



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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EM Legislation Amendment Bill

A VFBV News Note to members was issued on 1 March seeking to bring to your attention some legislative amendments currently before the Victorian Parliament seeking to amend amongst other things the Emergency Management Act 2013 and consequential amendments to the CFA Act 1958, which for the most part are restricted to aspects relating to Regional and Municipal Fire Prevention committees and planning.

At a fundamental level the proposed legislative amendment removes the Regional and Municipal Fire Prevention Committees from the CFA legislation shifting the powers, responsibilities and arrangements previously assigned to CFA to now come under the EM Bill and Emergency Management Victoria (EMV). The proposed legislation repeals Part IV of the CFA Act in its entirety.

Following the introduction of IFMP (Integrated Fire Management Planning), arrangements surrounding Regional and Municipal fire prevention committees has been a topic of discussion amongst volunteers, CFA and within communities for quite some time.

During this time, both CFA and VFBV have previously identified that there are several issues arising from the move away from the old MFPC structures, especially around community engagement, Brigade/Group representation as well as a loss of focus and accountability for risks identified and their treatment (especially road/rail corridors etc), that should be considered in any future legislative arrangements.

It would appear these concerns and previous input may have been lost along the journey, as they do not appear to have been addressed in the proposed legislative changes now before Parliament.

Given that there has been a long gap between the initial introduction of IFMP arrangements and initial discussions about changes to Regional and Municipal fire prevention committees you are encouraged to revisit this issue amongst your local networks; stocktake how the current arrangements are working and/or how they could be strengthened; and provide feedback as a priority if there are other issues you wish to raise regarding the proposed legislation.

Although the amendment Bill is already before Parliament, VFBV will continue to explore opportunity for consideration for amendment to the Bill to address previously raised volunteer concerns. You are encouraged to engage in conversation at local MP level to ensure volunteer issues are understood.

Please see the VFBV website for more information, including copies of the proposed legislation.

Tatura Junior Champs

Another impressive performance saw Tatura A win its fifth consecutive State Junior Championship, coming first place in four of the nine Under 17 Years events and winning the Under 17 Years Aggregate, winning the Dry Aggregate, equal first in the Wet Aggregate, and coming first overall in the Grand Aggregate with 55 points.

Other strong performances came from Melton and Euroa, with Melton having three successful teams competing. Melton A came first place in four of the Under 14 Years events, winning the Under 14 Years Aggregate, coming second in the Dry Aggregate, equal second in the Under 17 Years Aggregate, third in the Wet Aggregate and second in the overall Grand Aggregate with 44 points. Melton brigade's Teams B and C also had success, with Melton B winning one event and achieving a 2nd, 3rd and 5th placing; and Melton C gained two 2nd placings and one 3rd placing.

The Euroa brigade had two teams, with Euroa A coming first place in three events, equal first in the Wet Aggregate, second place in the Under 14 Years Aggregate, and were third placed in the Grand Aggregate with 36 points. The Euroa B team also had some success with one 4th placing and one 5th placing.

Of note was the first ever female Hydrant Race winner,

with Tegan Kubiel of Euroa A winning the Hydrant, Under 14 Years event, the first event of the Championship. Teagan was also a member of the Euroa A's winning team in three other Under 14 Years events events.

The Championship was held in Warrnambool and attracted almost 500 junior competitors, with 74 teams representing 45 brigades from across the state including 2 teams from Kellerberrin, Western Australia.

For more details of the weekend, see page 11 in this edition of Fire Wise.

While many people in the community are starting to talk about 'Summer' being over and Autumn beginning, the reality for CFA and all fire services is that there is still significant potential for bad fire conditions and this means the 'summer' work for us is far from over. Besides, we all know that our work doesn't start or stop during summer and as the CFA Chief reminded people recently, "CFA is one of the biggest urban firefighting services in Australia" and our work is year-round, across all risk environments, every day of the year and always evolving, expanding and growing to meet changing community needs.

Why do I state the obvious? Because there are still people in the community who don't appear to know this! Also, because I recognise that while I have stuff that needs to be discussed, I also respect that there is a heap going on just to maintain preparedness and respond to incidents and that this work has been at an escalated level for most CFA volunteers over the past few months. Hopefully we have managed a good balance between keeping you in the loop and letting you get on with 'summer'. It is also my way of saying well done so far and passing on the thanks and remarks I hear every day about how much your work is deeply appreciated by people throughout Victoria and their gratitude and respect for the work you do.

I state the obvious because I have received dozens of calls from people concerned about some recent comments by people, including our own Minister Mr Merlino, selectively using the recent performance data to paint CFA as an inadequate service and inferring that this is because volunteers can't provide first class service, and misleading the public into thinking that performance issues are because the CFA Act prevents CFA from keeping pace with Victoria's growth corridors.

CFA recently released the third round of quarterly performance data. And the overriding message that should have accompanied this data is that CFA, like MFB is performing

very well and that Victoria's fire services, based on any judgement criteria, and National comparisons across other Fire Services across the country - are performing exceptionally well with response times far better than other Victorian emergency services and very strong performance outcomes. Well done. I also take this opportunity to thank and congratulate the CFA Chief Officer for his recent public comment when he says the Victorian public should have confidence in CFA's service delivery and capacity to meet the needs of our communities. The data most certainly backs this up.

Others have not been so constructive in the way they have portrayed the performance data however the overwhelming feedback we have received including from the media commentary, is that the public are alive to the fact that some people are using the very worst interpretation of the performance data and describing it in the very worst way just to politicise the fire services so that they can drive an agenda to dismantle the CFA to meet a political and industrial agenda.

Let me be perfectly clear on a few issues:

We all need to be driven by meeting the needs of the community and improving community safety outcomes.

Where there are service demand pressures or service gaps these should be addressed.

VFBV has repeatedly stated, that the CFA Chief Officer should have the decision-making power to respond to service delivery demands and challenges with maximum flexibility and agility so that CFA can continually evolve and develop solutions to changing local needs.

The CFA Chief Officer must have the capacity to determine operational policy and resource decisions without political or industrial veto or interference.

There is nothing in the existing CFA Act or existing fire service arrangements that prohibits or limits the Government or CFA Chief Officer from increasing service capacity (whether this means establishing new fire brigades, satellite

by Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

stations, appliance upgrades, volunteer training, volunteer recruitment or paid staff support) in any CFA area experiencing service performance issues. The only thing preventing the CFA Chief Officer from performing this role now is restrictive EBA arrangements and Government resourcing that are overriding and limiting his powers under the CFA Act.

And there is nothing in the proposed Fire Service Reform legislation or Government policy that will provide any additional capacity, flexibility or agility to respond to service pressures that doesn't already exist in the existing CFA legislation and volunteer based, fully integrated service model. In fact, the proposed Fire Rescue Victoria arrangements will diminish the flexibility and options available for CFA to adapt service capacity based on ever changing local circumstances. Simply changing the logo on the side of a fire truck does nothing to improve community safety.

To highlight some of CFA's published facts about the most recent performance data for the three months 1st October - 31st December 2017:

CFA attended 12,140 incidents, with 6% (~720) of these being structure fires

Of the structure fires, 558 required extinguishment.

There was one fire related fatality and 15 reported fire related injuries.

55% of fires resulted in less than half structure loss, with 63% contained to room of origin.

94% of fires contained to less than 5 hectares.

Incredibly, CFA reported over 3,000 prevention and preparedness activities including School and Youth programs/visits, public awareness sessions, Home fire Safety Sessions, Fire Ready Victoria workshops, and Structure fire safety applications etc.

As the CFA appropriately stated 'the statewide figures show CFA brigades continuing to perform well across a variety of urban and rural environments' with 89% of fires in significant urban areas achieving the response target of 8 minutes and 91% of fires in all other urban areas achieving response targets. It is a fact that some CFA brigades did not meet response targets and CFA has acknowledged that the reasons for this include fire station location, CFA brigade access/egress facilities, volunteer brigade station conditions, road net-

bers at prolonged incidents or where members are working in hot or strenuous conditions. The Mernda Unit has been built on a Mitsubishi Canter, 4.5T with seating for four, and able to be driven on a standard driver's license. It includes scene lighting and extensive storage for portable generators, first aid supplies, defib, tables, cooling chairs, tent, eskies and hydration fluids. Mernda Captain spoke passionately about how it has provided increased opportunities for operational support members, many of whom are paramedics looking to contribute to the Brigade's functions as well as the extensive health, wellbeing and extended health monitoring benefits provided to members at incidents. Keep an eye out during this year's VESEP program for full vehicle details.

Rehab Units

During last year's VESEP Program, the VFBV/CFA Joint Equipment & Infrastructure Committee supported providing assistance and support for the building of two new Rehab Units, each sponsored and led by local brigades (Mernda & Yallourn North), with the intention of forming a standardized build in consultation with CFA Engineering and Fleet, so that the unit could be added to a future VESEP "pick list" and offered as a standard vehicle.

At a recent meeting of the Joint Equipment & Infrastructure Committee, delegates congratulated the Mernda Fire Brigade, after a recent show and tell of the first completed prototype. Building of the second vehicle will commence shortly. The Committee notes that the Brigade has provided extensive and impressive leadership, knowledge and experience into the vehicles design, and thanked the Brigade for its impressive contribution.

Rehab units support the health and wellbeing of mem-



works/traffic congestion, brigade capacity support gaps such as training opportunity etc. - all issues that can be addressed by CFA within the existing powers, responsibility and operating scope of the CFA Act.

If you are wondering how CFA's performance stacks up against other services - for the same reporting period MFB reported 10,077 incidents, with 738 of these being structure fires; and they conducted 239 prevention and preparedness activities (including Dangerous Goods inspections, Residential risk referrals, fire investigations and community education/resilience programs). MFB reported 89% of emergency call outs met response targets. Like CFA, MFB had some locations with lower response performance and factors causing this included road networks/congestion larger service areas and longer travel times for stations servicing outer suburbs, extreme weather, time of day etc.

For the 2015/16 year, the NSW Fire and Rescue Annual Report reported that permanently staffed fire crews achieved a response time of 9 minutes 58 seconds to 90% of all structure fires. A recent release by Ambulance Victoria for the period 1st October - 31 December 2017 reported a statewide achievement of 81.4% of code 1 incidents within 15 minutes.

No-one is suggesting anything other than aiming for the fastest possible response to emergencies - the thing that gripes me is that some MPs are twisting the story and spinning to the media a selectively negative slant on CFA performance when in fact it is something we as a State should be very proud of and a performance that not only compares well with other services but for the most part excels. As I have stated publicly in recent media, VFBV and volunteers are sick of people attempting to politicise the fire service and trying to invent a crisis of community confidence just so that they can drive the flawed and industrially driven Fire Service restructure agenda which at its core is designed to dismantle CFA so that unlawful EBA provisions can find a loophole through Fair Work Act requirements that simply aim to stop EBAs from restricting how an organisation such as CFA supports, equips, engages and manages its volunteers.

I encourage all of you to be active, respectful and constructive voices in your local communities, through your broad networks and via people you know who can talk to other influence chains to ensure our communities and the general public understand these basic facts and to counter the CFA/volunteer vilification spin that looks like being adopted by some just to achieve a political agenda to dismantle CFA.

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