

VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



Welcome to the latest edition of our quarterly feature supplement. The supplement includes relevant news, updates and information on current issues being pursued by VFBV on behalf of members.

Adam Barnett
CEO, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

Additional Resources and Updates Available Electronically

Nominations for Trustee's	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp47
Australia Day Honours 2025	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-supp48
Open for Consultation Dashboard	https://tinyurl.com/vfbvDashboard

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

This month's enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. Annual Vol Survey Now Open	Please table and note
2. Editorial: Icebergs Ahead	Please table and note
3. Editorial: A Busy Start to 2025	Please table and note
4. 2025 State Firefighter Championships	Please table at your next meeting and pin to your noticeboard
5. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting and pin to your noticeboard



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2024/25 Survey Last Chance



We want to know your views on your CFA experience, good and bad.

Tell us about CFA Training, your brigade, how well consultation is working, and whether you feel adequately recognised and respected by CFA and the Victorian Government.

Last year, more than 2,000 volunteers participated. Make your opinion count and take the survey today. Survey closes very shortly.

Scan the QR code or visit
<https://www.vfbv.com.au/cfa>





ICEBERGS AHEAD

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' February 2025 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

The *RMS Titanic* hit an iceberg on its maiden voyage just before midnight on the 14th April 1912, sinking three hours later, and taking with her more than 1,500 of the 2,200 people on board.

What does this have to do with fire services you ask? Not much admittedly, however recent speculation does point to the fact that an out-of-control fire in one of the ship's coal bunkers may have contributed to the ship's high speed that contributed to the collision as opposed to speculation the captain was eager to beat the crossing time of Titanic's sister ship the *Olympic*.

But my main reason is both the ship, and the iceberg, have become popular metaphors for not only the hubris of humankind (unsinkable ship), but the litany of errors that contributed to the disaster that are only seen with the benefit of hindsight. It is also a good demonstration of cause and effect of the risk appetite implemented by her captain, crew and owner/ operator White Star Line.

Prior to the sinking, the ship had received multiple warnings from other ships. In fact, before the ship even set sail it was generally accepted that there was an increased risk of icebergs over the previous years. However, once they set sail, multiple reports streamed in. The first was two days prior to the sinking where the French ship *La Touraine* sighted two icebergs.

Then on the morning of the sinking (0912 hours), the *RMS Caronia* passed on reports of westbound steamers reporting icebergs. Dutch ship *Noordam* informed it later that morning (1147) that they had encountered much ice. Early afternoon (1349) another report came in from German steamer *Amerika* that it has passed two large icebergs. Then at 1354 *RMS Baltic* sent a wireless telegram reporting that the Greek steamer *Athinai* had sighted icebergs and extensive ice fields drifting along the same route as the Titanic. Then at 1830 the *SS Californian* observed three large icebergs south of her position. At 2140 the *SS Mesaba* reported heavy pack ice and a great number of icebergs. The final warning came again from *SS Californian* at 2255 reporting she was surrounded by ice and had stopped for the night.

In essence all these warnings were either dismissed, not passed on or treated as minor or irrelevant. Hindsight shows us how disaster could have been averted should the count-

less warnings have been heeded in the first place. A good parallel for how we often feel over our countless warnings on the state of CFA funding and resourcing.

You have heard me repeat frequently that Victoria is considered one of the most fire prone places in the world due to our local flora, topology and weather patterns. In fact – the two most fire prone places are considered to be Victoria and California USA.

And just like the two warnings that the *SS Californian* sent in 1912, her namesake the State of California is sending what can only be described as one of the biggest warning calls we can get.

We look on with a shared understanding and horror at the extent of the Californian bushfires that have devastated large parts of the greater Los Angeles area and so far have claimed 28 people, and thousands of destroyed structures. Sadly, these numbers will only grow as the fires continue to burn. Our hearts and thoughts are with all those affected.

But in a frightening parallel to Victoria, criticism of years of Government neglect and underfunding of California's fire services and bureaucratic heavy bodies that have failed to adequately prepare are ringing loud and clear.

And while there has been some surprise that these fires have taken grip in North America's winter – one should remember how early the 2019/20 fires first started along the Australian eastern seaboard hitting NSW in August 2019.

As I have repeatedly stated, reducing CFA budgets in one of the most fire prone places in the world, and with the Government's own climate modelling predicting longer, more frequent and more intense fire seasons – is just complete madness. This time around however, we don't have to rely on "hindsight" to heed the warnings.

California also has the largest firefighting air fleet in the world. A sombre reality check for those that think aircraft are a silver bullet. Don't get me wrong – aircraft are a crucial and effective part of our firefighting operations. They make an incredible difference when they are available and can be used. But history tells us that on many of the worst days of natural disasters – we often cannot get aircraft in the air due to the extreme weather conditions and winds. This is not an argument for less aviation funding – but rather a call to stop diverting funding from frontline services as if its either/



or. It is not one or the other – it must be both. Boots on the ground is our first and last line of defence from any bushfire. And those boots need trucks to get there and fight it.

Recently the State Government announced a \$10M boost to CFA's fleet budget. A very welcome boost completely overshadowed by the announcement that it comes at the cost of a new emergency service tax hike that will in some cases triple the cost to residents and property owners. While collecting an extra \$600M in the first year alone, the Government only promised \$10M (0.01%) of that solely for CFA, and instead threw a whole bunch of public service bodies into the same bucket competing for precious funds. Calling it a Volunteer Fund was just the icing on the cake of a deal that just stunk and wiped any goodwill that volunteers may have given it.

And while \$10M sounds like a big boost - much like an iceberg - the real story lies below the waterline – the danger much harder to see.

First of all, the fact that the extra is such a huge boost tells you how little recurrent funding actually gets given to CFA for fleet and capital works each year. At present, only \$12 - \$15M in any given year is allocated to fleet.

To put that into perspective, CFA manages 2,300+ vehicles. 1,707 of these are tankers, and 218 are pumpers, and this does not include the hundreds of slip-ons. If we assume a very basic formulae of aiming to maintain a maximum age of 20 years for Tankers, and 15 years for Pumpers – simple math tells us that CFA needs at least \$55M per year to replace 100 trucks per year. Therefore, boosting the CFA fleet budget to at best \$25M per year, is still less than half of what is needed to stop the fleet getting older. In other words – CFA trucks will continue to get older and older endangering firefighters and communities alike when spare parts can no longer be easily sourced, as in what is happening now. For example, a 20+ year old pumper was recently off the road for almost 12 months waiting for a spare part to be manufactured overseas.

And this is the decades of Government neglect that is on show. Trucks have not just magically turned 35 years old. This is a problem of at least three decades in the making. In fact, VFBV campaigned back in 2014 when CFA was forced to remove its maximum 20-year age limit that prior to that had been in place, but to which they could no longer afford.

The age of the fleet speaks for itself. There are 230 fire trucks more than 31 years old, with the oldest 35. There are 244 aged between 26 - 30 years. There are 269 aged between 21 – 25 years. And this group is being chased by another 372 trucks that are now aged between 16 and 20. This is a total of 1,115 trucks that need replacing.

Across the state, there are about 870 single cab tankers. These tankers require volunteer firefighters to ride on the outside of the truck, facing backwards as they ride into danger. On a blistering hot 40 degree day they have no protection from the sun or heat, no aircon – and they can't even see the road ahead. Likewise in the middle of winter when its five degrees - they have no protection from the cold or rain during winter. Not to mention the toxic smoke and fumes they are riding towards without even so much as a window to wind up. Talk about a raw deal. This is how the Government rewards the selfless men and women volunteer firefighters keeping millions of Victorians safe from fire and other disasters year after year.

Any Government spokesperson that tries to claim these trucks are fit for purpose and roadworthy should immediately give up their taxpayer funded vehicle (that gets replaced every three years) and spend 30+ years riding on the back of a fire truck without basic amenity and see how they like it. The problem is further amplified when you stop to consider that it's one thing to replace ageing fire trucks, but the new trucks won't even fit into the old and dilapidated fire station built to house them. In regional and rural areas in particular – the lack of capital investment has left old sheds that are no longer fit for purpose, have no amenity for firefighters to change in, and some don't even have a bathroom. Some do not even allow a fire truck door to be opened all the way without hitting someone or something.

Due to their age, and lack of funding – many of these old stations aren't even long enough to fit a new truck while the front doors are not high enough to back one in even if they were lucky enough to be given one, which they're not.

And funding for CFA's capital works budget you ask? You have to time travel back to the 2021/22 State Budget to find the most recent budgeted new money for base capital land and building upgrades.

The lack of sustained investment in Victoria's CFA is nothing short of a travesty. 100 years after the world's biggest unsinkable ship sank to the bottom of the ocean we look back and wonder how they let it happen with all those warnings. The issue of CFA fleet and capital funding will take a major course correction. Governments do not have a good track record of thinking outside short-term election cycles. This must change, and it must change prior to our next Black Saturday.

We can all see the figurative icebergs dead ahead – and it will not be through lack of trying that our warnings are ignored. Thank-you to all members who are helping us raise these concerns within your own spheres of influence – keep up the good work.



A BUSY START TO 2025

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

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Starting a New Year is often a chance to reflect on the old and look towards the new with optimism. And while there's nothing wrong with that of course, pragmatism calls on us to be a little more realistic with our expectations. While I still harbour eternal hope and can see the magnificent potential of what can be achieved, I am tempered by the current political realities.

So, when setting my expectations for the year ahead, I draw from a quote of the social justice and civil rights activist, Martin Luther King Jr. who said: "If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl. If you can't crawl, then just move inch by inch in another direction."

For me this demonstrates the power of continuing to put one foot in front of the other, knowing each step is another step closer as we continue our push for fair and equitable funding.

And while we have made some great recent progress, we must stay focussed on our most pressing challenges such as the inequitable CFA budget, ageing CFA fleet and fixing the ridiculous secondment arrangements that are holding us back. While the recent truck funding is a great start – it is still only about a quarter of what we need to start making a dent in the fleet that has been long neglected. With more than 700 single cab tankers and ageing trucks, it will take some serious investment to catch up.

The hope of purposeful changes with a new Premier and new cabinet have not materialised. Perhaps expecting great courage from today's political leaders was too much to hope. But as I have said all along, they will either be part of the solution or consigned to history as part of the problem.

VFBV continues to draw attention to the complete inequity of CFA's budget, and the government's prolonged attack on CFA's resourcing and support. We have continued to track the government's investments in CFA over the last five years, and have found despite increased costs and high inflation, government has invested less and less in CFA's base funding year after year.

Lining up the last five CFA annual reports clearly shows the drop in government grants towards CFA funding over successive years, despite what government's media releases state. In 2020, prior to the government's fire services reforms, the total income to CFA from government grants was \$807 million. Following reform, the total in 2021 was cut to

\$351M, a drop of more than \$455M. Now let's put the last five audited financial statements side by side:

2020/21: \$351M
2021/22: \$347M
2022/23: \$341M
2023/24: \$339M
2024/25: \$337M

The trend and pattern are unmistakable. At a time when fire seasons are getting longer, more intense and high-risk days are becoming more frequent – the government is actually defunding CFA and investing less and less. This is like reducing your insurance as the rate of theft increases. In the most fire prone place on earth – it's just madness.

And those figures are just the headline figures. What is hidden is the murky smoke and mirror games that are being played by pretending to invest in CFA, while in fact they are diverting those funds to other agencies or government bodies.

Further analysis has revealed the tens of millions of dollars being siphoned from CFA's budget to be diverted to public service bodies and departments, effectively representing a further cut to CFA's budget. Each year, the Department of Justice and Community Safety withhold a portion of CFA's budget for its own purposes. Back in 2014, this amounted to just \$10M.

However, in recent years the amount being siphoned away has sharply increased, masking the real cuts being made to CFA's base funding. For example, the amounts withheld over the past four years is:

2021/22: \$27.6M
2022/23: \$34.9M
2023/24: \$46.2M
2024/25: \$67.3M

When these figures were first revealed, department officials issued blanket denials, and then ultimately settled on a statement that stated that "every dollar of these quarantined amounts is spent on CFA – directly benefiting the CFA and its volunteers." The statement then went on to claim that really this was just an efficiency arrangement where one government department paid the bill for equipment delivered to CFA for things like radios.

Far from "every dollar" being spent on CFA, a VFBV free-

dom of information request into the last five years of these withheld grants uncovers explicit detail that refutes this assertion.

For example, over the last five years funding sent to EMV separate to the operational communications program reached \$12M a year.

Funding was also diverted for “Inspector General Emergency Management Services” which reached \$1.8M last year. These are just two examples of this funding directly funding public service bureaucracies and is a far stretch from paying for vital CFA “equipment”

Which leads us to the Fire Services Property Levy. To be clear, Section 76 of the CFA Act stipulates that Government contributions to CFA are to be sourced from 22.5% from consolidated revenue, and 77.5% from the fire services property levy. No one disputes this is the funding formulae, but it has been thrown up to try and confuse people how much of the total levies collected are actually going towards funding CFA.

On two separate occasions, Treasurer Tim Pallas has confirmed to Parliament that only 25% of the total collected fire services levy funds actually go towards CFA, with the remaining 75% going to FRV. The Treasurer confirmed this figure to questions on notice on the 22nd August, and again on the 19th September 2024.

The reason this is such a big deal is due to how the levies are aggregated across the different property types. One must remember that prior to its reforms, it was the Andrews Government that altered the Fire Service Property Levy in 2020 and dropped the differential rates.

Under the old system, an area covered by CFA would pay the levy required to fund CFA, and the areas covered by FRV paid the contribution to FRV. Thus, after reform, when CFA's budget was slashed by \$455 million – these savings would have been directly passed onto all residents residing in a CFA area through a reduced levy.

Under the new system however, FRV's huge cash injections relies on people in CFA areas to send 75% of their levy funds to fund FRV.

This effectively means rural areas are cross subsidising the cost over runs of FRV. These were the cost overruns our own Emergency Services Minister the late Hon. Jane Garrett passionately warned about and resigned over.

Despite only operating 85 fire stations across Victoria, funding required to fund FRV last year reached a record \$1.07 billion.

It probably does not make much of a difference to a resident sitting in Melbourne who pays just \$204 a year under the current levy. However, it makes a huge difference to a primary producer who is paying an average of \$2,500 a year in levies, for a service many of them volunteer to provide in the first place. This is set to increase to almost \$7,000 under the new hikes just announced. These are the people growing our food! For farmers to be paying thousands in levies, with only 25% of those funds actually going to the service that protects them is the modern equivalent of highway robbery.

All the while they house some of the oldest trucks in the nation. For regional and rural areas to be cross subsidising city

services is just grossly inequitable and is a slap in the face to regional communities.

And for property owners to be slapped with another tax increase during a cost of living crisis just compounds the problem.

Just weeks ago, the Government announced another hike and that the Fire Services Property Levy will be rebadged to be called the “Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund.” The new levy will not only fund CFA and FRV, but for the first time will also fund VicSES, Triple Zero Victoria, the State Control Centre, EMV, Emergency Recovery Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria.

The new levy will increase from \$1.033 billion this financial year to \$1.649 billion in the next financial year. So, from this extra \$600+ million, how much do volunteers stand to get in extra funding you ask?

The Budget update papers released by the Treasurer on 13th December, provided a cold answer. Of the additional revenue to be collected, only \$50 million was set aside in output initiatives for “Supporting our emergency services and volunteers.” This equates to just 8% of the increased revenue. The exemption for SES and CFA volunteers has been costed at \$6M per year, and the budget papers assume will not even be in place until 2026. This \$6M exemption is put into stark reality when you consider there are already \$31M of other exemptions in place for existing pensioners, single farm enterprises and veteran gold card holders.

So why does the new name refer to it as a Volunteer Fund? Well one can only assume it is the same cynical ploy that named the controversial reforms as the “Firefighters’ Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019.” Just as this name traded on sick firefighters to hide its true intent, the name of the new property levy now seeks to trade on the good name of volunteers, hoping the public swallow a massive tax hike.

VFBV will be opposing volunteers being slighted by tying the name of the new levy to volunteers’ good name. As a member said to me recently, its like they pat us on the head with one hand and poke us in the eye with the other.

We are also expecting further consultation on the proposed exemption, that will exempt a volunteer’s primary residence. Given the broad diversity of views that is likely to be among volunteers, we are demanding that sufficient time be provided that will allow genuine consultation on how the exemption will work.

Government has confirmed from the outset that the exemption will be optional, so volunteers may choose whether to apply or not. We do not yet have any information on how renters may be treated, or the other details of how the exemption would work. We will engage broadly and seek your views as soon as preliminary details are known.

With a busy year ahead, and an even busier one predicted on our fire grounds over summer, we will need to look out for one another. For those called away during the Christmas and New Year break – thank-you. For the partners and loved ones who filled the gaps your absences made at home – we give our sincere thanks also. Stay safe, and please look after yourselves and one another



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2 Minute Briefings March 2025

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 Community Safety

March 2025

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

COMMUNITY SAFETY NEWSLETTER

Since 2020, CFA has produced a bi-annual community safety newsletter. These newsletters are a valuable resource for brigade Community Safety Officers and Captains. The newsletter provides all the latest news on projects being undertaken by CFA to improve community engagement, information on programs and resources available for brigades to use as well as ideas that brigades can use for more effective engagement of their community.

Previously, the newsletter relied on District Community Engagement Coordinators (CECs) emailing it directly to brigades. This method was effective in some areas but often ineffective and in a small number non-existent, leaving many brigades unaware that the resource even existed. Joint Committee delegates have long advocated that this newsletter should be accessible through Members Online and available to all CFA members and have even suggested members automatically get a copy under an optional subscription process. As of the beginning of 2025, the current issue, and all back issues, are now available and can be found by searching Members Online for 'Community Engagement Newsletters'.

VFBV encourages all brigade Community Safety Officers to make use of this resource in their community engagement endeavours. Brigades can also provide any feedback, ideas or suggestions on what they would like to see in the newsletter by emailing - communityengagement@cfa.vic.gov.au

POST FIRE SEASON COMMUNITY SAFETY

Each fire season CFA conducts a survey of community members who live in high fire risk areas as identified by the Victorian Bush Fire Risk Register (VBRR). The survey is designed to help identify preparedness, attitudes and perceptions towards bushfire risk, how people plan to respond to fire as well as track changes in these things over time. This survey has been conducted annually since 2009, respondents are chosen at random and contacted by telephone. The sample size can vary between 600 – 1200 people.

The 2024 survey key findings highlighted an overall downward trend in some aspects of community bushfire perception and preparedness. The survey found that 45% of people living in fire prone areas are not concerned about their safety despite acknowledging that they are at risk.

There has also been a decline in preparedness. When asked whether they have a written plan, only 17% responded that they do. 60% of respondents indicated they have a verbal plan only. Of those respondents who did not have a written plan, 52% indicated it was not necessary.

Whilst 93% of those surveyed accept it is their responsibility to prepare their property for fire, most focus on 'easy to do' preparation such as general garden maintenance, rather than having a comprehensive plan. 50% believe that should a fire occur it is CFA's responsibility to protect them.

Delaying the decision to leave was also significant. Only 30% of respondents indicated that they would leave an area during a bushfire event. 14% of people indicated they would wait and assess the situation and 16% would wait until they were instructed to leave by emergency authorities. 12% of respondents would stay and actively defend their property.

Despite this, the survey indicated that the community's trust in CFA remains high and the community understands the importance of staying connected with CFA and their local brigade.



2 Minute Briefing

Joint Equipment & Infrastructure

March 2025

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

ADDITIONAL WORKWEAR

Members have continued to request that CFA investigate further how volunteers can access additional workwear. The State Logistics Centre in Scoresby has recently negotiated longer opening hours from 9 am to 3 pm, Monday to Friday which will allow better access for volunteers nearby. CFA has advised comms will be sent out shortly on warranty and replacement, and all district offices will be made aware to avoid any misnomers or communication issues. Along the same lines, volunteers expressed that some Districts are saying they don't have supplies of Wildfire PPC and, therefore, members have to wait; CFA advised that there are stocks of next-gen Wildfire PPC so there should be no issues accessing PPC through your District. Proban Wildfire PPC is no longer being ordered so volunteers who have not been measured in the new gear are encouraged to get sized at either your District or through the SLC.

STATION DESIGNS

After many requests from volunteers across all classes of brigades and what appears to be a very long and drawn out process CFA has advised that draft Terms of Reference have been developed for a new Station Design Working Party. The working party will begin to meet shortly with the aim to investigate and develop a new set of station designs that will bring improved safety, technology and volunteer amenities.

In a related matter, delegates have queried whether there has been any improvement in budgets or timelines regarding station builds managed by the Community Safety Building Authority (CSBA) and have requested better visibility and involvement in the tender evaluation process on builders and designers. Initial information suggests a large increase in costs and long extended build times. CFA is working on a procedure for simplifying brigade-funded works which will go through the Infrastructure Services Management Committee for sign off before distribution.

CAB CHASSIS STANDARDS CHANGE

CFA has advised the committee that there are extended waiting periods for some Cab Chassis from overseas due to the changes in emission compliance standards from Euro 5 to Euro 6 for cab chassis, which impacts many manufacturers including Isuzu and Hino.

Euro Standards are vehicle emission standards for pollution controls and mandated computer diagnostics designed to improve safety for drivers. CFA has advised that these changes may result in an 18–24 month gap in availability from these manufacturers. However, the cab chassis built and delivered to Australia before November 2025 will remain compliant. CFA has secured cab chassis for the medium tankers in the build program, and those for heavy tankers have been sourced. Work is ongoing for the light tankers as well.

STATION BREAK-INS

In what can only be described as a very disappointing set of circumstances members will be reading or hearing in the news more frequently about an increase in CFA Volunteer Station break-ins and vehicle robberies. We all understand how hard brigades work in their own family time to fundraise or subsidize the purchase of life saving equipment to help their communities. Delegates have asked CFA to consider ways in which they can ensure new station designs and vehicle builds can be made more secure to mitigate the frequency of break ins and theft. CFA has been undertaking an audit of current station security and will report back to the committee when completed. Brigades should be aware that all of the equipment supplied by CFA and the equipment brigades purchase themselves are covered under CFA's insurance. One-way brigades can make the process of replacing stolen or broken equipment a little less painful is to make sure your brigade has a detailed comprehensive asset register. The up-to-date asset register will assist CFA in determining details in the event that an insurance claim to replace the stolen gear is required. If brigades are unsure about how to start an asset register please talk to your district support team.

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

SECONDARY SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Discussions with CFA are still ongoing with confirmation that a report regarding the reintroduction of a schools' program is being prepared for the CFA Executive to be reviewed. Delegates have received member feedback encouraging CFA to reintroduce the schools' program(s) with a refresh of the junior and cadet programs initially and then following into other programs that in the past have been well received. Members observed that there are various other programs currently being run in parts of the State that current programs could connect in to. Unfortunately, the Youth Pathways Team has lost some key staff but are looking at a fresh start to engage schools to accredit students that complete any PUA components, plus support any in-school program(s).

HONOURS AND AWARDS

CFA has confirmed that a paper is under development with the intent of enhancing the current criteria for some of the current CFA honours and awards. Delegates are very keen to understand the proposed changes and have requested an update so that consultation can begin.

The 2025 Australia Day honours have been announced and six CFA members were awarded the prestigious AFSM award. Di Billingsley (Boolarra), Fiona Burns (Yarra Valley Group), Lisa Hicks (Pakenham Upper), Mark King (Yallourn North) and Tim Smith (Hurstbridge) along with District 17 ACFO Mark Gunning were all acknowledged for their continued and significant work in CFA. Congratulation to all members.

'GIVE US A HAND' CAMPAIGN

CFA first launched the 'Give us a hand' recruitment campaign back in 2023. The moderately successful "give us a hand" campaign was once again released in June/July 2024 with increased funding and a renewed focus on inspiring community members to volunteer for their local CFA brigade. The revitalised campaign was targeted statewide with the Chief Officer officially launching the program. CFA is requesting feedback on its success or otherwise so please contact your District Council or the Volunteer recruitment team with your comments and suggestions on how the Volunteer Recruitment journey can be improved.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT HUB

The Volunteer Recruitment Hub (VRH) is still receiving adverse comments from volunteers trying to join or transfer from Brigades, although a lot of the 'bugs' have been recently resolved. Members noted the main feedback they observed related to Member Transfers and the transfer of Junior members to the senior ranks. Many volunteers are frustrated by the waiting times for many aspects of the process and believe that many volunteers are just giving up and volunteering with other organisations. If you have recently joined CFA or transferred from one brigade to another please keep providing feedback to volrecruithub@cfa.vic.gov.au so that issues can be documented and improvements made.

CHAMPIONSHIPS

The final touches are being applied for the 2025 State Firefighting Championships being hosted in Mooroopna over the weekends of the 22nd & 23rd of March (Juniors) and 29th & 30th of March (Senior Urban & Rural).

If you have competed in the past or want to give the competitions a try, all entries will be most welcome. Plan a visit to Mooroopna or talk to your local competition association or VFBV District Council for information and support.



2 Minute Briefing

Joint Operational Capability

March 2025

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

REMOTE PILOTED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS (RPAS)

In recent years CFA brigades under the guidance of CFA Commander Aviation, John Katakouzinis have been leading the way in the training and use of drones through an emergency response lens. Brigades at Rowville and Edithvale have been trialling the Remote Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) to investigate how they can best assist crews during structure fires and other hazardous materials incidents. Trials will continue over the next 12-18 months to ensure incident controllers can assess whether the drone response will assist them in their assessment and planning for incident response. The use of RPAS is strictly monitored by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) and CFA is hoping to have 20-40 volunteer pilots trained in the use of RPAS. The CO Volunteer Forum featured this back in June 2024 and further testing is continuing by members of the two brigades.

FLIGHT SIMULATOR TAKES OFF

The members of the Committee recently spent time at VEMTC Bangholme, which has become the home of the first of its kind flight simulator. The simulator replicates the interior of an aircraft and with the use of reality goggles members get to experience what it is like to fly a real aircraft in a safe, controlled environment. Members were able to get a better understanding of the use of aircraft in emergency situations as well as experience firsthand how simulators can enhance training in aircraft use. The state-of-the-art simulator uses a mix of reality goggles with a 280 degree view of the landscape to allow volunteers to undertake mapping, air attack and practice communication and radio skills. The computer-based scenarios duplicate real time fire activity and allow members to immerse themselves in aircraft training based on minute-by-minute scenarios as well as re-enacting fire incidents based on past incidents.

TREE HAZARD ASSESSORS

A number of experienced volunteer members from across the state completed a trial of the new Tree Hazard Assessor training some time ago and provided feedback into the project but have now questioned why this has not progressed and when they will be able to be endorsed and carryout this important role. Members will be aware that the mandatory hazardous tree awareness course is available on LMS, but to date there is no movement on the Tree Assessor training. CFA intended, back in 2021, that 4-5 members of each brigade would be endorsed to undertake hazardous tree assessment. Tree Hazard Assessors require a thorough understanding of fire-ground reporting relationships and the ability to work unsupervised in a high-risk environment as well as the ability to differentiate between tree species and understand how fire can impact. From an operational point of view having CFA volunteers trained and qualified to undertake this type of work is extremely important in ensuring our members can safely and effectively engage in an incident where trees are impacted. Delegates have requested an update on when this training will be available.

PV STOP TRIALS

In further development to CFA's ability to combat fires within rooftop solar electricity systems CFA is working on a project to trial an innovative new product. The new product is called PV STOP. Photovoltaic solar systems convert sunlight into electricity which can then generate dangerous DC and AC electricity, which is difficult to detect and manage when uncontrolled, even when an isolation switch is activated as the solar panels continue to generate electricity making it dangerous for fire fighters. The extinguisher style containers contain a thick liquid solution that coats solar panels effectively 'de-energising' the PV System. The coating makes it safer for firefighters to then extinguish a fire. The liquid also can be used in a preventative measure in storms or approaching fires protecting the panels from damage and once dried can be peeled off without damaging the panels. With the rapid rise in the use of solar panels on residential homes, businesses and large-scale solar farms, PV Stop could be an important part of the arsenal in combating these dangerous fires in the future. Once the trial is underway we will update members on progress.

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

ROLE OF GROUP

With the significant recent fire activity across the state it has again highlighted the need for the Group to be included in the chain of command especially in relation to level 2 IMT incidents. While this issue has been discussed in recent JCC meetings and in many forums at various times over recent years there has been little progress. Committee delegates have been requested to canvas their local groups to get a clearer picture of the group's current involvement in IMT and other roles. If you have any feedback you would like to highlight to the committee regarding the Group structure and use please discuss within your local group and email m.dryden@vfbv.com.au with your solutions, ideas and suggestions.

SECTION 29 AUDITS

Delegates have highlighted for some time the inconsistencies and frustration across the state when undergoing the Section 29 process. For those that are not aware Section 29 of the CFA Act states that the Chief Officer must from time to time inspect or arrange for the inspection of all brigades and report on their state of efficiency or otherwise, and make such recommendations as he thinks fit.'

Members have commented many times on the way that the Section 29 inspection differs from brigade to brigade, district to district and region to region. CFA recently engaged KPMG to undertake an audit of this process. Of no surprise to the delegates the audit has found that the most notable finding was the variability of S29s undertaken, and while there are some systems and processes in place they are not consistently applied. The delegates have requested that the KPMG Audit report be shared and discussed further within the committee to see if there are any findings that volunteers can have input into and that further consultation occurs regarding any changes that CFA may wish to implement that will make the process for brigades consistent, less of a burden and provide an avenue to discuss the results openly with their District management teams.

AAR FEEDBACK

We have reported on the impending changes that have been requested for some time on members giving feedback after an incident and what is done with the information once it enters the giant abys at CFA and the lack of confidence that members have that there will be any changes made once they report back after an incident. CFA has admitted that the process is less than perfect and that the system could be better served if the facilitators of the AAR session were afforded better guidance and training. The secondment model has not helped the progression of AAR outcomes because Commanders and ACFOs are frequently moved around and may not get to follow an AAR to its conclusion.

One solution discussed was providing better training to experienced senior volunteers who then could be assisted to facilitate proactive AAR sessions with the assistance of district staff. The Committee were supportive of holding a workshop at a future meeting to discuss this further.

FIRS HELP

Delegates have again raised their concerns about brigades seeking assistance with completing their fire reports through the Fire Incident Reporting System (FIRS). It was queried whether Group Officers, DDOs etc could be given access to all members in their Group and whether a Group Officer could add volunteers to non-primary events attended, or whether they can add themselves.

The committee was referred to the FIRS Guides available through Members Online and has been advised that the quickest way to add members to a report is to have this actioned by the primary brigade. Members cannot currently add themselves, however CFA has agreed to review this and report back to the committee if this change is possible in future changes to the system.

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

BEHAVIOURAL STANDARDS SESSIONS

Given recent changes to sexual harassment legislation and the vicarious responsibility of leadership and organisations as a whole, the committee discussed the importance of education and understanding of what is acceptable and appropriate in behaviour today compared to bygone years.

For example, one person's act of chivalry might be viewed as condescending and offensive by another. Delegates felt that in some way the Behavioural Standards sessions were helpful in discussing and demystifying some of these types of misunderstandings. In the past there have been varying degrees of effectiveness of Behavioural Standards sessions and the committee agreed one size does not fit all. Some delegates spoke of power point presentations that did not include in depth discussions and failed to engage attendees. The committee felt these discussions formed a key component of the Behavioural Standard session. CFA is in the process of training more presenters, therefore standardising aspects of the presentation but allowing for adaptability to each group's individual requirements. Part of Behavioural Standards learning will still be available online but backed up by face to face and group gatherings.

POTENTIALLY TRAUMATIC EVENT EXPOSURE TRACKER (PTEET)

The Potentially Traumatic Event Exposure Tracker's (PTEET) aim is to draw on existing data to measure members' exposure to potentially traumatic events; to better target mental health and wellbeing support services and protect the psychological health of members. This complements the existing services such as peers, chaplains, wellbeing etc. Delegates highlighted that FIRS data does not currently capture incidents like significant livestock loss which can be similarly traumatic for volunteers. CFA has confirmed that FIRS doesn't capture other events that fit within the criteria for PTEs. For example, it doesn't capture violence during turnouts, or suicides. CFA will continue to refine the tracker to do so. Regional DCOs proposed 15 locations including a mix of busier and smaller brigades for consultation. Werribee, Plenty, Epping, Echuca, Portland, Casterton, Hamilton, Colac, Winchelsea, Strathmerton, Cosgrove-Pine, Bethanga, Fish Creek, Berwick and Lakes Entrance have been selected as the initial brigades.

VFBV delegates along with other volunteers, also engaged with CFA in an online workshop. Consultation sessions were held with some of the above mentioned brigades and discussion included:-

- Is the criteria for classifying events as potentially traumatic correct?
- What other criteria may be relevant?
- Is the proposed response to the data, which will involve offers of additional workshops and individual wellbeing checks, the best strategy?
- Are there other strategies that should be considered?
- While the initial intention is to focus on location data for the first 12 months, it is possible in the future to also utilise data on individual members to inform wellbeing checks. Is this a helpful strategy?
- If yes, how should the wellbeing checks be delivered?

CFA acknowledge that members still find it difficult to decide themselves to call the Wellbeing Support Line and that support is preferably offered proactively. For example, through wellbeing check in locations where attendance at PTEs is frequent.

- There was mixed response from brigades to possible wellbeing check processes. Some Brigades are more supportive of phone check-ins as they feel that this is a more confidential approach i.e. can be done in their own time and in private. Other Brigades would like face to face options. Consideration also needs to be given to using CFA thrive as a quick check in during workshops. The approach taken will need to be negotiated locally.
- There is strong support for the new mental health literacy program with 90-minute interactive workshops particularly when held for a group of Brigades.
- A proposed new support model at Epping Brigade which is planning to schedule health checks, a wellbeing workshop/wellbeing checks and a family day in succession in April or May next year. VFBV support this important work and will continue to contribute to ongoing discussions.

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

ICT PROJECTS UPDATE

Delegates were pleased to get an update on some changes that ICT services have been developing to support the organisation to combat the ever-increasing changes that occur in the ICT space. The ICT has undertaken a 'stocktake' of the current systems it operates across all areas of the organisation and has concluded that all areas of CFA would be better served by investigating a move towards more out-of-the-box platforms and programs with less customisation. This will result in programs that are more user friendly, and result in a better experience for members. CONCUR is a recent example of this, which went live November last year, and the rest of SAP4Hana is on track for May 2025 implementation. These changes will be significant across the CFA systems as there are over 90 initiatives which will be implemented in a phased delivery. We will continue to report on ICT changes as the delivery of ICT solutions continues to benefit volunteers.

PAGER REPLACEMENT

The CFA endorsed EAS Pagers are the primary alerting method for CFA members mainly because of their reliability. At the time of print many districts will be in the middle of or have just completed the Alpha Legend (enhanced pager) replacement program. The new replacement pager program was trialled in District 13 then rolled out across selected districts over the past couple of months and will continue across the state during the next few months. The new replacement pagers have an adjustable volume, flashing LED visual alert, improved battery life and better reception to name just a few of the advantages. The project is expecting to replace around 23,000 pagers in the next 12 months. Members are reminded that if you experience any problems with your pager, you should contact the EAS help desk on 1800 604 977. If they are unable to fix your problem they will refer you to your District office to obtain a replacement pager.

MOBILE DATA CAPABILITY (MDC)

CFA has reported that the MDC project is continuing to work on providing volunteers with better resources when turning out to incidents. Districts have been heavily involved in validating data requirements as well as vehicle allocation for mounting brackets. It is intended that primary appliances will be the first vehicles to receive the tablets once procurement is completed. CFA reported that 950 tablets have been purchased, and consultation will continue with security requirements, including ease of login requirements being worked through. Members eagerly wait for some more definitive dates for completion and rollout.

MULTI FACTOR IDENTIFICATION (MFA)

On the 3rd of October 2024 CFA introduced Multi Factor Authentication (MFA) to combat the ever-increasing cyber-attacks that organisations like CFA are experiencing. The uptake of the MFA has been good with 12,435 registered members to date which accounts for 34% of the active volunteer accounts. Members are encouraged to access their Members Online profile by registering for MFA. The process is simple although it does add another step to logging on which members may find annoying, however for the protection of the system and CFA data it is worthwhile. If members are having trouble registering for MFA they can watch the You tube 'How to' video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEkHyiXeetk> or contact the ICT Service Desk at ict-it-servicedesk@cfa.vic.gov.au phone 1300 883 734 or contact Cybersecurity at cybersecurity@cfa.vic.gov.au

UPDATES AHEAD

Delegates are preparing for a partial EAS Pager Replacement Program, 000VIC's Next Generation CAD Project, the continuation of CFA's Radio Replacement Program, FMR Program, Mobile Data Capability Project, The National Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSMB) initiative as well as projects such our Road Network Modelling (constant improvement), transition to a more stable data management platform from Access/Excel to SQL server environments and many more.

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

VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The Volunteer Leadership Development (VLD) program was established several years ago as a Donations Funded Project with the purpose of establishing programs and training courses to develop members' non-operational leadership skills. Delegates have communicated a level of frustration with the slow progress of the VLD project. However, the JTC was encouraged by the presentation on the project they received at the most recent meeting. Volunteers have access to courses and programs such as Having Challenging Conversations, Captains Peer Mentoring Program and the Women in Leadership Mentoring Program. The project plans to be adding to its catalogue over the next 18 months with programs such as Young Adults Mentoring and offering support for members to complete a Cert IV in Leadership and Management. As a positive step forward CFA has re-established the very popular FIRELINE Leadership program. JTC members are now looking forward to receiving regular updates on the project and will be actively monitoring the progress as it continues. Members who are considering, or have taken on leadership roles within their Brigades or Groups, and feel like they need to develop their leadership skills, are encouraged to discuss their ambitions with their brigade leadership team and District Support.

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TRAINING

For years VFBV has been well aware of members' frustrations in being able to access Incident Management Training (IMT) and has been actively pursuing CFA to implement solutions to this problem. Most IMT courses are currently delivered primarily by Emergency Management Victoria and rarely seem to be scheduled at times or locations that are convenient for volunteers. It was heartening when CFA announced that it was committing to delivering all IMT courses in house and later engaged an external contractor to develop some 30 courses with a view to having them completed by late 2024 to early 2025. Disappointingly, CFA has now advised that the external vendor has severed their relationship with CFA and will not be completing the project. The work completed by the vendor to date has now been handed over to the CFA Training Development department and it will be completing the courses. Unfortunately, this means that the delivery of these courses will be significantly delayed. CFA will be incrementally delivering a full number of IMT courses over the next 18 months to 2 years. The JTC has been informed that CFA is seeking short term solutions to build capacity in on ground operational roles such as Sector Commander. VFBV will keep members updated as to what opportunities there may be to undertake this training in the near future.

GETTING THE TRAINING YOU NEED

It's been a long-held maxim that brigades and members struggle to get the training that they want. Reasons such as insufficient resourcing, inconsistent planning and communication between Districts and members, frustration with the online LMS and even course materials being unavailable to be delivered for long periods are all large obstacles. But there are some things that members, brigades and groups can be doing to improve the amount of training they receive.

First and foremost, is to ensure that members complete an EOI in the LMS for any training that they wish to undertake. The first thing that Districts should be taking into consideration when building their Training Plan is what training is in demand in which areas. But there is no way for District to know the specific needs of brigades without members expressing their interest.

Where Brigades have an operational need for members to receive certain training, but they are being refused due to issues like the brigade already having a surplus of this particular skill according to their BOSP, it is well worthwhile the brigade contacting their District training department directly to explain the requirement. For example, a Brigade might be struggling to get BA training for their members because they have more operators than the BOSP minimum requirements stipulate. But a significant proportion of those qualified members are not available during business hours, the brigade is well advised to contact their District Training and directly seek the member training they need to fill their capability gap.



STATE FIREFIGHTER CHAMPIONSHIPS

Urban Junior State Championship	22/23 March 2025, Mooroopna
Urban Senior State Championship	29/30 March 2025, Mooroopna
Rural State Senior Championship	29 March 2025, Mooroopna
Rural State Junior Championship	30 March 2025, Mooroopna

The CFA-VFBV State Firefighter Championships will be held at Mooroopna later this month on consecutive weekends.

The first weekend, 22 and 23 March, will see 33 teams compete for the State Urban Junior Championship across 18 events.

Action on the following weekend will see 91 senior teams and 33 junior teams take part in the State Rural Senior and Junior Championships and the State Urban Senior Championship, competing across both urban and rural tracks in a celebration and showcase of CFA and championships.

On the evening of Saturday 29th March the spectacular Torchlight Procession will be held, this year through the streets of Mooroopna, in an impressive display of CFA to the community.

Participating are not only brigades competing in the Urban Senior Championship, but also teams from the Rural Championship and some non-competing brigades.

To ensure the successful conduct of the Championships, more than 200 VFBV Judges and Officials volunteer their time and expertise over each weekend to ensure that the State Championships maintain the high standard developed over many years. VFBV thanks all these members for their commitment and encourages any new members interested in nominating as a Judge to contact VFBV at championships@vfbv.com.au

Across the two weekends of the Championships there will also be displays from a range of CFA departments as well as a number of different appliances on display– all CFA members including families are welcome to attend even if you aren't competing in the Championships.

More information for competing brigades for both the Rural and Urban Championships can be found on the VFBV website www.vfbv.com.au