



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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2023 State Championships

Later in March the 2023 State Championships will be held over consecutive weekends at the Mooroopna Recreation Reserve.

The first weekend of competition will be for the Urban Junior State Championship on 18 and 19 March with 41 teams competing in 18 events over the two days. Harvey and Kellerberrin brigades are also making the trip across from Western Australia to compete in the Urban Junior Championship with Harvey also competing the Urban Senior Championship the following weekend.

On the following weekend, 25 and 26 March the Urban Senior Championship and the Rural Senior & Junior Championships will be held. Across this weekend there will be 75 senior teams and 40 junior teams.

Across both weekends the Championships will also be supported by more than 200 judges and officials who have volunteered their time and expertise to ensure the successful conduct of the State Championships.

The popular and impressive Torchlight Procession will again also be conducted on the evening of Saturday 25 March at Victoria Lake Park in Shepparton, with 2023 marking 150 years since the first demonstration and display of Victoria's volunteer firefighters was held in 1873 which included a Torchlight Procession through the streets of Melbourne.

Participation in the Torchlight Procession is also open to brigades not competing in State Championship events. Any brigade wishing to participate in the Torchlight Procession should contact Peter Davis peter.davis@cfa.vic.gov.au or 0458 933 797 as soon as possible.

Radio allocation policy

Feedback is being sought on CFA's proposed new Radio Allocation policy and procedure.

The new policy and procedure has been developed in preparation for the planned rollout of CFA's replacement to the operational radio fleet. The revised policy and procedure covers the radio justification criteria and outlines the initial allocation of radio's to brigades, groups, appliances and officers.

Feedback can be provided by individuals, brigades, groups and District Councils.

Due to procurement activities, feedback is due by **Wednesday 15th March 2023**.

Please visit the VFBV website for more information,

CFA alcohol and other drugs policy

Feedback is being sought on a new draft policy covering Alcohol and other drugs, including prescription medication.

The draft policy covers arrangements for the appointment of a 'responsible officer', when alcohol can be consumed and a ban on brigades from applying for a new liquor license, with existing licenses able to be kept.

All members are encouraged to read and provide feedback ASAP. Feedback is due by **Monday 8th May 2023**.

Please visit the VFBV website for more information and a copy of the draft policy,

including copies of the policy and procedure.

VFBV Board positions

Vacancies on the VFBV Board will arise when the terms of four VFBV Board members expire on the 1st October 2023. Of the four members whose terms are expiring, two are eligible for re-appointment.

VFBV invites applications from any CFA volunteer who is motivated by the prospect of making a difference and believes they have the skills to contribute to the VFBV Board.

The role of a board member involves contributing to VFBV direction, policy determination and monitoring the performance and governance of the Association. This includes actively contributing to policy discussion, consulting with CFA volunteers and contributing to the identification and management of strategic issues.

VFBV is seeking applications from gender and culturally diverse candidates in addition to a diverse range of skills and experience including applications from diverse brigade types and classifications.

Members should familiarise themselves with the VFBV Board member role statement and key selection criteria available from the VFBV website or via the office at (03) 9886 1141.

Applications close on **Monday 28th August 2023**.

CFA BOARD POSITIONS

The CFA Act recognises that it is important that the CFA Board has strong volunteer expertise, knowledge and an understanding of CFA volunteers. To support this, four of the skills-based CFA Board members are appointed by the Minister for Emergency Services from a panel of names submitted by VFBV. This year, the terms of two volunteer nominees will expire in December 2023, with both members eligible for re-appointment. One is for a volunteer from brigades predominantly serving rural

communities, and the other being for a volunteer from brigades predominantly serving urban communities.

CFA volunteers who believe they have the skills, experience and capacity to make a contribution to the Board of CFA are invited to apply. In addition to volunteer experience and knowledge, nomination will have regard to any of the following - knowledge of or experience in; commercial; technical; operational; legal or financial matters; expertise in fire or emergency management; land

By empowering, supporting and embracing local communities to contribute to fire safety, knowledge and participation, we build safer and more resilient communities.

The volunteer CFA model is based on the fundamental tenant of partnering with our communities to share responsibility for fire safety. It is based on the philosophy that if we share an understanding of how to recognise and understand risk and jointly accept responsibility for managing that risk, then we will be far more effective at reducing the occurrence and reduce the impact should an emergency occur. It accepts that because of the size and speed at which emergencies can develop, the best way to protect Victorians is to partner with them to prepare, prevent, mitigate, respond and support recovery from emergencies. Not to mention the incredible social capital and empowerment that emergency volunteering creates across the community.

This shared responsibility model encourages all Victorians to take actions, commensurate with their abilities to prevent, prepare and safely respond to emergencies. An integrated approach to emergency management brings together agencies, state government, local government, industry, non-government organisations and everyday Victorians to work together to protect lives and property from fire and other emergencies.

The strength of the CFA system is because it is built from the community and for the community – it is therefore intrinsically linked. It does not need to parachute personnel into communities in times of disaster, as its people are already living inside and part of each community. They already have existing relationships, partnerships and understanding of the local context. Members of the community come together to learn the skills and knowledge of disaster preparation, prevention, response and recovery that builds a timeless legacy that embeds these emergency management skills into the community.

When disaster does strike, these citizens don't need to look up or study local priorities or seek local knowledge, it is already built into the system. Communities with strong brigades don't look outside their community for help, they look within first. And provided they are adequately supported by government, they have the tools, equipment, resources and morale to provide the initial response as emergencies develop.

This is just as important during the recovery stages as management; or any other field relevant to the performance of the functions of CFA.

VFBV is seeking applications from gender and culturally diverse candidates in addition to a diverse range of skills and experience including applications from diverse brigade types and classifications.

Members should familiarise themselves with the CFA Board Charter and further information on the application process is available from the VFBV website or via the office at (03) 9886 1141.

Applications close on **Monday 26th June 2023**.

VOLUNTEER SURGE CAPACITY IN ACTION

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

well, because long after many others leave, it is the local brigades that remain to support and care for their communities as they transition to recovery.

The beauty of the CFA model is as a disaster grows, the system can top-up and provide critical backup and support to assist those communities during their times of need. What we refer to as the CFA volunteer surge capacity is exactly that – it is the ability of the 1,214 communities across Victoria who have all established, supported and contributed to their local volunteer fire brigade pitching in to help neighbouring communities, and at times even those from afar.

This massive surge force provides unparalleled weight of attack when fires threaten and can be mobilised quickly and efficiently right across the entire state without leaving any communities unprotected. Crews stay behind to defend the local community, while the surge is sent afar to assist others.

Volunteer brigades have planned for these contingencies for decades, with many adding their own fundraising funds and precious time to purchase trucks and equipment above the minimum allotment that government provides. In what other workplace do the workers volunteer their own time and efforts to fundraise for critical equipment just to do the job they have been asked to do by the State? Imagine the boss passing around a cap for workers to donate to buy the pens and paper used by the office. Yet the State very generously provides that same equipment to its paid workforce paid for...you guessed it – by you and your community through tax dollars. This is why VFBV is so passionate about educating decision makers on the inequity and unfairness of the current system, that sees CFA as the most poorly funded fire service in Victoria, despite it also being by far the largest, most trusted and efficient.

Often times, volunteers have had to fight the very organisation they are donating the trucks to just to get permission to build and fund these critical assets. In fairness to CFA, their opposition often stems from the fact that once the asset is added to the organisation, CFA receives no additional funding from government to actually cover the maintenance and running costs. And pulled from the pages of a comedy skit, that leaves us with a shambolic arrangement where the agency can't actually afford to accept millions of dollars of donated equipment that would ultimately become assets of the state and be on call during times of emergency.

Returning to the incredible surge capacity provided by volunteers, when it works well, we usually don't hear much about it – because the emergency has been nipped in the bud, and controlled long before it has grown to a size that makes for compelling TV.

Case in point was the most recent TFB days that

occurred in late February. With high temperatures, high gusty winds and a large amount of grassland fuel loads, these were the perfect conditions for dangerous fire behaviour.

For example, on the 24th Feb, a TFB was declared for the Wimmera and Southwest fire districts. Over the course of the day, 25 significant grass and scrub fires were responded to. The majority of those were controlled within an hour or two, with all of them controlled by the end of the day. In each case, the local response and weight of attack was outstanding. Our highly trained and professional volunteers did outstanding work sizing up the incidents and establishing control points on arrival. Each initiated calls for "make tankers" and provided word backs early, matching resources to the risk and ensuring an appropriate weight of attack could be achieved early and effectively. Volunteers doing what volunteers do best – just getting on with it.

The established practice of brigades pre-planning and having crews on standby was again highly effective and meant requests for additional tankers was met with ease.

So far, the largest blaze was the Flowerdale grass and scrub fire that began on the afternoon of the 21st February. Burning through very steep and inaccessible country, this fire was fanned by strong wind gusts and grew to over 500 hectares by the early evening. 56 CFA appliances, 15 FFMVic appliances and 9 aircraft battled the fire into the evening.

Three days later, the fire was brought under control, despite having grown to 1,000 hectares in size. An incredible achievement. Despite posing a threat to multiple homes, there have been no confirmed loss of homes, nor any confirmed reports of livestock losses. This is an outstanding result and has been attributed to early asset protection initiated by the crews and the incredible skill of the responding crews. Only measuring the success by loss is always flawed, with these examples highlighting the incredible 'saves' that occur at each incident.

These are just a couple of examples of the fantastic work that gets done every day by CFA volunteers in partnership with other ESO's and the community to protect and defend their communities during emergencies.

Why is this all so important. Because Victoria is one of the most fire prone places in the world. With changing weather, longer fire seasons driven by our changing climate and urban sprawl encroaching our forested areas, the need to build, strengthen and protect Victoria's CFA volunteer surge capacity is critical.

Asking less people to do more is not going to be sustainable nor in the best interests of the Victorian public. It would be a very brave politician, commissioner or bureaucrat that is prepared to testify at the next Bushfires Royal Commission that they were



comfortable not doing anything to bolster and grow Victoria's volunteer capacity to deal with the ever increasing emergencies that we will face in the future.

VFBV continues to advocate for greater government support in recognising and promoting the great work all our emergency service volunteers do, and the need to encourage, educate and promote the importance to the wider community in order to drive recruitment, retention and high morale. The need to protect the large volunteer surge capacity drawn from metropolitan areas is critical to ensure we are prepared for those major disasters when they strike. The regularity of large fires like Ash Wednesday, Black Saturday and the 2019/20 Australian eastern seaboard fires provide a clear impetus of what we must plan and prepare for, and what is at risk if we don't.

Anything or any policy that continues to erode or disincentivise Victoria's emergency service volunteers will one day be scrutinised by public enquiry. And the question we will be asking is - what did you do to build, protect, support or encourage Victoria's most treasured and efficient public asset, Victoria's CFA?

VALE

It is with great sadness we learned of the passing of VFBV Life member Ron Jacobs OAM AFSM on the 25th February.

Ron was a Life Member of the Chelsea Fire Brigade (now Patterson River) and held the position of Association Secretary for the Victorian Urban Fire Brigades Association (VUFBA) from July 1984 until July 1993 and was honoured with VUFBA Life Membership in 1995.

Ron was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) in the 1992 Queen's Birthday Honours list and was further recognised with the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the 2012 Queen's Birthday Honours List for service to the local community through roles with historical, local government and emergency service organisations.

Ron was also heavily involved in urban competitions as a competitor and also spent more than 30 years on the Executive of the Eastern Districts and Flinders Associations and was awarded the VUFBA Gold Star in 1986.

Ron was also the father of long serving VFBV Staff Member and fellow Association Life Member Jenni Laing.

We pass on our deepest condolences to Jenni, her siblings Bruce and John and the wider family, and members of Patterson River Fire Brigade.