



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



Vale

VFBV was saddened to learn of the passing of great friend and life member Bill Pressey AFSM on 30 June.

Bill was a former VUFBA Executive member, former President of VFBV District Council 5, member of Urban Competitions and Rules Committee and often officiated at State Championships and local competitions.

He was a recipient of the VFBV Gold Star in 2008 and was made a VFBV life member in 2010. We send our thoughts, prayers and sympathy to Malcolm and Carolyn Bishop, family, friends and loved ones. We also extend our thoughts to members of Mortlake Fire Brigade. Bill will be sorely missed.

Dual motions

The VFBV Board and State Council have passed dual motions condemning the poor implementation and change management process of Victoria's Fire Service Reforms.

Both bodies have also passed a motion that as signatories to the Volunteer Charter, the Victorian Government and CFA have breached their obligations to VFBV and CFA volunteers under the Volunteer Charter.

Both motions were unanimous and both issues will be formally raised with the fire services implementation monitor.

TENANCY AGREEMENT

VFBV's request for an extension in negotiating a tenancy agreement for CFA/FRV co-located stations has been agreed, with 'status quo' arrangements preserved until 15 August.

VFBV raised the concerns of CFA volunteers who were only shown a draft tenancy agreement just one week prior to the intended start date. Members are encouraged to continue sending feedback on the draft agreement to help inform ongoing discussions.

WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD CFA 2.0

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

July 1 should have been a date we celebrated the rise of two proud and strong Victorian fire services. CFA volunteers were promised a strong and independent service, free from industrial interference that would be well resourced and supported. We were promised a fresh and renewed focus on respecting, consulting, and supporting community embedded volunteers.

Instead, many of our volunteers and staff are still in shock and trying to work through last minute bombshells dropped on us on the eve of implementation while dealing with poor implementation and chaotic change management. If this wasn't bad enough, we now grieve yet another CFA CEO and Chief Officer cast aside at the last minute during a critical time and juncture.

Amongst the "reform" casualties so far; Minister Jane Garrett (quit); CFA CEO and ex deputy police Commissioner Lucinda Nolan (quit); the entire CFA Board (sacked); CFA Chief Officer Joe Buffone PSM (quit); MFB Chief Officer Peter Rau (quit); MFB CEO Jim Higgins (quit); MFB A/Chief Officer (quit); MFB Board Chair Andi Diamond (quit); CFA CEO Dr Paul Smith (quit); MFB Chief Officer Dan Stephens (quit); and CFA CEO/Chief Officer Steven Warrington AFSM quits.

All well credentialed, all with distinguished careers, all committed to serving the Victorian public, and all who have made a heavy sacrifice to honour their duty to Victorians.

Does this not signal that something is terribly, terribly wrong with these arrangements?

I despair that the institutions designed to protect us and provide checks and balances are failing us. For how can so much turmoil and angst not have been the focus of independent inquiry,

overview or investigation by now? Perhaps it is and we just need to be patient. My plea to those of you feeling disheartened is to hang in there. History tells us that there is always a time of reckoning. VFBV will continue to pursue all means for full accountability to those that we believe have overseen what can only be described as a train wreck of failed policy and change management, appalling conflicts of interest and behaviours that in our view constitute serious improper conduct.

CEO/Chief Officer Steve Warrington AFSM

Steve was a veteran CFA officer, serving 42 years after joining CFA as a volunteer in 1978. Steve was a passionate leader and firmly believed he could carve out a strong, independent and autonomous CFA from these reforms. I admired his optimism and drive to try and get the best outcomes from the mess presented to us by Parliament. Sadly, I also witnessed the immense pressure and stress that was put on him, and the humiliating broken promises and commitments that were ripped away in what can only be described as farcical and inequitable governance structures with poor oversight void of any integrity or transparency. Nobody should underestimate the personal and emotional toll these arrangements were taking on him, our sectors senior leaders and those around them.

And while Steve's term was not without controversy, I can say that I respect his decision to resign rather than be forced to sign documents he knew to be damaging and potentially unlawful. He put the organisation's needs, his statutory obligations and those of the Victorian public above his own. His final act epitomised his love for the organisation and its people. He would not betray his CFA nor its volunteers and staff. And while we will each remember Steve in our own

way and from different viewpoints, I urge you to reflect on the courage and resolve it took to stand up and say no. Thank you Steve and thank you for believing in CFA and the wonderful work we all do in keeping our communities safe.

Disingenuous Consultation

I have heard from many CFA volunteers who are furious that 90 minute meetings held back in February and March have been referred to by the Minister in Parliament as evidence of "substantial engagement" with volunteers on its reforms.

The claim that 54 workshops involving over 1,330 volunteers represented genuine engagement is one of the more appalling misrepresentations I have heard.

To be clear – CFA ran these engagement sessions – not government. They were a question and answer forum to provide volunteers an opportunity to ask CFA's reform team questions and try and seek some clarity on future arrangements. Volunteers walked away with more questions than answers, with most questions unable to be answered.

And let us not forget each group was promised rigorous follow-up, and further sessions in the future to address outstanding questions and actions. This did not occur.

Let us list some of the topics that were not subject to any answers or discussion at those sessions: the FRV/CFA secondment agreement; changes to CFA RDO model; the removal of 171 administrative support staff from CFA; joint operating procedures; the rumoured 50% budget cut to CFA's base funding; and a tenancy agreement for volunteers at co-located locations.

It is incredibly important that we call out these blatant mistruths and reject this spin. Volunteer consultation is too important to allow it to be treated with such disrespect. I urge any member who attended one of these sessions to get in touch with your local MP, and let them know what you think about these activities being used to spin that volunteers were genuinely consulted on these matters in any meaningful way.

\$126 Million Package

In one of the more cynical episodes of this whole sorry saga was the recent announcement of an additional \$126 million package for the CFA. Sent through the CFA email system just hours after the public announcement of Steve Warrington's sudden resignation and refusal to sign the government's secondment agreement - this hastily written communication was seen by many for exactly what it was.

Most disappointingly, VFBV spent months last year working in good faith with government on a suite of initiatives designed to support CFA volunteers. We asked that these initiatives be announced independent of any bad news story – as has repeatedly occurred. We argued that the continual use of cheque book diplomacy immediately following any negative story or event was

deeply insulting and undermining volunteers trust in the government, and we urged them to reposition vital support for CFA volunteers as positive initiatives – not something to be done to simply try and quell volunteer dissatisfaction and outrage after announcing a terrible decision.

So, what's in this package? We requested the upskilling of volunteer trainers and assessors and additional resources to improve the availability and accessibility of training programs, money for research into new respiratory protection options for firefighters involved in grass-land or wildfire scenarios where breathing apparatus is not appropriate; an additional allocation of a full set of bush-fire PPC ensemble for every operational volunteer so that they can have access to their personal protection clothing when their other set is away for cleaning; sustainable and long-term investment in capital funding for stations and fleet replacement to address the ageing infrastructure and ageing truck fleet; and we argued for additional investment in leadership training including mental first aid to support volunteer leaders be able to support members mental wellbeing.

And while I am disgusted that this hard work would be trotted out to try and divert attention from the Chief Officer's sudden resignation and the government's latest disaster, these are nonetheless critically important investments that will benefit CFA volunteers and are welcomed. I want to thank all our working parties, joint committees and VFBV delegates that helped us advocate and assist with the development of business cases for these initiatives. Thank you and well done.

Farewell
I want to acknowledge the terrible pain and anguish many of our administrative and operational staff have experienced also. Rushed and last-minute position reviews with little to no consultation has deeply impacted the very people on whom we rely. To those leaving for FRV we wish you all the best and thank you most sincerely for your service. For those staying or returning to CFA we say thank you and extend our deep gratitude and respect for the critically important work you will continue to do alongside us.

New CEO and Chief
I take this opportunity to welcome CFA's new acting Chief Executive Ms Catherine Greaves and the new acting Chief Officer Mr Garry Cook. Both have been appointed for a 3-month term and will lead CFA through the next stages of reform. And while both will have to work hard to earn the trust and respect of CFA's 55,000 strong volunteers and staff, we must work hard to unite and support the people who will be tasked in carving out CFA's place in the new reform world.

We need to walk the next steps purposefully, decisively and together. I know many of



you will be distrustful and cynical. You have every right to feel that way.

BUT – for those intent on inflicting the chaos and harm and trying to undermine community led emergency management volunteering – they would like nothing better than to have us turn on each other or throw in the towel.

But they are underestimating you and the support we have in our communities. We are not fair-weather friends. We have been up against far worse. We face ferocious fires and the worst that mother nature can throw at us. We are used to overcoming impossible odds.

We must continue the journey, embrace the opportunities, minimise the harm and do what we can to build and secure CFA 2.0.

Sadly, this government has demonstrated it cannot be trusted. And while we have worked incredibly hard to provide a different way – we must now accept and adapt to the new environment put before us. The VFBV Board has determined that as a result of the government's failure to embrace the opportunity so generously extended by volunteers to work cooperatively and collaboratively on its reform journey - we will now pursue change through public advocacy.

We will have to work together to secure the vibrant and independent community fire service our state deserves.

I invite you to engage with your local VFBV District Councils as we pursue positive initiatives that seek to restore CFA to an organisation that respects its volunteers, trusts its volunteers and supports and empowers them to partner and deliver its vital services to our communities. We will work hand in glove with our staff to celebrate, respect and empower community focussed and driven outcomes.

For a start – lets work on restoring the volunteer chain of command; restore and strengthen the role of groups; share our operational knowledge and experience through volunteer led exercise and tweets; and empower volunteer leaders to manage and embrace new technologies, systems and processes that will modernise our service. In short – let us respect and embrace our past to help guide and cement our future. As history has so aptly demonstrated - when volunteers work together – there is no limit to the possibilities. CFA volunteers are drawn from every community that we serve. That is our strength. And from those communities comes greatness. Let us work together to build CFA 2.0!



VFBV BOARD VACANCIES INVITATION TO APPLY

Closing date for written applications is 28 August 2020

VFBV advances the interests of all Victorian fire brigade volunteers and advocates on their behalf to CFA and other key stakeholders. The VFBV Board drives policy development based on volunteer input and is involved in management of issues of central importance to all CFA volunteers.

Vacancies for Four Board Members will arise when the terms of Nev Jones AFSM, Andy Cusack AFSM, Bill Maltby and Greg Walcott expire on 1 October 2020; all members are eligible for re-appointment.

The term of appointment will be to 1 October 2022 (two years) and applications are invited from interested volunteers to be considered for these vacancies.

The role of a VFBV Board Member involves contributing to VFBV direction, policy determination and monitoring the performance and governance of the Association. Also actively contributing to policy discussion at Board Meetings, networking with others about policies and issues management, and not only making decisions but being prepared to actively advocate for the benefit of all CFA volunteers and ultimately the Victorian community.

A Board Member Role Statement including the key selection criteria is available from the VFBV office or from the VFBV website.

This is an honorary position; no honorarium is paid.

If you are motivated by the prospect of making a difference for CFA volunteers, then send your written application addressing the key selection criteria in the role statement, plus an outline of your CFA activity including the names of two referees.

Applications must be lodged with VFBV by **Friday 28 August 2020** to:
 VFBV, 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East 3151
 Tel: 9886 1141; Fax: 9886 1618
 Email: j.laing@vfbv.com.au