, Group Officers and Group Secretaries as well as VFBV delegates to please take the time to read this and future editions, and to table at your meetings the quarterly VFBV Supplement for the benefit and knowledge of your members.

VFBV delegates work tirelessly to advocate and represent CFA volunteers, and anything we can do to improve member awareness of this important work - the better. VFBV is your association, so please stay connected and get involved.

Adam Barnett
CEO, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria

VFBV Quarterly Supplement

Your November enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. Fire Services Reform – Update from the CEO	For Briefing
2. Presumptive Legislation Regulations	For Briefing
3. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
4. 2020 State Championships Flyer	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
5. VFBV Annual Report (Secretaries Only)	Please table at your next meeting

FIRE SERVICE REFORM UPDATE

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer
Published: 1st November 2019

High-level planning for next year's Fire Services Reform implementation continues. I want to acknowledge the frustration and impatience expressed to me by many volunteers who are savage on the lack of formal communication or updates from the sector. As I have said to these people, from a VFBV perspective - I wish I had more news to give you, I simply do not.

I am committed to providing appropriate information to members as it comes to hand and as soon as VFBV is formally engaged and consulted on specific elements of reform. Due to the nature of this high level planning, there has simply been no specifics formally raised with VFBV to share and get feedback on. As soon as there is, I will ensure we seek your feedback. The VFBV Volunteer Reference Group is due to meet with senior Government and CFA representatives later this month, so I'm hoping following that meeting we'll have an update to share.



While I understand many are suspicious and believe this lack of information to be a sign that discussions are simply occurring without us or in secret behind closed doors, I do not share this pessimism. Observing the structures and people in place dealing with reform – I think the lack of tangible 'progress' to be more a reflection on the early nature of some of these discussions and the machinery of government in how momentum and decisions get made (or not) as the case may be. Remember – there was very little planning or analysis about how these reforms were going to work or be implemented. Therefore, much of the work occurring now and, in the background, is trying to develop and understand how some of these systems might actually work and what impacts there may be. And while I don't want to harp on about how we pointed out to law makers the danger of agreeing to these changes without the proper analysis or modelling being done prior to the legislation being debated– now that the decision has been made, we should look to it as an opportunity.

It means, looking at it as glass half full - we can embrace the opportunity to influence this planning and implementation. Government has promised to do this work in consultation with all stakeholders equally, and that provides volunteers something that was not provided to us before the legislation was passed. Consultation. Genuine consultation with volunteers – before decisions get made. Lets welcome that, and make the most of this unique opportunity to create the CFA of the future.

Until proven otherwise, I intend on taking Government and CFA at their word – that any changes that will or have the potential to impact on volunteers will be transparent and consulted on, and that volunteers and VFBV will be provided with a genuine opportunity to be engaged, understand the impacts and have input so that an informed view or alternatives can be reached before decisions are made. This commitment has been given by Parliamentarians, the Minister, EMV and CFA and I intend on taking this promise seriously.

For now, we will continue to monitor progress and arrangements and ensure that these commitments are being met. If not – then we must call it out and escalate as required. I commit to you that should this promise be broken you will be in no doubt. Should our good will, good faith and good intentions be taken advantage of, I'll be seeking your assistance to put it right.

On a pleasing note, I can report that the Government has delivered on its commitment to VFBV that we would be engaged and represented at the highest levels. The Minister has formed a VFBV Volunteer Reference Group at the strategic governance layer. This will ensure we can monitor and contribute to high level strategic issues, opportunities

and concerns. This is a small strategic group made up of the VFBV State President Nev Jones, State Vice President Samantha Rothman and myself. As workplans are developed by the various workgroups - this group will monitor consultation and implementation. Its role will be to inform senior levels of Government on the progress of consultation and ensure decision makers are aware of any volunteer impacts or concerns.

The Minister has assured both us and the unions this will not be the only engagement mechanism. All current consultative structures will continue. This will ensure existing structures are linked and are being used to gather input and feedback. There are similar reference groups in the governance structure to ensure career firefighters and non-operational employees are also represented and involved. I hope this will ensure all perspectives are present and equally involved in discussions.



Figure 1: A VFBV interpretation of the government's fire service reform governance structure.

In other news, on the 23rd September the Minister hosted a strategic workshop with a small group of leaders drawn from across the sector. It was attended by VFBV, UFU, EMV, ESTA, CFA, MFB and senior department and government representatives. This workshop explored and discussed stakeholder perspectives on implementation challenges and opportunities. VFBV was represented by State President Nev Jones AFSM and myself. While this was not a decision making forum, it was a terrific opportunity for stakeholders to discuss reform and begin developing shared trust, transparency and goodwill.

I am pleased to report that discussions were positive and good natured. With so much water under the bridge there was no way we could cover everything, but as a way of kicking off a new approach it was certainly a huge step in the right direction. The outcomes of this session are being used to inform the prioritisation of the key issues and opportunities for the implementation teams to focus on as they develop their work plans.

VFBV is committed to an open and collaborative approach with all stakeholders and will continue to do everything we can to support this approach.

Over the coming months the agency groups (made up of EMV, CFA, MFB, ESTA and FRV) will start developing draft work and implementation plans. We are told that stakeholder feedback and input will be sought during each phase. Each of the workstreams will identify projects and tasks required to transition to the new model. This will include scope, key dependencies, assumptions, resource requirements and scheduling estimates.

I expect this work to start picking up pace and momentum as it progresses from scoping to delivery. VFBV will continue to advocate for strong engagement with the field. We will seek open and genuine opportunities for members to be involved and that the agencies promote, encourage and seek feedback. I must caution members that when the rubber hits the road there is likely going to be an expectation of fast turnaround for feedback and input. And while we will continue to advocate for engagement strategies that respect the Volunteer Charter and respect the size and diversity of all our people across the sector, I foreshadow a constant tension. A tension between two competing priorities. Enough time to engage genuinely as one. And the expectations of meeting project deadlines and dependant activities as two.

I'll do my bit to ensure decision makers are aware of our expectations, but I encourage members to start preparing for this work now. As firefighters we are used to planning for the worst and hoping for the best, so let's make the most of this opportunity.

For example, are you linked to VFBV consultative structures through your local level?

Are you ready to provide informed feedback and comment?

Have you selected delegates to represent your brigade or group that attend and contribute to your local VFBV District Council?

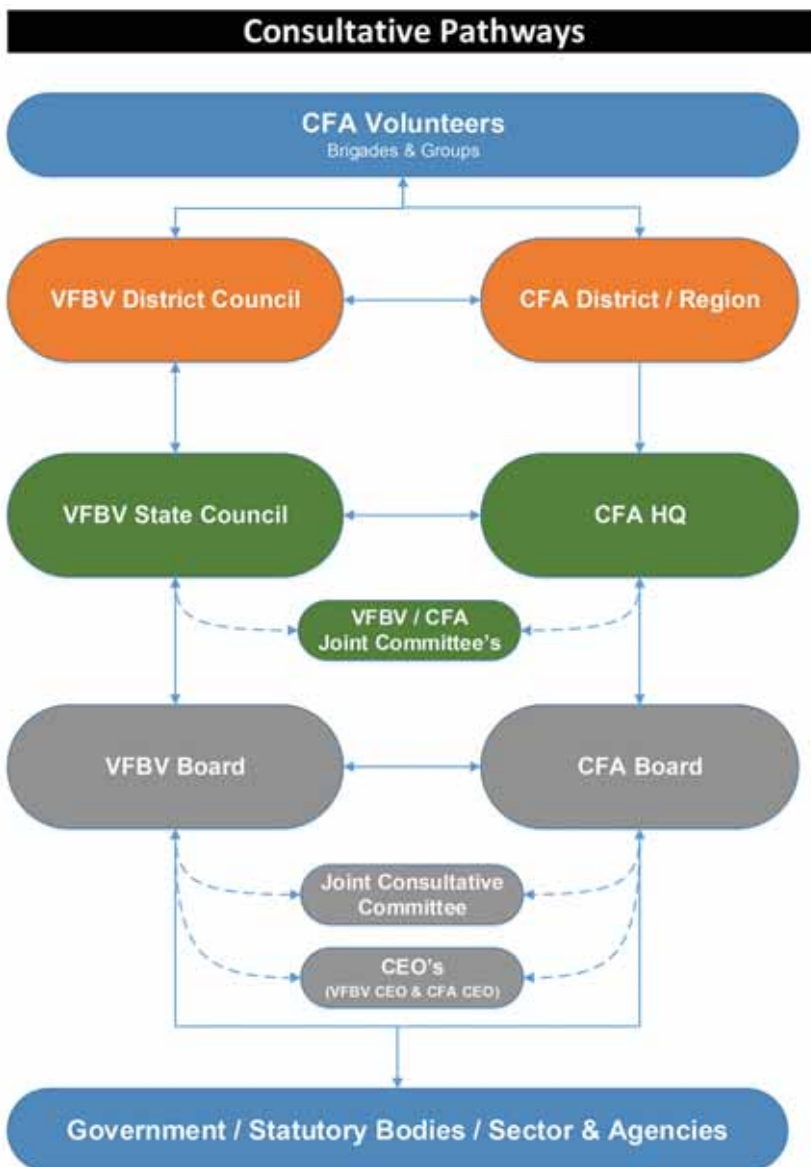
Do you know who they are?

Has your brigade or group started discussions about how it will prepare and inform your nominated delegates to represent your wishes back to District Council?

Did you complete this year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey? This was a golden opportunity to have your say about what is working well and what needs improvement. Did you use it?

Get involved and don't wait to be told what someone else thinks the new CFA will look like.

Start thinking about how we as volunteers will address some of the new challenges and opportunities. Start thinking about the new service delivery model that will be required. What do you need from the agencies and the Government to support you? How do you want to be encouraged when you're giving your all and making sacrifices to protect and defend your community during its time of greatest need? Tick – tock. Are you ready to answer these questions when they are asked? Please get involved.





Presumptive Legislation Regulations

Published: August 2019

I am pleased to report on the positive progress made in developing the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation Regulations 2019 and the work of VFBV in advocating strongly for CFA volunteers.

Presumptive Legislation provides a rebuttable presumption for volunteer and career firefighters suffering from specified forms of cancer. It legislates that these cancers are presumed to be due to the nature of their service as a firefighter for the purposes of claiming compensation. It is intended to reverse the onus of proof so the sick firefighter does not have to needlessly face the almost impossible task of proving which specific fires, incidents or toxins caused the cancer.

The presumptive rights part of the legislation formed Part 2 of the Government's Fire Services Reform Bill, and, unlike the remaining parts of the legislation, the presumptive rights portion of the Bill came into operation on the day after the Act received Royal Assent.

One of the first priorities for VFBV was to influence the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation Regulations that were to be developed immediately following Royal Assent. While the Bill provides the framework for the law, the Regulations provide the detail and specifics that are required to give practical effect to how administrative processes would actually work. For volunteers in particular, the Regulations are even more critical, as they deal with the workings of the controversial 'advisory committee' required for all Victorian volunteer firefighter claims.

VFBV's concerns and objections to the additional barriers and processes that only volunteer firefighter claims must go through are well known and documented. I am not going to repeat them here. However, while the regulations are not able to completely cure those problems (as they have to operate within the framework of the principal legislation), we saw an opportunity to work with Government and stakeholders to develop the regulations in such a way that could minimise the harm while hopefully mitigating the potential bias that the legislation creates. The goal was to influence the regulations as best we could to ensure volunteers received as fair and respectful treatment as possible under the circumstances.

That is why I am so pleased to report that our hard work and collaboration over many weeks with the Minister, the Hon. Lisa Neville, her staff, EMV and WorkSafe on the drafting has had some positive effects. The Regulations have consequently now been made by the Governor and were given effect on 9 July. And while there were, of course, compromises along the way, I am pleased with the result and very grateful for the hard work and good faith displayed by the Minister's office in particular.

Discussions were very productive and respectful and gave me increased confidence that the much-needed healing of divisions of the past is on the right track.

One of VFBV's primary objectives was to gain increased transparency in the advisory committee process and its outcomes. In this vein, the new Regulations require the advisory committee to provide its expert opinion (and the reasons for it) within 10 days of receiving the request from WorkSafe.



The Regulations also now provide an opportunity for the claimant firefighter to provide their own information to the committee should they wish to – and the firefighter can request a copy of the expert opinion and the reasons for it, which must be provided within 7 days of the request being made.

These were key criticisms of the original legislation and these changes are important safeguards that volunteers will welcome as they significantly increase the transparency and accountability of the committee.

Other areas of importance was the ability for the nomination and activation of the three-person panel to be tailored to best suit the nature of the application they are to review. For example, the panel that reviews whether a volunteer firefighter has ‘attended fires to the extent reasonably necessary’ could be made up of just fire service experts, which may be different to a panel established to review an exceptional exposure event that may require scientific knowledge. This starts to lay the groundwork and shape the working of the panel closer to the simple ‘tick and flick’ process that was promised to us.

There is also provision for the panel to help the applicant firefighter obtain relevant records or local knowledge – an important safeguard should agency records be incomplete or insufficient.

With the Regulations now complete, VFBV’s next priority is to review the actual claims forms and process to ensure a sick firefighter is not delayed or confused by complicated paperwork. Our preliminary analysis indicates current forms are likely to be somewhat confusing for firefighters submitting a presumptive claim for cancer. This is mainly because the forms were primarily designed to report common workplace injuries where exact causes are known. We will now direct our efforts at working with WorkSafe and CFA on possible solutions. We are also investigating options for additional support for volunteers as they go through the claims process, and I’ll report back on progress shortly.

In summary, this is a positive outcome considering our starting point, and demonstrates the value of working cooperatively and in good faith with stakeholders to achieve a good outcome.

The proof will be in the pudding so to speak, so while good progress has been made on the intent and design of administrative processes, we will need to remain vigilant and monitor the progress of future claims that will test these processes. Despite the inherent weaknesses of the legislation, we will need to see whether these measures can, in fact, mitigate the different treatment of volunteers and career staff simply because one is paid. The ultimate measure of success will be that there is parity of results and all firefighters who go through the system receive fair, equitable and compassionate treatment.

We will all need to monitor the situation closely to ensure those commitments and promises are kept.

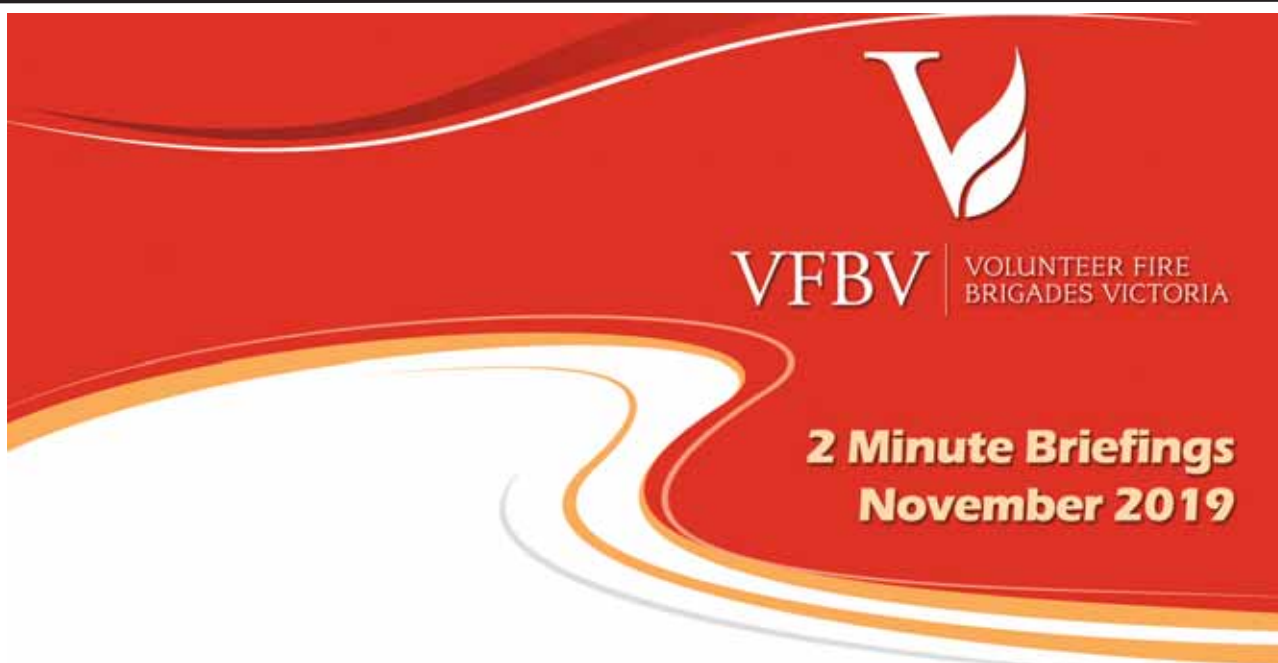
ROB GIBBS

Most of us know the story of Rob Gibbs, who has courageously spoken up about his treatment by CFA and the authorities over the last three years as he has battled for compensation to support his medical expenses and care.



A few short years ago Rob was a healthy, active firefighter, filling key leadership roles, a regular first responder including attendance at many significant and well publicised incidents. Today Rob, 48, is wheelchair-bound and in constant pain from leukaemia. He is battling this terrible, painful illness and has clear advice from a medical specialist that his firefighting was the primary cause. And yet he continues to be forced to battle Government insurers and lawyers when he should be concentrating on his health and his family. Rob has been left out in the cold because the legislation that passed Parliament in June this year contained a clause that only backdated presumptive rights to diagnoses occurring after 1 July 2016.

VFBV will continue to support and campaign strongly for Rob, who deserves a fair and just outcome – not just for himself but for his wife and young daughter. We will keep working for the best, but Rob's experience remains a cautionary tale and one I hope gets addressed as quickly as possible – not just for the trust of CFA volunteers but for the simple humanity, compassion and fairness that Rob is due. We will continue to monitor progress of Rob's case and will keep you apprised.



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.



2 Minute Briefing

Joint Communications and Technology

November 2019

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

PORTABLE RADIO LIFE

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

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

SUPPLEMENTARY ALERTING SYSTEM (SAS)

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

TRUNKING RADIO (SMR)

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

CONNECTED BRIGADES UPDATE

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

SPATIAL VISION MAPBOOK

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

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

RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLER UPDATE

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

AFAC NATIONAL FIRE DANGER RATING REVIEW

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

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

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

TFB AND ISSUANCE OF INFRINGEMENT NOTICES

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

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

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

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



2 Minute Briefing Joint Equipment & Infrastructure

November 2019

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

PUMPER/TANKER PROTOTYPE UPDATE

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

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

ONLINE SMALL EQUIPMENT REGISTER

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

ONGOING STATION MAINTENANCE CONCERNS

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

APPROVED LED LIGHT BARS

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

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

PROVISIONAL PAYMENTS FOR MENTAL HEALTH CLAIMS PILOT

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

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

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

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

CFA DISCIPLINE PROCESS

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

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

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

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

INCIDENT CONTROLLER SURVEY

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

LESSONS MANAGEMENT CENTRE LAUNCHED

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

You can access the Lessons Management Centre via:

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

SEASON FOCUS

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

You can access this landing page at:

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

TREE HAZARD AWARENESS ASSESSOR COURSE

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

LONG TERM VACANCIES

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

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

'B' CLASS FOAM TRAINING MATERIALS

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

URBAN FIREFIGHTER PROGRAM

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

DRIVER EDUCATION

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

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

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

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

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

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

YOUNG MEMBER SURVEY FEEDBACK

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

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

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

BRIGADE MANAGEMENT MANUAL

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

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

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

CONCERNS FOR DROP IN VOLUNTEER NUMBERS

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

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



CFA/VFBV Firefighter State Championships

28th & 29th March 2020 at Mooroopna

Come & join a CFA Weekend



All CFA members are invited to join for the weekend, or a day, linking up with fellow members and friends from across the state, or come, see and participate in a great variety of **CFA activities** including:

- **Display of new CFA vehicles.**
- **Training displays:** virtual reality, learning hub, entrapment drill & mobile props.
- **Community Safety:** Content Portal and Activity Reporting Tool demonstrations.
- **Fire Equipment Maintenance:** interactive display providing guidance & technical advice relating to FEM.
- **Brigade and Volunteer Support:** Annual Brigade Review and Brigade Capability Profiling Application demonstrations, Brigade Recruitment Retention and Re-engagement support, Memberlink support, Honours & Awards, Volunteer Induction advice.
- **CFA volunteer apparel:** available for purchase on provision of member ID.



Plus **Trade Displays** of a range of firefighting trade organisations attending showing the latest in firefighting technology.



Plus **kids entertainment** and a **Food Truck Festival** at the ground both days, an **Arts & Craft Market** on Saturday and a **Farmers Market** on Sunday.

2020 will be a combined event of the State Urban Senior Championship and the State Rural Championships Seniors & Juniors, with the Rural and Urban events conducted on their own traditional tracks alongside each other, in an exciting showcase of competitions and a showcase of CFA to the community.

All CFA members are invited to attend as a spectator, team supporter or competitor, where members can compete on their own for their Brigade, or with fellow Brigade members to make up a team to compete in the rural or urban events, or both.

There are events for all size teams, whether one or two competitors up to eight competitors, for all ages, genders and abilities. See the reverse side for the program of events for both the rural and urban Championship events.



Brigades can choose to compete in the whole program for the rural or urban events, or just one event, or just march in the spectacular **Torchlight Procession** on the Saturday evening, with Brigades marching around Victoria Park Lake, Shepparton in an impressive display of CFA to the community.

The Torchlight Procession will conclude with the Greater City of Shepparton's *Converge Festival*, which commences at 4pm with food trucks and live entertainment for all CFA members, families and the community.

Entry forms & further info are available from the VFBV website or the VFBV office

CFA / VFBV State Championships

28th & 29th March 2020 at Mooroopna

STATE RURAL CHAMPIONSHIPS - PROGRAM OF EVENTS

SATURDAY – 28th March 2020, State Rural Championship

Low Down Pump & Ladder, 5 competitors
Hose & Ladder, 4 competitors
Tanker Hose Reel & Ladder, 5 competitors
Tanker – Priming, Pumping & Ladder, 4 competitors
Hydrant & Tanker, 4 competitors
Tanker – Drawing Water from Tank, 4 competitors
Torchlight Procession, 2030 hours

SUNDAY – 29th March 2020, State Rural Junior Championship

Low Down Pump & Ladder (11-13 Years)
Low Down Pump & Ladder (11-15 Years)
Hose & ladder (11-13 Years)
Hose & ladder (11-15 Years)
Tanker – Priming, Pumping & Ladder (11-13 Years)
Tanker – Priming, Pumping & Ladder (11-15 Years)
Hydrant & Tanker (11-13 Years)
Hydrant & Tanker (11-15 Years)
Tanker – Drawing Water from Tank (11-13 Years)
Tanker – Drawing Water from Tank (11-15 Years)

Rural Championship eligibility etc.:

- Members have to be a registered CFA member and aged 16 years or over to be eligible to compete in the Senior events, and the Brigade has to be affiliated with VFBV.
- Saturday evening all Brigades can participate in the Torchlight Procession around Victoria Park Lake, Shepparton in an impressive display of CFA Brigades.
- **Junior 11-13 Years** includes competitors 11 years up to & including 13 years; &
- **Junior 11-15 Years** includes competitors 11 years up to & including 15 years – for both age groups, as at 1st January 2020.
- Both Saturday's Senior events and Sunday's Junior events will conclude with 50m Sprint Races - for the Seniors, a Female Sprint and a Male Sprint; and for the Juniors, a Female & a Male Sprint for the 11-13 Year teams and for the 11-15 Year teams.

STATE URBAN CHAMPIONSHIP - PROGRAM OF EVENTS

SATURDAY – 28th MARCH 2020

Ladder Race
B Section Hose & Ladder Fives
A Section Y Coupling, 4 Competitors
A Section Hose & Ladder Eights
B Section Y Coupling, 4 Competitors
B Section Pumper & Ladder
A Section Marshall, One Competitor
A Section Hydrant & Tanker
B Section Marshall, One Competitor
Trial Marshall, One Competitor Female Event
Trial Marshall, Two Competitors Female Event
B Section Wet Hose Striking One Disc Twice
A Section Y Coupling & Ladder Eights
B Section Hose & Reel Sixes
Discipline Contest

Torchlight Procession, 2030 hours

SUNDAY – 29th March 2020

Hydrant Race
A Section Pumper & Ladder
B Section Marshall, Two Competitors
B Section Disabled Hose & Reel Sixes
A Section Marshall, Two Competitors
A Section Hose & Reel Sixes
B Section Hose, Hydrant & Pumper
B Section Hydrant & Tanker
A Section Hose, Hydrant & Pumper
A Section Hose & Reel Eights
Champion Fours

Urban Championship eligibility etc.:

- Members have to be a registered CFA member and aged 16 years or over to be eligible to compete, and the Brigade has to be affiliated with VFBV.
- For 2020, Brigades will be able to enter for the whole program of events or just one event – the whole program entry fee is \$60, or for one or more events, @ \$5 per event.
- Therefore Brigades don't need a competition reel to compete – they can compete in any one or all of the individual events such as the Hydrant Race or Marshall One Competitor, or with more competitors in the Y Coupling Fours, or in any of the three Appliance events.
- A new Appliance Aggregate is to be introduced for the team gaining the highest points across all 3 motor events, for both A Section and B Section.
- In 2020, as a trial, female only events are being introduced for the Marshall Events - One Competitor and the Two Competitor.

For queries or further information, or for new members and Brigades to competitions, needing assistance with coaching or equipment, please contact your District VFBV Support Officer or VFBV office on 9886 1141 or j.laing@vfbv.com.au