



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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SURVEY NOW OPEN

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

Volunteers may complete the survey by scanning the QR code below, or visiting the VFBV website. Paper copies are also available from the office and you can call (03) 9886 1141 to request a paper copy be posted to you.



Board elections

Following the October AGM, the VFBV Board has met and held its annual elections. Samantha Collins has been re-elected as State President, Andy Cusack AFSM has been re-elected as State Vice President, and Libby Hay has been elected as Treasurer. Board office holder terms expire each year in October.

The State Council Executive also announced at the AGM that Darren Wallace has been appointed to the VFBV Board for a two year term, replacing retiring Board member Nev Jones AFSM.

Darren joined CFA in 1991, and has held the positions of

JOINT COMMITTEE EOI

Expressions of interest are still open for volunteers to nominate to the CFA/VFBV Joint Committee's for the 2023 calendar year.

If you feel you can contribute and have the time, are passionate about one of the eight streams and want to be an integral part of our Joint Committee process – then please visit our website or talk to your local VFBV State Councillor or VFBV Support Officer for a nomination form.

Nominations are due 28th November 2022.

We are seeking volunteers from broad and diverse backgrounds to participate in our consultative structures. Young members, women and members of culturally diverse backgrounds are highly encouraged to nominate. If you would like to learn more about what the role entails and how to get involved, please contact your local VFBV Support Officer, State Councillor or EO Mark Dryden.

Open for consultation

Formal consultation has commenced on two policies: an updated CFA Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy; and a CFA Asset and Building Naming Policy and Procedure.

VFBV is seeking broad feedback and comment from volunteers in order to inform and assist with VFBV formal responses to these documents. VFBV District Councils have also been invited to lead local discussion at District level.

The CFA Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy has been updated to reflect the new Victorian Child Safe Standards that came into effect in 1 July 2022, and are in their six-month transition period.

The new Victorian Standards are more prescriptive than the previous standards, with new minimum standards for each standard that all organisations must meet.

As I write, we are anxiously holding our breath as we monitor flood levels and the prospect of more rain forecast over the coming weeks. Communities right across the State continue to experience major flooding, with more than 950,000 sandbags having been laid across the state in the past seven days alone. The sandbagging response represent an extraordinary shared effort by emergency services, local councils, businesses and community members to prepare for rising flood levels, and the CFA model of sharing

FLOOD SUPPORT

VFBV has published a useful Fact Sheet to assist members impacted by the recent floods navigate the various support available. The fact sheet outlines the various local, State and Commonwealth support available and provides electronic links to resources where available, as well as common phone hotline numbers for those having difficulty accessing the internet.

The Fact Sheet is available via the VFBV website, or paper copies can be provided by calling the VFBV Office on 9886 1141 or contacting your local VFBV Support Officer.

Resources include immediate relief and recovery grants and advice, longer term assistance grants, income assistance, welfare support and mental health resources and support.

Captain, Lieutenant and Secretary of Trafalgar Fire Brigade in District 9, and DGO for Baw Baw Group.

Congratulations to all office holders, and we welcome Darren to the Board.

FLOOD RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

responsibility with the community again comes to the fore as we witness community resilience in practice.

While SES remains the primary agency, CFA has again risen to the occasion to support our friends and colleagues, with at time of writing more than 3000 CFA volunteer deployments over the last seven days alone. These figures only represent incident response, and do not account for the thousands of deployments occurring to assist with community programs.

Since 12 October, the SES received more than 9500 requests for assistance (RFA), with the key locations of RFAs coming from Shepparton, Rochester, Echuca, Kialla and Mooroopna. While these may have been the hotspots for RFAs, the wider impacts are clear and there are many, many other communities similarly impacted right across the state.

Current impact assessments indicate close to 700 homes have been deemed uninhabitable, with approximately 12,000+ agricultural properties estimated to be impacted by flooding across Northern Victoria alone. Agriculture Victoria are estimating close to 35,000ha of farm area is affected, including 881km of fencing.

As per usual, CFA volunteers have selflessly turned their attention and efforts to assisting with the flood response and coming to the aid of their local communities. There are countless stories of rescues and evacuations, not to mention assisting property owners and the vulnerable prepare their properties.

Those brigades not under direct threat continue to reach across their boundaries and offer support and assistance to those communities that are. Metropolitan districts have also assisted by providing surge to strike teams and IMT rotations, and will play a critical role over the coming weeks and months as we transition to recovery.

The value of the deep networks and relationships built over many decades in each of our brigade's communities has resulted in fast and effective response to what is always a dynamic and evolving risk.

As previous emergencies have taught us, we need to remain vigilant and disciplined in our approach to ensure fatigue and exhaustion don't overwhelm. As always, this is a marathon not a sprint, and brigades will remain helping these communities long after the initial emergency has passed.

VFBV has issued a fact sheet to assist members directly impacted access the various local, state and commonwealth support available. We have researched the various resources available in order to provide a simplified pathway to navigate to get support. Grants are available to assist with temporary accommodation, food, clothing and personal items. For example, the Personal Hardship Assistance Program's Emergency Re-establishment

Assistance fund can provide up to \$42,250 to help pay for clean-up, repairs and rebuilding to eligible people.

In our research, it is clear that many of the services available rely on internet access to navigate, but there are a number of hotlines that have been established that can assist people over the phone. The Flood Recovery Hotline is one such example and members can call 1800 560 760 to start to access the various support available.

For those without phone or internet access, information is also available face-to-face through any of the seven emergency relief centres that are currently active across the state.

VFBV Support Officers are also available to any brigade that needs assistance linking impacted members with the various support options.

We'll keep an eye out for changes in what is being offered and will provide regular updates to try and keep the fact sheet relevant and current. A live version of the Fact Sheet is being maintained on our website.

While efforts are quite rightly prioritised on response during the next little while, there will come a time when it is appropriate to lean more into the recovery space. I encourage brigades to continue to link up with the various recovery agencies to ensure efforts are joined up and not duplicated at the local level.

Brigades are doing an incredible job responding to community needs, and CFA volunteers are again demonstrating why CFA is known as the 'can do' organisation. No matter the need, we find a way to just get it done, with as little fuss as possible.

On behalf of the whole VFBV family, can I please express how proud we are of your efforts.

Please look after yourselves and maintain the focussed discipline that you are trained for in order to keep yourself, your crews and by extension - your communities safe. The provision of your selfless duty to those in need is amongst the highest of virtues and you are a shining example of the very professionalism that CFA volunteers are renowned for. Well done and keep safe.

VALE

It was with great sadness that we bode farewell to Bill Watson AFSM who passed away on 11 October after a long battle of complications arising from heart surgery back in June. A beautiful service was held in Wonthaggi on the 21st October to reflect and celebrate Bill's life and his significant contribution to CFA, VFBV and his community.

Bill held numerous senior positions across his long volunteer career commencing his service with CFA in 1968 with the Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade.

Following his national service and relocation to Wonthaggi in 1975, Bill joined the Wonthaggi Brigade, where he would later become Captain in 1983. He moved back to

Ferntree Gully in '93, where he again stepped up to Captain with the Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade in 1999, before moving back to Wonthaggi in early 2016.

Bill would have been the first person arranging task forces to assist with the current flood recovery operations, having established the concept following the 2012 North East floods, where he was the VFBV District 13 Council President at the time. This concept was later adapted by Bill to support drought, fire, flood and further extended to support farmers and dairy farmers during bouts of hard times.

Bill's service to the association was long and varied, having served in multiple positions, including as President of the VFBV District 13 Council 2011-2014, and much earlier as the President of the Urban Association District 8 Council in the late 80s, with him again serving as State Councillor for District 8 up until his illness. Bill was a mentor to many and was a key driver of the VFBV Youth Network.

We have lost a great friend and advocate, and Bill will be sorely missed. His passion and advocacy for firefighter safety was second to none, with Bill most recently founding the 'Healthy Fire Stations' initiative.

We send our thoughts, prayers and sympathy to Gay, Lisa, family, friends and loved ones and thank them most sincerely for sharing Bill with us. We also extend our thoughts to fellow members of the Wonthaggi and Ferntree Gully fire brigades.

ELECTION

On Saturday 26th November, Victorians will head to the polls for the 2022 State election.

The needs and desires of CFA volunteers has been well ventilated over the years, and VFBV has undertaken extensive work over the years to educate members of Parliament from all sides of the political divide on how the contribution of volunteers can be appropriately recognised, respected and supported.

Equitable and sustainable funding and resourcing to ensure brigades are equipped to serve their communities; respecting the Volunteer Charter and the commitments made under it; protecting volunteers from inappropriate political and industrial interference; and a commitment to building and strengthening the capacity and capability of volunteers to protect their communities have all been identified by volunteers as critical measures to support the vital role that CFA volunteers play across the Victorian emergency management sector.

Members should reach out to candidates and ask how their policies address the above priorities, before deciding on your vote.

Brigades are also urged to reflect on the support they have received from each of their local MPs over the past years, both individually and as a collective. Many brigades have written to MP's over various issues across the last term



and are best placed to reflect on whether the responses they received met the brigade's expectations or not.

Volunteers will always support those that support them, and we urge all members of parliament to reflect on their own contribution over the proceeding four years in supporting and respecting the vital and valued individuals who make up CFA, and whether or not their deeds and actions have honoured the words and commitments they have made in Parliament and through legislation.

To all members of parliament who have stood up for CFA volunteers on various issues over the years, whether that be through funding, support, legislation, presumptive rights or any other measures taken that have sought to respect and support volunteer firefighters, we thank-you most sincerely and appreciate your support and wish all candidates well in the upcoming elections.

SURVEY NOW OPEN

As advised last month, by the time you read this, the annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey will be open and accepting your feedback.

You can use the QR code displayed on this page to open the survey on your smart device or visit the VFBV website to undertake the survey online. For those who would prefer to complete a paper-based survey, please call (03) 9886 1141 and we'll happily post you one.

The survey is a critical and important tool that gives CFA, Government 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 welfare, engagement and wellbeing.

The results are used to prioritise funding bids, inform the allocation of resources and help direct energy to initiatives that seek to address the area's most in need.

Please contribute and share your voice, and please don't just leave it for others.

As I said last month, your voice matters and will have an impact on decisions affecting the future. So - if you have not participated in the survey before, make yourself a promise that you won't let this opportunity pass you by for another year. If you're not contributing to the feedback, it's a bit hard to criticise the decisions being made.

Visit www.vfbv.com.au/cfa or scan the QR code displayed on this page with your phone or tablet to complete the survey now.