



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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BE AN ACTIVE CONTRIBUTOR

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Many of you would be familiar with Brigadier Richard Thomas Eason and his introduction and contribution to CFA's 'little red book' - a guide to Operations and Tactics in the field.

Eason was CFA's first full-time Chairperson and served as Chair between 1965 – 1978. He was renowned for his passion for training, and his strong defence of the virtues of integrity and unselfishness in leadership.

He said the basic function of a leader was to inspire PEOPLE to produce their best efforts, describing a leader as an individual who achieves identified goals through the work of others, without relying on his or her position of power. He said that technical ability in fire-fighting for example was of little use unless officers of all ranks could coordinate the human resources under their command.

Treating people with dignity and respect it was said, will always bring better results than patronising, and the ability to lead others depends on a personal trust which inspires members of groups to blend their individual skills and energies into a cooperative effort. This is just as relevant today as it was back then.

CFA relies on the good will, trust and mutual respect of all its people. These qualities of leadership articulated by Eason should not be lost, and again serves as an example of how our past should inform our future.

Perhaps less known, was the advice Eason gave to new members. Members of brigades were told they too had a responsibility. The responsibility to be an active contributor to the brigade and not just be a name on a book. He said it was only through active membership that members would be playing their part in maintaining an effective service for their community. And we all recognise there are many ways to contribute to a brigade.

So it is in this vein that I want to encourage every CFA volunteer to please contribute to this year's volunteer survey, which is now open. We want to hear from you.

The annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is an initiative by VFBV, designed by and for volunteers to help capture and communicate fundamental issues as volunteers see them. It contains 33 questions on issues chosen by volunteers.

The survey is a critical and important tool that gives CFA and other decision makers clear feedback, directly from volunteers about the issues affecting them. It is a critical tool in monitoring short-and-long-term trends, and the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at improving CFA volunteer engagement and well-being.

Help us strengthen CFA's future culture. The survey results not only help keep VFBV informed but assists with our advocacy on behalf of all CFA volunteers.

Please contribute and share

your voice, and please don't just leave it for others. Visit www.vfbv.com.au/cfa or scan the QR code displayed on this page with your phone to complete this year's survey.



NEW CHIEF

On behalf of the VFBV Board, State Council and members I welcome the appointment of Jason Hefferman as CFA's new Chief Officer. Jason will commence his role with CFA on the 30th November.

Jason comes to us from NSW, where he is currently an Assistant Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service. Importantly, Jason has more than 20 years' experience as a volunteer firefighter and has also recently acted as Deputy Commissioner.

He is highly recommended by our friends in NSW and has demonstrated a proven track record in advocating strongly for volunteers and building sustainable volunteer capability and capacity in his RFS role as the Director for Response and Coordination.

I look forward to working with Jason during this critical period in CFA's history.

I would also like to pay tribute to Acting Chief Officer Garry Cook.

Garry took on the role of Acting Chief at a critical time and has provided diligent and stable leadership during what can only be described as some of CFA's darkest days. He has navigated recent months with calm and professionalism which has been testament to his strength of character and values. On behalf of CFA volunteers, I commend Garry on his stewardship and thank him most sincerely for his leadership and untiring commitment to CFA.

CHILD SAFETY

As many would be aware, VFBV introduced a Child Safe Policy back in early 2018. And while as an organisation the care or supervision of children is not part of our primary function or role, we felt it incredibly important to lead by example and to recognise child safety not just as a legal obligation, but as a moral one also.

In more recent times, the VFBV Board and myself worked with State Council to commit to an aspirational target of maximum density adoption of working with children cards for all senior state level VFBV officials. The intent was to not only lead by example but to demonstrate that volunteers will always respond better to change when it is done respectfully and in partnership. We used a risk-based approach to identify those roles where it was

essential (such as officials officiating at State Junior Championships) and implemented immediate checks for those roles two years ago. We then actively encouraged the broader leadership to work towards our aspirational target.

I am pleased to advise that we have exceeded our target and achieved a 100% result across our entire state structures. In essence, this means every single VFBV Board member, State councillor and VFBV employee now holds a valid working with children card.

I want to congratulate the VFBV Board and State Council on the initiative and this outstanding result. It is a shining example of the commitment and values shared by VFBV officials and was done without any threats or fanfare and demonstrates the incredible value and effectiveness of volunteer inspired leadership.

Hopefully this assists to demystify the working with children check process for the broader membership and demonstrates that with the right approach - voluntary schemes can be just as effective as mandatory ones.

NSW SAYS THANK-YOU

The NSW Government has announced that it will be recognising 65,000 people involved in this year's NSW bushfires by awarding a citation, certificate of recognition, a commemorative cap and a letter from the Premier acknowledging their contribution and service. Commissioner for Resilience (and Ex RFS Commissioner) Shane Fitzsimmons joins the premier as a signatory on the certificates and is quoted as saying "The NSW Bushfire Emergency Citation symbolises mateship, teamwork, volunteering and helping when times are tough."

"They are a meaningful commemoration of a bushfire season we won't forget and a symbol of the state's gratitude."

The NSW Government has committed to recognising all interstate members who contributed to the NSW campaign fires, and CFA has nominated members in accordance with the award criteria. The NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet is administering the award, and members will be mailed directly later this month.

VFBV commends the initiative and thanks the NSW Government most sincerely for recognising the significant contribution made by Victorian firefighters during this year's bushfires.

Victoria deployed over 2,500 personnel interstate last season, with the overwhelming majority of those being CFA volunteers. All this while battling our own fires in Victoria.

Members should be incredibly proud of their contribution to not just local communities, but our interstate ones also.

GOVERNMENT FUNDED CAMPAIGN

We have heard from many members this month incensed at the TV and print media campaign launched and paid



for by the Victorian Government on behalf of FRV. These ads have run over the last couple of months stating that FRV is ready and prepared. The density of these adverts in areas predominately covered by CFA brigades have been the most offensive to many CFA volunteers who have felt completely overlooked and have rightly asked why the government would only be funding a campaign for one fire service (FRV) and not a dual badged campaign letting all Victorians know their volunteer and career fire services are equally ready.

And in my conversations with volunteers it is clear they don't begrudge our career counterparts some recognition, but blind Freddy could see how insensitive and offensive the campaign is of CFA and the vital contribution of over 50,000 hardworking CFA volunteers following one of Australia's worst fire seasons.

It reflects very poorly on the Government to be so blatantly one-sided and sadly is yet another example of the disdain and lack of respect for the incredible work being done by all firefighters (volunteer and paid) ahead of this season to train, prepare and plan. Shame on them for once again trying to pit one service against the other.

To my fellow volunteers, please don't be disheartened. The Victorian public and community are well aware of your role and professionalism. They are behind you and they recognise, value and respect the work you do.

And to the broader audience, let me be crystal clear. CFA and CFA volunteers are always ready. We and our career brother and sisters will do all we can to work together and keep Victorians safe, despite the horrible mess the government has left for us to clean up. We will step up this year, like we have in all previous ones. Despite all the disruption and chaos being inflicted on our senior levels and ranks - CFA's 1,219 brigades are ready and are prepared.

We are training, maintaining our equipment and reviewing our operational preparedness to maintain our full-time on-call operational readiness 24/7. Shame on anyone who by deed or omission tries to pretend otherwise.

And as I started this month's column with some words from Brigadier Eason, I felt it only fitting that I end with some. I came across a contribution made by Eason in Volume 137 of the Australian Army Journal printed

VFBV's AGM

As previously advised, in line with current Victorian Health Guidelines issued under Victoria's State of Emergency and advice from Consumer Affairs Victoria, the VFBV Board authorised a three-month extension and postponement of our annual AGM to the 6th December 2020.

Due to the likely short notice in easing of restrictions, this year's AGM will be a low-key affair and there will be no guest speakers.

To comply with health guidelines and contact tracing requirements, any delegates intending to attend this year's AGM are required to register their details with the VFBV office by the 30th November 2020.

The office can be reached via (03) 9886 1141 or via email at j.laing@vfbv.com.au

ROYAL COMMISSION

VFBV welcomes the release of the Commonwealth's Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements final report.

The Commission's final report makes 80 recommendations to improve Australia's national natural disaster arrangements. These recommendations are welcomed by VFBV and are regarded as positive, pragmatic and common-sense recommendations that will serve Australia's disaster arrangements well. Many of the recommendations are strongly supported by VFBV evidence, witness testimony and volunteer views put to the Commission during its deliberations.

We look forward to engaging with the relevant State and Commonwealth governments as the recommendations are progressively adopted and implemented. A copy of the final report is available from the VFBV website.

CONSULTATION ON CHILD SAFETY

CFA has commenced formal consultation over proposed changes to two CFA policies and one procedure, relating to improving Child Safety.

The draft proposals include a proposed requirement for new members to complete a working with children check as part of their application process when they join. Copies of the draft documents are available for volunteer feedback and review and can be accessed through your local VFBV District Council or VFBV Support Officer. VFBV will provide a formal response to CFA after reviewing volunteer feedback.

All brigades, groups and individuals are encouraged to contribute to this review and provide feedback. Please visit the VFBV website for further details.

Feedback is due back to VFBV by the 11th January 2021, but much sooner if possible.

VESEP SUPPORT

A reminder that the closing date for the 2020 Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program (VESEP) is the 16 November.

VESEP provides grants of \$2 for \$1 of Brigade/Group funding to assist Brigades and Groups in acquiring a wide range of ancillary equipment in recognition of your significant contribution in supporting Victorian communities in times of emergency.

The program started back in 2000 as CSESP (Community Safety Emergency Support Program), in close consultation with VFBV, as a way of recognising the incredible commitment volunteers have to their communities.

VFBV recognised the benefits to volunteers in having an annual grants program with an application process that was easy to follow with minimal paperwork and local input.

VFBV has refreshed our VFBV Application Help Pack and the pack is now divided into easily downloadable sections for your convenience. Visit the VFBV website to download your copy. If you require assistance with your Application please contact your VFBV State Councillor, VFBV Support Officer or VFBV Office.

VFBV wishes all Brigades and Groups well with applications.

in 1960.

In it, Eason - a staunch ally of volunteer reservists - reacts angrily to what he felt were unfair criticisms of the Citizen Military Forces, which today we know as the Army Reserve.

The very last paragraph of his contribution was a powerful and inspiring defence of CMF and reservists. I have taken the liberty and artistic license to change and adapt his closing words for today's CFA context:

And now let me state a most vital thing. If anyone

wishes to make the demise of the CFA as a firefighting force sure and certain, then just let it be believed that Victorians cannot count or rely on their CFA volunteer brigades.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that all recent fire seasons show the standards reached by volunteer firefighters. They actually built the firefighting traditions of this country. They have not yet let down the CFA, Victoria, Australia or the Realm, and they do not intend to do so in the future.