



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## VOLUNTEER TRAINER & ASSESSOR: GOOD PROGRESS

Volunteer delegates from the VFBV/CFA Joint Training Committee attended a full day Volunteer Trainer & Assessor Forum arranged by CFA to engage with a small reference group of volunteers, staff and management from the Training department to workshop a series of high level key issues regarding the process and practice of volunteer trainer and assessors, and what could be done to build and improve capability and support for this vital role.

The forum covered topics such as: the role; expectations; scope; mentoring; endorsement; resources and validation processes. EO Adam Barnett praised the initiative and thanked the management and staff in attendance on behalf of the volunteer delegates and VFBV.

The forum was very well run, and the commitment and time dedicated to the day by the staff and volunteers out of their busy schedules to make time for the forum was inspiring and deeply rewarding. Discussions were open and frank and the respect between all stakeholders was evident throughout the day as volunteers and staff collaborated and discussed the different perspectives. Participants workshoped a high-level conceptual framework and partnership with the intent to progress a much improved and robust strategy to build, support and nurture volunteer trainers and assessors across the State.

VFBV wishes to thank DCO Paterson and Manager Learning & Development David Kearney for arranging and supporting the initiative. The Joint Training Committee have made this project a key priority for development and progress throughout early 2018, with delegates to the Training Committee looking for CFA to address volunteer feedback that has been consistently raised during previous training reviews over recent years. The Committee is hopeful of continued good progress and will keep members updated as the project progresses.

## IMT AVAILABILITY TOOL

The VFBV/CFA Operations Committee requested confirmation that the online IMT availability tool that was trialled last year that allows members to indicate their availability for IMT duties via an online portal, was in place for this fire season.

The Chief Officer advised it was, and he had provided direction to OM's in December last year that it was his expectation that the tool be used by districts to support their IMT planning process.

The Committee was advised that all IMT endorsed members should have access to the tool via Brigades Online, with CFA ICT Services working to improve the uploading of endorsement lists that trigger access to the tool.

Any endorsed members unable to access the tool should escalate the issue through their chain of command so that any access errors can be resolved prior to the Fire Season.

## CFA FUNDING CUT A KICK IN THE GUTS FOR VOLUNTEERS

by Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

If you are reading this you probably already know that last month, CFA withdrew funding support for FIRE WISE without any consultation and without any regard for what it means for volunteers. And you will also know how important this publication is as an opportunity for CFA the Government, VFBV and others to communicate with volunteers, and how important it is for volunteer views to be shared and expressed respectfully and constructively without censorship or fear of payback.

By way of background, since 1970 CFA has paid a small annual funding grant to support this volunteer focussed publication in recognition of the important role it plays in volunteer communication and consultation. And in the 25 plus years that I have been involved with CFA, this publication has always been used by CFA as one of the most important means of communicating with volunteers - if anything the small annual grant might have been too little, but it was never too much.

The small funding grant from CFA to FIREWISE has helped keep the cost of volunteer subscriptions down and helped ensure broadest possible circulation to CFA brigades, volunteers and friends of CFA across Victoria. And when I say small annual grant, I mean small - the CFA annual grant last year equated to about \$4 per brigade per month.

The FIRE WISE newspaper and The Fireman newspaper before it, have been an integral part of CFA's ability to communicate with and hear from volunteers on the ground since the creation of CFA.

Everyone talks of the CFA family, the big family spread across Victoria. And most of us know that ongoing two-way communication, sharing stories and conversation, feeling included, celebrating successes and heartache, staying in touch with news, feeling connected even when we are far apart, and feeling that our views have been heard and listened to are really important elements of keeping that sense of belonging, pride and commitment going.

So to say I am disappointed to hear that CFA has decided to withdraw funding to FIRE WISE is an understatement.

CFA's withdrawal of funding is a big and sudden departure from the history of a close partnership type relationship between CFA and the FIRE WISE publication, and The Fireman before it since the formation of CFA. Until last month CFA was listed as an 'Official Supporter' of FIRE WISE and for many decades this monthly publication, issued to CFA brigades throughout Victoria, was regarded by CFA as an 'Official Publication of CFA'. Gordon King, editor of FIRE WISE has proudly

reminded us that this close relationship has never reduced the editorial independence of this important volunteer focussed publication and at the same time there has never been an instance when the newspaper's editorial staff censored or restricted any messaging from CFA or the government regarding their various organisational, policy or change announcements.

CFA's decision to suddenly cancel its small funding support to this valuable volunteer communications tool, with no explanation of the logic, no consultation with volunteers and no regard for what it means for volunteers demonstrates a growing attempt to block and prevent volunteer's views being heard. This is just one more step in the gagging of volunteers right and ability to have a voice.

The cost of CFA's support to FIRE WISE is a tiny fraction of the CFA's budget and an even tinier fraction of the volunteer connection, motivation, goodwill and sense of belonging it helps create.

This is another sad step in sapping the spirit from CFA volunteers and a disregard for fundamental things that help keep volunteers motivated. CFA's annual financial contribution to FIRE WISE was approximately \$5000 per month. This small contribution helped keep the cost down for volunteers and brigade subscriptions and was a recognition that for many decades CFA has recognised and used the FIRE WISE newspaper as a key volunteer communications vehicle.

Many volunteers have said to me that volunteers should demand CFA provide adequate funding to support an independent communications medium for volunteers as part of the bargain for volunteers contributing their time. The critics that suggest CFA shouldn't pay anything and that volunteers should have to pay for it is that it is volunteers who make CFA what it is and that the value of services provided by volunteers is more than \$ONE BILLION every year. Yes, CFA's own estimates calculate that CFA volunteers contribute service to Victoria worth more than \$1,000,000,000 (one billion) every year and yet claim they can't see the cost benefit of a measly \$60,000 funding that helps volunteers across Victoria share news, ideas, innovations and views.

This is an appalling disregard for volunteers and the contribution volunteers give to making CFA the wonderful organisation it is today. Many volunteers have already expressed their frustration that this is just another way of CFA shifting cost back to volunteers - CFA's financial contribution helped keep the cost of this publica-



tion low for volunteers who currently pay for their monthly subscription.

All supporters of FIRE WISE and the principle of volunteers having the ability to speak freely, to share ideas and have a voice are encouraged to voice your concern regarding the CFA's withdrawal of support for FIRE WISE and join VFBV's campaign to ensure FIRE WISE survives.

If you are talking to people outside CFA, explain to them how CFA works, explain the value of services provided by volunteers and explain that the cost of CFA's annual financial support to FIRE WISE is about 2 cents a year from the average household Fire Service Levy.

I have given FIRE WISE editor Gordon King my commitment that VFBV will work with FIRE WISE to find a way forward whatever this requires. Our immediate priority will be to ensure this vital communication and consultation mechanism survives, our next step will be to achieve a more sustainable financial footing into the future and safe from the threat of someone simply cutting the funding supply because they don't like what volunteers have to say. I can assure volunteers that we will not let this issue go away without satisfactory resolution.

Volunteers deserve a voice and FIRE WISE is part of that voice - it is a publication for volunteers by volunteers, it should be applauded, supported and encouraged by CFA and Government not kicked in the financial guts.

### WHAT CAN VOLUNTEERS DO

1. Communicate your concerns via emails and letters to CFA, your local MP and via broad public messaging through your local networks and friends.

2. Maintain your subscriptions to FIRE WISE and take up the offer of free electronic access

3. Be ready to join future campaign effort to raise the awareness of the importance of volunteers having strong, volunteer driven, communications and consultations opportunities because I know the funding cut to FIRE WISE is not going to be the only challenge our volunteer voice will be confronted with.

4. Help use this disappointing action by CFA to make the volunteer voice and FIRE WISE publication even stronger - send in your letters of support now and make a future habit of sending in articles of interest and issues for open conversation to FIRE WISE.

5. Stay tuned for further developments and be ready to join further action to ensure the voice of volunteers is heard, respected and supported.

## NBN TRANSITION

CFA has identified approximately 150 CFA sites will be transitioning to the NBN by end of this year, with 20 done so far.

When a Brigade/Group location is affected, the Brigade is contacted via the District, and CFA Communications will then liaise with Telstra, NBN Co and the Brigade/Group as the work progresses. Frequently, a CFA Comms person will need to be available in person on the day of the works. CFA Comms are currently working on a FAQ to assist affected locations. Brigades who have arranged their own internet access need to be aware that they will have to liaise with their current Internet Service Provider (ISP) to arrange transfer.

Brigades and Groups should also be aware that once a site is fully switched over to NBN - the loss of power to the exchange can result in all communications (including phones) going offline until power is restored. (This applies for 'fibre to node' installations) Brigades/Groups are recommended to adjust their Comms plans accordingly, ensuring redundant communications methods are identified and planned for on pre-plans.

The Joint VFBV/CFA Communications & Technology Committee has requested CFA escalate the issue with EMV in order for a sector wide approach, as delegates felt this issue would also have a significant impact on the general public who may also lose their telephone lines in times of emergency, which has the potential to impact on the emergency warning system etc.

## COMPLAINTS AND DISPUTES MANAGEMENT REVIEW

The Joint VFBV/CFA HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee continues to advocate for the improvement of Complaints and Disputes Management within CFA. Results from an external review conducted for CFA have validated feedback provided by VFBV and volunteers including instances of; complaints and disputes that have been inconsistently managed and are being handled inconsistently and concurrently by different parts of CFA; complaints not being managed fully in accordance with legislation, policies & procedures; extended time to resolve complaints; and limited visibility of the scale, type and status of complaints and disputes.

These issues have the potential to affect the delivery of procedural fairness and natural justice and are of great concern to VFBV. CFA have committed to improving its complaints and dispute process and are establishing a dedicated Complaints Management Team within CFA's Workplace Relations Team. VFBV has supported a comprehensive review of current regimes and design of complaint procedures and is keen to be working with CFA to identify opportunities for improvement in CFA's handling of complaints and disputes. Updates will be provided as this work progresses.

## DISTRICT TRAINING BUDGET MYTH BUSTING

CFA has advised the Joint VFBV/CFA Training Committee that no members should be hearing that training or access to training grounds is being restricted due to budget constraints.

Delegates were advised that training budgets were all in healthy states and there is sufficient budgets for all reasonable requests for training and access to training grounds, with some budgets being under-spent. If your Brigade/Group

## MANUAL REPRINT

Delegates escalated the issue of a shortage of current Bushfire Firefighter Manuals, with reports of manuals not being available for recent volunteer recruit courses. Some affected Brigades having to resort to requesting members return their old manuals for use by new recruits.

CFA has confirmed an additional re-print of 5,000 manuals has been placed, and was recently received - so manuals should now be available again. If you have any issues ordering manuals, please raise with your local State Councillors who can assist you escalate the issue.

has not recently approached your District for training access or resources because you have been told "no" in the past - you are highly encouraged to re-approach your local Manager Learning & Development who should now be able to accommodate your request. If you have any issues accessing additional training resources, please raise with your local State Councillors who can assist you.

## MORE FOR ONLINE SUBSCRIBERS

More than 1,000 VFBV subscribers now receive this page via direct email. You can sign up to receive this information, VFBV's popular Two Minute Briefing from the VFBV/CFA Joint Committees and other information direct to your personal email.

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