



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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VFBV Board position available; invitation to apply
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STRUCTURAL HELMETS

VFBV has become aware that some CFA senior officers are giving the impression that the acquisition and rollout of new European style structural helmets to volunteers is being delayed by VFBV. To be very clear:

- VFBV requested an inclusive consultative forum for the evaluation and selection of a new structural helmet over two years ago
- VFBV requested one helmet to be selected – and there to be no difference between the helmet selected for career staff and volunteers
- VFBV requested that the replacement strategy be fully costed, funded and rolled out State wide with no preferential treatment in rollout between career staff and volunteers

Two years later, CFA has advised VFBV that under Victorian Government Tender Guidelines and Policies, it is required to run an open tender and evaluation process before procuring helmets or choosing a manufacturer – and as this has not yet been done, it cannot proceed with procurement until this is complete. As such, CFA advised it would be running an evaluation and asked if VFBV would like to be involved in it, to which we have responded – yes, and quickly. This should not be in any way construed as VFBV being the cause of the delay, or VFBV insisting on some other process. The evidence and history clearly show VFBV has been trying to be proactive on this issue for over two years. VFBV is very disappointed that any senior officer would seek to give any other impression, and VFBV wrote directly to the CFA Chief Officer in June this year requesting he assist with correcting the record.

It is unclear why the procurement of helmets for staff has allegedly not been subject to the same Victorian Government tender guidelines and policy that volunteers are being told they must follow, and this remains a question requiring CFA response and explanation.

GROUP OFFICER HELMETS

VFBV continues to seek clarification on rumours that CFA is introducing new helmet colours for career staff only and asking why there has been no consultation with volunteers on the proposed changes. VFBV State Council has expressed strong disappointment with CFA's advice that it has come to an agreement with UFU on helmet colours, and that volunteers will not be permitted to wear the same colour helmets as career staff. Not only does this appear to be trying to implement the Government's Fire Services Reform by stealth, but VFBV considers these constant petty attempts to segregate and discriminate against CFA members based on their pay status to be divisive, is contrary to CFA values and is designed to drive a wedge between career staff and volunteers. Again, the lack of volunteer consultation not only breaches the Volunteer Charter and CFA Act but has led to an obvious volunteer impact not being identified, planned for or consulted on.

CFA has confirmed that as a result of this agreement, volunteer Group Officers and Deputy Group Officers will not be issued with new white structural helmets, advising that in the future volunteers will only be issued with red or yellow European style structural helmets when they are rolled out.

CFA has advised this is because Group Officers and Deputy Group Officers are a role not a rank, and that these officers are not normally involved in internal structural attack. VFBV State Council has rejected these explanations, reminding CFA that Group and Deputy Group Officers are in fact a rank, and are specified in the Chain of Command under Chief Officer Standing Order 8.0

Further, the argument that this role/rank is not likely to be involved in internal structural attack does not stand up to scrutiny when you consider

CFA also intends to issue new helmets to its Operation Officers and Operations Managers.

VFBV has cautioned CFA about its approach, advising that volunteers are increasingly reporting they are not feeling respected or appreciated by CFA, and the serious consequences these secret backroom deals are having on volunteer goodwill and morale. VFBV is now considering options to further escalate our concerns and will continue to seek a fair and transparent resolution.

Low voltage fuse removal

As reported last month, VFBV requested that CFA consider a simple RPL process for qualified electricians to be recognised for low voltage fuse removal.

CFA provided an opportunity for volunteers to meet with the CFA working group and subject matter experts to discuss details. CFA has advised that whilst it will be possible to provide RPL for the electrical safety awareness portion of the course, there were aspects of the CFA low voltage fuse removal training that require an assessment of an individual's knowledge and awareness of specific CFA procedures, which are not covered by the industry generic package. Also, it was advised that CFA was intending on issuing new electrical current detection equipment that will require training and familiarization.

CFA has agreed to prioritise online and self-paced training options for the more generic electrical safety awareness package, that will then shorten the length of face to face learning required to cover the low voltage fuse removal portion of the course. VFBV continues to advocate

Concern about Presumptive Legislation: a failed promise

by Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

On top of the steady flow of concern I receive about lack of action and perhaps spurred by the recent Channel 9 A Current Affair episode or recent discussions in the Victorian Parliament over the past month, I have received an increasing number of queries from volunteers asking:

'What is the status of Presumptive Legislation for Victorian firefighters?' and

'Why hasn't this legislation been delivered in accordance with a commitment made by the Victorian Government leading into the 2014 Victorian State election?'

Good questions, and I share the frustration of many of you who have expressed concern that not only has this promise not been delivered, it is now also clear that the Victorian Government does not think that volunteers and paid firefighters should be afforded the same protection and the same simple process when they need support in the unfortunate event of suffering a firefighter

related cancer.

In simplest terms presumptive legislation remains an undelivered promise for Victorian firefighters.

A presumptive legislation arrangement was proposed by the Victorian Labor Government last year; however in an appalling move that legislation was inappropriately tied to the completely separate issue involving legislation to dismantle CFA. Furthermore the proposed presumptive legislation arrangements, whilst proposing a good and simple arrangement for paid firefighters, unfortunately did NOT provide that same simple process for volunteers.

Since that time VFBV, along with many other respected public officials including legal experts, have expressed deep disappointment not only that the presumptive legislation was linked as a ransom note for a carve up of CFA but also at the deficiencies and

inequity in the discriminatory arrangements proposed for volunteers.

These concerns, to date, have been ignored by the Government and worse the Government has sought to falsely set about describing their proposed legislation as something that it is clearly not, claiming that it was developed in consultation with VFBV and that it is the same as the Queensland presumptive legislation - a legislation that VFBV would welcome if this statement were in fact true.

I am very concerned that the Government is misrepresenting its proposed legislation as something that it is clearly not. It is true to say that VFBV has said the model now applying in QLD is good and should be applied in Victoria. But the Victorian Labor Government's proposed legislation is NOT the same as QLD and includes specific clauses that add extra hurdles and administrative complexities for volunteers. Anyone who disputes this needs to be asked to line the two bits of legislation up side by side and remove the differences and problems included in the proposed Victorian legislation for CFA volunteers.

In April this year, the Labor Government's proposed legislation failed to gain support of the Victorian Parliament, complicated by its link with the very controversial carve up of CFA.

Subsequently an attempt by MP Daniel Young on behalf of Shooters Fishers and Farmers Party seeking to reconsider presumptive legislation as a stand alone issue also failed to gain support. The motion proposed by Mr Young was defeated in the Upper House with Labor, the Greens and Reason Party MPs voting against a motion that would have allowed Presumptive Legislation for firefighters to have been passed almost six months ago.

In May this year the collusion attempted to introduce presumptive compensation legislation into the Lower House, with amendments to the Government's proposal removing the discrimination between staff and volunteers. The Lower House divided for a vote on the motion, it was not supported by Labor MPs and was therefore defeated.

Last month a motion by independent MP James Purcell, Vote One Local Jobs, to expedite the consideration of Presumptive Legislation as a stand alone legislation (ie separated from the fire services structure changes and carve up of CFA) did not get support from Labor MPs who not only spoke against his motion but in my view either deliberately or accidentally misrepresented Labor's proposed legislation as being the same for volunteers and paid staff when clearly it is not.



So the story drags on and it is with some disappointment that I reflect on the day about five years ago now when I, along with Greens MP Colleen Hartland, then Shadow Minister James Merlino MP and several hundred volunteers, gathered outside Liberal MP Kim Wells office to try and push this issue along. Back then I called for the politics to be taken out of this issue. Back then I thought I had peoples word that volunteers would be treated the same as paid firefighters and that legislation would happen. I was critical of the Liberal Government which was in power at the time, I am critical of the way this Government is trying to tie presumptive legislation to a carve up of CFA now. I am very critical of any MPs promoting legislation that discriminates against volunteer firefighters (and even more critical of the ones spinning that it doesn't) and I am critical of the MPs blocking attempts to expedite the passage of a rethought and fair legislation now.

Firefighters health should be beyond politics, beyond pay status and beyond misleading untruths.

VFBV, legal experts and people associated with cancer legislation in other states such as QLD, which now enjoy good presumptive legislation arrangements, have provided very clear and detailed advice to all MPs that the legislation currently proposed by the Victorian Government does not treat volunteers and paid firefighters equally and furthermore the proposed legislation does not provide a simple process for volunteers.

Instead it sets up and perpetuates complex administrative and legal arrangements for volunteers and a much simpler process for paid firefighters. It treats volunteers and paid firefighters differently even though they attend the same fires, breath the same smoke, are exposed to the same toxins and suffer the same illnesses. We have given them a simple way forward based on removing the extra volunteer hurdles in the Victorian proposal, but this has been ignored.

For now it looks like there needs to be a rocket put under this issue and I encourage all volunteers to reactivate on this matter. Write to your local MP, raise this concern within your local community networks, talk as broadly as you can and let everyone know about the frustration that we now face at every fire and now heading into another summer, without fair and simple protections if it comes to seeking help for a firefighter related cancer.

If you were a volunteer or paid firefighter in QLD, TAS, SA, WA, ACT, NT you would be better supported. Are CFA volunteers worth less?

WELFARE AND EFFICIENCY SURVEY NOW OPEN

The annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey opened on 31 August and you are encouraged to have your say.

One of the largest surveys of its kind, the VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is a critical tool to capture formal, evidence-based feedback directly from CFA volunteers about their expectations and satisfaction with matters they feel are a priority for their general welfare and efficiency.

2018 will be the seventh time the survey has been offered and with the high number of participants it is an extremely reliable representation of the views of CFA volunteers. Participation in the survey is important to ensure the survey continues to be a significant method of capturing volunteer opinion, monitor trends and guarantee volunteer voices are heard.

For the third year the survey is also being offered to fire service volunteers across Australia which will allow for a comparative view about how CFA volunteers feel compared to their peers in other fire services.

It is vital that you get involved. The survey will take 10-15 minutes to complete and is open until close of business on Monday 22 October.

Visit the VFBV Website to take part in the survey. Previous years results can also be found on the VFBV website.

PLUMBING REGS REVIEW

VFBV has requested CFA conduct an impact analysis of the proposed Plumbing Regulations 2018 on CFA FEM services, expressing disappointment that CFA has not engaged or consulted with volunteers on the regulation sunset review.

VFBV analysis has indicated that the proposed Regulations which are expected to be in place by November 2018 would prevent CFA Brigades from maintaining,

for the building of electrical safety mobile training props, in addition to the training campus props that would give Brigades and Groups access to more flexible training options, allowing flexibility of training to occur at the local Brigade/Group level at times and locations suitable for volunteers.

testing or servicing hose reels in the future. Under current practice, trained and appropriately qualified FEM personnel can provide basic test and service to the "dry" side of the reels, with any repairs or maintenance to the "wet" side needing to be done by a licensed plumber. The proposed regulations suggest that this ability will be removed, and any routine level 1 or level 2 testing or maintenance of hose reels will need to be performed by a licenced plumber.

Given the high number of CFA FEM Brigades who routinely service and test hose reels, VFBV believes this may have a large impact, and has requested urgent attention by CFA to clarify and advocate changes, for what we presume is an unintended consequence of the regulations review.

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