



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## FEEDBACK REQUESTED

There are a number of important issues for all volunteers currently out for feedback, and VFBV strongly encourages all members to participate in forwarding their comments and views, to enable VFBV to advocate on their behalf to CFA.

**1. Brigade/Group Allowance Survey:** The CFA Annual Allowances have been a longstanding issue raised by Brigades and Groups as a matter of concern for many years, and the current survey out for feedback will enable VFBV to determine if current allowances are adequate, and to be able to advocate on this important issue. Survey responses are due no later than Monday 6 August 2018, and can be mailed to VFBV, faxed to 03 9886 1618 or emailed to [allowanceSurvey@vfbv.com.au](mailto:allowanceSurvey@vfbv.com.au)

**2. CFA Proposed Traditional, Social and Digital Media Business Rule:** CFA has formally requested VFBV review and provide feedback on this proposed CFA Business Rule. Any comments on suggested improvements or clarifications would be welcome from volunteers, as would any practical limitations or difficulties members may identify. Feedback or comments are due no later than Monday 20 August 2018, and can be mailed or faxed to VFBV, or emailed to [m.dryden@vfbv.com.au](mailto:m.dryden@vfbv.com.au)

**3. CFA Integrity Framework:** CFA has formally requested VFBV review and provide feedback on CFA's proposed Integrity Framework. Any comments on suggested improvements or clarifications would be welcome, as would any concerns, aspirations or practical limitations/difficulties members may identify. Feedback or comments are due no later than Monday 20

August 2018, and can be mailed or faxed to VFBV, or to [c.fryer@vfbv.com.au](mailto:c.fryer@vfbv.com.au)

**4. Torch and PPC Kit Bag Survey:** The allocation of Torches and PPC Kit Bags has been raised by District Councils as a matter of concern to volunteers, with State Council's decision to survey all Brigades and Groups to seek feedback and volunteer views, to enable VFBV to form a position on which to advocate to CFA on behalf of all volunteers. Feedback or comments due no later than Sunday 30 September 2018, and can be mailed or faxed to VFBV, or emailed to [torchSurvey@vfbv.com.au](mailto:torchSurvey@vfbv.com.au). An online version is available via VFBV website.

The above documents have already been distributed widely and to District Councils, except for the Torch and PPC Kit Bag Survey which is due to be distributed shortly via our quarterly mail-out. All volunteers are asked to participate in discussions at the District, Group and Brigade level, and forward your feedback and views on these important key issues.

VFBV's process of engaging with the field and seeking feedback from volunteers is vital in enabling VFBV to strongly advocate to CFA on your behalf. Feedback does not necessarily need to be a lengthy formal business case, it can be a letter or a simple short email, briefing putting forward your comments or views. All feedback is welcome and appreciated.

## Genuine consultation - get involved

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Acting Chief Executive Officer

In all organisations, but even more so in a volunteer-based organisation, the importance of genuine consultation and engagement of volunteers in decisions that affect them cannot be overstated. Enquiry after enquiry, report after report highlights that the failure to genuinely consult with or listen to volunteers, and the under-utilization of the significant knowledge and experience of volunteers is an area that still requires significant attention.

Successive annual VFBV volunteer welfare and efficiency surveys also highlight volunteer dissatisfaction with the extent and manner to which consultation occurs, especially in decision making at CFA corporate level.

A failure to consult and engage **effectively** and **genuinely** with volunteers has significant consequences. Amongst these are:

- programs not being implemented with lasting buy-in
- programs not being conducive to optimal volunteer participation, potentially missing critical volunteer capability development
- poor decisions that have serious impact on long term volunteer viability, morale and willingness to contribute
- decisions designed to suit the corporate environment and needs – but not necessarily workable or practical on the ground
- excessive time spent on “selling” or “spinning” decisions that have already been made to try and illicit support and compliance

Whereas genuine, up-front engagement and consultation that is timely, honest and transparent has been proven time and again to lead to:

- lasting community capacity and shared responsibility outcomes that contribute to strong community resilience for a safer Victoria
- programs, policies, initiatives and systems that work for volunteers and get the most out of what volunteers are prepared to contribute
- better understanding of the challenges and context for proposed solutions, policy or organisational arrangements that leads to better, faster and longer lasting outcomes
- efforts focused on solving problems and sharing in developing workable solutions that ultimately harnesses the experience and knowledge amongst volunteers and leads to wider buy-in, acceptance and support

It is VFBV's strong belief that empowering volunteers and engaging with them to consider issues and contributing to decisions and leadership on the best way forward leads not only to solutions that will work better on the ground, but also contributes

to a motivation for members to continue contributing their services and generates a feeling of pride and ownership in the organisation's goals and values, supports innovation and positively contributes to an agile organisation and values-based culture.

On this latter issue, CFA cannot operate on the premise that all leadership, direction, governance and performance management will be provided by paid personnel. Whilst the significant contribution that is made by our paid personnel is greatly respected and appreciated – volunteers aspire for an organisational culture where they feel their input and contribution is similarly respected, nurtured, embraced and appreciated.

As volunteers, we do not accept second class treatment or differential outcomes simply because volunteers are not paid. Consultation must therefore treat all stakeholders and members as equals, and any decisions or side deals that are negotiated between closed doors and pit one group against another or unfairly advantage one group over another should not be supported. We must also guard against the politics of envy to ensure it doesn't similarly dictate policy direction or outcomes. Mature, inclusive and equitable consultation arrangements that encourage all members of all backgrounds and experiences to work collaboratively towards shared goals should be what we all aspire for and work towards.

Last month, reflecting on former CFA Chair Ray Greenwood's passing, the wisdom in his remarks in this publication upon his retirement was evident when he said: “The unique blending of permanent staff and volunteers which we enjoy and perhaps take for granted also needs to be fostered and sustained and this is a mutual responsibility. Expecting too much from each other and a lack of communication are the surest ways to damage any relationship, and this one is too valuable to lose through neglect.”

In any “workforce”, the genuine engagement with those doing the “work” is key. In a decentralised organisation it is even more important. In a community embedded and overwhelmingly volunteer based organisation - it is critical.

On this issue, I encourage all members to actively contribute to discussions and forums available to seek your views and input. Referred to elsewhere throughout this publication, as well as being a regular feature of VFBV District Councils - are reminders on topics of which targeted



feedback is being sought.

I encourage members to not just focus on “meeting” dates, and formal requests for feedback but to also utilize the structures and support networks that span and reach almost every community across Victoria. VFBV networks, just like Brigade and Group structures operate 365 days of the year. These organic networks are a treasure trove of good ideas and sensible practical solutions – and are often untapped through the sector's formal structures.

Whether it be a new policy or initiative being developed; how best to support service delivery; new equipment design; discussions on how best to support and structure training delivery; health and safety initiatives; or embracing community education and prevention activities – the sharing of your knowledge, experience and expertise is vital.

While it may be easy to feel down or skeptical about the current environment and how your views and input may or may not be considered by decision makers – we need to trust and have faith that volunteer consultation and engagement will ultimately be embraced, nurtured and respected.

Our deeds, our actions and our words do and can make a difference. Contributing to the discussions and participating in respectful and genuine conversations about all matters that affect us, play a significant role in guiding an organisation's culture, values, behaviors and approach.

Don't give up, and don't under value your input. It doesn't have to be fancy or formalised, or run pages and pages long – just get involved. The sharing and exchanging of views and information to form genuine and informed dialog is the key. Hearing and understanding differing viewpoints and perspectives often yields great rewards, and many of those “ah-ha!” moments. We owe so much to those that came before us, and like every previous generation – we have an obligation to keep striving to make things better and stronger than when we inherited it.

And on this note, and on behalf of the entire extended VFBV family, I want to acknowledge the passing of our great friend, John ‘Macca’ McLeod AFSM. John passionately and tirelessly advocated on behalf of CFA and CFA volunteers until the very end. He will be sorely missed, and we send our thoughts, prayers and best wishes to Trish, and John's extended family and friends.

## Vale John McLeod AFSM

It was with great sadness that VFBV heard of the passing of our esteemed colleague and friend, VFBV Life Member John McLeod AFSM, who passed away last month after a long illness.

Known by many throughout the fire services as ‘Macca’, John was a member and Ex Captain of the Boronia Brigade for over 60 years, and made a significant contribution to the Brigade, and District 13 Brigades.

John was an Executive Member of the former Victorian Urban Fire Brigades Association from 1971 to 2002, and on his retirement was amongst the longest serving Association members, having represented District 13 for over 30 years. John's significant contribution over the years included holding office as Association President on four occasions - 1967/77, 1989/90, 1994/95 and 1996/97 and he contributed on numerous Association Committees and working parties over that time.

John was a huge supporter and active member at local urban competitions and State Championships, being a former competitor, coach, judge and Track Master for over thirty years.

He continued his service and strong support of the Association following his retirement, including up until his passing as a member of the VFBV Working Party developing the history of the two volunteer Associations, and will be sadly missed by his friends, colleagues and fellow firefighters throughout the fire services.

## New to VFBV Board

VFBV welcomes new Board Member Libby Hay, who fills a VFBV Board casual vacancy which arose earlier this year following the resignation of Mick Nunweek (Stawell), who resigned from CFA earlier this year.

Libby grew up in country W.A., where her Dad was heavily involved in the local volunteer brigade. Having always had an awareness of how important volunteer fire brigades are to local communities, life came full circle a few years ago when she joined the Barwon Heads Fire Brigade as an operational member.

The Brigade's Community Safety Coordinator, Libby is also a member of the Bellarine Group Community Safety Committee.

Libby's professional background is in strategic communications with many years' experience working in the private sector, and it is this expertise she is looking forward to bringing to the VFBV Board.

The Board will be welcoming Libby to her first Board meeting next month, and is looking forward to her involvement and input.

A number of applications were received for this casual vacancy and the interview panel were impressed with the high calibre of all candidates.

All members are reminded of the forthcoming VFBV Board vacancies later this year, and encourages any member interested in making a difference for CFA volunteers, to consider applying. Applications close 1st August 2018 (further details on page 9 this edition of Fire Wise).

## Supplementary Alerting

A multi-agency project team involving CFA, SES and Ambulance Victoria have launched a survey to gather the views of volunteers on a future supplementary alerting system, involving a mobile app.

VFBV supports this survey and project, and encourages all members who would like to compliment their paging service with additional options such as mobile apps to provide feedback via the survey. A link can be found via the CFA and VFBV websites. The survey closes on 31 July 2018.

## Low Voltage Fuse Removal

The Joint Operations Committee continue to raise its concerns with the state of training and equipment concerning Low Voltage Fuse Removal. Due to the lack of delivery of courses, and skills maintenance training – the numbers of trained personnel has plummeted to an all-time low, with only a handful of members across the state remaining current.

VFBV continues to advocate the importance of this training for the safety of members and reducing the risks of electrocution hazards, as well as address the non-standard, outdated and untested equipment prevalent across the State and inadequate storage of removal sticks on vehicles.

CFA advised VFBV last year that it had completed and submitted a Business Case to Government for funding of a program to replace untested and dated equipment as well as address the urgent need to re-establish skills maintenance and skills acquisition training across the State. VFBV understands that the CFA request for additional funding to fund this program has been unsuccessful.

VFBV had requested the Chief Officer escalate the issue and have the matter addressed by the CFA Board as a matter of urgency, advising that alternate escalation paths may need to be considered by VFBV should progress continue to be slow. Earlier this month, CFA advised of positive progress to rectify the issues and the Committee continues to try and inform and advocate to CFA on the serious risks both to members, and the organisation the current situation is resulting in.

## MORE FOR ONLINE SUBSCRIBERS

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