



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

Address: 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East, 3151  
 Email: [vfbv@vfbv.com.au](mailto:vfbv@vfbv.com.au)  
 Telephone: 9886 1141  
 Chief Executive Officer: Adam Barnett

Post: PO Box 453, Mt Waverley, 3149  
 Website: [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au)  
 Fax: 9886 1618  
 State President: Nev Jones AFSM



## 2022 CHAMPIONSHIPS

The 2022 State Championships will be held this month on consecutive weekends at Mooroopna Recreation Reserve in Mooroopna.

The Urban Junior State Championship will be held first on the weekend of 19-20 March, with 37 teams entered to compete in 18 events over the two days. It is estimated that approximately 300 junior competitors will be attending, along with their brigade supporters, families, friends and members of the community.

On the weekend of 26 and 27 the Urban Senior Championship and the Rural Senior & Junior Championships will be held for the second time at the same venue on the same weekend.

Competing across the two days will be 32 Junior teams and 78 Senior teams, including Harvey who are making the trip across from Western Australia for the Championship.

The evening of Saturday 26

March will also see the return of the Torchlight Procession, with CFA brigades marching around Victoria Park Lake in Shepparton. The Torchlight Procession hasn't been held since 2019 due to COVID and it will make its return this year in an impressive display of CFA to the community.

Any Brigade not competing at the State Championship events, are invited to also participate in the Torchlight Procession either as participants or spectators. Any brigade wishing to participate should contact Peter Davis [peter.davis@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:peter.davis@cfa.vic.gov.au) or 0458 933 797 asap.

## THANKS

Thank you to all members who completed this year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey.

As soon as we have finished compiling and analysing your responses, we will publish the results.

On March 8 we celebrate International Women's Day, with this year's campaign theme being #BreakTheBias.

You may have seen the campaign imagery showing people forming a cross with their hands to signify solidarity and encourage people to think about deliberate or unconscious bias that makes it difficult for women to move ahead.

International Women's Day grew out of the labour movement of the early 20th century. In 1908, 15,000 women took to the streets of New York protesting for shorter hours, better pay and voting rights.

The creation of an International Women's Day was first suggested by Clara Zetkin in 1910 at the International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen. Clara was a communist activist and advocate for women's rights. She had no fixed date in mind.

Her campaign reverberated across the Americas and Europe with similar protests and marches across the world. More than a million people in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland protested for the right to vote and to hold public office.

The first celebration of the day followed this ground swell the following year in 1911.

But it wasn't until a wartime strike in 1917, when Russian women demanded "bread and peace" that prompted 90,000 Russian workers to strike on March 8th that then led the army stationed in St Petersburg to rebel. So significant, this movement led Tsar Nicholas II to abdicate the Russian throne. The provisional government that replaced him granted women the right to vote, and hence why March 8th (the first day of the strike) was chosen to become the day International Women's Day is celebrated, adjusting for the Gregorian calendar.

As regular readers would know, I believe strongly that history informs and provides critical context for many of today's problems. Knowledge and study of the past allows us to ask deeper questions. It provides a unique perspective to examine modern problems.

Just think about the timeline above for a moment, and reflect on how recent it was that women actually had to campaign across the world just for the right to vote and hold public office.

And for those that think Australia was ahead of so many others across the world, Victoria provides us a very interesting case study of why perhaps gender equality has been illusive.

While South Australia was the first Australian territory to grant universal suffrage in

1894, it was in fact Victoria that accidentally allowed women to vote in a State election 31 years beforehand. In what is described as "faulty legislative drafting", the Victorian Electoral Act of 1863 granted all ratepayers listed on local municipal rolls the right to vote. The reason this was described as "faulty" was that Parliament hadn't intended this outcome and had overlooked local government legislation that had permitted women to be added to the municipal rolls of local government elections. In the following general election of 1864, Victorian women then proceeded to use their right as created by the new Act.

So affronted and embarrassed by this oversight, the Victorian Legislative Assembly (lower house) hastily amended the Act in 1865 to fix the 'error', and again restrict voting to only male ratepayers.

Despite 19 private members' bill from 1889 onwards, it wouldn't be for another 43 years that the Victorian Parliament in 1908 finally granted the right of women to vote, with Victoria being the last Australian State to legislate. Arguments against the new legislation sighted the dangers of "introducing biological weakness and feminine attitudes into public life."

It would take another 22 years for Lady Millie Peacock to become the first female woman elected to the Parliament of Victoria in 1933.

Why is this important? Think about how long it takes for things to change. Even small things take time, so think about big changes, and changes that may not be so obvious, such as bias or social inequity. Expecting changes like gender equality to be magically fixed within one generation when the mistreatment of women is centuries old would be fool hardy. International Women's Day is a recognition that we have to work hard to dismantle bias and barriers that have existed across our societies for thousands of years.

The challenge for all of us is how to use the day to move past tokenistic support and use it to prompt and encourage long lasting change.

And this is where you come in.

I'd like to invite members to reflect and ponder on how each of us can work together to forge inclusive brigade cultures where women are not only welcomed but thrive. A culture that supports women and moves from a culture that simply tolerates diversity to one that embraces the opportunities it presents to our sector and celebrates the changes

we make, without feeling resentful or jealous of the arrangements that seek to address past injustices.

To those brigades and leaders that have already done it, congratulations and well done. You are the inspiration and guiding light for others to follow.

Interestingly, our annual volunteer survey asks members the question "There are no barriers to the roles women can occupy in my brigade." Consistently, this is one of the best performing indicators, with performance meeting expectations every year since the survey began ten years ago.

However, when you extract the male responses from the data, women consistently score this question worse than their male peers.

When we drill down to the differences and I discuss these issues with volunteers, it is clear that men often use a different interpretation of what they deem as a "barrier". Many point to the fact that anyone can get on the truck and anyone can stand for an officer position, and therefore reach the conclusion that there are no barriers.

It is not until you start unpicking some of that and start to think about how confronting it must be for a woman to join an overwhelming male organisation, how hard it is to fit in sometimes when you can't relate to the culture or social connections formed over decades of service and how hard it must be to feel like you represent your entire gender every time you attend training or sit an assessment and feel like you have to prove everyone wrong, with any mistake made out to feel like a blemish on your entire gender.

How about the fact that Government's chronic asset underfunding of CFA leaves volunteers having to tin shake just to try and save up for improvements to their tinshed stations just to provide simple privacy for members to change in when dressing for a fire call.

Consider also that even today in 2022, CFA generally only issue one size gas suit and one size splash suit for chemical and hazardous material incidents. That's fine if you're six feet tall and size 10 feet. But what about everyone else?

In encouraging news, and after many years of VFBV advocacy through our committee structures, CFA has recently agreed to start trailing disposable splash suits that will be issued in multiple sizes. A great achievement for

## TAKING THE LEAD

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer



sure, but just an example that not all barriers are easily seen or identified.

Back in 2015, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) supported "The Women in Fire and Emergency Leadership Role" research project into identifying the barriers for women to working in fire and emergency roles. To this day it remains instructive reading.

But it's not all doom and gloom. It is obvious that today's fire services are more open than they have ever been and are working hard at addressing barriers. CFA enjoys one of the highest rates of operational female fire fighters across the State, but we must also acknowledge the sector starts from a low base. I am constantly inspired by stories of brigades that have been trail blazers in building welcoming and supportive approaches to building a brigade they and their members are exceptionally proud of. We should use International Women's Day to celebrate these kind of success stories as well.

Our annual State Championships are just one window to the growing diversity, with the junior events in particular showing the huge inroads in gender diversity which will flow into senior ranks over the next little while.

I also want to acknowledge the many of you who feel that these discussions can be a minefield in themselves, and often stir up a broad diversity of views and opinions from all genders. Often, well intended comments and initiatives can easily come across as patronising or disempowering. Keep in mind how incredibly offensive it can be to think that every person of one gender must all think the same and want the same things. That's why these conversations need to be respectful and reflective. They are deeper than a slogan, or a 280 character social media missive.

And just because these issues are hard and complex doesn't mean we shouldn't keep having the conversations. It just means we should come to them with an open mind, a generosity of spirit, be prepared to learn from them, be open to changing our minds, and be sensitive to the fact that there are not always one size fits all answers or solutions.

If anyone can do these things, you can. Volunteers have forged and led much of the sectors progress. If history is any guide, our future is in safe hands. Your hands. So keep at it.

## POSITION VACANT

VFBV is seeking to appoint a VFBV Support Officer to work in regional Victoria with VFBV District Councils, Brigades and volunteers to facilitate consultation, issues resolution and volunteer engagement.

The position is a state role, with emphasis and focus on providing support throughout CFA's West region (CFA Districts 15, 16, and 17). This is an existing position, with the incumbent recently transferring to the North west Support Officer role.

In addition to relevant skills and experience, candidates will need to understand CFA and volunteerism, be good listeners; be able to facilitate good consultation; ability to establish productive networks; navigate through complex issues resolution; be self-starters and have a passion to improve arrangements that benefit the welfare and efficiency of CFA volunteers.

Extensive regional Victorian work travel is envisaged, and flexible work base locations will be considered for the position, with the priority focus to assign a work location within the CFA West Region. Flexible working arrangements, to cater for extensive evening and weekend work, will be tailored to match the needs of our volunteer membership base. This is a full-time position.

Prior to applying you should familiarise yourself with the Position Description – available from VFBV office or website.

Applications close Tuesday 12th April 2022.

## TRAINER & ASSESSORS

VFBV has recently proposed at the Joint Training Committee, a systematic and State based appeals process for TA (Trainer & Assessor) endorsements after VFBV reviewed complaints from dedicated, experienced, and committed TAs who claimed that they were denied the opportunity to become endorsed.

Currently, the State policy for TA endorsement is for District ACFOs and MLDs to endorse or deny TAs to deliver training programs at the local level. However, there is no accountability or justification required to be given to a TA as to why a particular decision has been reached.

In many situations where TAs have sought VFBV assistance to help resolve the issue, there has been no reasonable justification found for the denied endorsements. In many cases no genuine or methodical explanation or professional development plan have been given to TAs with many cases found to be the result of personality differences or instability of ACFO positions.

VFBV recognise the contribution that TAs have on CFA

and advocate strongly that the TA endorsement process must be fair, equitable and provide natural justice and procedural fairness to all concerned. TA endorsements should be based on merit and ability, and minimise the potential for personality conflicts to overshadow the process. CFA has agreed to work collaboratively with VFBV to develop a fair and non-biased appeals process to establish accountability and transparency and to support the ongoing effectiveness of TAs.

## Update your status

Members are reminded of the requirement to update their CFA record with their COVID-19 Vaccination booster (third-dose) details as soon as possible, as per the Victorian Pandemic Order directions. Emergency Service members are required to update their status by 12th March 2022.

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

## MORE FOR ONLINE SUBSCRIBERS

Want to receive this information direct to your email? You can register for VFBV's e-newsletter via [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au) and clicking on the VFBV Newsletter Box.

Our Facebook page is at [www.facebook.com/cfavol](http://www.facebook.com/cfavol) and you can follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/vfbv](http://www.twitter.com/vfbv) or on Instagram @volunteer\_fire\_brigades\_vic