



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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## 2023 STATE CHAMPS

Brigade and team entries and judge and officials registration for the 2023 State Championships are now open. The 2023 Championships will again be held on consecutive weekends in March 2023 in Mooropna. All team entries and judge and official registrations will close on Sunday 19th February 2023.

The first weekend of competition will see the State Urban Junior Championships take place on Saturday 18th and Sunday 19th March. While on the second weekend of competition, Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th March, the State Urban Senior Championship will be contested alongside the State Rural Senior and Junior Championships.

Brigade and team entries will again be collected online for the 2023 championships. Please visit [tinyurl.com/2023-champ-entry-open](http://tinyurl.com/2023-champ-entry-open) for links to enter your team or register as a judge or official for any of the championships.

The VFBV website also has information for competing brigades as well as updated rule books for both the urban and rural competitions along with lists of local competitions being conducted in the lead up to the state championships.

Also in the lead up to the State Championships, the Urban Competition and Rules Committee are conducting a skills workshop for all competition judges and officials, coaches and com-

petitors on Sunday 22nd January 2023. Please visit the VFBV website to find out more information and RSVP to the VFBV office if you are interested in attending the skills workshop to [championships@vfbv.com.au](mailto:championships@vfbv.com.au) or 03 9886 1141.

If you require an assistance during the registration process, please contact the VFBV office on [championships@vfbv.com.au](mailto:championships@vfbv.com.au) or 9886 1141 or CFA at [championships@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:championships@cfa.vic.gov.au)

## Survey closing

This year's Vol Survey is closing soon.

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.



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## Flood reimbursement

Members are reminded that the Victorian Government have instituted a Volunteer Flood Response Expense Reimbursement scheme for CFA, SES and LSV volunteers involved in the response to claim any personal expenses incurred. Visit the VFBV website for further details. Claims can only be made once and must be submitted by 31st January, 2023.

VFBV continues to update its useful Fact Sheet to assist members impacted by the 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 (03) 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, business support and mental health resources and support.

## Ash Wednesday

A reminder that the 40-year commemoration of the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 service will be held on Sunday 12th February 2023 at the Ash Wednesday Bushfire Education Centre in Cockatoo.

Capacity at the venue is limited,

so a booking and expression of interest system has been implemented to track interest and allow the committee to respond to demand. If you are planning on attending in person, please visit [tinyurl.com/vfbv-ashwed](http://tinyurl.com/vfbv-ashwed) and complete the expression of interest. The service will also be live streamed for those unable to attend on the day.

times, and efforts that have been in train for a while now should hopefully start producing some results throughout 2023.

Shortly, I am hoping the draft five-year implementation plan to address the recommendations made by CFA's culture and issues management review will be ready for wider consultation and review by volunteers. I have been very pleased to see the early efforts made internally within CFA to build a set of draft actions that seek to address the various findings.

CFA has committed to undertaking broad consultation on the draft plan and I am looking forward to those continuing discussions. The proof of course will be tangible outcomes and progress that can be felt at all levels of the organisation. Actions range across culture reform, improved diversity and inclusion programs, embedding the behavioural standards, improved conflict management and disciplinary processes, improved consultation and respect for the Volunteer Charter, new processes to help brigades and groups quantify what support they need, improved induction for new volunteers and staff and fairer and more transparent access to training, endorsements and appeals processes.

VFBV has challenged CFA to articulate and quantify how the various actions will result in an improvement, and how each will be felt, heard and seen by individual members in order for the results and progress to be judged against. Too often in the past, actions from various reports have just been paid lip service or wrapped in corporate speak which has not resulted in any definable or quantifiable improvements. We hope to change this, and I have been very pleased to observe the level of support within the CFA executive to bolster actions.

Similarly, our new Joint Committee processes kick in this year, with refined terms of reference for the eight CFA/VFBV Joint Committees and a renewed commitment by the CFA CEO and Chief Officer to strengthen these critical consultative mechanisms. The new commitments include a renewed focus on genuine engagement, transparency and accountability with new mechanisms to provide oversight and escalation where necessary. State Council has also agreed to refined processes to improve collaboration across the committees and greater use of short-term working parties to progress specific issues that may require the input of one or more committees.

Natalie, Jason and myself have each worked personally to reinvigorate the Joint Committee processes and agree to the overarching governance arrangements to ensure they are setup for success and taken seriously.

We have worked together to find common ground and a structure that isn't overly bureaucratic but yet still provides appropriate checks and balances.

I am hopeful that this high level of commitment and leadership sends a powerful message that we are serious

## The promise of a new year

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

about using the committees to genuinely work together and solve problems, making CFA a terrific place to volunteer and work.

In the spirit of the mutual respect laid down by the volunteer charter, our committee structures don't rely on us always agreeing, but rather provides a formal mechanism for each of our organisations to know exactly where the other stands on a particular issue leading to a better understanding of what we are each trying to address.

Regular readers would be aware that I don't place my trust or optimism lightly, but you should draw confidence from recent actions that demonstrate that CFA is becoming more responsive.

Members would note that following broad consultation with VFBV and drawing on the work we did with Brigade Captains across the state, CFA and other volunteer emergency services (CFA, SES and LSV) recently relaxed its vaccination mandates, aligning themselves with community settings. CFA should be commended on listening to the feedback and responding appropriately.

Similarly, just before Christmas I was pleasantly surprised to receive a detailed response to the VFBV feedback we provided on SOP 5.04 on hose testing. While a lot of effort goes into providing, analysing and consolidating the results of volunteer feedback, sadly it has not always been routine to get a detailed response and learn how the feedback has been considered.

To the credit of the Fire Equipment Maintenance (FEM) team, most of the feedback has been taken on board and incorporated into a new revised SOP which is now going through its approval processes with the Chief. This includes improvements to better clarify PPC requirements, incorporating the use of hose test trailers into the SOP, aligning test pressures with brigade capability rather than a generic brigade classification, and modifying the existing requirement to test all hose after each use with a more common-sense inspection process to determine after use servicing and testing requirements based on how the hose was actually used.

And while consultation takes time, the provision of suitable time to conduct broad field consultation and discuss the issues with brigades and groups has led to a much-improved piece of doctrine, which is now vastly more intuitive and user friendly and far more likely to achieve the improved safety outcomes that were sought. The FEM team should be congratulated for their approach, and I think them most sincerely for the collaborative and respectful manner they have conducted their review.

### Presumptive Legislation

In further welcome news, on the 15th December amendments to the Commonwealth Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment

(Prescribed Cancers) regulations received royal assent by the Governor General. This amendment added a further eight new cancers to the Commonwealth's firefighter presumptive (cancer) legislation. The new cancers added are lung, skin, cervical, ovarian, penile, pancreatic and thyroid cancers as well as malignant mesothelioma. The new cancers include the addition of specific female reproductive cancers, taking the total number of cancers covered by the federal scheme from 12 to 20.

While this does not directly affect Victorian firefighters just yet, it adds much needed impetus for the Victorian scheme to be updated.

Members would recall that independent MP Tania Maxwell (and fellow CFA volunteer) introduced a private members bill last year seeking to include three female reproductive cancers. While the bill was opposed by both the Government and the opposition, Minister Symes (Emergency Services Minister) did commit to further work to pursue their inclusion.

Since that time, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) conducted its review of available scientific literature and determined that the cancer risk for firefighters should be reclassified as group 1, acknowledging that the work performed by firefighters is carcinogenic to humans.

This, along with the amendments made to the Federal scheme, should now provide the Victorian government all the evidence it needs to update the Victorian scheme to ensure our firefighters receive the same protection as their federal counterparts. I have recently re-written to the Minister seeking her support.

I have also sent my thanks on behalf of Victorian volunteer firefighters to Australian Senator David Pocock who negotiated the amendments to the Commonwealth presumptive legislation scheme as part of the negotiations over the Australian Government's recent IR law changes, noting it will significantly assist our advocacy for the addition cancers to be added to the Victorian scheme.

Senator Pocock is the independent Senator for the Australian Capital Territory and has been a staunch ally of volunteer firefighters, fighting to have ACT volunteer firefighters recognised by the Commonwealth legislation, just as Victorian volunteer firefighters are under the Victorian scheme. He has worked closely with our friends from the ACT Volunteer Brigades Association, whom we work closely with through our national body - Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA).

While this likely has some way to go here in Victoria, these are important milestones that will assist our continued advocacy and I will keep you updated on progress. While we hope no-one ever has to use these protections, the reality is when



they are needed – they provide an enormous peace of mind for the individual and their families allowing them to concentrate on their treatment and wellbeing during what is often a fight for their life. It's not a hand out, and simply provides firefighters with the same entitlements that other workers are entitled to when they are injured in their workplaces. For volunteer firefighters especially, who often don't have any sick leave or paid leave to draw upon – these protections are crucial.

### Survey

And a final reminder that our annual volunteer survey will be closing shortly. The survey has been open since the 27th October and if you have not yet completed it – time is running out.

I have yet to meet a volunteer who does not have an opinion on how well or how poor things are going within CFA, so I urge you to please contribute so that you can help us make a difference.

Please don't just leave it for others to comment. Every response adds credible weight to the results and improves our ability to use the results to effect real change.

CFA is using the results, and many of the indicators directly influence CFA programs and priorities, including funding bids for initiatives that seek to address the problems raised.

The survey asks for your opinion on most aspects of your CFA experience. From training, consultation, people management, support from and cooperation across CFA, culture, how well volunteers are respected and how you feel about the future.

We take your privacy seriously with all your answers being confidential, and we never share your personal details with anyone including CFA. All results are deidentified, yet every comment and every response are analysed to understand what is working well and what isn't. Use the QR code on this page to do the survey today.

### FIRE SEASON

As predicted, the later than usual fire season commenced, with the first total fire ban days declared over the new year. Thank-you to all members who attended incidents over the Christmas and New Year periods. While there is never a good time, the sacrifices made by members to attend to emergencies during what are among the most treasured family times is greatly appreciated and respected. Welcome to 2023 and thank-you for all you do. Stay safe.

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