



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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Nominations for Trust Fund

A reminder that the VFBV Board is calling for nominations to the CFA & Brigades Donations Trust Fund.

Following nominations, five new or reappointed members will be appointed by the VFBV Board to serve as VFBV trustees on the Trust Fund for a 12 month term. The Trust Fund committee meet quarterly, either via teleconference or at CFA H.Q.

Nominations close Friday 22nd June 2018 and can be mailed to VFBV office 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East 3151 or emailed to vfbv@vfbv.com

Annual Brigade/Group Allowance Survey

A reminder that last month we posted the Brigade/Group Allowance survey to all Brigades and Groups.

The issue of Brigade and Group allowances is regularly raised with VFBV delegates as a matter of concern amongst members. As a result, State Council has recently decided to survey all Brigades and Groups to determine if current allowances are adequate. The information gleaned from the survey will assist with future advocacy on this important issue.

The survey closes on Monday 6 August – and is also available via the VFBV website.

VOLUNTEERS, SPREAD THE WORD

by Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

I am yearning for the day that I write this column celebrating an observation that things might have turned a corner and that current Victorian Government has finally seen the light and re-thought its flawed plan to carve up CFA. Unfortunately, I still cannot report this as being the case.

Over the past months I have had two major themes of questioning about where things are at and where they are headed regarding the current Victorian State Government's fire service restructure and CFA carve up plans.

On the one hand I have had many optimistic (and unfortunately misguided) queries or should I say hopes asking whether the silence in the media and other forums means that the Government's Fire Service reform agenda – the CFA carve up – has been defeated once and for all by the decision in the Victorian Parliament Upper House a few months ago. And on the other hand I have had many volunteers, members of the community and friends of CFA asking what they can do, what more VFBV can do, to ensure the Victorian Government puts aside its flawed CFA carve up agenda and starts a more constructive, transparent and genuine agenda to talk about what we can all do to ensure Victoria's fire services meet the needs of tomorrow.

So to start somewhere simple lets clear up one sad reality. The Government's push to carve up the CFA is not over. The Premier has publicly stated that his Government remains committed to its CFA restructure agenda and that they will continue to pursue whatever avenue they can to see the legislation get through.

So unless we and the community can change the Government's mind, the risk of this legislation and its negative consequence is a very real and continuing issue. If this Government can somehow get the numbers to push the legislation through before the next state election in November then the indication is they will do so and one can assume that if a Labor state government is elected in Victoria at the November State election, their push to carve up the CFA will continue.

So this leads to the next most common question. What can people do about it?

I know we have discussed this before and I know many of us are well and truly sick of it but the reality is that we all need to keep our voice up and we need to redouble our efforts to explain our concerns and to expose the flawed motivation behind the Victorian Governments proposed changes to CFA.

I, along with a huge number of very experienced CFA volunteers, am firmly of the view that if this Governments policy gets up and the carve up of CFA goes ahead it will be the end of CFA as we know it.

There is plenty documented on VFBV website about the flaws in both the motivation behind the Government's reform and the flaws in what they are proposing. And the community is now pretty well enlivened to the dirty deals and game playing that seems to be sitting behind the proposed changes.

What they are less aware of is the fact that the proposed changes will provide no additional service capacity or service flexibility to meet urban growth demands than what exists today; they are not aware that the changes will actually further erode the CFA Chief Officer's ability to manage his or her statutory responsibilities and will pave the way for even more political and industrial interference in the way CFA operates; that all CFA operational personnel, including all operational personnel who currently support brigades throughout regional Victoria as Operations Officers and Operations Managers, will be transferred out of CFA to a new organisation Fire Rescue Victoria and then seconded back to CFA under arrangements that decrease the CFA Chief Officers ability to select, deploy and manage them; that in truth the changes are just designed to find a way to circumvent the laws that seek to ensure EBAs cannot limit how CFA equips, supports, recognises, respects and consults with volunteers.

To be blunt, the Victorian Government's Fire Service Reform is nothing more than a CFA carve up and it looks to be driven more by caving in to union pressure than anything to do with community safety.

So, getting back to the question about what you can do. Every volunteer can help by actively generating discussion amongst your family, your neighbors, your local community networks, your friends and relatives – explain our concerns to them and explain the potential impact on the future of CFA if the proposed carve up goes ahead. CFA volunteer and community networks are a very expansive and powerful tool, turn on your networks and ask your networks to let your local MPs know about how you feel and what you expect them to do about your concerns.

Take time to share your concerns with everyone you know and ask them to talk to everyone they know. Ask your local MPs whether they will support CFA and what they will do to help stop this



legislation, work closely with and support any MP who supports CFA volunteers; work hard to change the minds of any MP who isn't listening or who needs further convincing and encourage for the conversations to become very public.

CFA volunteers have enormous respect in the community and people are going to listen. But you have to speak up and maintain the voice if we are going to be successful in avoiding the dismantling and destruction of CFA.

Furthermore, it would appear that some members of Parliament will use whatever story they can to erode public confidence in the CFA model and services provided by volunteers in an endeavor to justify the flawed CFA carve up.

The mis-use of response time data reporting and claims that performance gaps are caused by the CFA current structure and legislation are totally misleading. And the inference that volunteers aren't up to the task of providing modern urban fire-fighting services is a slap in the face to volunteers and a blatant lack of respect for the professional work volunteers do. Sure there are circumstances when service demands will exceed volunteer capacity and everyone agrees that our interests need to be driven by community safety, but the fact is that where there are service gaps, the existing CFA model has the ability to grow and evolve service, adding equipment, infrastructure, paid firefighter support and other support to supplement volunteers based on local needs.

For the Government to infer that response time service problems are caused by the current CFA legislation or the CFA volunteer and fully integrated service model is bull. When these comments and inferences are made, take the time to educate your local MP and your local communities about the facts.

We should not silently tolerate anyone who is misusing data or spreading selective spin to denigrate volunteers just for the sake of a political or industrial agenda. Whilst VFBV can seek to bring things to order at a broad level, the best place to hold some people to account will be via your local community

CFA Complaints and Disputes Management

VFBV continues to raise its concerns with CFA over its Complaints and Disputes management processes. Delegates to the Joint HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee were surprised to learn late last year about an external review that had been commissioned to review CFA processes and expressed disappointment that not only had there been no consultation to gather the views and feedback of volunteers during this review, but there had also been no formal consultation about the establishment of CFA's new Complaints Management Team and Integrity Unit that now operate out of headquarters. Whilst the establishment of these new units may both be laudable outcomes, VFBV continues to advocate that volunteers have a clear expectation that CFA's processes are transparent, fair and equitable and are surprised that VFBV and volunteers had not been formally engaged in their establishment.

The failure to meaningfully and effectively consult before decisions are made; to listen to volunteer concerns/inputs early in the deliberative process; and the under-utilisation of the knowledge and experience of volunteers results in widespread disaffection in volunteer ranks, and

CFA REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

VFBV is receiving complaints from Brigade's concerning CFA's changes to its end of financial year reporting requirements, that was reportedly communicated by CFA's Chief Financial Officer on the 23rd April. The most common complaint is about tight timeframes and the increased red tape and workload being pushed back down to Brigades, especially to Captains who have been advised they must now provide a Statutory Declaration when submitting their annual financial statements.

VFBV has no knowledge or background information as to the changes sought or the reasons for the changes – and has written to CFA seeking it meet its statutory obligations to consult, which will assist us better understand the changes, volunteer impacts and what additional support and assistance CFA will be providing Brigades and Groups to meet the revised requirements.

We will keep you informed on progress.

ultimately leads to poor acceptance and compliance and a lack of confidence amongst volunteers in the very systems designed to support, encourage and protect them.

VFBV has requested that CFA commit to engaging with the Joint Committee to discuss CFA's new processes and systems surrounding complaints and dispute resolution, with priority to be given to reviewing processes that ensure all CFA members involved in enquires or investigations in matters of dispute, conflict or discipline are afforded important basic rights such as; being treated with **dignity and respect**; ensuring **procedural fairness** - which means processes are objective, impartial and effective, timely and confidential; and ensuring principles of **natural justice** are applied which is about treating members with fairness and without bias.

VFBV believes that historically and taking in account current practices and processes, CFA are still not adequately addressing and delivering on these expectations, and we continue to receive complaints from members who have been involved in the process. We are aware of cases where volunteers are experiencing extremely long delays in having matters dealt with and are in limbo and often under suspension during these long delays. During these delays, members experience considerable anguish and anxiety, and VFBV continues to raise concerns about the impacts this has on members welfare. There are also reported cases of matters being escalated into formal investigations without and before, seeking local assistance and solutions at Brigade or Group level - missing vital opportunities for swift and local resolution outcomes – which has been CFA's policy objective.

We will continue to advocate for improvements and transparency in CFA's complaint and dispute resolution arrangements and have indicated to CFA that this remains a high priority area for the Committee to progress at their next scheduled meeting later this month. We will keep members updated on progress.

informative manner, an understanding of the diverse interests and requirements of members of the service, an ability to foresee and plan for the future of the organisation, and his outgoing and friendly personality."

Ray made a significant and positive contribution to CFA and was a staunch advocate and friend of CFA, volunteers and volunteerism and will be sadly missed.

VFBV, on behalf of CFA volunteers, pass on its condolences to the family.

Vale former CFA Chair Ray Greenwood

VFBV is saddened to hear of the death of former CFA Chair Mr Ray Greenwood, who passed away 5 June.

Ray served as Authority Chair from 1985 to 1989 and will be remembered fondly by Association members as a gentleman, great contributor and astute leader.

He is remembered as a fair man who genuinely had CFA volunteers at heart; and will long be remembered as a CFA Chair who, along with his wife Adrienne, was never shy about dropping in to Brigades right across the State for a friendly 'cuppa' and a chat.

He was a friend who worked hard to build a close and respectful partnership with volunteers, staff and the

volunteer Associations. A frequent attendee to Association meetings, one of his final acts as Chair was to attend the Executive meeting of the then Urban Association, saying that one of the highlights of his time with the CFA was taking the salute during the discipline parade at State Championships.

In the thank-you message on the front page of the 1989 June edition of 'The Fireman', his fine attributes which were described as having added to his success as Chair - were defined as including "...his integrity, his ability to communicate with all levels, an outstanding public speaking prowess which enables him to deliver a positive message in a very clear, concise and

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