



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## UPDATE YOUR STATUS

CFA is requesting that all members please update their CFA record with their COVID-19 Vaccination status as soon as possible, as per the Chief Health officer's directions.

ONLINE: <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au>  
 BY PHONE: (03) 9262 8663

## CFA Board Applications

VFBV is now seeking applications from any CFA volunteer interested in applying for any of the volunteer nominated positions on the CFA Board.

The terms of CFA Board Members Dawn Hartog, Kent Griffin, Beth Davidson and Peter Shaw due to expire in mid 2022. All four members are eligible for renomination, but will be required to re-apply for nomination.

The CFA legislation recognises that it is important that the CFA Board has strong volunteer expertise, knowledge and an understanding of CFA volunteers.

To support this, CFA legislation provides for four of the CFA Board's Members to be appointed from a panel of names submitted by Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, two being representatives from brigades predominantly

servicing urban communities and two being representatives from brigades predominantly servicing rural communities.

CFA volunteers who believe they have the skills, experience and capacity to make a contribution to the Board of the CFA, are invited to apply. VFBV is seeking gender and culturally diverse candidates, in addition to a diverse range of skills and experience including applicants from diverse brigade type and classifications.

Please see page 12 of this edition of Fire Wise for further details, or visit the VFBV website. Applications are expected to close early in the new year.

## Training campus opened

It has been with excitement and anticipation that the new VEMTC Central Highlands Training Ground at Ballan was recently officially opened by Victorian Attorney General and Emergency Service Minister Jaclyn Symes.

While the opening was small in numbers it wasn't small in CFA's ability to showcase the new state of the art training ground with tours of the facility and demonstration on the PAD.

The build of Central Highlands commenced after the closure of Fiskville some

years ago and has now resulted in CFA now having a new, modern, and safe training facility to be used by all volunteers.

Central Highlands can be booked by Brigades/Groups to utilise for skills maintenance training or booked as part of skills acquisition training.

Earlier this year VFBV conducted a nomination process on behalf of CFA to name the road network at Central Highlands. All nominations were provided to the CFA executive to select from.

VFBV was proud to witness the official unveiling of the road network including naming rights and presentation of replica signs and certificates to the 10 volunteers, staff and family members of those that have had the honour bestowed upon them.

We congratulate each of the successful candidates, including all those that were nominated. We wish to acknowledge the extremely high quality of nominees from across the state.

Further information on the new Central Highlands Training Ground can be found on Members online including videos and virtual tours.

I have drawn inspiration from an unusual source this month, and quite by accident. As I was doing some research on another topic, one of those annoying pop-up adds flashed on my screen to advertise a new album released by London based Kiwi drummer and composer Myele Manzanza. The title of the album was 'Crisis and Opportunity, Volume 2' and I thought to myself, what a great title, and what a fitting way to describe the year just past from a CFA perspective. After digging a little deeper, I discovered that Volume 1 was actually released last year as a way for Myele to direct his creative energy during what he describes as a difficult period of the health crisis and personal impacts where he lost the ability to earn a living and perform during the London 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns.

So, on the basis that imitation is the highest form of flattery, I have commandeered the title as this month's theme.

And while it would be understandable that many of us would like nothing else but to just wish the year gone, I can't help but reflect on the Chinese philosophy of yin and yang that describes how opposite forces may actually be complementary, rather than opposing.

Don't get me wrong, this year has been extremely challenging and difficult. CFA volunteers have had to contend with a high level of leadership churn and instability, contentious reform, low morale, and the COVID-19 pandemic just for good measure.

The leadership churn in particular has been relentless. Over the past five years alone, volunteers have witnessed 5 Ministers, 22 CFA Board members including three chairs, 6 CEOs and 4 Chief Officers. And I won't count the senior leadership team changes as quite bluntly - I have lost count. No-one should underestimate the impact this level of instability has on an organisation, let alone an emergency service.

My admiration for our members resilience has been profound. This resilience is a reflection of the selfless duty and optimism of volunteers to do whatever it takes to best protect and support their communities during times of crisis. It must not be abused or taken advantage of. And while we are trained to put out fires, this year we have had to contend with numerous metaphorical ones also.

And while no-one could blame us for feeling a little cynical and angry at what has been done to one of Victoria's most trusted and respected emergency services, CFA vol-

unteers have displayed the utmost professionalism and duty throughout. There has been plenty of opportunities for the cheap shot or free kicks along the way, but we have all worked incredibly hard together to resist and raise above the petty and work diligently to seize the opportunities as well as welcome and nurture the new leaders through the organisation.

I have spoken frequently over the last little while of the cautious optimism I hold that I think we may be through the worst, and I can see small embers of hope. Like you, I will need to see a much longer period of sustained effort and results before I call it, but nonetheless you should have started seeing some tangible evidence trickle down from the new CFA leadership that provides a glimpse of what's to come.

Despite the COVID-19 overlay of the year, VFBV has worked extremely hard to progress matters of importance to volunteers, seizing the opportunity of fresh leaders to advocate several long-standing issues of concern.

For example, the recent announcement of defibrillators being allocated to every CFA operational vehicle in the fleet is very welcome news. Over 11 years ago, VFBV successfully lobbied the CFA Board to reverse CFA's ban on brigades and groups even being able to purchase defibrillators themselves. This landmark decision followed years of advocacy and campaigning. And while we shouldn't have to 'lobby' for such critical life saving pieces of equipment for an emergency service organisation like CFA, we continued our push for CFA to roll them out State-wide. The fact that this announcement had to be funded from community donations made during the 2019/20 bushfire season and not core funding is telling, but while it's been a long while coming, it is a good example of volunteers' persistence and patience in contending with insufficient funding of Victoria's largest and most efficient fire service.

There has also been good progress on the Storz coupling changeover program, with CFA finally abandoning its desire for volunteers to use grants programs to fund what can only be described as a basic piece of equipment (firehoses.) We have welcomed CFA advice that it has now committed funding to finish the rollout across the State.

Initiatives to support diversity have also been a long-standing focus over the years,

with VFBV successfully campaigning for female tailored bushfire PPC back in 2014. Since that time, issues around female fit gloves and boots have been raised through our PPC/E Committee, with female hygiene packs for all operational vehicles nearing reality by the end of the year - an issue first raised by VFBV back in 2015, following some great work done by the District 24 Women's Reference Group. VFBV is continuing to pursue adequate modesty arrangements in station turnout rooms to further support the government's diversity targets as well as new ergonomic focus and studies to ensure new equipment and vehicle designs do not unconsciously act as a barrier.

Similarly good progress has recently been made to VFBV's campaign for a second set of bushfire PPC to be issued to all operational volunteers. With the new design finished some years ago, the project has now reached tender stage and announcements are expected early in the new year of when these garments can start rolling out. Given this was a key priority raised by VFBV with the government during discussions on the CFA capability initiatives investment, we are pleased to see this project nearing completion.

We continue to also focus on the need to review and update the structural ensemble to account for the significant advances in materials over the past decade.

Workwear is inching closer to reality with the whole tender and procurement process now completed and the initial shipments of garments due very shortly. With some additional funding secured through recent Government VESEP grant rounds, members will also be very happy to hear the initial allocations to brigades will be far higher than originally anticipated. Order forms are hopefully due to start going out to brigades by the end of the year.

These are all good practical initiatives where significant progress has been able to be made. However, there are also many non-tangible outcomes being achieved.

For example, the current independent culture and discipline process review is an incredibly important piece of work that has taken significant advocacy to pursue and has the potential to be a foundation piece to best position CFA for the future. As too has CFA's recent announcement that the Chief Officer has accepted all 14 recommendations from the independent AFAC review into CFA training. Our delegates have worked incredibly hard over the months to not only frame the review, but to support the review teams research and advocate for CFA's support and resourcing to implement the reports findings.

And while I have purposely chosen more tangible examples, I could have easily touched on more strategic ones such as the work we are doing on the need for sustainable fleet funding, proper

## CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer



infrastructure maintenance schedules, empowering volunteer officers, strengthening the role of groups and stronger volunteer consultation assurance frameworks.

Which leads me back to the start of this month's column, and the yin and yang of crisis and opportunity. It was early Taoism which is an ancient Chinese philosophy that taught distinctions between good and bad events are perceptions only and the duality of yin and yang cannot be so easily divided.

While I hope all future opportunities don't present themselves alongside crisis, I do take comfort from this concept of nature's balance and that old adage that the sun always shines after every storm.

This is how I, and I hope you too, choose to look at the passing of 2021 as we focus on the promise of what's to come in 2022.

### VALE

Just as we were going to print, news of Assistant Chief Fire Officer Peter Lucas AFSM passing came in.

Peter was a 50-year CFA veteran, and joined Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade as a volunteer junior member back in 1971. He was accepted as a CFA career firefighter in late 1975. At the time of his passing, he was acting ACFO Training Delivery. CFA ran through his blood and he recently joined The Basin Fire Brigade as a volunteer again. Peter was awarded his AFSM in 2004.

Peter was instrumental in the establishment of CFA's critical incident stress peer support program and a strong advocate and friend of CFA, volunteers and all emergency service personnel. He treated everyone within CFA as one big family and led by example. Most recently Peter worked with us on the emergency services memorial project where he again championed the need to honour and respect those that have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Peter leaves a legacy of duty, compassion and respect that extends well beyond CFA and across the sector. He will be sadly missed by friends and fellow firefighters, and we extend our deepest sympathy to his family and loved ones.

We were also very saddened to learn of the passing of almost 80-year CFA veteran Ray Larcombe from Rochester Fire Brigade, and former CFA Operations Manager Bob Potts.

Further details on Ray and Bob can be found on Page 12. They will both be sorely missed.

## SURVEY OPEN

This year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is now open.

Scan the QR code or visit our website to complete the survey today.

This year's survey is critically important. With a new CFA leadership, the results from this year's survey will directly influence the upcoming years priority actions, and are central to our advocacy work with CFA about what needs to be done to improve the organisation. Our advocacy depends on robust volunteer feedback to help inform decision makers of the issues of most importance to you and our fellow volunteers.

Be part of improving CFA and help us make a difference.



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