



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

Address: 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East, 3151
 Email: vfbv@vfbv.com.au
 Telephone: 9886 1141
 Chief Executive Officer: Adam Barnett

Post: PO Box 453, Mt Waverley, 3149
 Website: www.vfbv.com.au
 Fax: 9886 1618
 State President: Nev Jones AFSM



WELFARE FUND

The Welfare Fund Committee has moved quickly to provide expeditious support for members directly impacted by this season's bushfires. With the large number of members directly impacted, high demand on the fund is expected and is being planned for. Brigades are requested to contact a VFBV State Councillor or VFBV Support Officer as soon as they become aware of members requiring assistance.

On the 4th January, VFBV issued a comprehensive News Note to members outlining available bushfire relief and recovery resources, such as Commonwealth, State and VFBV grants available for members impacted by the fire activity. It and updates are available from your VFBV District Council or vfbv.com.au

A list of support for CFA volunteers that has been generously donated by the corporate sector is also available at our website. Offers from Coles, Telstra, Optus, Vodafone and AGL are available to all CFA volunteers as at time of writing. Any additional donations will be progressively added.

16/17 year old operational firefighters

A reminder that the views of members on the continued use of 16- and 17-year old's as operational members is being sought.

With the law classifying any member under the age of 18 as a child, members are requested to discuss and make submission on whether the minimum age for operational activities should be changed or if there are further steps that can be taken to protect and improve the safety of children participating in CFA activities.

Brigades, Groups and members are encour-

aged to discuss at their local District Council meetings, and all members including juniors, parents, fellow brigade members and leaders are encouraged to consider making submission so that all perspectives can be understood and considered.

Information on how to make a submission can be found on the VFBV website, or by contacting your local State Councillor, VFBV Support Officer or District Council Executive member. Submissions are due by Monday 2nd March 2020.

State Championships Under 18's

CFA and VFBV have worked together to implement a new registration process for any competitor under the age of 18 taking part in this year's Horsham or Mooroopna State Championships.

CFA will require all parents and guardians of any person under the age of 18 to provide parental consent and supply relevant personal and medical information of their child, utilising the secure online platform CareMonkey. CareMonkey may be a familiar tool for many parents as it is utilised by many schools, scout groups and sporting clubs across Australia.

Parents and Guardians of

Cancellation of BA courses

VFBV delegates to the Joint Training Committee have expressed disappointment and escalated complaints arising from some Districts that are reporting cancellation or non-running of Breathing Apparatus courses due to the rollout of the new MSA BA Sets.

Some trainers have claimed that because training materials have not been rewritten to cover the new MSA sets that they are therefore unable to schedule courses using the current content.

VFBV delegates have strongly criticised this lack of planning and approach and have called on CFA to urgently resolve the issue. VFBV also continues to pursue delays experienced by volunteers attending BA Search and Rescue components required for internal structural attack.

EXTRAORDINARY VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTION

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

In last month's column I reflected on the incredible contribution that CFA was making to the QLD and NSW campaign fires. Our world-renowned volunteer surge capacity instantly swinging into action to deploy over 2,000 cumulative personnel deployments interstate to NSW and QLD to assist them in their time of need.

And while I write this month's column, it is estimated that we have again deployed another 2,500 CFA volunteer deployments to deal with the East Gippsland Fires. It is expected that this contribution will significantly increase as the Corryong, Abbeyard and Alpine fires continue to burn, not to mention the NSW fires across the border with another peak fire danger day looming as I write.

To be able to support interstate colleagues and then instantly redeploy to our own increasing operational activity back home demonstrates the incredible size, strength and capacity of our world-renowned volunteer model. Joining us have been hundreds of emergency management volunteers from the relief and recovery sector. I have been so incredibly proud of our members and brigades as I have observed them swing into action preparing, defending and protecting their communities. I attended and observed community meetings run by local brigades throughout east Gippsland to support and prepare their communities prior to and during emergency warnings and evacuation calls. Over half a million emergency warnings have been delivered by text and land line to communities in danger. With many community members feeling scared, isolated and worried, these meetings have been critical to reinforce the leave early messaging.

On display has been the incredible trust and respect that the public have for their local brigades and volunteers, with many in the fire zones heeding the call to relocate or leave early ahead of critical spike days. This, along with improved community warnings and advice backed up by authentic and honest conversations between brigades and their communities is likely to have been a key contributor to the relatively small number of fatalities experienced during these major bushfires when compared to Black Saturday.

With over a million hectares burnt, three fatalities, the loss of 286 properties and 400 other and out buildings is an extraordinary outcome. And while we grieve and feel every loss, we must force ourselves to recognise the sheer size and scope of what has been saved.

VFBV delegates and officials have been on the ground working alongside affected brigades and members - ensuring welfare support and recovery resources are made available as soon as possible. With many communities still inaccessible, this work continues. Any member, brigade or group who requires any assistance or support should reach out to a VFBV State Councillor or Support Officer as soon

as possible so we can arrange any additional or specialist support you may require.

Meeting with members directly impacted has been a deeply humbling and moving experience and one that I will struggle to put into words. The resilience, outlook and humility of our people, some who have lost so much has been truly inspirational. Through the very worst of times, we see the very best in people shine through. The generosity and care for others that has been shown by people directly impacted has been truly amazing, as too has the outpouring of appreciation and support by the wider public for everyone involved.

To all CFA members and those from our partner emergency service and recovery agencies thank-you. To all the incredible people assisting with relief centres and restoring access and essential services to impacted communities thank-you. To those of you contributing to welfare support of not just our own members but fellow Victorians - thank-you. Those of you in your local areas making yourselves available so fellow members can be deployed on strike teams further afield - thank-you. It is our collective efforts that make our response to these significant events so effective and admired across the world. Well done and thank-you. Be proud of your efforts and the part you have played.

I also want to make special reference to our emergency broadcasters who have done a wonderful job under very testing circumstances. The number of emergency warnings alone has put enormous pressure on them, and their calm and professional approach has been magnificent.

I will repeat what I said last month regarding fatigue and watching out for each other to guard against overcommitment. It is in our nature to put others ahead of ourselves. Please look out for each other to ensure your commitments are sustainable and as least disruptive to your families, careers and work/life balance as possible. During disaster, I understand the incredible drive you each have to give your all and rush to the aid of others. This will be a long season and we will need to pace ourselves.

For those of you who have been deployed and come across some challenging arrangements that have tested your patience and goodwill - try not to let it get you down. Make a note of it and ensure you raise it during future debriefs and post season reviews that are sure to follow. We all need to have a real good think about how some of these systemic frustrations continue to occur every season and how we might work with CFA to fix them in the future once and for all. Many of you are understandably tired and frustrated. Please be kind to one another. I say that not to patronize but to reassure. We are all in this together, and our communities are looking to us for hope, leadership and reassurance. There will be plenty of time to



review and reflect. Its not about ignoring or brushing it under the rug, but for now our focus is responding to our community's needs.

VALE

I along with you were heartbroken to learn of the recent in the line of duty deaths of three NSW RFS firefighters, and one Victorian firefighter from Forest Fire Management Victoria. On behalf of VFBV, CFA volunteers and all members I express our deepest sorrow and pass on our heartfelt thoughts and prayers to the family, loved ones, fellow brigade members and work colleagues. We mourn alongside our NSW and Victorian forest firefighter brethren for these devastating losses.

Deputy Captain Geoffrey Keaton and Volunteer Firefighter Andrew O'Dwyer, both from Horsley Park Fire Brigade were tragically killed while on duty at the Green Wattle Creek fireground, near Buxton in south western Sydney on the evening of Thursday 19 December 2019.

Volunteer firefighter Samuel McPaul, a member of Morven Rural Fire Brigade, was tragically killed while on duty at the Green Valley fireground east of Albury NSW on the evening of Monday 30 December 2019.

Forest Fire Management Victoria firefighter Mat Kavanagh died on Friday 3rd January 2020 when the vehicle he was travelling in was involved in a collision on the Goulburn Valley Highway Victoria.

Each of these firefighters were bravely defending their communities at the time of their deaths and their sacrifice and service will be forever remembered.

Our thoughts are also with all the other firefighters who were injured alongside each of these during the accidents. I pass on our thanks and gratitude to our fellow emergency service workers who were involved and assisting members at each of the scenes.

STAY SAFE

To all members, please take care of yourselves and stay safe for what will be an extended fire season.

We will stand by our communities for as long as they need us. After the fires have passed, we will then shift our focus to assisting with their recovery. And just like the fire ravaged landscape will heal and regrow, so will our resolve and dedication to helping our communities rebuild. Be proud of what you have achieved and thank-you for all you do in keeping our communities safe. CFA volunteers - ordinary people doing extraordinary things!

SPIRIT OF CFA

Due to the high level of operational activity the deadline for nominations has again been extended to Sunday 1st March 2020. With some of the incredible stories coming from this year's fire season, this is a terrific opportunity to recognise those people you think make an incredible contribution to CFA.

More information, the criteria for the awards and the process for nomination can be found at cfa.vic.gov.au/spiritofcfa

VESEP GRANTS ANNOUNCED

Minister Neville recently approved the outcomes for VESEP 2019/20. CFA was awarded \$10 million under this year's program. All applicants either successful or unsuccessful received notification by CFA early this month.

Of the 180 successful CFA grant applications, 43 are replacing or upgrading firefighting and specialist vehicles, 33 volunteer amenities improvements, 63 equipment and 41 minor works projects

In addition to the Brigade projects, \$2.4M has been allocated to state wide initiatives which include:

- Road Crash Rescue Equipment for volunteer Pumpers @ Warragul, Werribee, Berwick & Bacchus Marsh
- Retrofit Kits for loss of Quenchmaster loss of prime for tankers
- Cool Climate Jackets. Final phase completing the order from the VFBV survey results.
- Retrofit non slip steps tankers
- Big Fill Trailer Pumps (single axle) for 4 Regions - North West, South East, South West and West
- Crew Spray Protection development for Ultra Light Tankers
- Personal Protective Clothing for chainsaw operations - Phase 1

2020 STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS CALENDAR

- Urban Juniors – Horsham, 22 & 23 February
- Urban Seniors – Mooroopna, 28 & 29 March
- Rural Seniors – Mooroopna, 28 March
- Rural Juniors – Mooroopna, 29 March