

# 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

Open for Consultation Dashboard	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbvDashboard">https://tinyurl.com/vfbvDashboard</a>
2025 Drought Relief Resources	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup51">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup51</a>
Emergency Services Tax Forecast Funding	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup50">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup50</a>

## VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

This month's enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. Annual Vol Survey Now Open	Please table and note
2. Editorial: Getting Involved	Please table and note
3. State Firefighter Championships	Please table at your next meeting and pin to your noticeboard
4. Editorial: Springing Into Summer	Please table and note
5. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting and pin to your noticeboard



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

# 2025/26 Annual Survey



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

Our annual survey gives you the opportunity to provide feedback confidentially, but in a form that allows us to use your feedback to effect real change.

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.

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





**EDITORIAL**

# GETTING INVOLVED

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

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

At October's State Council meeting, delegates reaffirmed our long-standing approach to advertise for expressions of interest to our Joint Committee's and approved the opening of this year's expression of interest process.

The embracing of the broader membership through our peak consultation forums is one of the key features of VFBV. I am most proud and ensures our consultative arrangements are broad and consultative and not just an echo chamber or an endless self-affirming feedback loop.

For those who may be unaware, CFA and VFBV have established eight joint committee's that link CFA's key organisational units to VFBV and our members which facilitates CFA to meet its obligations set out in Section 6 of the Country Fire Authority Act.

Our joint committee processes embody the commitment agreed and enshrined through the Volunteer Charter, where we have committed ourselves to use and apply the Charter in the spirit of mutual respect and goodwill and to work together in that spirit to resolve any disputes which may arise between CFA and volunteers by reference to the key principles set down in it.

And while the third signatory to the Charter is still missing in action (government) with the closure of the sectors only volunteer consultative forum, CFA and VFBV have agreed to ensure we each live up to our commitments and obligations and continue to strengthen our relationship.

The scope of the CFA/ VFBV Joint Committees is to ensure genuine volunteer participation, advice and involvement early in the decision-making process on all decisions intended to be made by CFA that impact or have the potential to affect volunteers.

They are a key mechanism for CFA to discharge its statutory obligation to consult with the elected representatives of volunteers on all matters which may impact upon them including proposed policy, legislation and the adequacy of resources to enable volunteers to deliver CFA services.

In late 2021 - CFA and VFBV entered high level discussions about how we could strengthen our consultative processes, and uplift accountability, transparency and collaboration. The intent was to better align our consultative structures

with the IAP2 spectrum of public participation and increase our participation goals to the higher end of the spectrum towards the involve and collaborate tiers.

This involved a considerable restructure and an affirmation that in order to overcome the historical issues of CFA departments often working in separate silos; that each of our committees would remain subject matter based, and the terms of reference would enshrine an obligation on CFA to ensure appropriate subject matter expertise and authorising environment through the provision of executive level chairs.

This restructure breathed new life into our joint committees and went a long way to restoring our confidence that the CFA executive was serious about pivoting to a more volunteer centred workforce and living up to its consultative obligations.

As I reported at last months AGM, our committees are the engine room of our consultative structures, and on reflecting on the previous twelve months - they collectively met 32 times throughout the year, which is a conservative figure as we have not included working parties. Our committees involved more than 85 volunteer delegates across the state, with every district and region represented, and accounted for more than 10,000+ volunteer hours freely given to working with CFA to improve things and make things better.

And to put the massive year we have had in perspective, over the past 12 months VFBV has consulted and reviewed 24 revised standard operating procedures, one new CFA policy, overseen the remaking of the CFA regulations, facilitated 2,115 volunteers to complete our annual volunteer survey, and gathered and considered more than 4,300 items of individual feedback.

Our joint committees progressed over 100 individual issues throughout the year, many out of sight and out of mind, but collectively amounting to significant progress on topics raised by brigades through our statewide District Council networks. Eighty-eight of these topics are covered in our annual report.

On my dark days I despair how long some things seem to take to progress, until I remind myself that CFA has not been master of its own destiny for a very long time now. Many of the improvements require government support



through investment or resources, and the diverse makeup of our 1,200+ brigades present a challenging environment to find solutions that suit every community.

And it's not all smooth sailing. There are still topics where we find ourselves at loggerheads with CFA, but one of the strengths of our relationship and shared history is that we continue to work through these issues with each trying to understand the perspective of the other.

Overall - a massive year all up, and one where volunteer unity also reached new levels with our highest rate of brigade support in our 140-year history – proving that there is more that unites us than divides us. And while we can't possibly please every single person every single time, this is more a reflection that sometimes we are simply unable to find consensus among volunteers due to the broad diversity of our brigades and number of individuals. But I think it speaks volumes that brigades are able to put these differences aside and appreciate that we are stronger together – even when we do disagree.

In total, a record 1,239 brigades and groups affiliated last year representing in excess of 95% of all brigades sending a strong message to government and the sector that volunteers will always back volunteers.

Strong advocacy to government also reached a new peak, with VFBV being required to advocate on numerous issues such as the expansion of presumptive cancer legislation following our successful work that saw Victoria's scheme expanded to include three female reproductive cancers. And while good progress, we have been required to continue our fight for fair treatment for volunteers suffering mental injury with our continuing work to see PTSD added to the presumptive scheme similar to other states across Australia.

Victorian firefighters should not be any less protected than other firefighters across the country, and sadly under current arrangements they are. Our National Body, the Council for Australian Volunteer Fire Associations also continues to advocate to the federal government, asking them to take a leadership role in bringing the list of cancers covered by the State's disparate schemes together. Cancer does not discriminate so why should our legislation. But the sad reality is depending on where you are in Australia, what you are covered for, for how long and how you access it are all very, very different.

Other topics requiring a large amount of effort has been our continued advocacy on the deteriorating CFA budget and ageing CFA fleet; the controversial emergency services tax and volunteer rebate scheme; the ministerial determination on the Fire District Review Panel's recommendations; the Fire Services Implementation monitors annual workplan and monitoring; the EMV volunteer engagement review; the CFA regulation 10 year sunseting review; and volunteer treatment under the Fiskville redress scheme.

And while consultation requires patience and endless good will, it is also some of the most rewarding work we do. Many of the things and threats we are able to influence never see the light of day, as we are committed to working with CFA in a spirit of solving our differences quietly. It is a relationship built on respect and trust and has stood the test of time.

But every now and then, when our consultative processes have been exhausted, we are left with no choice but to expand our advocacy broader or to more public facing comms. Our commitment to our members is to exhaust all other options first, but if we are simply unable to achieve some kind of consensus with CFA, then we reserve the right to take the matter further.

You have seen this over the last 12 months in our work on volunteer compensation in particular with CFA having now returned to the table and discussing improvements in line with the concerns we raised last year. I will have more to say about this as discussions progress, but is a wonderful example of our persistence on a matter close to volunteer hearts. In many respects members rarely think about what's in place should they become injured while conducting CFA activities, so it is very much up to VFBV to be proactive to ensure if you do find yourself in need, the systems and processes are fair, and best support you returning to a full life post injury and recovery.

To finish up where I started, I would urge members to consider whether they have the desire to contribute to our joint committee processes for the year ahead. District Councils have been encouraged to have nominations returned to them by Monday 17th November 2025, to allow time for the District Council prioritisation process prior to submission to the VFBV Executive Officer by Monday 24th November 2025.

If you have an interest, I would urge you to discuss with your local State Councillors, VFBV Support Officer or District Council Executive member. You can also find out more via the VFBV website.



## EDITORIAL

# SPRINGING INTO SUMMER

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

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

Early last month, AFAC and the Fire Chief's released the Seasonal Outlook for spring. For those who have been around for a little while, the telltale signs of indicators trending upward all point towards the potential for a busier than usual fire season. As one of the most fire prone places in the world, unsurprisingly Victoria receives strong emphasis in this year's outlook.

The outlook makes clear that Victoria has recorded the lowest-on-record 18-month rainfall deficits. These have persisted across the west of the state and extend across west central and south-west Gippsland. The drought conditions that farmers have been reporting on over the last 18 months are evidenced by the underlying soil moisture levels. The outlook also acknowledges that these areas have recorded a significant accumulation of dead plant material that have the potential to heighten bushfire activity further in the season.

And while recent rains may be sending mixed signals to the general public, the real danger is starkly outlined in the report. While acknowledging heavy falls across the south-west, central, eastern and north-east ranges, the evidence shows that while the rainfall has dampened the top layer of soil, the lower-level soil remains historically dry, with uncertainty in how long the top layer of soil will remain damp.

Despite the recent rainfall, and early above average spring rainfall estimates - the outlook cautions that this underlying dryness could rebound very quickly, and areas with arid vegetation types may dry out quicker during warmer and windy weather. It also cautions that while the recent rainfall will generate green growth in paddocks through spring, this will conceal the underlying dryness.

It is this mixed signal environment that highlights the importance of CFA's shared responsibility model. The beauty and wisdom of CFA's community placed volunteer brigade model is uniquely designed to cater to these situations and is the key reason VFBV actions and activities will never risk damaging the well-earned volunteer reputation that our community safety relies upon.

Brigades are advised to lean into CFA's community education and safety campaigns to make it clear that this season will require preparation. Educating the community on positive actions they can take to prepare their homes and properties for the increased risk of fire that is likely to eventuate late spring will be crucial.

The trust and respect the community places in CFA volunteers provides a unique opportunity to lead these community conversations. Our Joint CFA/VFBV Community Safety Committee have also worked hard over the preceding year to encourage and work with CFA to refresh and contemporise the public facing materials.

Brigades can also seek advice from their local Community Safety Managers located in District/Regional offices, for support in engaging with the community at the local level. As well as information on core programs, including material for connecting with new residents or how to host an engaging community display, it may also be an opportunity to connect residents with a community fireguard session, home bushfire planning resources or the property advice visit service. These and other resources can all be accessed from the Community Engagement Content portal on Members Online or through your BASO or local Community Engagement Coordinator (CEC).

And while it may be too late to be actively involved this season, members stepping away from frontline operational roles are exceptionally well suited to becoming volunteer presenters or undertaking the training to become home visit advisors. And there is no better time of year to be learning and being mentored as these programs start to roll out. There are many pathways available for non-operational or those transitioning out of operations to support community safety and education. Bringing one's operational experience and background make you a very credible presenter, so don't underestimate this pathway and the ability to influence change. So, if you have taken a step back from a suppression role, consider how you might be able to support the prevention side of our business.

### ANNUAL BURNOVER DRILLS

It is that time of year that members are all encouraged to complete their annual skills maintenance in preparation for the fire danger period ahead. The burn over drill is an annual requirement, while refreshing your tree hazard awareness training is required to be redone every three years. While the burn over drill is best done in person, the tree hazard awareness training can be completed online, or via a brigade face to face session should you prefer.

And while some members often talk to me about why they think it is unnecessary to need to redo the burn over drill each and every year, for those of us who are involved in the after-



math of a serious firefighter injury or death and speaking with your loved ones, all I can do is impress on you the importance of undertaking this core refresher each year.

Even if you have many many years of experience, if nothing else - your involvement in the drill allows other members to benefit from your experience, and who knows – you just might pick up something during the refresher that you may have missed or forgotten.

At the risk of contradicting myself, there is a potential risk that the annual refreshers encourage complacency. Just because you know how to do the drill, are you equally prepared to ensure you and your crew are never put into a situation that may require it in the first place?

These discussions are best done at the same time as your annual drills as they ensure we don't just refresh the how but gain a better understanding of the why.

Our Joint Operations Committees have been working with CFA on refreshing case studies gleaned from real after-action reviews to present real stories that can help you step into the mindset of a crew leader and learn from those who have come before us. These are available through CFA's lessons management section of Members Online, and are often featured in CFA's pre-season updates, so keep an eye out for them.

In the lessons management section, you can also find some case studies of previous tanker burn overs. To emphasise my point, the title publication "Last Resort Tanker Survival Checklist" is a poignant reminder that performing a burn over on a tanker should be a last resort, and we are putting a lot of trust in the equipment and safety systems on what for many are very old trucks. As the old idiom teaches us - you are safest not to find yourself in that situation in the first place. But should you do so, doing the annual refresher will ensure it becomes muscle memory and not something you will need to struggle to remember in what is a high-risk - high stress environment. It also allows you to evaluate how your peers and fellow members may react during these events.

#### **ANNUAL VOL SURVEY**

As teased last month, our annual VFBV vol survey is launching this month and you once again have the opportunity to provide feedback on what's working and what's not. A huge shout out and thank-you to each of the 2,115 volunteers that completed the 2024/25 survey.

Your continued involvement in our annual survey adds significant credibility to the results and allows us to keep advocating for improvements on your behalf. It also keeps a

spotlight on the critical areas you tell us are your priorities. And because its arm's length from CFA, we don't have CFA marking their own homework, which provides confidence to volunteers that the issues they are raising are being prosecuted without fear or favour and are being objectively pursued through our networks.

Even if you are raising the same things you have observed for many years in a row, annual involvement ensures these issues are always contemporised, and no one can hide behind the excuse that it's an old issue and doesn't exist anymore. The year-on-year trends are also a critical performance measure that assists CFA determine if the things that have been done to improve an area have hit the ground yet or not.

As a result of the continued consistent dissatisfaction expressed through the survey each year in the training category, we will be working closely with VFBV District Councils to provide strengthened relationships between the Regional and District training teams and brigades. As discussed last month, a deep dive into the qualitative comments provided through the survey last year made it clear that training delivery issues remain a significant flash point. Issues such as when courses are scheduled, where they are scheduled, how much notice is provided, and administrative issues such as how cancellations and waiting lists are handled, as well as if there are enough scheduled courses to meet demand are consistently raised as priorities.

And given the majority of training delivery is scheduled and managed at the local District level, there is an increased opportunity for District Council's to play an active role in working with brigades and district officers to strongly influence improvement that will directly benefit the local patch.

Simultaneous to this local work, VFBV State Committees are also committed to pursuing substantive changes and improvements to CFA's LMS and the other related training systems that we all rely on to register, track and report on training needs and outcomes. VFBV will continue to encourage CFA to bid for critical funding that will allow these systems to be fit for purpose and suit an organisation the size of CFA.

These are just two examples of how the survey results directly lead to work and initiatives to address the key issues you raise as priorities.

Please visit [vfbv.com.au/cfa](http://vfbv.com.au/cfa) to access the 2025/26 survey, or phone the office via (03) 9886 1141 to request a paper copy be mailed out to you. QR codes are also available from VFBV State Councillors or Support Officers, or via Fire Wise or the website.



## STATE FIREFIGHTER CHAMPIONSHIPS 2026 TEAM ENTRIES NOW OPEN

Stawell will be the host for the 2026 CFA/VFBV State Firefighter Championships. It will be the first time the State Championships have been held in Stawell since 2006. Across the two weekends of competition there will be displays of teamwork, camaraderie and friendly competition between brigades from across the state.

State Urban Junior Championship	21 and 22 March 2026
State Urban Senior Championship	28 and 29 March 2026
State Rural Senior Championship	28 March 2026
State Rural Junior Championship	29 March 2026

To register your team entry or for judge and official nominations please visit <https://tinyurl.com/2026-entry> or scan the QR code below.

**Entries will close on Sunday 15th February 2026.**

Any questions about the Championships or want more information?  
Please contact [championships@vfbv.com.au](mailto:championships@vfbv.com.au) or call the VFBV office on (03) 9886 1141.



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

### FIRE WEATHER DISTRICT REVIEW

Victoria is divided into 9 Fire Weather Districts (Mallee, Wimmera, South West, Northern Country, North Central, Central, North East, West and South Gippsland and East Gippsland). These Districts are the primary geographical areas used to communicate fire danger ratings and total fire ban information to the community. The current district boundaries have been in place since 2010 and align with Bureau of Meteorology forecast areas and with local government areas where possible.

CFA, along with partner agencies, are now undertaking a review into the Fire Weather Districts. This review will determine whether boundaries are still fit for purpose and whether they provide accurate information for people to make relevant decisions relating to risk mitigation and fire preparedness. Feedback is open until June 2026.

Many CFA members will be aware that daily conditions can vary greatly from one part of a District to another and often the official Fire Danger Rating for a District is different from what conditions are experienced locally.

The review uses two decades of data (2000–2020) on weather, terrain, fuel, and fire history to better understand what Victoria's fire climate zones are. Key variables include temperature, wind, drought factor and the McArthur Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI). Population, industry and agriculture have also been taken into consideration.

Initial research has shown that it is not uncommon for there to be a local government area within a Fire Weather District that has a different Fire Danger Rating to the official rating issued for that day. By increasing the number of Fire Weather Districts in the state to 12 or more would reduce this from occurring significantly. Any changes to the Fire Weather Districts would require a statewide public education campaign from all of Victoria's fire agencies to educate community members about the changes before they come into effect as well as an update to all current relevant fire safety education materials. Members can learn more and participate by visiting [www.cfa.vic.gov.au/fireweather-review](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/fireweather-review)

### PROPERTY ADVICE VISIT SERVICE

The Property Advice Visit Service (PAVS) is a program utilised by many brigades to help community members to understand their fire risk and prepare their properties for fire. It encourages people to think ahead and to create a plan for what they will do to minimise the risk posed to them from fire. Data from 3,700 PAVS visits, conducted between 2023 and 2025, are being analysed to help understand how much of a difference the PAVS program is making. This can be used to help guide future program developments. Until now there has been little collective study of what residents intend to do before a fire occurs or if their property is threatened by fire or what information source people are aware of and access when required. When completed this research will allow brigades delivering PAVS to better understand what the likely needs of their community members are and tailor their PAVS visits to have the longest lasting impact which leads to behavioural change.

### AFDRS RESEARCH

CFA, in partnership with the University of Melbourne, has begun research into people's understanding of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS). The AFDRS was introduced in 2022 to be a consistent rating system across all Australian states and territories. Prior to this each jurisdiction had its own way of displaying Fire Danger Ratings.

The research focuses on three Victorian communities and aims to better understand people's experience of the new system and challenges. It will aid fire agencies to better communicate Fire Danger Ratings and fire risk to members of the general public. Members can learn more about this project by visiting [www.cfa.vic.gov.au/fireratingresearch](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/fireratingresearch)

December 2025

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### STATION BUILD PROGRAM PROGRESS

CFA has announced construction at the Newborough fire station is progressing well, with the external cladding completed and significant progress made on the interior work. In-ground services are developing smoothly at Wyndham Vale, Metcalfe and Serpentine. The tender documentation for The Basin project has been finalised. Additionally, work continues on the Heathcote and Rochester Emergency Services Hub projects as they progress through town planning and detailed design, with initial reviews now completed.

In other areas, the Base Capital Station Modification Program is moving forward, with preparations underway for tender documentation for eight stations. Land and Building Services has the concept designs for 12 stations that have been approved, allowing them to move on to the schematic design and town planning stages. L&BS are also finalising the concept designs for the remaining seven stations in consultation with volunteer stakeholders. Furthermore, the Gender Diversity Program has begun construction for internal modifications at one station, and tenders have already closed for five more stations. CFA is in the process of preparing documentation for an additional five stations, which will be released soon.

### SAFETY COMPLIANCE UPDATE (LOW VOLTAGE FUSE REMOVAL AND SAFE WORK AT HEIGHTS)

All SWAH training props for West Sale, Longerenong and Penshurst are complete and operational. Upgrades at Huntly have begun and are expected to be finished shortly. Seven LVFR training trailers have been completed and delivered to CFA, with an additional five currently in progress. A deployment plan and location are being discussed with OD&T and MLDs to optimise access. It is anticipated that the booking process will follow existing regional and district procedures. Alternative energy warning tape has been delivered to the districts, along with a suggested plan for its allocation to primary appliances. The responsibility for LVFR skills acquisition has been assigned to the regions and districts for delivery.

### GAS FLARE OFF EQUIPMENT

After sustained advocacy by delegates, we are pleased to advise that skills acquisition courses are set to resume following the release of a new training package after an extended hiatus. A review of the equipment in use across the state is currently being conducted to seek VESEP funding aimed at modernising and standardising this equipment. A working group is being formed, consisting of representatives from each flare-off brigade, as well as a district representative. Urban Operations and Specialist Response will jointly manage this initiative.

### ULT CREW PROTECTION RETROFIT

A total of 216 vehicles were scheduled for mass fit-up, and all 103 Toyota Land Cruisers have now been completed. The fit-up of all Nissan Patrols is also finished. The fit-up of the first Ford Ranger has begun, and the confirmation of designs will be completed before mass fit-ups start. Sourcing the required parts and ensuring a secure supply are ongoing processes. All scheduled ULTs are expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Delegates have raised brigade concerns about issues with quality control of the program. CFA has acknowledged existing issues related to quality and workmanship and has advised they have taken feedback on these concerns seriously. They have further advised they are currently addressing these quality issues. Additionally, the need for a centralised register for reporting issues and repairs has been identified. The Committee emphasised the importance of this register and agreed on the necessity of having a designated contact person for volunteers to reach out to with questions or concerns regarding quality assurance. Districts should be shortly informed on how to guide volunteers to the appropriate resources.

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

### RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

After sustained VFBV advocacy on behalf of members, including the issues involving the Volunteer Recruitment Hub, CFA has completed its external review of how the organisation recruits and inducts community members into the organisation. Key groups engaged during the review include VFBV, the Young Adult Advisory Committee, brigades, staff, regional leadership teams, more than 600 survey responses and 20, 1 on 1 volunteer interviews conducted. To capture the thoughts of members and community members who have tried to join CFA over the last 12 to 24 months, two surveys were conducted to better understand the reasons for which some may have withdrawn from the system, and what barriers others encountered along the way. Recent and additional upgrades to the VRH are providing better data collection to tease out where in the process members may be held up, and CFA has reported a healthy drop in the amount of time applicants are kept waiting. The public report has been released by CFA, and published on CFA Members Online.

### RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

Members are encouraged to make use of the newly launched Honours and Awards Search & Filter Dashboard, a tool designed to assist brigades and individuals in identifying the most appropriate award for various forms of service and contribution. This dashboard aims to increase accessibility and improve the nominations process by helping members navigate eligibility criteria and the broader CFA awards framework. The committee is continuing work to enhance the overall CFA Honours and Awards Program. An ongoing action item is for the expansion and review of CFA's awards to increase inclusivity and eligibility, with further work continuing through the Honours and Awards Committee. Updates on how eligibility criteria are applied are still in progress, and the committee has left this action open for future reporting.

The committee has also had broader discussions about recognising former members, including how other organisations track former personnel to acknowledge their passing. While not part of the formal awards program, this discussion reflects the committee's wider commitment to ensuring all volunteer contributions across a member's lifetime can be respectfully recognised. The new dashboard can be accessed from: Honours and Awards | CFA Members Online

### CONTEMPORARY VOLUNTEER MEMBERSHIP MODEL (CVMM)

The Contemporary Volunteer Membership Model (CVMM) project is progressing through its formal governance processes, with draft recommendations now before the Steering Committee and further input being provided by the Project Reference Group (PRG). These bodies include broad representation from volunteers and staff across the CFA, including the Women's Advisory Committee, Young Adults Advisory Committee, VFBV, and regional members, ensuring wide consultation and diverse perspectives.

Current work focuses on developing an options paper and a high-level implementation approach to ensure the project establishes strong foundations for future changes. The committee discussed several core components of the proposed model, including police checks, Working With Children Checks (WWCCs), member transfer procedures, and medical checks. These areas are being reviewed to improve consistency, compliance, and the overall volunteer experience while reducing unnecessary administrative burden on brigades. The CVMM aims to present to members options that will improve modernise and simplify how volunteers enter, move through, and participate in CFA, while ensuring that processes remain safe, inclusive, and supportive.

The options paper will be completely open for volunteers and brigades to comment on and review, and will be promoted widely as soon as it is released. No decisions will be made on any of the options until after all the feedback has been considered. Keep an eye out for this important work.

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### SPECIALIST CAPABILITY PLANS

CFA has advised delegates that they are well on the way to developing a long term capability plan which incorporates data from a myriad of sources including the Baseline Capability Profiling App (BCPA) and other organisational areas to ensure that the organisation is developing in the ways that meets the changing community requirements, incorporating the organisations long term vision and strategy as a part of the yearly planning cycle. The Baseline Capability Profiling Application (BCPA) allows CFA to better understand its member base, skills profile, turnout data and assets, in order to use this data for advanced capability planning. With this year's fire season forecast to be challenging the Capability plan has enormous potential to assist regions, districts, groups and brigades to ensure they plan for the right training, equipment and adequate resources to meet the challenges ahead. It is hoped this increased evidence base will also show government the need to increase resourcing and provide CFA with a more sustainable base budget.

### EMR CHANGES

VFBV delegates were updated on the changes to Emergency Medical Response (EMR) for volunteer brigades and have insisted that all affected brigades are consulted prior to final decisions being made. Members may remember that EMR was first introduced back in 2007 in partnerships with Ambulance Victoria where trained CFA, EMR volunteers respond to 'Priority 0' medical emergencies at the same time as Ambulance Victoria paramedics to improve the chances of patient survival. With the rapid expansion of the very successful Fire Medical Response (FMR) program, which is seen as more sustainable, and has been modified to better support Ambulance Victoria integration, CFA in consultation with the affected brigades, has agreed to cease the operation of EMR within CFA. There were only six brigades that continued to respond to EMR incidents after Fire Service Reform in 2020 and three of those have agreed to transfer to fully operational FMR response brigades while the remaining three co-located brigades' members have agreed to no longer respond with their career counterparts under the old EMR program. Members at all affected brigades will continue to maintain their training if they wish and some participants are keen to be involved in training other FMR members with CFA and AV are ready to assist in the transition.

### PPE&C COMMITTEE

After some time in recession, VFBV delegates were pleased to confirm with CFA that the Personal Protective Equipment and Clothing Committee (PPE&C) has resumed meeting. The PPE&C committee oversee any changes, updates or changes to PPE&C that the organisation is facing. The list of agenda items is lengthy due to the length of time between meetings and the many changes and exciting upgrades to members protective clothing and equipment are expected to be consulted on closely over the coming months. Some of these changes to PPE&C has been communicated through various forums, with the resumption of a regular meeting schedule hoped to improve the timeliness of future updates as we continue to inform the membership of upcoming changes.

### SUMMER PREPAREDNESS

After CFA's successful 'GET FIRE READY' campaign - brigades are now focussed on preparedness for the upcoming fire season, while compliance with the Chief Officer's three mandatory requirements have been communicated to all brigades. It is the expectation that prior to the commencement of the Fire Danger Period, all operational members intending to respond will have currency in the three mandatory requirements, and for this to be recorded in the Learning Hub. The Regional teams are communicating to brigades and groups to continue to update communication plans to prepare for a busy summer. Pre-season briefings have been occurring across the state at a District, group and, in some instances, brigade level. IMT preparedness including appliance and strike team readiness as well as messaging around communities being prepared remains a critical focus for everyone. The most important message for everyone is to remain aware, familiarise yourself with local conditions and ensure every member returns home safe.

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### POCKETBOOK UPDATES

Since the release of the pocketbook app in April 2025 members have continued to provide positive and constructive suggestions and additions to the pocketbook team to enhance the first version released. CFA has committed to continuing to develop the app over time. As the Mobile Data Capability Project rolls out tablets to Pumpers and other vehicles the Pocketbook app has been placed on the home screen, allowing members to access SOPs, Health and Safety information, brigade management topics and comms information from the tablet in the truck. Other key features include operational topics, calculators and converters, member contact information and importantly the ability to access these features even when offline and there is no internet connectivity. If you would like to download the app on your phone or tablet, or simply read about the features - or FAQs visit Members online.

### LESSONS LEARNED

As we head into another fire season, members often ask what we have learnt from previous seasons and what changes will be made to make member experiences safer and ensure continuous improvement. There have been many After Action Reviews completed across the whole state after what was a long and challenging 2024/25 season yet volunteers question what is changing, as there has been little feedback received by the hundreds of members who attended group feedback sessions, district meetings and regional discussions or AARs. CFA's online Lessons Management Centre continues to develop new material to help members understand and learn from previous incidents through case studies, AARs and the first on scene articles, however members have commented that little is getting back to the individuals or groups that provide valuable insights into events. CFA is developing the online Lessons Platform that will allow members to digitally submit observations from incidents and AARs and delegates are seeking for the system to provide a link back to the member who contributes so that there is a record of their feedback being received or acknowledged. We will continue to monitor the progress of the Lessons Platform as it develops.

Delegates will also continue to pursue improvements that allow members to see how their constructive feedback has been used and acted on, which in turn should improve members confidence of participating in AARs.

### CFA FIRE RECONSTRUCTIONS

CFA's Senior Research Officer attended the meeting at the request of members who were interested in understanding what happens across the sector regarding fire reconstructions and the valuable lessons learned from past events. CFA, in collaboration with other agencies including DECCA, have been researching fires through reconstruction since the early 1960's and fires are identified as suitable for reconstruction based on the amount of scientific information and data that is collected. This information is then used to determine the spread of growth of a fire, how it spotted and what other major issues occurred through the duration of the fire.

The meeting discussed at length the Little Dessert and Yarram Gap fires through an overview of the reconstructions and from a scientific context how they developed. Members questioned whether there are any learnings or suggested changes to how the fire ground resourcing and operations are undertaken and any recommendations to travel times, water resourcing and crew resourcing had been identified from these reconstructions. In delegates minds – it's one thing to reconstruct and collected data, but the real opportunity is to use that data to inform future improvements to fireground operations.

The research is still in its early days, and behaviour models and fire simulators will continue to be developed. It is worth noting that from an international perspective CFA is considered to be one of the leaders in fire behaviour science and research across the country.

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

### PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS SURVEY

The committee discussed CFA's work to address psychosocial hazards within the organisation, part of which includes a survey, available to all CFA members. This survey is intended to identify areas for improvement, shape future policies and programs informed by volunteer input and create a healthier and safer CFA.

CFA partnered with Converge, their Member Assistance Program provider, to deliver the survey. The survey was confidential and did not ask for a name or any identifying information. It included 28 questions (two questions per hazard) and took about five to 10 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, volunteers were also asked whether they wished to partake in focus groups to discuss their experiences further. This process was entirely voluntary.

A number of committee delegates completed the survey and found it to be relevant and valuable and were encouraged by this important work. VFBV will continue to monitor the survey response and outcomes in the upcoming Joint Committee meetings.

### SCHEDULE 1A WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECKS (WWCC)

The committee discussed CFA's communication strategy to volunteers who are required to obtain a WWCC, particularly those who fall under Schedule 1A (listed below): -

- Junior Leaders and Coaches
- Presenters of child-focused community safety programs (Fire Safe Kids and similar)
- Members playing the role of Captain Koala and Santa
- Any other person undertaking child-related work as defined by the Worker Screening Act 2020

Communications are currently being sent to any volunteers potentially performing these roles who have not yet obtained a WWCC via email and to their postal address. Delegates encouraged CFA to expand their methods of engagement with volunteers to include notifying the brigade so local follow-up can occur. CFA has agreed. It is VFBV's belief that many volunteers possibly hold a current WWCC but have not yet informed CFA that they have registered their WWCC with another organisation. It is also possible they may require assistance uploading their WWCC. CFA has created a direct email address for WWCC support via [wwcc@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:wwcc@cfa.vic.gov.au) and delegates were assured that CFA will continue to reach out to these volunteers and support and assist them to comply.

### COMPLAINTS PROCESS TRAINING

In response to the launch of the new CFA Regulations, which occurred on 31 July, and following sustained advocacy by VFBV for an uplift on CFA discipline processes, CFA have engaged an external provider to look at training requirements in the 'end to end' discipline process under the new regulations, including Restriction of Duties/Suspension, Referring Officer training and Hearing Officer training.

Both CFA and VFBV agree on the need for Referring Officers and Hearing Officers to be well equipped in their knowledge, to perform these extremely onerous and important roles. VFBV appreciate the level of commitment by those ACFOs and DCOs to the task, and support and encourage ongoing development and training, to ensure the highest level of expertise is provided to volunteers and brigades who find themselves traversing the CFA Complaint/Hearing Process.

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

### MAJOR PROJECT UPDATES

**Radio Replacement Program:** This project is nearing completion with 9,500 portables distributed to both Brigades and Groups. Over 3,300 vehicles are now fitted with Motorola radios and with only five districts remaining for fitting, this project was due to be completed by end of September. There is a small amount of catch up required for local base installations and bag radio delivery as focus initially was based on west of the state.

**Mobile Data Capability Project:** 575 vehicles have had a dock installed. For vehicles that have yet to have their Tait mobile radio removed, the docks and new radio will be installed at the same time.

**Satellite Services:** All FOV/MCV's will receive Satellite Services. Installation will occur as part of the Motorola radio replacement installation.

**Cross-Border Interoperability POC:** An exciting piece of work is currently underway with testing agreed by NSW and South Australia. The purpose for this is to ensure that there is seamless communication and interoperability across Victoria, NSW and SA. EMV are on board with this project and providing additional support and feedback.

**Pager Replacement:** 16 out of 21 Districts have completed the pager replacement process.

As the pager replacement process is like for like – members need to hand over their old one to receive a new one. Currently only 75% have been returned. Once all Districts are completed, CFA will then know how many have not been returned and the actual cost to CFA to cover the unreturned pagers. This may be quite costly and certainly not budgeted for as each pager is approximately \$500.00, so members are reminded if they have a pager that is sitting in a draw at home or on the bench in the station that is not being used please contact your District office and organise a replacement or return item.

### DIGITAL STORE UPDATE

Whilst ironing out a few bugs in the system, members have embraced the use of the digital store, and the expectation is that this will continue to grow.

Version 1 of a CFA Digital Store is due for an upgrade imminently; with additional functions and user experience enhancements to occur over the course of 2026. Member feedback and suggestions can be made at [digitalstore@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:digitalstore@cfa.vic.gov.au)

### 2026 AND BEYOND

What's next for the VFBV CFA Technology and Innovation Consultative Committee?

Due to the number of legacy programs underway delegates have been very absorbed on technology projects with innovation and future looking projects taking a backseat. Radio replacement, pager replacement and tablets to name just a few, delegates are now really keen to seek more discussion and action regarding issues and actions for future innovation and the effect it can have on volunteers and CFA.

Discussion has moved onto innovation ideas such as -

- How could AI assist members? Perhaps AI can take some of the administrative burden away from members.
- Tankers of the future – What features will make the roles firefighters undertake safer, easier and more effective?

Members are encouraged to reach out to a committee member to add your ideas to the mix for future discussion.

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

### DELVING DEEPER INTO TRAINING ISSUES

The responsibility for the delivery of training is spread across the 5 individual Regions. Each Region has their own Manager Learning Development (MLD) who is responsible for the scheduling and delivery of training within the Region and reports to the DCO of the Region. There is also one State MLD who reports directly to the DCO of Training and is responsible for the delivery of Statewide courses such as Driver Training and First Aid.

In an attempt to understand the issues impacting training, delegates on the training committee invited all six MLDs to the most recent Committee Meeting. This meeting gave members the opportunity to directly raise issues that have been brought to their attention by volunteers in their Districts and to hear from the MLDs as to what they see as the constraints to delivering training in their Region. The discussions covered many different aspects of training delivery within Regions and Districts but some consistent themes that appeared to be having the biggest impacts on the experience of members became apparent:

- Flow of information breaking down between CFA HQ Training and the Training teams, Catchment Teams and Brigades in the Districts.
- Inconsistencies in needs analysis, scheduling, administration and delivery of training across the five Regions and even across Districts within a Region.
- Insufficient administrative resources within District Training teams to provide the backend support to deliver more training courses
- Turnover and availability of paid Instructors and the need for better engagement with Volunteer Instructors.
- Engaging with Brigades and Groups to determine training needs, scheduling and delivery methods

Delegates will continue to work with CFA to mitigate the impact on members ability to get the training that they want and need. Brigades and members who are experiencing problems getting the training they require or have feedback on courses can log their feedback via <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/training/complaints-and-feedback/training-matters-complaints-and-feedback-hub> or search Training Complaints in the Members Online portal.

### LMS UPDATE

CFA's upgrade of the Learning Management System (LMS) last year has been plagued with problems with many members telling us they are experiencing significant issues accessing training, member records and Brigade reports. These disruptions have taken months of hard work to resolve and caused understandable frustration for members.

In some good news, CFA have advised that most of the issues have now been addressed and CFA is moving on to implementing planned enhancements to the system. Improvements include better reporting functionality for Brigades and Districts and the ability to match course outcomes with specific skills. Alongside the enhancements, CFA has embarked on a project to examine options for what the future of the LMS will look like. Whatever the best solution turns out to be, the JTC Members will be pushing for volunteers needs to be one of the key inputs to the decision. While this work is a step in a good direction, any replacement of the current LMS is likely to be a long term project taking three to five years.



**VFBV** | VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

## 2025/26 SURVEY OPEN

**This Year's VFBV Vol Survey is now open.**

**Be part of improving CFA and help us  
make a difference.**

**Your views are important - we want to  
hear from you, please have your say.**

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

