



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## YOUTH NETWORK UPDATE

The VFBV Multi-agency Youth Network is bubbling along successfully, attracting over 100 young volunteers from CFA and other agencies as members.

Our Champions workshop at Yarrambat attracted experienced volunteers from 13 Districts to discuss how best to support our young volunteers, and the VFBV Multi-agency Youth Network Facebook page has become a useful forum for discussion.

Many young members of the Network and their Champions have attended recent District Council meetings, and are planning projects including encouraging greater use of the internet for CFA purposes such as lodging FIRS reports, and for easier and wider access to VFBV District Council meetings.

If you are in Districts 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, or 22 and think you would make a great Champion, drop Chris Fryer a line at [c.fryer@vfbv.com.au](mailto:c.fryer@vfbv.com.au) or give her a call to discuss the role.

If you are between 18 – 35 years of age and want to be involved, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/vfbvyouth> and complete the online form. You are then welcome to 'friend request' at the VFBV Multi-agency Youth Network Facebook page. We look forward to hearing from you all in the future.

## WA CANCER LAW SOON

Presumptive legislation to give volunteer firefighters fairer and simpler cancer compensation arrangements is now before the West Australian Parliament, and expected to receive the support of both the Liberal National Government and the Labor Opposition.

The WA Bill does not match the current standard met by Queensland and South Australia, where volunteers and staff are treated equally, but it is well ahead of the out-of-date and discriminatory Tasmanian legislation being considered as a model for Victoria.

Unlike their career colleagues, WA volunteers will be expected to show they

have attended at least five hazardous fires a year for five years to qualify, with 'hazardous' fires defined by a list in the legislation that includes structure and vehicle fires.

The WA legislation is expected to take effect in October, and will be retrospective so that it includes coverage for volunteers who have been diagnosed with any of the listed cancers since the career firefighters' version of the legislation took effect in 2013.

Victoria still does not have firefighters' cancer legislation, and we encourage volunteers to let your Victorian MPs know it is time to pass presumptive legislation that treats all firefighters equally.

## Taking action in Court, Parliament and at local level

By Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

As we go to press, the Federal Government has introduced its volunteer protection amendments to the Fair Work Act into Parliament, and VFBV is putting considerable work into preparation for a return to the Supreme Court on 22 September.

The Supreme Court has stopped CFA putting the CFA/UFU Enterprise Bargaining Agreement to paid firefighters for a vote until the conclusion of that court case, which will allow the EBA to be properly examined by an independent umpire that will hear and judge the volunteers' concerns.

This is a crossroads for the volunteer based and fully integrated CFA, it has been left to VFBV to make a stand on behalf of all volunteers and the communities we protect, and we are greatly encouraged by the many messages of support we are receiving from volunteers everywhere.

Volunteers around the state have begun fundraising for the Valuing Volunteers Support Fund, which will assist with

VFBV activities in support of volunteers without the use of any government or CFA funds, or Brigade and Group affiliation funds. Volunteers are encouraged to help to promote fundraising for this initiative through community groups, sausage sizzles and other local efforts. Members of the public can learn more and make a donation to the Valuing Volunteers Support Fund by visiting the mycause crowd funding website <https://www.mycase.com.au/cfa>

You can find the Federal Government's draft legislation, the Fair Work Amendment (Respect for Emergency Services Volunteers) Bill 2016 on our website. VFBV was able to provide valuable input to the development of the legislation, and we are very pleased that it has shaped up in a way that we believe meets our concerns and deals with the practical issues affecting volunteers.

The legislation will be a simple change to the Fair Work Act, making it objectionable

for workplace agreements to restrict or limit the emergency service organisation's ability to:

- engage or deploy its volunteers;
- provide support or equipment to those volunteers;
- manage its relationship with, or work with, any recognised emergency management body in relation to those volunteers;
- otherwise manage its operations in relation to those volunteers;

The legislation will also provide an ability for volunteers, through bodies such as VFBV, to make submissions to Fair Work Australia if we have any concerns.

The amendments aim to fix an anomaly in Commonwealth law that affects CFA volunteers and the volunteers of other emergency service organisations covered by the Fair Work Act. The anomaly that has been of concern over recent months allows enterprise agreements for paid emergency service workers to override State emergency management laws such as the CFA Act – If left unresolved, it would effectively allow industrial interference into the organisation, operation and support of CFA volunteers, and CFA decision making affecting volunteers.

We are hopeful the legislation will get support from all sides of politics, and volunteers from Victoria and other States are working with MPs and Senators to explain the need for the legislation, its benefits and its importance to volunteers.

The legislation has no impact on pay negotiations, but does provide a mechanism to address the concerns that have been broadly discussed about the current EBA.

VFBV's preparation for the Supreme Court is well under way. The Supreme Court supported our application to suspend the CFA/UFU EBA until the conclusion of the court case. VFBV is fighting to maintain CFA as a volunteer based and fully integrated fire and emergency service with employees fully integrated with volunteers to provide seamless public safety services to Victorians. The proposed Enterprise Bargaining Agreement would see:

- The powers of the Chief Officer overridden;
- The union given power of veto on issues affecting volunteer organisation, operations and support;
- Clauses that are contrary to the CFA Act, and
- Volunteers treated as second class just because they are not paid.

The Supreme Court trial will allow the EBA to be properly examined by an independent umpire that will hear and judge the volunteers' concerns without the emotion, the hype and the politics that have complicated the issue until now.

While the Supreme Court's decision is encouraging, VFBV



is disappointed that it had to take the issue to court at all. The previous Minister, CFA Board, CEO and Chief Officer, and now the Supreme Court, have all clearly seen there are clauses within the proposed EBA that must be examined for their effects on volunteers.

The court hearing will give us another chance to raise the questions CFA has refused to answer, such as:

- Claims that volunteers will be protected by a clause in the EBA
- The proposed Greater Alarm Response System (GARS)
- The interference in non-operational personnel who provide critical volunteer support functions through the BASO and Volunteer Support programs
- Restrictions in the EBA on effective volunteer consultation rights under the CFA Volunteer Charter

Our interest is in preserving and protecting the powers of the CFA Act, and VFBV did not take legal action lightly.

The last thing volunteers wanted to do was take on the organisation and the Government that should have been protecting CFA all along, but our repeated efforts in asking for the genuine consultation guaranteed under the CFA Volunteer Charter and the CFA Act have been unsuccessful.

VFBV had little choice but to take up leadership on the issue, when on Friday, 12 August, the new CFA Board resolved to sign the EBA.

The CFA Board claimed it had "consulted extensively" with VFBV and "worked to address their concerns before making our decision." However, a letter from CFA's lawyers to VFBV the same day admitted that no changes had been made to the EBA in response to the volunteers' concerns, saying "In light of the bargaining position of the UFU... and in the context of the policy position of the Victorian Government, no further changes have been able to be agreed."

There is a lot of hard work, research and preparation to be done ahead of the Supreme Court trial on September 22. We are interested in going into this summer season without EBA clauses that will override how CFA operates, and without clauses that interfere with the work volunteers do and the way volunteers are supported.

We will continue to advocate for all volunteers, to save the CFA as a volunteer and fully integrated emergency service for the people of Victoria.

## Actions for volunteers

With the EBA issue due in Federal Parliament and still very much an issue for Victoria, we encourage volunteers to continue raising their concerns, by:

- Emailing and talking to your Federal and State Members of Parliament
- Seeking meetings with MPs and Senators to tell them about volunteers' concerns
- Raising the issue with local media and the community
- Keeping signs, leaflets and other campaign materials ready, we may need to hit the streets at short notice
- And at all times, maintaining our normal professional standards of behaviour and emergency response to your community

Stay up to date via your State Councillors, 'Fire Wise', VFBV updates and [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au)

## Record numbers for survey

As we go to press, the 2016 VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey has just closed, with a record numbers of volunteers having taken part.

More than 3,000 CFA volunteers took part this year, along with thousands more from VICSES, Ambulance Victoria, Red Cross Victoria, Life Saving Victoria, St John Ambulance, The Salvation Army and the Victorian Council of Churches Emergencies Ministry.

This year, VFBV is also hosting local versions of the survey for fire agency volunteers in other states, on behalf of their associations and the national body the Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA).

VFBV designed the survey in 2012 to measure volunteer's views on issues like how well they are being supported, trained, recruited and retained by CFA, and how well they're managed at Brigade level.

The annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is a co-operative process; each year's results have been compared with previous years' figures to show trends in how volunteers feel on each of the issues, and the final report is studied by VFBV, CFA, Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) and the State Government.

Once the data has been fully analysed, a final report on the survey results will be made available via your District Council and on our website.

## VALUING VOLUNTEERS FUND DONATIONS

Local volunteer fundraising and donations via the VFBV website have already yielded thousands of dollars for the Valuing Volunteers Support Fund, established by VFBV to receive donations to support the work we are doing to protect, advocate and represent CFA volunteers.

VFBV has now expanded the fundraising to the mycause crowdfunding website; members of the public can learn more and make a donation by visiting <https://www.mycase.com.au/cfa>

Donations are accepted from members of the public and corporate donors, but not from any political organisations. Donations are not tax deductible, but donors can request a receipt.

There are full details of the wide range of work to be supported by the Fund on the VFBV website [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au) and Victorian Farmers Federation members can donate through the VFF.

## CHECK YOUR AFFILIATION

Are your Brigade/Group's VFBV Affiliation and Brigade's VFBV Volunteer Welfare Fund subscription up to date? If you are not sure, check with your Secretary.

Affiliation is at record levels, with 93% of Brigades supporting VFBV's work through their affiliation in 2015/16.

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare Fund makes small grants on a needs basis to CFA volunteers, long serving former volunteers and their families, who are experiencing significant financial hardship.

Typical cases include volunteers affected by prolonged illness, bereavement, loss of earnings, or the accommodation and travel costs associated with supporting a relative in hospital.

For more information, visit [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au) and go to the Member Services area, contact your State Councillor or call (03) 9886 1141.

## Congratulations on VESEP grants

Our congratulations go out to the 179 CFA Brigades and Groups who have shared in \$9.3 million in newly announced Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program (VESEP) grants, for operational gear, improvements to facilities and emergency vehicles.

Every year, VFBV provides practical help to CFA Brigades and Groups making VESEP applications. For those considering an application in any future funding rounds, case studies and guides are available from VFBV's 21 District Councils across the state, and also available for download from the VFBV website [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au)

VESEP is a vitally important program, now in its 16th year, and VFBV has worked with successive State Governments on its original design and subsequent improvements. The program provides one off grants of up to \$100,000 for emergency vehicles, equipment and facilities improvements that add to each Brigade's ability to protect Victorians.

Most VESEP funding is provided on a two for one basis, as a top up to local fundraising. This year, CFA has added \$2.8 million for statewide initiatives so that local fundraising is not required. Among those initiatives is the provision of Cold Climate Jackets that were chosen, field tested and improved with the direct involvement of VFBV volunteer representatives.

The great strength of VESEP is that the decisions are made by local volunteers to meet the specific needs and fundraising capabilities of their local communities.

## THE LATEST NEWS

Get the latest in our email newsletter or VFBV's popular Two Minute Briefing from the VFBV/CFA Joint Committees. Register at [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au) - click on the VFBV Newsletter box. Join the discussion on our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/cfavol](http://www.facebook.com/cfavol); follow on Twitter [www.twitter.com/vfbv](http://www.twitter.com/vfbv) or Instagram [@volunteer\\_fire\\_brigades\\_vic](https://www.instagram.com/volunteer_fire_brigades_vic)