



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## VFBV VolWel Survey

This year's Volunteer Survey closes this month. Have you had your say?

A frequent criticism of volunteers is the lack of consultation and the fact that no-one asked what we thought. Here is an opportunity for you to provide feedback on what is working well and what isn't.

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is an annual snapshot of volunteer views and opinions. It keeps us informed about what volunteers think and how they think CFA is performing. It helps us understand what you need to support your CFA activities. It's not just about what is not working. It is often a good insight into the areas that are working well which helps us learn from the good. It also helps show areas that with a little bit of attention could be doing better.

If you haven't done this year's survey – then how will anyone know what you think? Your input is valued. The results of the survey are used not just by VFBV to advocate on your behalf but senior leaders across the sector. The results go to CFA, EMV and Government. It shapes and

## WORKWEAR PROGRESS

CFA recently reported on the results of the second volunteer workwear survey that was undertaken as a follow-up to the previous survey. More than 3,300 people responded to the original survey. Following wide spread criticism of the original designs by VFBV and volunteers, CFA worked with VFBV to redesign the garments based on volunteer feedback.

The second survey showcased the re-designed garments and asked for confirmation on several design options. Over 1,700 volunteers responded to the second survey. Over 87% of people

drives the important advocacy work that gets done in the background to help you.

Make your voice heard and contribute to our understanding of what is working and what isn't. Visit [vfbv.com.au](http://vfbv.com.au) today to complete the survey before it closes this month.

This month - nominations opened for the 2020 Spirit of CFA Awards. Nominations for the current round will close on 3 January 2020.

Held every two years, the Spirit of CFA awards were first held in 2018 and recognises the exceptional achieve-

## Fire investigation helmets

VFBV was approached by a high number of fire investigators who were deeply critical of CFA's recent roll-out of fire investigation helmets. The new helmets now visually differentiate between career firefighters performing the role, and volunteer fire investigators.

It was pointed out that each undergoes the same training and have the same qualification and this team frequently works across both volunteer and career lines. We were told the team works very well as one integrated team with a high level of respect between the volunteers and staff who make up the team. The fear was this forced differentiation will now erode this common culture and kinship and create a wedge based solely on pay status.

VFBV shares these concerns and advocated strongly for CFA to stop this approach. We argued the folly of differentiating between CFA members based on their pay status and the unintended consequences and negative impact it has on the sectors culture of 'working as one'.

CFA representatives advised VFBV that CFA and the UFU have come to an agreement on differentiating career fire investigators from volunteer fire investigators and therefore there was no choice but to comply with this agreement.

State Council has supported a request by District Council 23 to therefore advocate for the withdrawal of the 'volunteer' sticker that has recently been introduced. CFA has subsequently now agreed to its withdrawal acknowledging this had not been consulted on and was introduced in error. Despite career member fire investigator helmet colours changing – CFA has agreed that these changes should not impact volunteers and status quo will remain for volunteer fire investigator helmets. They will continue to be blue and will continue to be identified as they were previously. New stickers to replace the ones that were placed on volunteer fire investigator helmets during the Pacific R55 helmet rollout are now in the process of being issued, and CFA has issued a memorandum to all volunteer fire investigators explaining how to replace the stickers.

agreed this version of the workwear addresses the issues previously raised. 81% indicated they were satisfied with the new version.

VFBV has endorsed the survey's results and advised CFA that it supports each of the preferred design choices selected by the majority of respondents. CFA is now undertaking detailed design and specification work to pre-

pare for tender. VFBV continues to advocate that the specifications encourage natural fibres and have requested CFA support greater flexibility in the Chief Officers allocation strategy to allow the opportunity for brigade input into how the new garments be rolled out. VFBV continues to encourage CFA to finalise the specifications and release for tender as soon as possible.

## Torch and kit bags

At last month's VFBV State Council a position on helmet torches and kit bags was finalised and endorsed. State Council drew on the results of VFBV's Helmet Torch and Kit Bag Survey that sought feedback from almost 1,000 members. It has formed the position that a Helmet Torch and Kit Bag should form part of CFA's minimum PPC wildfire allocation for all members upon completion of their minimum skills.

The survey results confirmed VFBV's view that safety was the primary consideration for helmet torches, with 99% of Brigade/Group and individual responses to the survey agreeing that helmet torches should be considered essential equipment for operational use and should form part of minimum standard. There was an overwhelming preference for personal issue vs vehicle caches.

State council considered the results that showed 92% of brigade responses and 84% of individual responses indicated helmet torches the more appropriate minimum standard over right angle or handheld torches. However in recognition that preference for helmet torches over right angle torches dropped to 78% from predominately structural districts, State Council has requested delegates to the Equipment and Infrastructure Committee work with CFA to explore alternatives for a future second phase strategy. This strategy would address the availability of right angle torches for the structural environment such as during BA operations etc. VFBV will now brief CFA on the results and corresponding State Council position and campaign for CFA support for the new minimum standard. We will need to promote the increased health and safety outcomes the new minimum standard would bring for firefighters, as CFA support is likely to be contingent on funding.

## VFBV Board annual meeting

The VFBV Board held its annual meeting on 4 October and welcomed new VFBV Board member David Sidebottom. David is a volunteer from District 13 with over 50 years of CFA service and experience in senior leadership roles. David is an experienced company director of his own company, and previously worked as an Operations Manager for Yarra Valley Water. He replaces Kate Boschetti who retired from the VFBV Board in September and was thanked for her valuable contribution and service over the last two years.

Following interviews and a selection process, Samantha Rothman, Jan Cleary and Libby Hay were all reappointed by the State Council Executive panel for a further 2-year term. Graeme Jilbert and Robert Auchterlonie were both re-appointed by State Council as the two State Council delegates to the Board.

Re-elected were Nev Jones AFSM as State President, Samantha Rothman as State Vice President and Andy Cusack AFSM as Treasurer.

## RECOGNISE THE QUIET ACHIEVERS

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

ments of CFA members across nine categories.

These awards are an excellent opportunity to recognise some of our quiet achievers. We all know people who go about their work without any thought of recognition or praise.

The world is roughly split between those with a preference for either extroversion or introversion. Extraverts are often rewarded more often because they are noticed more and tend to enjoy social interactions. They are often described as being enthusiastic and talkative. They tend to be more assertive around people and enjoy being in the spotlight.

Introverts are often more reserved or reflective. Because they prefer to work quietly or in the background, their contribution may often be overlooked or taken for granted. They may also be overlooked for recognition or leadership roles simply because extroverted behaviour fits more comfortably with the stereotype about how good leaders behave and interact.

Interestingly some of the world's most successful leaders have been introverts. Former US President Barack Obama is a recent example. He reminds us of the importance of honouring and respecting those amongst us who thrive in solitude but also make an incredible contribution to the team.

These people often contribute just as much to outcomes. They excel at activities that make good use of their listening skills. The team benefit from their deep thought and reflection to solve the problem at hand.

I encourage you to think about people who are always delivering amazing things. Those that consistently contribute or deliver outstanding results. Especially those that don't enjoy being in the spotlight or aren't shouting from the rooftops. Have a think about who has made a real difference to your brigade or group. Who toils away day after day, year after year and doesn't get the recognition or thanks they deserve?

The Spirit of CFA is a great opportunity to acknowledge and recognise the incredibly valuable contribution CFA members make to our community. Nominate people so that they receive the recognition they deserve. Visit the VFBV or CFA websites for information, or email [spiritofcfaawards@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:spiritofcfaawards@cfa.vic.gov.au)

### AFSM

A reminder that nominations for the next round of Australian Fire Services Medal's close on 1 November 2019. AFSMs are awarded twice a year as part of the Australia Day and Queens Birthday honours lists. They are awarded for distinguished service to the fire services across Australia.

Members should refer to the CFA Honours and Awards Nominator's Guide for help when preparing a nomination. Request the guide from [cfa-awards@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:cfa-awards@cfa.vic.gov.au)

### Fire Services Reform

High level planning for next year's Fire Services Reform implementation continues. The Government recently announced its reform Strategic and Operational Governance structures.

I am pleased to report that the Government have delivered on their commitment to VFBV that we would be engaged and represented at the highest levels.

The Minister has formed a VFBV Volunteer Reference Group at the strategic governance layer. This will ensure we can monitor and contribute to high level strategic issues, opportunities and concerns. This is a small strategic group, VFBV representatives are State President Nev Jones, State Vice President Samantha Rothman and myself.

As workplans are developed - this group will monitor consultation and implementation. Its role will be to inform senior levels of Government on the progress of consultation and ensure decision makers are aware of any volunteer impacts or concerns.

This will not be the only engagement mechanism. All current consultative structures will continue. This will ensure existing structures are linked and are being used to gather input and feedback. There are similar reference groups in the governance structure to ensure career firefighters and non-operational employees are also represented. Hopefully, this will ensure all perspectives are present and equally involved in discussions.

On 23 September the Minister hosted a strategic workshop with a small group of leaders drawn from across the sector. It was attended by VFBV, UFU, EMV, ESTA and senior department and government representatives. This workshop explored and discussed stakeholder perspectives on implementation challenges and opportunities. VFBV was represented by State President Nev Jones AFSM and myself.

While this was not a decision making forum, it was a terrific opportunity for stakeholders to discuss reform and begin developing shared trust, transparency and goodwill.

I am pleased to report that discussions were positive and good natured. With so much water under the bridge there was no way we could cover everything, but as a way of kicking off a new approach it was certainly a huge step in the right direction. The outcomes of this session will be used to inform the prioritisation of the key issues and opportunities for the implementation teams to focus on as they develop their work plans.

Over the coming months the agency groups (made up of EMV, CFA, MFB, ESTA and FRV) will start developing draft work and implementation plans. We are told that stakeholder feedback and input will be sought during each phase.

Each of the workstreams will identify projects and tasks required to transition to the new model. This will include



key dependencies, resource requirements and scheduling.

I expect this work to start picking up pace and momentum as it progresses from scoping to delivery. VFBV will continue to advocate for strong engagement with the field. We will seek open and genuine opportunities for volunteers to be involved and that the agencies promote, encourage and seek feedback. I must caution members that when the rubber hits the road there is likely going to be an expectation of fast turnaround for feedback and input.

And while we will continue to advocate for engagement strategies that respect the Volunteer Charter and respect the size and diversity of all our people across the sector, I foreshadow a constant tension. A tension between two competing priorities. Enough time to engage genuinely as one. And the expectations of meeting project deadlines and dependant activities as two.

I'll do my bit to ensure decision makers are aware of our expectations, but I encourage members to start preparing for this work now.

For example, are you linked to VFBV consultative structures through your local level? Are you ready to provide informed feedback and comment? Have you selected delegates to represent your brigade or group that attend and contribute to your local VFBV District Council? Do you know who they are? Has your brigade or group started discussions about how it will prepare and inform your nominated delegates to represent your wishes back to District Council? Have you completed this year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey?

This is your opportunity to have your say about what is working well and what needs improvement.

Get involved and don't wait to be told what someone else thinks the new CFA will look like. Start thinking about how we as volunteers will address some of the new challenges and opportunities. Start thinking about the new service delivery model that will be required. What do you need from the agencies and the Government to support you? How do you want to be encouraged when you're giving your all and making sacrifices to protect and defend your community during its time of need? Tick – tock.

Are you ready to answer these questions when they are asked? Have you answered the questions we have already asked you like through this year's volunteer survey?

Get involved.