



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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Training peer review

The CFA Chief Officer has recently commissioned a short peer review into CFA training. The independent peer review is being conducted over the next few weeks by representatives of AFAC.

Volunteer and VFBV feedback on training has been consistent for many years, and part of this review will include a look at the outcomes of previous reviews and enquiries and how well those recommendations have been acted on. VFBV has provided considerable background information covering extensive volunteer feedback from both the Garnock Training Review (2009), and the Jones Inquiry (2011) reviews. We have also used data collected through our Annual Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey, and work done in preparation of the Fire Services Review (2015) and the recent Commonwealth Royal Commission (2020) and State based IGEM (2020) fire season reviews from last year.

We are also facilitating three focus group discussions comprised of Brigade Training Officers, Captains, Group Officers, Volunteer Trainer and Assessors and the volunteer delegates to the Joint Training and Operations Committee's.

This is an important opportunity to influence future priorities and action to improve CFA training, and as such - we welcome the opportunity to do so. VFBV is providing our full support and cooperation with the review teams enquiries and will continue to strongly advocate on the issues raised by volunteers through our consultative networks.

VFBV AFFILIATION

Thank you for members' strong show of support. VFBV affiliation rates averaging 95% over the past five years, shows the value of our unified voice is clearly recognised and demonstrates strong support for the important work that VFBV does on behalf of all CFA volunteers.

The 2021/22 renewal notices for your Brigade/Group's VFBV Affiliation and Welfare Fund have been forwarded to all Brigades and Groups with a due date of 30 June 2021. As well as affiliating with VFBV we strongly encourage Brigades to subscribe to the VFBV Welfare Fund.

The Welfare Fund provides small grants of up to \$5,000 to assist volunteer members, their immediate family members and long serving ex members. The grants support members experiencing personal financial hardship/crisis by providing welfare grants on a needs assessed basis, that may assist in alleviating stresses impacted on the individual ability to maintain involvement as a volunteer.

In recognition of the significant donations received to the Welfare Fund from the public following last year's devastating bushfires, a one off 50% discount is being offered for the 2021/22 Welfare Fund Subscription, reducing the

cost to all Brigades this year to \$45.00. Both the VFBV Board and the Welfare Fund Committee see this as a way of supporting the many Brigades who have subscribed to the Welfare Fund since 1913. It is hoped that this reduced cost will encourage new Brigades to join the Welfare Fund this year for the benefit of their members. This is a very low cost to ensure that your members are covered should they find themselves in financial hardship for whatever reason.

Brigades and Groups that pay VFBV affiliations before 30th June 2021 will automatically go into the draw to win their choice of one of the worthwhile prizes kindly donated by GAAM - G-Force Nozzle with Quick connect coupling; Gated Wye with Stortz Inlet and quick connect outlets; Root Soaker; TFT Break Apart Nozzle; or from Powdersafe - five Helmet Torches and carry case; or donated by CFA six Uniden Digital Scanners. VFBV sincerely thanks GAAM Emergency Products, Powdersafe Pty. Ltd. and CFA for the continued generous support in providing these prizes. For further details of prizes on offer, see the flyer included with the VFBV invoices sent to your Secretary last month.

The VFBV Board is calling for nominations to the CFA and Brigades Donations Trust Fund.

The purpose of the Trust Fund is to raise and receive money and donations of goods and services from the public for distribution to Brigades, to assist with costs of purchasing and maintaining firefighting equipment, facilities, training and resources and administrative

Nominations for Trust Fund

expenses of Brigades which are associated with their firefighting functions.

Following nominations, five new or reappointed members will be appointed by the VFBV Board to serve as VFBV Trustees on the Trust Fund for a term of two years.

One member has advised they will not be re-applying;

Honour, Culture and Recognise - Reconnect - Reimagine

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

This year's annual memorial service was held on Sunday 2 May in close proximity to the new Victorian Emergency Services Memorial, located in treasury gardens in the Melbourne CBD. The new memorial was completed last year during lockdown, and therefore this was the first official opportunity to recognise this fitting tribute to our fallen members from CFA, Forest Fire Management Victoria, MFB, VICSES, Ambulance Victoria, Live Saving Victoria and Marine Search and Rescue.

This year saw the addition of CFA firefighter Phillip McGennissen from the Wonwondah Rural Fire Brigade added to the honour roll. Phillip died while undertaking a roadside burn in 1957. His addition to the honour roll alongside the 79 other CFA firefighters (including 11 from pre-1944) is an important tribute to his family, friends and loved ones and recognises those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty on behalf of their communities. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the local community, brigades and VFBV District Council 17 who all assisted in the long advocacy for Phillip to be recognised, and we pass on our most solemn thoughts and prayers to Phillip's daughter Ms Judith Pymer.

Following the cancellation of last year's service due to COVID-19 restrictions, this year's service recognised the losses during the 2019-20 fire season of three Victorian firefighters from Forest Fire Management Victoria; Bill Slade, Mat Kavanagh and David Moresi. Three New South Wales firefighters from the NSW Rural Fire Service; Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul. And North American firefighters; Ian McBeth (Montana), Paul Hudson (Arizona) and Rick DeMorgan Jr (Florida).

To each of these we say thank-you, as we extend our deepest sympathies to their families and loved ones and promise them that their sacri-

ifice, and the sacrifice of all our fallen will never be forgotten.

VEOHRC

On day of print deadline, the Victorian Legislative Council (the upper house) agreed to a motion put up by the Hon. Wendy Lovell MP requiring the Leader of the Government to table in the Council within 14 days, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's independent review that examined the nature and prevalence of discrimination, including bullying, and sexual harassment within the CFA and MFB.

As members would recall, VFBV has been a very strong supporter and advocate of the review and shared a common goal with VEOHRC in ensuring that our fire services are safe, inclusive and respectful.

The review, the aftermath and the court challenges that have ensued have caused great hurt. For many who were brave to come forward to share their stories, the lack of recommendations, actions and progress only added to the trauma of reliving their experiences. I want to share some direct quotes and excerpts from the then Chief Commissioner of Police, Mr Graham Ashton APM in his message in the Phase One report of 2015 that was reporting progress from a similar review conducted, concluded and published into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour within Victoria Police.

"For the past 163 years, Victoria Police have been leaders in our community."

"We showed leadership once again when we decided to tackle the critical issue of sexual harassment and predatory behaviour in our own organisation."

"...The results make for confronting reading. When you read the report you'll be left in no doubt there have been some terrible behaviours exhibited and some terrible experiences and ordeals have been endured"...

"This must change, this will change."

"...Sexual harassment and predatory behaviour occurs across all of society, across all sectors. There is no part of our community which is not affected."

"We will change our culture, our approach and make Victoria Police a safer organisation for our people. We will set the example, as we have done in so many different areas, for others to follow. The leadership challenge for us is to improve Victoria Police."

I quote these words to reinforce to you all the vital importance of striving for and showing leadership to help improve our fire services. I know many of you feel wounded and ashamed when a relatively small number of people do the wrong thing and hurt others and thereby bring our services into disrepute. But I also would like to share the hurt and trauma

experienced by those who raise these concerns when they do occur, and the feeling and perception that our systems and service unwittingly can at times close ranks and deflect responsibility or project indifference when we defend how these issues are rare or in the minority. Even a single person experiencing harm within our organisation is one too many. CFA is also not an island, and if these behaviours are in our communities, it stands to reason there are elements of it within our service. This is not about blame, but rather shifting the conversation to how can we mature and strengthen our processes, systems and culture to ensure we eliminate this evil wherever it hides within our ranks.

If I could please appeal to all members to keep an open mind and consider what further work we can each do to contribute to a safe and respectful culture. And while there is plenty of intrigue and innuendo surrounding the report and other agencies/bodies, could I please urge us to focus on our own organisation and what we can each do for us to improve CFA and make it a safer and inclusive organisation for all our people.

VFBV continues to very strongly advocate in this area and for all our people, including arguing for improvements to CFA's complaint and discipline processes, and the critical importance of supporting all members through that process fairly, with empathy and with compassion. I have discussed these issues regularly with CFA's new Chief Executive and Chief Officer and feel they both share our concerns and commitment to improving processes, systems and outcomes as a priority.

Volunteers have a very proud history in this regard, with the CFA Volunteer Code of Conduct being developed in 2001. What was originally planned as one unifying CFA Code of Conduct developed by both volunteers and staff to cover all personnel, was eventually released as the Volunteer Code of Conduct. A simple but powerful statement that sets the standard of values and behaviours we will each hold ourselves to. Who knows, twenty years later and a new environment - perhaps it's time to revisit the notion of one unifying code for all.

I appreciate the journey ahead may be difficult and painful - but I have yet to meet a single volunteer who is not a staunch defender of the need for our brigades and workplaces to be safe and inclusive.

I want to close by acknowledging our former Minister, the Hon. Jane Garrett MP who when questioned on her way into Parliament before yesterday's motion in the upper house stated that she continues to support the release of the VEOHRC report that she herself commissioned. And I quote:

"I'd just like to make sure that women feel protected in



the workplace, so this is all part of that."

"Lots of workplaces have gone through this and this is just another one, we have seen it in police, ambos, the military...this is a very well-worn path."

On behalf of VFBV I wish to affirm our deep respect and admiration for a member of parliament who has always displayed great courage and integrity. Jane, thank-you for your continued support for the women and men who have bravely shared their experiences in the hopes the process would be used for positive change. And thank you for restoring our faith that this issue can be above party or partisan politics.

Volunteer Week

This year, national volunteer week (NVM) will be celebrated from Monday 17th to Sunday 23rd May 2021.

100,000 Victorians contribute their time, skills and resources to ongoing volunteer work in local communities before, during and after emergencies.

As outlined in the 3V's report - within just Victoria alone, emergency management volunteers contribute a conservative value of \$2.5 billion dollars of value each and every year.

This year's theme for national volunteer week is 'Recognise. Reconnect. Reimagine.'

On behalf of VFBV can I please pass on our deep gratitude, respect and appreciation for the work you do each and every day in your communities, and the vital service you provide.

I want to make special mention and recognition of all our members, volunteers, brigades, groups and staff who over the last year have ensured all our community facing services and response has been maintained. Amidst a global pandemic, you have continued to deliver essential services to our communities without interruption, and often at times despite the significant distraction of lockdowns, restrictions and curfews.

The fact that response has been maintained, community education activities and programs have been adapted, fire season preparedness and preventive works have been delivered without fuss or complaint goes to the heart and soul of the volunteer and CFA ethos and spirit of serving our communities and standing by them through thick and thin no matter what it takes. Thank-you and well done on an incredible achievement.

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