


# 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>
2026 Bushfire Recovery Resources	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup53">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup53</a>
Parliamentary Inquiry into 2026 Fires	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup54">https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup54</a>

## VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

This month's enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. 2025/26 Vol Survey Last Chance	Please table at your next meeting and pin to your noticeboard
2. Editorial: Complimentary, yet not Identical	Please table and note
3. Editorial: Make it Count	Please table and note
4. 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
6. Donations for Volunteer Support & Recovery	Please table at your next meeting and pin to your noticeboard



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

# 2025/26 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>





**EDITORIAL**

# **Complimentary, yet not identical effort**

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' February 2026 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

I wish to start this month by reiterating my words of thanks that was published on the 14 January, and is reproduced on page 3 of this month's *Fire Wise*. On behalf of the whole VFBV family we continue to acknowledge the absolutely incredible work that has been done, and continues to be done, by CFA members in fire affected communities across the state.

As at writing, heatwave conditions continue across large parts of the State and are expected to last until the first few days of February. All up, this has been the longest heatwave event in Victoria since 2009.

Highlighting the high and sustained workload our crews are still shouldering, as at January 30 there are currently seven major fires across the state, with more than 435,000ha of land burned.

While numbers are still being compiled, more than 12,000 volunteers have been deployed, not counting the thousands who have remained in area for local coverage, or who have put themselves on standby. These numbers demonstrate CFAs incredible volunteer surge capacity and why it is so important to protect it from further decline.

I also continue to be humbled by the modesty of our members who mourn every loss yet refuse to give up. That inextinguishable community spirit shines even brighter, as members battle what at times are unstoppable beasts of mother nature.

And while the losses are widely reported, I remain frustrated that more is not done across the sector to measure and estimate the incredible saves. With real time mapping and predictive modelling underpinning the majority of our community warning systems, I believe it to be a significant missed opportunity to not recognise and value the incredible combined efforts of our firefighters and other agency personnel. If we can plot polygons on maps based on rate of spread, weather and fuel loads, surely it is not beyond our capability to provide some rough estimates of what was achieved by the incredible work done by our crews working to pull these fires up.

It's important to similarly acknowledge the contribution of members who provide day to day coverage and township

protection of their local areas. These sacrifices allow other crews and members from each brigade to be dispatched far and wide to support incidents afar. Similarly, those who contribute through support roles are all equally important and vital to our mission of saving life and property.

A quick shout out to our wonderful DMOs who have been working tirelessly keeping the fleet operational - no small feat in its current state. The relationships they have established with volunteers through their regular maintenance schedules during the year really pays off during campaign fires, as members have trust in the people they know and have a pre-existing relationship with.

A huge thank-you also to all our delegates and officials who have been working to support affected brigades to access additional support resources. Sadly, as is often the case, the same disasters that affect our communities also affects our own members. Tragically, this season has seen the highest level of CFA volunteers who have lost their own homes from campaign fires since Black Saturday, with more than 20 of our own members' homes lost.

Highlighting the profound commitment of volunteers to their communities, the majority of these members were actually on fire trucks or deployed to the fireground saving other people's property when their own homes were lost.

As a result, the VFBV Welfare Fund and VFBV Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust have been working tirelessly to support members in hardship. Just in January alone, the Trusts have provided more than \$150,000 in grants to members affected, with priority being to those who have lost their primary places of residence.

This has put significant workload onto the Trustees of each Trust, and I want to pass on my heartfelt appreciation to our volunteers who take on these roles, and who's work is often unseen in the background.

I also want to pass on my appreciation and absolute awe of the brigade Captains, officers and members with whom we have been working with to support these members. Each brigade we have worked with has been under immense pressure with simultaneous demands in continuing to fight active fires within their communities, as well as having to

care for those members personally impacted. In each case, far from simply looking after their own, each brigade has been leaning heavily into supporting community wide recovery works, and I cannot articulate the immense pride I feel seeing our very capable brigades and volunteers lead their communities through what are very very difficult days. From catering for community members who have lost everything, to supporting relief centres, providing drinking water, generators, fuel and livestock feed – these efforts are all on top of their active firefighting.

It is these intrinsic community connections and networks that some miss when trying to figure out why CFA brigades have such a high level of trust and connection within their local communities. Our fire brigades are far more than simply a building or shed to store fire trucks. They are the beating heart and soul of the very communities in which they are located. While often underestimated, they are the glue that builds community resilience.

The demand on our Trusts does not come without consequence. Our Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust in particular, is now almost completely depleted. This fund relies on donations to do its vital work and is only activated during large scale emergencies. As such it holds very little reserves and therefore relies on donations following the event. The now spent reserves were only made possible due to the generous corporate donation from the Barlow Impact Group following the 2019/20 bushfires.

And while asking for donations it is not an activity we relish, it is a necessary requirement to support the crucial work we do in supporting CFA volunteers during these kind of events. The article on page 3 of this edition's *Fire Wise* publication outlines some of the previous work of our Trusts.

Brigades, Groups and members of the public may donate via [www.givenow.com.au/volunteersupport](http://www.givenow.com.au/volunteersupport) or for larger donations and to avoid processing fees being deducted from your donation, direct deposit details are available at [www.supportcfavolunteers.com.au](http://www.supportcfavolunteers.com.au)

I also draw members attention to our Bushfire Recovery Resources Fact Sheet that was published in early January and has been updated as information changes.

In our experience, people experiencing hardship are often overwhelmed and do not have time to search, find and navigate the various assistance that is available. Our Fact Sheets try to put all relevant resources into a single document that can either be viewed electronically – or handed to someone who can then assess what they need most. We can post a printed copy by contacting [vfbv@vfbv.com.au](mailto:vfbv@vfbv.com.au) or the office on (03) 9886 1141.

Since our January edition, there has been a significant number of developments across our multi-year campaign for fairer CFA funding and resourcing. The outpouring of community support, awareness and concern for CFA's lack of fair funding was due in large part from deliberate community awareness we have been building over the last few years. We have provided the detailed and trust worthy analysis highlighting issues with CFA's budget, the age of the fleet, and lack of support for CFA more generally including basic volunteer amenity.

Unsurprising, following recent fires there was also a significant convergence of political activity and attention as Government tried to deflect much deserved criticism from its decade's long underinvestment in CFA and ideological attacks.

Be assured that VFBV is undertaking high levels of advocacy

within government, CFA and across our sector. These discussions are robust and ongoing as one would expect following recent developments.

As a peak body, our commitment is to always honour and respect the hard-earned volunteer reputation, ensuring we represent volunteers with dignity, strength and professionalism. Our authenticity and restraint build trust and respect. Effective advocacy is not achieved by simply shouting the loudest. Mother Teresa is often quoted as saying "I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things."

Ultimately our goal is to move the needle and achieve long-term bi-partisan support for fairer funding of CFA, a sustainable and safe firefighting fleet, and greater support and respect for CFA volunteers and the vital role volunteer brigades play now and for the future.

This requires deliberate effort, strategic intent and building credibility and trust with those we interact. A year ago, to the day, I wrote about the short sightedness of current government policies and the obvious learnings from disasters such as the RMS Titanic. Two years prior to that I wrote about the forgotten lessons from Ash Wednesday and the high price we pay in Victoria for those lessons. And just last month, prior to the current bushfires even starting, we covered the critical measures of under resourcing of CFA.

These arguments will not be won or lost within a single bushfire season. They never have before. Long term change requires hard work and sustained efforts.

We cannot decry the effects of politicisation of the fire services, and then simply resort to playing politics when it suits. I firmly believe the overall politicisation of the fire services has been the single worst thing to inflict our sector and the vital work of an emergency service.

VFBV efforts are therefore focussed not only on the emergency at hand, but working across the political divide to engage, educate and change the minds of decision makers without resorting to partisan politics, or exploiting community anguish. While alternate tactics may bring temporary relief, they will ultimately lead to a state of perpetual grievance, counter grievance and turmoil. None of which will work for the communities with which we protect.

And while I do not criticise the efforts of others, I assertively reject any suggestion that only identical approaches and tactics will prevail. We must each play to our strengths and see others as a complement to our own.

Our warnings have been clear, and our ability to influence stakeholders will ultimately rest on relationships built on trust and respect. We are not afraid to engage with frank and fearless advice, but personal attacks rarely win the argument. This doesn't mean going softer, or avoiding the hard discussions, but it does mean being strategic and using our influence with scalpel precision.

I appreciate we are navigating a very complex and emotional environment. I also appreciate the anguish that is fuelling people's emotions and acknowledge they are genuine grievances. We are focussed on the long journey, and we still have a way to go. We must not betray our principles for the illusion of short-term gain no matter how alluring. We continue to invite government to partner with volunteers using the principles and promises made under the Volunteer Charter and join us in building a safer and more resilient Victoria.

Stay safe and look after each other.



## EDITORIAL

# MAKE IT COUNT

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' January 2026 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

Five years ago, I welcomed in the New Year and said good riddance to the one just gone.

One can't help but be reflective this time of year, but if I'm being honest, I'll admit it's getting harder and harder to remain optimistic that government will finally see the error of its ways and adjust its current policy settings to better support and enable CFA to be all it could be. Given we are one of the most fire prone places in the world, I dare say the Victorian community would very much appreciate it as well.

There is only so long our warnings can go unheeded until a day of reckoning. An under resourced, under supported CFA is akin to cancelling your home insurance policy straight after you get robbed.

As I remarked on Premier Allen's ascendancy to the Premiership, the change of leadership would either be an opportunity to be part of the solution or part of the problem. Sadly, on all reasonable measures it would appear to be the latter.

And thankfully - while the days of all out contempt for volunteers and CFA through their reform agenda is largely behind us, there is yet to be substantive movement on the key policy areas setting CFA up for failure. We've told them, CFA has told them and their own independent fire services implementation monitor has told them in no uncertain terms. What more can we do?

Maybe you've heard that parable about a man clinging to his chimney on the roof of his house as flood waters surround him. He prays to God for help. A man in a rowboat comes by and tells him to jump in. The stranded man yells "its ok, I'm praying - God will save me." A short time later as the waters continue to rise, a motorboat comes by and tells him to hop aboard. The stranded man repeats the same refrain that he's praying and God will save him. Finally, a helicopter comes by and drops a rope to rescue him, and he again waves them away, saying he has faith, he's praying and God will save him.

A short time later, the flood waters completely overcome him and the stranded man dies. In Heaven, he asks God - given his faith and his prayers - why did God abandon him in his time of need and not save him? God replied - "What are you talking about. I sent a rowboat, a motorboat and then a helicopter. What more did you expect?"

So, have I given up optimism as this year's New Year's resolution? No - far from it. I'm actually more determined than ever.

As Martin Luther King Jr said "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." On the other side of

the pond, eighteenth century English poet Alexander Pope wrote "Hope springs eternal in the human breast" referring to our insatiable appetite to think something better is always coming.

At the end of the day, a volunteer organisation relies on optimism to survive. Our forebears served as wonderful role models in constantly pursuing improvements and to always keep trying, no matter the difficulty. They too at times had to wait for natural disasters to finally spur governments into action. Human inability to learn from history is sadly a common affliction.

If anything - patience and persistence are one of our defining strengths as a volunteer association. Long after topics and issues come and go, our pursuit for strategic meaningful long-term improvement that places community safety above all - never wanes.

Speaking of learning from history - in the July 2004 edition of 'The Fireman', Fireman Sam asked the question "Is red tape killing vols?"

He opined: *"...where would we be if it were not for the volunteer effort that has helped to make Australian life what it is today?"*

*"We are fortunate that many in the community are still that way inclined. But I fear the number is dwindling. It is certainly more difficult to attract volunteers. Sadly, it is also more difficult to be one."*

*"What was a trickle of change has developed into a flood."*

*"Over the past four or five years there has hardly been a month go by when there wasn't some new piece of legislation, local government by law, Code of practice, government department procedural process, statutory authority requirement, or competency requirement that somehow impacted on the numerous volunteer organisations that help keep a community running on a day to day basis."*

He summarised that far from seeking payment or reward, volunteers seek the satisfaction of seeing good results for their efforts and the feeling that it has all been worthwhile. He also said the other form of 'reward' that volunteers would really appreciate is that their efforts are facilitated and supported by government and administrators.

How is it then, that 20 years later government and bureaucrats are still not able to grasp the simple concept of valuing and respecting our volunteers?

The most recent example are last month's media releases heralding the announcements of this year's VESEP grants.



Don't get me wrong – VESEP is a wonderful program that was developed in partnership between government, CFA and VFBV before being extended across the sector. The government should be congratulated for continuing with it, and boosting it significantly. Given its roots, and the collaboration of the three signatories to the volunteer charter - it should not be surprising that it is immensely popular and has grown year after year.

Unfortunately, far from any acknowledgement of this partnership, we were served a release bereft of any such modesty or humility and instead given vulgar self-congratulation and spin. Worse – the government media releases took credit for more than \$30 million in grants, and the “biggest ever grants for emergency services volunteers”

Hiding in plain sight of course, was every dollar that CFA, SES, LSV and CoastGuard volunteers donated as a VESEP contribution. The omission is both stark and insulting. Not a single reference to the fact that this year for example, CFA volunteers contributed a new record of almost \$4 million in brigade funds earned from fundraising and hard work.

Is the government so indifferent that the men and women making immense sacrifice to serve their communities in their time of need just might be looking for some form of acknowledgment or basic understanding of what they do and what motivates a volunteer based organisation?

Can you remember a time that police chipped in for their police vehicles? Or paramedics for their ambulances? Can you imagine a group photo of departmental public servants posing for a photo with the Minister to hand over the keys and celebrate the governments replacement of their government fleet vehicle every 3 years?

And we can't even manage a simple thank-you or acknowledgement that volunteers - rather than simply accept a hand-out, worked hand in hand with government to fund and replace millions of dollars' worth of trucks and equipment?

Let's not forget that for many brigades, these contributions represented decades of painstaking fundraising and sausage sizzles to build up the funds to eventually apply for a grant in the first place. Or is it the embarrassment of the inconvenient truth that volunteer fire brigades must actually scrimp and save to buy their own essential pieces of trucks and equipment their communities rely on simply because the State does not properly fund them to begin with?

So, allow me to say a heartfelt thank-you. I can't profess to speak on behalf of all Victorians, but I'm yet to meet one that doesn't respect and appreciate the incredible contribution that emergency service volunteers make to the State.

To put the volunteer contribution into perspective, CFA volunteers have contributed more than \$41 million in funds to the program over the past 20 years alone. An incredible

achievement and legacy worthy of acknowledgement.

Add this to the conservative indicative value of the \$2.5 billion dollars that Victoria's emergency management volunteers contribute to Victoria each and every year through their volunteering, and you really are left with an obvious answer to Fireman Sam's question of where would we be without it? Think creek and paddle. Which brings us to the metaphorical creek without the paddle.

VFBV continues to draw attention to the complete inequity of CFA's budget, and the governments prolonged attack on CFA's resourcing and support. Despite government media releases spruiking “record funding” – our reality is far from the nirvana they falsely proclaim.

In January last year, I walked members through our analysis tracking the governments lack of investment in CFA over the past five years. We found that despite increased costs and high inflation, government have inexplicitly invested less and less in CFA's base funding year after year since reform in 2020.

We must continue to maintain the pressure on highlighting the smoke and mirrors being played with CFA's budget, and the inescapable aging CFA fleet that sees volunteer firefighters stuck on the back of almost 700 old single cab tankers breathing in the smoke and fumes on 40 degree days and sweltering in the sun.

Don't forget that of the \$500M extra in tax revenue the government is due to collect this year from their new Emergency Services Tax hikes, only \$10M of that extra has been allocated to the CFA truck replacement base budget. That is less than one-tenth of the funds required to maintain CFA's fleet of 2,389 trucks.

We must continue to educate decision makers and the general public about the escalating risks of relying on such an ageing fleet and the inherent safety risks this represents. The grounding of the entire FFMVic G-Wagon fleet late last year should be a stark warning to those that dismiss the ageing CFA fleet and convince themselves that a well-maintained fleet of trucks can last forever. A single volunteer injury (or worse), is far too high a price to pay for government inaction.

For all members that were called to duty over the Christmas and New Years break, a huge thank-you. For those that covered your absences at home and work – thank-you also.

And while we face numerous challenges, we should never lose sight of the incredible difference you each make every day in your communities. If last year culminated in celebrating the first 80 years of the formation of CFA, January 2026 represents the first steps of our next 80 years. We owe it to not only our forebears but ourselves to make each of them count.

Stay safe.



## STATE FIREFIGHTER CHAMPIONSHIPS

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

The CFA VFBV State Firefighter Championships will be held in Stawell later this month on consecutive weekends.

The first weekend, 21 and 22 March, will see 33 teams compete for the State Urban Junior Championship across 18 events.

Action on the following weekend will see 102 senior teams and 41 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 the championships.

On the evening of Saturday 28 March the spectacular Torchlight Procession will be held, through the centre of Stawell 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 each weekend to ensure that the State Championships maintain the high standard developed over many years. VFBV thanks these members for their commitment to and encourages any new members interested in nominating as a judge or official to contact VFBV at [championships@vfbv.com.au](mailto: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 volunteers 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](http://www.vfbv.com.au)

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

### PLAN AND PREPARE REDEVELOPMENT PROGRESS

Previously we provided details on the initial work being undertaken to redevelop the Plan and Prepare section of the CFA website. This work continues and is being guided by a deliberate and evidence-based planning process, designed to ensure the site meets the needs of contemporary users while supporting CFA's community safety objectives.

Changes are being informed by research undertaken in 2022, including surveys, one-to-one interviews and focus groups with community members and CFA volunteers. Website analytics and a formal user experience audit supported findings of users reporting difficulty finding information, particularly on mobile devices, and described the existing site as "cluttered, dense and clunky".

Key objectives of the project include improving mobile responsiveness, simplifying navigation, enhancing search functionality, and presenting information in a more intuitive and actionable way. Significant preparatory work has been undertaken to develop new page templates and functionality, including quick links based on popular searches, page summaries and key takeaways, 'jump to' headings, improved resource filtering, downloadable checklists, and enhanced use of imagery.

Content frameworks have also been developed as part of project preparation. These are designed to ensure information is consistent, accessible and on brand, regardless of who authors or updates content, and will support ongoing maintenance of the site post-launch.

Background work and testing has occurred to ensure the new website is user-friendly. Some updated content has already been published on the existing website to support current campaigns and community safety initiatives.

The Joint Community Safety Committee participated in a workshop to develop a strategy for communication and change management planning. Discussions focused on how volunteers should be engaged about the changes and how they can be supported to promote the redeveloped website within their local communities.

The redeveloped Plan and Prepare website is scheduled to go live between July and September 2026, with additional content enhancements planned following launch.

### FIRE EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE (FEM) TOOL

Following long advocacy, FEM is moving to an online system after relying on a paper-based system that involved printing over 139,000 sheets of paper per year on an old dot matrix printer that used continuous pin-feed perforated paper.

The Joint Committee and FEM advisory committee have ensured brigades involved in FEM have been consulted on what they would like the FEM process to look like and have been involved in updating the FEM Brigade Manual.

A review of FEM contracts has been completed, and a procurement process resulted in 16 suppliers being shortlisted to support FEM brigades. Brigades were asked to provide feedback on the shortlist, with 159 brigades supporting one of the nominated contractors available.

Implementation of the FEM solution through ServiceNow commenced on 1 December, with some early teething problems being sorted out. The rollout will occur in five stages, beginning with 68 brigades supported by eight to ten contractors. Full statewide rollout is planned by 30 June 2026, supported by an ongoing audit process to identify and address any issues arising.

March 2026

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#### FLEET UPDATE

VFBV continues to advocate strongly on the ageing CFA fleet, and the unsustainable level of funding that is preventing a proper replacement and renewal program. CFA has reported to delegates that it has lodged a further submission with the State Government seeking additional funding for appliances and that this is currently under active consideration.

The Committee discussed the potential implications of this submission on the forward appliance replacement program, including any impacts on delivery timelines, prioritisation, and resource allocation. In this context, CFA reaffirmed its strong and ongoing commitment to the progressive removal of single-cab and two-wheel drive vehicles where required. This commitment is supported through the established annual prioritisation process, which ensures replacement decisions are informed by operational need, risk, and strategic objectives.

In response, and noting brigades usually replaced their brigade funded appliances more promptly than CFA, delegates queried whether securing the first right of purchase of VESEP funded brigade-owned vehicles being retired was practicable. It was noted that CFA supports this and that it is under consideration. The Committee discussed how this approach may provide operational and financial benefits to the fleet, particularly through the effective short-term cascading of vehicles to suitable locations, thereby maximising asset utilisation, extending service life where appropriate, and delivering improved safety and value for money.

#### GENDER DIVERSITY CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAM

The Committee was advised that CFA has submitted a proposal seeking approval for a further round of works under the existing Gender Diversity Program. It was noted that all new stations, as well as any stations undergoing significant upgrades or modifications, must incorporate the principles and infrastructure outcomes of the Gender Diversity Program into their design and delivery.

This program is a key initiative aimed at delivering meaningful, gender-based transformational change across CFA. Its primary objective is to ensure that CFA facilities are welcoming, safe and supportive for all members, employees and visitors by addressing historical barriers within station infrastructure that may limit participation by people of different genders and abilities. This is achieved by providing modernised amenity facilities that appropriately cater to the diverse needs of all users. This includes delivering design solutions that consider gender diversity, disability access, privacy, safety, and dignity to recognise that fit-for-purpose amenities are critical to supporting participation, retention and wellbeing across the organisation.

The current and future phases of the program involve amenity upgrades at 41 CFA stations and three training campuses. Works are primarily focused on improving toilet, shower, and turnout facilities within stations, ensuring these spaces are inclusive, accessible, and functional. At training campuses, the program includes constructing dedicated change buildings to provide appropriate facilities for training participants. Collectively, these upgrades represent a significant investment in creating equitable and inclusive CFA environments across the state.

#### VESEP PREPARATIONS

With the dust having only just settled on the 2025 VESEP allocations, brigades are reminded that it won't be long before the next round opens. If your brigade is considering applying for a grant you are encouraged to get the process going now and not leave it until the last minute. Unsuccessful applications from the last round are encouraged to talk to the DPC and district officers to see what can be altered to get ready for this year's allocation. Contact with land and building services for any station alterations is a must as well as engaging with your group and DPC to see what improvements can be made for any vehicle grants.

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

### CONTEMPORARY VOLUNTEER MEMBERSHIP MODEL (CVMM)

The CVMM options paper has been released by CFA and is open for member comments and feedback with the aim of enhancing the organisations ability to attract, support and retain volunteers over the long term. The project acknowledges VFBV's commitment and involvement is essential for the strategic direction of the project, and seeks broad engagement with both delegates and members. Members are encouraged to access the CVMM Options Paper, through the Members Online portal and provide comment on the 13 recommendations or are encouraged to complete the survey. Members can also register your interest for future engagement activities or becoming a Champion by contacting [cvmm@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:cvmm@cfa.vic.gov.au)

### EMERGENCY SERVICES TAX REBATE

Delegates were provided with an update from CFA on the organisation's involvement in assisting members to claim their Emergency Services Tax rebate. The rebate scheme is being managed by the Department of Government Services (DGS) and can only be accessed through the portal on CFA members online. Members will need to confirm their eligibility, meet the criteria outlined and there is an appeals process if the system believes your information does not meet the CFA portion of the eligibility criteria. Delegates are keen to remind members that there is a misconception that volunteers can only apply for the rebate after they have paid their rates, when in fact a member can submit an application as soon as their rates notice has been issued. For any enquiries, support or to escalate issues you are having with the system there is an online form at <https://service.vic.gov.au/find-services/housing-and-property/eligible-volunteers-rebate-scheme> or phone 1300 778 931 during business hours.

### ANNUAL FIREFIGHTER MEMORIAL SERVICE

Each year on the 1st Sunday in May or the closest Sunday to International Firefighters Day which falls on St. Florian's Day on 4 May (St. Florian is the Patron Saint of Firefighters) CFA holds a memorial service to remember those firefighters who gave their lives to protect others and to honour the personal sacrifices and commitment our firefighters make each and every day.

The 2025 service saw some changes to the service that were out of character for many members who have attended previous services and whose concerns have been raised and discussed with CFA. Following consultation, some changes for the 2026 service are expected to bring the service back into line with members suggestions and balance both the faith-based portions of the service and arrangements to appeal to non-faith-based attendees also.

CFA has also agreed to improve its notifications to members for the service and have been requested to update the contact lists more regularly. As part of our commitment to cater to both regional and metro attendees, CFA has agreed to alternate between the Emergency Services Memorial in Treasury gardens and regional locations, with this years' service to be held at Ballan on Sunday 3rd May.

### VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT HUB DATA

Following significant advocacy by delegates, CFA has rolled out many changes to the online Volunteer Recruitment Hub (VRH) with many more updates still to come. There have been many members who have commented on the length of time it takes from sign-up to being accepted as a member within the VRH system. CFA figures show that in 2023 it took up to 90 days to be ready to participate as a member. Following numerous updates and enhancements that time has now been reduced to 29 days. Further enhancements due this year are expected to improve the volunteer experience further. The VRH team continue to develop cheat sheets, user guides and help videos to assist potential members and brigades to navigate the system. If someone is having trouble with the system, you can register for assistance through members online or by emailing the volunteer recruitment hub – [volrecruithub@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:volrecruithub@cfa.vic.gov.au)

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### PV STOP TRIALS

Members may recall this time last year we reported that CFA was looking into ways of combating fires from rooftop solar electricity systems and an innovative new product called PV Stop had come onto the market. Delegates were informed that a demonstration by the supplier of PV Stop has been arranged with the intent that a trial is being planned to run in selected brigades in District 8, 13 and 14 initially. The extinguisher style containers contain a thick liquid solution that when sprayed onto the solar panels instantly 'de-energises' the PV system. CFA has commissioned 26 PV Stop cylinders for the trial. The coating has challenges in how it is applied, and it has also been noted that while the pilot is underway there are very limited applications due to the risks associated with accessing rooftops. Only members with the required training and a current Safe Working At Heights (SWAH) qualification will be able to administer the product. We will keep you informed on the results of the trial.

### BA SWAP AND GO PILOT

The Breathing Apparatus (BA) Cylinder Exchange pilot went live in District 11 just before Christmas and is aimed at giving volunteers the ability to "swap and go" BA cylinders. The new pilot is being co-ordinated through Bairnsdale Fire Brigade and is designed to improve operational efficiency and flexibility for volunteers by reducing the need for volunteers to wait while cylinders are refilled or having to wait for courier pick up and drop offs.

QR codes attached to each cylinder will be scanned and entered into the ServiceNow App and are stored in the database each time they are used and filled. The QR codes link to a unique identifier in the ServiceNow system, enabling accurate tracking and streamlined exchanges. Users will be able to view cylinder information at their brigade level, record transfers, report issues and view cylinder history. We will keep you updated as the pilot is completed, results assessed and rolled out across the rest of the state.

### VOLUNTEER RESPONSE

It has to be acknowledged that members from across the state have done a remarkable job in combating the catastrophic fires since the start of the year and everyone from crews on the ground, strike team leaders, staging area managers, incident controllers and IMT members can all be very proud that every effort has been made to protect lives and property and to aim for a more positive outcome and in many areas the outcomes were more positive than in other areas. While the outlook for the remainder of the fire danger period still has brigades from every corner of the state on high alert lets celebrate the successes.

With the much-anticipated release of the CFA annual report recently there are some remarkable figures that show the incredible work volunteers do for their communities.

Over the 2024/25 reporting period volunteers attended 41,925 incidents and 81,940 total brigade turnouts across the state which is calculated at over 438,875 hours of volunteer time devoted to incidents. CFA volunteers also contributed over 5,500 shifts in IMT roles. The numbers just get more amazing when Community Safety is taken into consideration with 1,945 community events and informal engagement attended including CFA Open days. 2,680 smoke alarms were installed in at risk households and 4,774 hectares of land treated to reduce fire risk. These are just a few statistics that highlight the remarkable work that our 52,000 volunteers across the 1,208 brigades in every community.

Hold your heads up high everyone, you should be extremely proud of the effort and accomplishments but, the message to everyone during the fire danger period remains consistent, manage your fatigue, stay hydrated and stay safe – so everyone comes home safe.

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

#### INTEROPERABILITY

Delegates to the Operational Performance Committee have been keen to encourage CFA to support a better, more inclusive inter agency relationship in the future. Rather than each organisation duplicating systems, delegates have queried if there a better way to share technology to ensure all agencies are working from one source. Members used mapping as an example. There are currently three to four different mapping options available in both live and static situations within the emergency sector. While it was noted that different agencies use a mix of different platforms with both live and static data the benefits of using one mapping system were acknowledged. The committee are keen to advance and help develop a discussion paper that would assist all agencies in identifying the relevant elements, enabling a more structured consideration rather than future discussion at Committee level. It has been noted while mapping is just one element worth looking at there are others that could also be investigated over time.

#### FALSE ALARMS

Delegates to the committee are advocating for initiatives that would seek to reduce the prevalence of false alarms across the State. The Committee has requested CFA monitor and analyse the results of recent changes that have encouraged the disconnection of alarm signalling equipment (ASE's) where they are no longer required, and whether this has reduced the number of false alarms statewide. Delegates encouraged the further reduction of false alarms, and the benefits of using direct communications with facility owners to assist in this area. While severe weather can result in a waiver of the false alarm charge, delegates suggested consideration be given to waiving genuine false alarms where facility owners can demonstrate high levels of maintenance and efforts to ensure false alarms are minimised. The Committee considered if a standard information pack for all premises that highlights the importance of accurate site maps and detector locations could assist with a quicker response once brigades are in attendance. The committee noted the benefits of this onboarding concept for businesses, including the reduction of pre-planning work and costs on business for callouts.

#### AFTER ACTION REVIEWS (AAR)

With fire still burning across the state from what can only be described as a busy fire season - delegates are very keen to ensure that the many after-active reviews that will be conducted are done so in an effective, efficient, volunteer-friendly way, ensuring that everyone is able to contribute and document their experiences.

The ability to learn and improve in the way we fight fires, record interactions on the fireground, improve safety and ensure an effective use of volunteer's time is critical, from the fire front to the staging area. Learning from the many interactions across the myriads of complex and extended events is important in developing firefighters, incident control and inter agency training and ensuring that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past can only be done by listening to and recording what has happened to ensure CFA continues to make better use of the resources available.

Members who have something to add from their time at an incident can record their experiences in the Lessons Management system but should also engage with their local and group after action reviews to ensure this feedback is discussed and shared with their peers.

Delegates are investigating recent allegations from volunteers who have been raising concerns that some Districts may be sanitising results from local AAR's before sending them up the chain. One initiative to ensure this cannot occur would be to publish the AAR report to all attendees so that full transparency is provided following after-action reviews.

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

### CFA MEDICAL STANDARDS

VFBV continues to receive a high number of complaints from volunteers who find themselves trying to navigate CFA's new medical review processes. Delegates continue to advocate for a more timely and open process that will ensure volunteers are treated fairly and understand what the process is, and where they are in that process.

At the most recent meeting of the Joint Committee, delegates were informed that CFA had developed and written a new CFA Medical Standard to replace the AFAC medical guidelines that were developed by AFAC in 2006. The AFAC guidelines were never developed for agencies to use as a Standard, but rather as a guide to support and assist agencies with their medical methodology. Most importantly – they respected the principle that any medical processes must be practicable and respect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals. Importantly they enshrined the importance of agencies using their own consultative processes for any local application.

Therefore, delegates were surprised to learn that CFA had developed its own standard in secret, and without any engagement or consultation with VFBV. Under questioning, CFA representatives informed delegates that CFA would not be consulting on the new Standard but would engage VFBV over its implementation.

Delegates have now escalated this matter, and VFBV has informed CFA that we consider the lack of consultation to be a Charter breach, and that VFBV will not be supporting a Standard that has been developed without any consultation with VFBV or volunteers as is required under the CFA Act.

VFBV will continue to advocate for a medical process that is fair, transparent, timely and respects an individual's privacy. In particular, VFBV rejects any process that does not engage with an individual's own medical practitioner, or a standard that radically departs from every other State or Territory fire service across Australia without compelling reasons and evidence to support this approach. While we support medical standards that support the health and safety of all members, it is uncontroversial for volunteers to demand that something so personal and sensitive be developed in an open, transparent and consultative manner. VFBV has strongly urged CFA to reconsider its approach.

### COMPLAINTS PROCESS UPDATE

CFA is currently dealing with 86 open complaint and discipline matters. This demonstrates a huge improvement in addressing the backlog of complaints that had built up over recent months and years. Delegates have encouraged CFA to maintain this progress. Delegates welcomed the news that the Issue Resolution team will be bolstered by five additional staff which doubles the team's capacity to deal with issue resolution in a timely manner. Each of the five new positions will work closely with an appointed Region. These people will act as a mentor/guide to District staff who are managing complaints and issues, in the hope that these issues can be dealt with locally, expediently and with the cooperation of Captains, BMT's and brigades. CFA are also engaging with VFBV to review the discipline process, end to end, under the new regulations and continue working on training for Referring Officers and Hearing Officers, and the restriction/ suspension of members in complaint matters. CFA has engaged an external provider to work on the design of digitised training modules, due for delivery late in 2026.

The recent Allen and Clarke review engaged with many volunteers in face-to-face sessions, online Town Hall sessions and further feedback via online QR code access. The Allen and Clarke report findings will be provided to joint committee members in the coming months and VFBV will update members accordingly. VFBV have observed a recent shift in the volunteer experience with the Issue Resolution team between both the claimant and respondent and are pleased to note that volunteers are reporting feeling better treated and that they are encountering a more open and transparent team making the process much less confronting and geared to resolving issues and ensuring poor behaviours are addressed quickly and proportionately. VFBV continue to engage regularly with all levels of the Issue Resolution team and sharing the experiences of volunteers and brigades. We will keep members informed as this important work continues.

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

### RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

While many of our members are familiar with the highly visible, front-facing technology improvements within CFA — such as new pagers, replacement radios, and mobile data capability projects — fewer may be aware of the significant work being undertaken within the Research and Development (R&D) area.

These pressures impact our volunteer members, CFA's operational processes, and the funding model that supports agencies across the sector. It may seem obvious, but emergency services must invest in research and development if we are to effectively meet these challenges into the future.

The CFA Research and Development team is currently engaged in more than 40 projects, with priority given to initiatives that will deliver the greatest impact for volunteers and operational capability. The CFA Research Strategic Plan provides a long-term, structured approach that aligns with the CFA Outcomes Framework. It also strengthens collaboration with Universities, DEECA, Parks Victoria, FRV, EMV and other fire agencies across Australia with the assistance of AFAC.

Of particular interest to committee members was a demonstration of the Bushfire and Analytics Tool (BAT) dashboard, which is now beginning trial phases. This project aims to support operational decision-making by integrating historical, current, and forecast weather data, fuel information, and fire incident data into a single, comprehensive dashboard. The information is visualised across multiple spatial and temporal scales, providing a clearer and more dynamic understanding of fire behaviour. Importantly, the platform also offers early access to experimental models and products, enabling users to trial emerging science and provide valuable feedback.

The research team has compiled completed fire reconstructions from dozens of incident reports dating back to the 1960s. This data enables the development of advanced fire behaviour models and simulation tools, which provide evidence-based insights into how effectively bush and grass fires are being suppressed today.

Another ongoing project generating valuable operational data is the Creswick 'Smart Tanker' tanker initiative. This tanker is fitted with flow rate meters, cameras, and high-frequency GPS tracking. These tools allow the research team to monitor water usage during incidents, providing measurable evidence of suppression effectiveness through detailed data analysis and case studies.

These examples represent only a portion of the innovative work being undertaken. VFBV delegates will continue to advocate and monitor progress across these projects throughout the year.

### SUPPLEMENTARY ALERTING SYSTEM (SAS)

Release 12 of SAS was available as of 8 December 2025. This release introduces Apple Car Play as well important maintenance updates as well as performance improvements. Android Auto was introduced in Version 9. Both Apple Car and Android Auto allow members to view and navigate to incidents via their cars built in display. For all the information on SAS including user guide, training videos and FAQ's visit: [www.cfa.vic.gov.au/sas](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/sas)

### PAGER REPLACEMENT

The pager replacement process is coming to an end with scheduled completion in April this year. Currently there are approx. 7000 pagers highlighted as not being returned for multiple reasons and as this is a like for like swap this may end up with CFA having to pay for missing pagers. CFA continues to encourage brigades and members if they have a pager that is not being used please contact your district to arrange for its return this will allow CFA to have a clearer idea when the replacement process can be completed.

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

### AFAC TRAINING PEER REVIEW

In 2021, CFA commissioned AFAC to undertake a peer review of CFA's training systems, with the aim of providing advice on key initiatives to improve the development and delivery of training within CFA. Since that time, the Joint Training Committee (JTC) has had regular input into this work and continues to monitor progress. The AFAC review made 14 recommendations. To date, CFA report that eight recommendations have been completed, including establishing a single point of decision-making for training, centralising control of training records and materials, implementing formal feedback mechanisms for volunteers and staff, improving the engagement and management of Volunteer Instructors, delivering nationally recognised competencies, registering with ASQA, strengthening engagement with other agencies, and ongoing monitoring of progress against recommendations.

However, several important items remain outstanding. These include developing comprehensive capability and training pathways, replacing BOSP with a more effective tool, finalising IMT training pathways and courses, revising CFA's scope of registration, exploring simpler pathways for small rural brigade members progressing through GFF and implementing a skills maintenance framework. Of these initiatives, all but the development of a comprehensive skills maintenance framework have had significant progress towards their completion. Delegates will continue to monitor progress.

### TRAINING PATHWAYS

Many members should now be familiar with the Training Pathways that CFA began implementing in the second half of 2024. These pathways clearly define the prerequisites for courses, the training required for specific roles, and any formal endorsements that must be in place before a member can undertake those roles.

Under the new framework, any member who is not currently endorsed for a role will be required to complete all of the training set out in the relevant pathway before being endorsed. However, members who are already endorsed for a role will be able to maintain that endorsement without being required to complete additional training, even where they may not have completed all prerequisite courses listed in the pathway. This transition approach is intended to recognise existing skills and experience and avoid disadvantaging long-serving members. It recognises on the job training vs classroom learning.

It is critical that Captains ensure member endorsements are accurately recorded and up to date in the LMS. Correct records will allow members to be appropriately "grandfathered" into their current roles under the new training pathways. Any member who currently holds endorsements for roles such as Strike Team Leader that require District endorsement should check LMS to ensure that these are recorded in the members records. Any Brigades or members experiencing difficulties in this process should contact their District training team in the first instance and if it can't be resolved, can then raise the issue to CFA Headquarters through the Training Complaints system on Members Online.

### MEMBERS ONLINE CHANGES

Delegates have long voiced frustration at inconsistent or delayed information flowing from CFA, particularly in relation to changes in training requirements and processes. CFA has acknowledged these past shortfalls and over the past 12–18 months has made significant improvements to the Training section of Members Online, creating a single, central point for training-related information. The updated pages provide clear guidance on how to enrol in courses, the latest news and updates from the Training Department, LMS user information, and step-by-step guides for Captains and Brigade Training Officers to access reports. The site also includes information for members interested in becoming more involved in training delivery such as the process to become a Volunteer Instructor, information from the Regional Training teams and how members can raise complaints and provide feedback on their training experience. The Training section can be found at: Members Online → Brigades / Operational → Training



# DONATIONS

The VFBV Volunteer Support & Recovery Trust and the VFBV Welfare Fund are currently supporting CFA volunteers impacted by the 2026 Victorian bushfires. Demand is high, and the reserve funds of the VFBV Volunteer Support & Recovery Trust are nearly depleted.

As at February 2026, more than 22 CFA volunteers have completely lost their homes and contents from the recent bushfires, with the majority of those on fire trucks or on the fireground helping others when their own homes were lost. More than \$160,000 in grants has been paid responding to these fires this year alone.

Over the years and since their inception - our Charities have distributed more than \$4.4M in grants to volunteers in need.

Our emergency grants help them get back on their feet and continue volunteering with their local brigade. 100% of donated funds received go to helping CFA volunteers in need. VFBV covers all administration, audit and staffing costs to ensure 100% of donated funds go to those in need.

Under CFA Finance Policies - Brigades and Groups are permitted to make donations to our charities. We are also calling for public donations.

Visit

[www.supportcfavolunteers.com.au](http://www.supportcfavolunteers.com.au)