



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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

Post: PO Box 453, Mt Waverley, 3149
 Website: www.vfbv.com.au
 Fax: 9886 1618
 State President: Samantha Collins



PRIZE WINNERS

Congratulations to the winners of the 2024/25 VFBV Affiliation Prize Draw!

Thank you to all Brigades/Groups who paid their 2024/25 affiliations prior to 30 June this year and qualified for the early payment prize draw.

The winners and their selected prizes are:

1st prize - Meering West FB (D20) - G-Force Nozzle with Quick connect coupling and Gated Wye with Storz inlet and quick connect outlets

2nd prize - Hardies Hill FB (D15) - 5 x Helmet Torches and carry case

3rd prize - Yarck FB (D12) - Root Soaker and Bag

4th prize - Tallangatta Group (D24) - TFT Break apart Nozzle

A big thank you to GAAM Emergency Products and Powersafe for once again donating these great prizes.

Remember, by affiliating, you are making a vital contribution to the important work we do on behalf of all CFA volunteers. Advocacy, support, research and the provision of trusted and credible advice are all strengthened when volunteers work together and stand united as one.

If you are not sure whether your Brigade or Group's VFBV or Welfare Fund subscriptions are up to date, please contact your secretary urgently, as we encourage all those who have not yet affiliated to do so as soon as possible. For any enquiries, contact your VFBV Support Officer, State Councillor or call us at the office on 9886 1141.

Urban skills workshop

The Urban Competition and Rules Committee is holding a skills workshop prior to the commencement of the 2024/25 competition season on Saturday 5 October at the Melton competition track at the Melton Recreation Reserve.

On the day, workshops will be conducted and facilitated by experienced judges, officials and competitors.

The skills workshops are targeted at both current and prospective judges, officials, coaches and competitors who wish to gain new skills and knowledge or build upon existing skills.

The coach and competitor workshops will cover the use of tray in reel events, rolling on, competitor safety, appli-

ance, marshal and junior events. While the judge and official workshops will cover all judge roles, including but not limited to judge in the box, announcers, on track judging, starting, and recording.

Committee members will also be on hand to conduct equipment checks prior to the start of the competition season so brigades are encouraged to bring along their competition equipment to ensure that it is ready to go for the upcoming competition season.

If you are interested in attending the skills workshop, please RSVP to the VFBV office via championships@vfbv.com.au or (03) 9886 1141 by Monday 23rd September.

AGM

This year's AGM will be held on Sunday 6th October, following State Council.

Please refer to page 2 of this month's VFBV Quarterly Supplement for details.

Presumptive update

The Queensland Government is the latest State Government to update its firefighter presumptive legislation scheme to provide presumptive protection to firefighters who suffer from cancers that have been scientifically demonstrated as likely to be a result of their firefighting service.

Queensland has not only added the remaining cancers introduced by recent changes by the Commonwealth but have also picked up each of the cancers covered by the other states and territories.

This makes the Queensland scheme the strongest in Australia, covering 22 cancers, as well as providing presumption for PTSD and asbestos related diseases.

Victoria continues to lag behind, with its scheme covering 15 cancers and no presumption for PTSD or asbestos related diseases.

Victoria is now behind the Commonwealth, ACT, Tasma-

VOL COMP

VFBV is continuing to monitor arrangements under CFA's Volunteer Compensation Scheme in light of recent cases that have exposed significant concerns in how some cases are being managed by CFA.

VFBV will continue to monitor and advocate for changes to ensure volunteer confidence in the scheme is restored.

Thank you to all those brigades who have been in touch to ask what they can do to support this advocacy, and thereby ensure all injured volunteers are treated with respect, compassion and above all, protection of their entitlements to ensure they may recover from their injury without the worry and stress of navigating red tape and bureaucracy.

We will continue to report on progress.

nia, Queensland and Western Australia, while the Northern Territory covers 15 cancers, but also has presumptive coverage for PTSD and asbestos related diseases.

All Australian volunteer associations are collectively advocating for harmonisation to ensure no matter where a firefighter lives, they are provided equal coverage.

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT?

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

On pages 5 – 8 of the VFBV September Quarterly Supplement that is included in this month's Fire Wise newspaper, you will find the summary result of our most recent volunteer survey.

The survey was conducted between October 2023 and February 2024, and is the 12th annual survey conducted since its launch back in 2012.

Our survey is a critical and reliable method to capture the views of volunteers as well as monitoring short-and-long term trends and the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at improving CFA. It's an annual snapshot of volunteer opinion, using questions on issues chosen by CFA volunteers. It's also one of the key opportunities for CFA volunteers to have their voices both individually and collectively heard, with the results studied by government, the sector and the CFA executive.

More than 2,185 volunteers provided their feedback on their CFA experience, which was 140 higher than the year before which is an outstanding result. This continues to make our survey the largest of its kind across Australia, by a significant margin and I'd like to thank each and every volunteer that participated. Together, we are making a difference, and you are helping improve CFA for generations to come.

So, what do the results tell us?

It tells us that the things within CFA's direct control are incrementally getting better. Over the seven themes, none have got worse. Four have recorded a slight improvement, and three have remained the same. However, some of the individual measures have gone backwards which emphasises the need for continued vigilance.

The top three areas requiring the most attention, and recording the highest scores for dissatisfaction are; Training; Cooperation across CFA; and Respect and Professionalism.

Training again recorded the highest levels of dissatisfaction across all themes, with a VolWEL of 3.1 which keeps it in the category of 'critical need for priority attention'. This was one of the themes that did not move this year, with the year before recording a 0.1 positive movement.

A reminder that a high VolWEL is an indication that things are not working well, while a lower VolWEL indicates things are more closely meeting expectation. A VolWEL of zero would mean volunteer expectations are being perfectly met. In our colour coding, we assign a score anywhere between 0 to 0.9 as meeting expectations with anything above 1.0 indicating there is potential for improvement.

When we drill down into the training questions three of the six questions on training recorded a worst result than the year before. Namely, the question "CFA provides enough training opportunities in formats, at times and at locations that make it easy for me to participate" which

recorded the worst result with a VolWEL of 3.6 when compared to 3.4 from the year before.

The next worst result was "Most training is available and provided within a reasonable distance from my brigade" recording a VolWEL of 3.2 which compares to 3.0 from the year before.

These two results indicate that opportunity (quantum) and access to training remain the two areas requiring the most support, and are mostly within the remit of District training departments.

On a positive note, the question "CFA provides good leadership training for volunteers in people management, brigade management, conflict resolution and mentoring" recorded a VolWEL of 2.7, which was an improvement of 0.1 from the year before. The related question from the 'Support from CFA' theme – "Volunteer leaders in my brigade are effectively supported and empowered to manage my brigade and undertake their roles" scoring a VolWEL of 1.6.

This is likely a reflection of the increased availability and expansion of the Captains Peer Mentor Program, the Women in Leadership Mentoring program and the re-introduction of the Certificate IV in Leadership and Management scholarships. Given all these programs are expected to increase capacity over the next 12 months, and with the reintroduction of the highly regarded Fireline Leadership program commencing shortly, we are hopeful of seeing continued improvement in this measure.

Interestingly the question "CFA's training expectations of me are fair and reasonable for the roles that I perform" remained unchanged with a VolWEL of 2.0. Given the proposed changes and increased requirements being pursued as part of CFA's review of Driver training, it will be interesting to watch this metric over the coming years.

In the 'Cooperation Across CFA' theme, three of the four questions saw an improvement. However, these gains were wiped out by a jump in dissatisfaction on the question "Volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at CFA Corporate (headquarters) level." This question recorded the equal worst result in the survey, scoring a 3.6 which is a 0.2 deterioration from the year before.

While the qualitative analysis is still underway, there are a couple of trends which really jump out when digging deeper into what is going on in this question.

While it appears volunteers have welcomed the increased opportunities to provide feedback to policy discussions, there is a very strong feeling and perception that they feel their feedback is either ignored or just paid lip service. This goes to the heart of whether consultation is genuine or not and resonates very strongly with my observation that volunteers not only

expect to be asked what they think, but they also expect decision makers to respond and act on their feedback, demonstrating how it has been used to affect the decision being made.

Over the past year I have had the misfortune of attending several workshops and forums arranged by CFA to gather feedback on a couple of projects that will have significant impacts on volunteers.

To see information nights dressed up as consultation and engagement sessions was frustrating to say the least, not just to me but the other participants also. Death by PowerPoint and simply informing volunteers on what has already been decided is not consultation, and the fact that this metric has gone backwards is a warning sign that volunteers are seeing straight through disingenuous opportunities and puts HQ on notice that volunteers are extremely worried about what they are seeing.

The 'Respect and Professionalism' theme was a mixed bag. On the one hand, the question "I respect and appreciate the effort made by CFA to support me as a volunteer" went backwards – recording a VolWEL of 2.4 compared to 2.3 the year before. Reading through the comments, this appears to be mostly driven by perceived budget cuts, and lack of investment by government into the service.

However, on a positive note, the question "In general, CFA staff accept and recognise the professionalism of volunteers" recorded an improvement of 0.2 with a VolWEL of 2.0 which is a very positive sign that the pivot to a stronger and more supportive volunteer culture is starting to be felt across the membership.

Yet again, the areas where decision making is closest to the brigade level as possible recorded by far the best results.

The three best performing metrics within the 'People Management: My Brigade' theme are all areas where volunteers have been empowered to make their own decisions. "The environment at my brigade is volunteer-friendly, welcoming to new members and creates good morale" scored a VolWEL of 1.1 indicating high levels of satisfaction. The questions "Workplace bullying is not tolerated in brigades of which I have been a member" and "Volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at my brigade level" both achieved a VolWEL of 1.3.

In the Recruitment and Retention theme, five of the seven questions recorded an improvement. Yet again, the two best performing areas of the entire survey were the questions "There are no barriers to the roles women can occupy in my brigade" and "People from all cultural backgrounds, different religions, political and personal beliefs are all made welcome at my brigade" scoring 0.7 and 0.6 respectively. Both of these



improved over the year before with the cultural background question improving by 0.2 and the no barriers to the roles women can occupy improving by 0.1.

Worrying however were the two questions on youth. The question "My brigade is successful in recruiting younger people as volunteers" scored 2.6 as did the question "My brigade is successful in retaining younger people as volunteers" also recording a VolWEL of 2.6.

Pleasingly, access to administrative support from CFA recorded an improvement, with a VolWEL of 1.6 which is a 0.1 improvement from the year before.

All up, I see a lot of consistency in the survey results with the areas that volunteers tell us are working well, and those areas they feel things are not going well. And while the results are always interesting, the question you should really be asking is so what is being done to drive improvement?

I'm glad you asked, as that is why it is so important for you to participate in the survey each year. We continue to strongly urge and encourage the CFA executive to support new initiatives that are designed specifically to meet a need identified by volunteers through the annual survey and help to drive improvements.

My wish is that far more programs will be created and supported that look to fill a need, rather than solve what I sometimes describe as the imaginary problems identified or prioritised through red tape and the bureaucracy of government and regulators.

The more programs and initiatives that are designed and funded that seek to address the very real and lived experience of volunteers - the closer CFA will come to truly being a volunteer organisation of choice.

The only way to cauterise the declining numbers of volunteers is to accept the fact that by running a volunteer organisation, you actually need to design your policies, procedures, and culture to actually appeal to volunteers and making them feel respected, valued and happy and making a place they actually want to spend time in. In other words – meeting the commitments under the Volunteer Charter, and honouring the statutory requirements under Section 6 of the CFA Act.

Who would have thought eh.