



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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16/17 Year Old's

The deadline for submissions has been extended, with a new closing date set for 15 May 2020.

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.

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.

CHAMPIONSHIP CANCELLATION

Following the ban of mass gatherings in response to COVID-19, members were advised on the 13th March that this year's State Championships had been cancelled.

Commencing in 1873, the State Competitions have enjoyed a very long and proud history which pre-dates our Federation and even pre-dates Australia's first Test Cricket match by four years! Highlighting the historic nature of this year's cancellation - the State Competitions have only ever previously been cancelled during the war years of the first world war and second world war.

VFBV would like to recognise the impact this decision makes not only on our own people, but on the host city of Mooroopna in particular. In recognition of these impacts, VFBV has requested CFA approval to conduct the 2021 and 2022 State Champi-

onships in Mooroopna.

Appreciation and gratitude are extended to all members of our Competition Committee's and the Mooroopna Host Committee who have together toiled extremely hard over the last 18 months to prepare for what was to be an historic celebration of our Urban and Rural competitions. With the next two successive championships to be held in Mooroopna much of that work will not be lost.

Thank-you to all competing brigades, competitors, coaches, organisers, sponsors and supporters for your understanding and cooperation as arrangements of the cancellation were progressed. The State Championships signify one of the earliest times in Victorian history that volunteer fire brigades united as one, and we look forward to continuing that tradition in the years ahead.

I want to acknowledge the incredibly difficult and challenging period we are all working through. Without a moment to catch our breath following this year's busy Fire Season, we now find ourselves navigating an extremely complex and challenging pandemic. COVID-19 will continue to challenge us and test both our resilience and that of our communities.

Unsurprising – our brigades have stepped up and have again proven themselves to be highly effective and agile. I commend you all on the amazing work done at the local level to activate emergency plans and protocols that are maintaining emergency response continuity to our communities.

A state level Pandemic Management Team has been established within CFA and is operating similar to an IMT, coordinating state level response, communications and planning. CFA and VFBV have activated the same working protocols we use during periods of high operational activity, and are working very closely together to share and leverage off the incredible knowledge and experience that sits within both organisations to help navigate the difficult pathways ahead.

With things moving so

CANCER CLAIMS

VFBV continues productive discussions with WorkSafe on how to streamline and simplify how volunteer firefighters apply for compensation under the new presumptive legislation scheme. In recognition that this is the first time many volunteers will be accessing a WorkSafe scheme, the work cover authority has agreed to progress in collaboration with VFBV new documentation and guides to assist volunteers with the application process and completion of the required forms.

Any volunteers who are considering making application under presumptive legislation are encouraged to contact a VFBV State Councillor, Support Officer or the VFBV Welfare Fund Secretary on (03) 9886 1141 prior to making application. We can assist you understand the paperwork and process while these hard-fought improvements are yet to be implemented.

processes being directly impacted by COVID-19 arrangements it will be essential that decisions either be delayed, or new processes put in place to ensure volunteers continue to be genuinely engaged and consulted.

Examples of priorities being pursued by VFBV have been to request brigade and volunteer consultation on the development of asset allocation statements; the inclusion of an appeal process prior to Ministerial signoff; a tenancy agreement for co-located brigades to clarify and protect volunteer access to amenities and shared areas and dispute resolution; volunteer consultation on any changes proposed to the response or operating model; the

AGILITY AND RESILIENCE

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

quickly, and the need to monitor both State and Commonwealth responses, I want to recognise the difficult and dynamic environment that we all find ourselves operating in. And while I know that some would like a little more detail or specific instructions/protocols to help guide brigade planning, I urge you all to have confidence in yourselves, your abilities and your training.

The reality is, this challenge puts every single one of our brigades on the 'fireground', responding to the needs of each of our own communities and dealing with an incident that is impacting directly on each and every-one of our members, both from a CFA perspective as well as a personal one.

Through our brigades – we are ready and prepared to give our all - working together with a very stressed and anxious community. No one knows your local patch and community better than you do. No one knows your members and their unique and diverse situations better than you do. No one will be able to adapt quicker and more effectively than you can. Back yourselves, your judgement and each other.

I have every confidence that you will use your very best endeavours to adapt and respond to the upcoming challenges as best we can. The strength of our systems and model is that our brigades represent the very best of over 1200 Victorian communities across the State. We have unparalleled reach and connection with our communities, their needs and how to keep them safe.

Use your local knowledge and experience to best adapt to the situation at hand. Be guided by your knowledge and experience and approach the challenge with the same calm and professionalism that we are renowned for.

You are vital and respected leaders within your communities. During these periods of uncertainty when many citizens are feeling scared, anxious and isolated - they are looking to you for leadership and assurance. I have every confidence that you and your Brigade will continue to be a beacon of hope and calm - just as we are during campaign fires.

CFA/FRV secondment model; the Fire District Review Panel; the Implementation Monitor and Plan; and a volunteer support and respect package to strengthen and enhance the support provided to volunteers during the changes to protect Victoria's essential volunteer surge capacity.

Progress and response to these requests have been found wanting.

Members will need to continue to monitor for any volunteer impacts (intended or otherwise) and escalate as required.

VFBV will continue to monitor progress and continue to highlight concerns as they become apparent.

Please take time to prioritise your mental health and wellbeing and keep an eye on those around you. Each of us will respond differently to the current situation, so its important we don't approach it like a one size fits all.

All peer and welfare services are running as normal, 24-hours a day. The CFA Wellbeing Support line is 1800-959-232. A new confidential opt-in 'check-in' service has also been initiated whereby members can sign up to receive regular scheduled phone calls from a peer, chaplain or wellbeing team member. This service can be used for a social chat, or if you need to talk more deeply about the challenges you are facing.

You can register for this service via wellbeing@cfa.vic.gov.au or by calling (03) 9262 8939.

Welfare Fund

Priority has been given to maintaining business continuity and operations of our Welfare Fund. All processes and systems remain in place and are operating as normal. Email contact with the Welfare Fund secretary is preferred (rather than phone) but phone options remain available via (03) 9886 1141.

VFBV Support Officers can assist with any initial enquiries or questions on process as well, and we have procedures in place to triage member enquiries. The Welfare Fund is also aiding members experiencing hardship to assist them register for other government support and assistance. We are tracking all Commonwealth and State relief packages to support impacted members connect with all options available.

Fire Impacted Areas

It is incredibly important that members in fire impacted communities do not feel forgotten or abandoned. I am committed to ensuring support for fire impacted communities continue, and we will stand by fire impacted communities for as long as it takes. On behalf of VFBV, I commit to every brigade, group or member in these communities that we will continue to support you and walk the long road of recovery together, every step of the way. Our support for you and these recovery activities will not waiver.

Impact assessments can continue to be sent in and logged, with our work to identify members impacted by this season's bushfires continuing. VFBV Support Officer Michelle Ryan (m.ryan@vfbv.com.au) is coordinating this work in the North East Region, and Colin Booth (c.booth@vfbv.com.au) for the South East Region.

While our working bee's and recovery taskforces have had to be suspended for now - they will resume as soon as it is safe to do so.

District Council Support

State Council has approved streamlined processes to enable District Councils to continue supporting brigades and groups at the local level. Care is being taken to ensure



the focus is on brigade/group operational response and logistics.

District Council executive members are being supported to keep regular contact with their brigades and groups to monitor any areas they need assistance with. Regular contact between the District Council leadership group and the local CFA management is ensuring any local issues raised by brigades can be quickly acted on and resolved at the local level.

Priority is being given to resolve any issues brigades or groups may be experiencing with accessing appropriate protective equipment and supplies. Ordering systems remain in place and stock levels are being constantly monitored. Orders should be placed and processed through the State Logistics Center as normal. Procedures to protect supply are in place, and you are requested to only order what you need.

Please work to resolve any issues at the local level first and escalate to your local District Council if you require any assistance.

Thank-you

Thank-you for the continued work you are doing in keeping our communities safe.

These are extraordinary times and will require us all to work together and support each other as we navigate the challenging road ahead. Never forget that we are well prepared and have a very robust and resilient operational response model in place. Each time our collective efforts have been tested - we have always risen to the challenge.

My hope is that just like in previous times, when we look back on this period and our response to it - that it will be remembered as a period of compassion, agility, fortitude and resilience.

A special thank-you to all members who in their other non-CFA roles continue to work within the health sector. Thank-you also to each of you contributing to essential roles like transport, logistics, and customer service/sales. There are too many sectors to mention - but we are indebted to you all.

Never forget that when we all work together, we are capable of so many extraordinary things. Don't lose sight of the tremendous 'good' that you are responsible for generating and putting into our communities. Stand tall, be kind to one another and keep your heads up.

Please stay safe, take care of yourselves and each other.

Protective Face Masks

VFBV delegates to the State PPC/E Committee have requested CFA establish a working party to review all scientific and research literature on protective face masks for use during bushfire firefighting.

In recognition that there are still many unknowns and a lack of consistency across fire services across Australian jurisdictions in this space, VFBV has requested that a multi-state working party be established. The intent would be to invite other States and Territories to consider becoming involved and sharing resources to investigate and consider the available evidence. VFBV is aware of a number of services who have conducted limited field evaluations on alternate products.

VFBV State Council has recommended a collaborative and multi-faceted approach to ensure all health and safety factors are considered. CFA Health and Occupational specialists have long cautioned on the widespread replacement of the current P2 masks without first investigating the available evidence, warning that there are complex interactions that first need to be tested and understood first. For example, concern has been raised that higher rated masks may increase the risks to firefighter's cardiovascular system as the body needs to work harder and compensate for more laboured breathing as is frequently experienced with non-positive pressure masks.

CFA has indicated support to this approach and will work with the committee to progress. We will keep members apprised of progress.

Driving Strategy

VFBV delegates to the Joint Training Committee have reported positive progress on changes being progressed under CFA's Driving Strategy.

VFBV recently met with the CFA State Driving Coordinator as part of the consultation process to discuss and workshop a strategy that will essentially result in a more streamlined and consistent approach to heavy vehicle licencing; safer driving both on-road and off-road; and a more flexible delivery of CFA driving legislation and policy.

FIRE SERVICES REFORM

VFBV continues to strongly advocate for volunteer engagement and consultation throughout the Governments Fire Services Reform implementation.

With many consultative

VFBV continues to advocate strongly for volunteers to be engaged, with particular emphasis and priority on supporting volunteer trainers and assessors to be empowered and supported with delivery.