



# 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



## VOL SURVEY

The 2024-25 annual VFBV Volunteer Survey is now open.

Scan the QR code at right or visit the VFBV website to take part in the survey as soon as possible.

Paper copies of the survey are also available by calling the VFBV office on (03) 9886 1141.



## STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS

Entries as well as nominations for judges and officials have opened for the 2025 State Championships to be held in Mooroopna.

The State Urban Junior Championship will take place on the weekend of 22 and 23 March 2025, followed by the State Rural Junior and Senior Championships and the State Urban Senior Championship on the 29 and 30 March 2025.

All entries and nominations will be collected online again this year via [tinyurl.com/2025-entry](https://tinyurl.com/2025-entry)

Information for competing teams including links to request entry forms for the championships, judge and official nomination forms, and information relating to each championship from the rural and urban competition committees is on the website.

The VFBV website also has updated rule books for both championships and a list of competitions to be held around the state in the lead up to the State Championship for both rural and urban competitions.

The popular Torchlight Procession will again form part of the second weekend of competition, taking place on Saturday 29 March in Mooroopna. Participation in the Torchlight Procession is open to all brigades, even if your brigade isn't taking in the championships that weekend.

Entries as well as judge and official nominations will close on Sunday 16th February 2025. If you have any queries relating to the state championships or need assistance during the registration process please contact the VFBV Office on (03) 9886 1141 or [championships@vfbv.com.au](mailto:championships@vfbv.com.au)

## SOP feedback

VFBV encourages all senior volunteers to make themselves familiar with the proposed changes and provide feedback ASAP.

Please visit the VFBV website to access drafts and change logs to help guide your feedback.

## INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

In 2024, International Volunteer Day is highlighting the vital role volunteers play in addressing the world's challenges.

International Volunteer Day is held annually on 5 December and is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly as a unique chance for volunteers and organisations to celebrate the efforts of volunteers and promote the work of volunteers in their communities. The day was established in 1985 by the United Nations General Assembly, and is mandated as an international observance to be celebrated each year.

This year's campaign is recognising that in every corner of the world, volunteers are usually the first to respond when required and they rise to meet challenges

with courage dedication and selflessness which sums up CFA volunteers perfectly. Each day we see CFA volunteers going above and beyond to ensure that their local communities and communities right across Victoria and Australia are safe and protected from fire and other emergencies.

The 3V's project conducted by the previous Volunteer Consultative Forum conservatively estimated that emergency management volunteers contribute between \$1.9 and \$2.5 billion to Victoria each and every year across all volunteer emergency service agencies.

On behalf of VFBV, thank you to all our amazing CFA volunteers for the work you do each and every day keeping Victorian's safe.

## CFA BOARD APPLICATIONS

VFBV will shortly be commencing our broad advertising for volunteers who may be interested in being nominated to the CFA Board as a volunteer nominee.

Two positions on the CFA Board are due to expire in June of next year, and members are requested to start thinking about potential applicants, application and selection detail.

## Truth and consequences

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

On 28 November, the Fire Services Implementation Monitor's (FSIM) Annual Report was tabled in Parliament. The FSIM was established as an independent entity in 2020 under section 122 of the Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) Act to provide assurance to government and the community on progress on the government's fire service reforms.

In his fourth Annual Report, the monitor - the Hon. Niall Blair - provides a thorough assessment of progress against the government's implementation plan. Findings two, three and four are particularly damning and deal with the long standing systemic issues within FRV's complex consultation and industrial arena, the impacts this has on all joint interoperability initiatives between CFA and FRV, and the devastating impact of the secondment arrangements that have resulted in the CFA Chief Officer's inability to manage his seconded workforce and the resulting long-term vacancies.

In slamming the secondment arrangements, the monitor concludes that in his opinion and the unanimous opinion of senior leaders of both CFA and FRV, that the arrangements are not working, have not worked for quite some time and in fact will never work.

And while these findings do not come as a surprise to VFBV which has been the canary in the coalmine about these issues for years, these findings from an independent monitor herald a crossroads for the Victorian Government.

Under the secondment agreement, FRV is contractually required to supply CFA with 45 Assistant Chief Fire Officers, and 96 Commanders. As you know, these are key positions and are critical to CFA's ability to perform its role. They also make up the overwhelming majority of the Chief Officer's paid workforce and chain of command.

The monitor has reported that on average in any given week there are at least 17 senior vacancies amongst the Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Commander pools each week. He also finds that at its worst, there can be up to 33 vacancies in a week, accounting for more than 20% of CFA's paid operational workforce.

Confirmation of widespread gaps and vacancies comes as very little surprise to many brigades which have been consistently and frequently reporting these shortages and gaps of support that they are now routinely having to deal with.

One of the largest impacts on volunteers has been the cascading flow-on effects from these vacancies that has created significant churn and upheaval across the ACFO and Commander pool. Brigades have told us that some districts have cycled through up to eight different ACFOs in a single calendar year. Do not underestimate the disruption and havoc this plays across an entire District, and the damage done to relationships and business conti-

nity.

These are alarming figures as we head into Victoria's fire danger period.

When discussing these arrangements, I urge members to clearly separate criticisms of the secondment arrangements from the people.

I want to make it very clear that our attacks on the secondment arrangements are in no way a reflection on the secondees themselves. Rather, they are a reflection on the misguided arrangements that set our secondees up to fail in the first place.

We absolutely respect and support each of the individual secondees loaned from FRV to CFA, and have great empathy for the impossible position they are often put in requiring them to straddle two significantly different organisational cultures, two entirely separate chains of command, and unacceptably high vacancy rates from unfilled positions which pushes these brave men and women to exhaustion as they try to cover empty positions while trying to protect themselves from burnout. We back our secondees and support them, and demand that they be treated better.

Under the arrangements, the CFA Chief Officer is forced to rely on 94% of his operational chain of command to be seconded from a different organisation. In fact, the Chief is left with only nine Deputy Chief Officers reporting directly to him, with all the remaining 141 uniformed officers in his chain of command forced to be seconded from FRV. At times, the Chief does not even get the chance to choose which ones.

In addition, the agreement obliges FRV to provide 53 instructors, and 29 training ground supervisors. In total, FRV is contractually required to supply CFA with 223 seconded officers.

Despite being contractually obliged to fill these positions, when seconded positions are not filled, FRV pocket the savings and redirect them to funding their own cost blowouts leaving CFA completely in the lurch.

Just think that through for a minute.

FRV receives the money for 223 secondees to be supplied to CFA, but when they don't supply up to one-fifth of those spots they get to pocket that money and apply those savings to their own business. You can't make this stuff up.

VFBV is advocating that the full budget for its seconded workforce should be provided to CFA, which will then pay FRV for the spots it actually fills. We are then asking for any savings from unfilled spots to then be directed to CFA's fleet budget to replacing ageing trucks.

This creates an incentive for FRV to meet its contractual obligations, but also provides CFA compensation for when it doesn't.

Now while the monitor expertly documents the repeated instances where these arrangements do not work and how they have constrained CFA's ability to

effectively manage its operational workforce, we remind members that these arrangements were never discussed or proposed by the fire services themselves. In fact, the CFA and MFB Chief Officers of the time were not even privy to the discussions and negotiations who along with volunteers - were left completely in the dark.

A 2017 Parliamentary Inquiry into the arrangements recommended the legislation not proceed and be withdrawn. The inquiry uncovered that the secondment arrangements along with other reforms were cooked up by a small group working in secret within the Department of Premier and Cabinet under then Premier Daniel Andrews and the then Deputy Premier and Emergency Services Minister James Merlino following the resignation of MP Jane Garret.

In our view, the Chief Officers and Commissioners are there to run emergency services that protect the people of Victoria. They have to make hard decisions, and put the safety of Victorians first and foremost in their minds. For a government to tie the hands of these officers behind their backs represents a complete dereliction of duty and a failure to govern for all.

The monitor also documents the long-standing systemic issue of the operation of the "consult and agree" arrangements within FRV that act as a significant barrier to progressing actions jointly led by CFA and FRV. He reports on the significant delays and the result of no clear pathways for resolution.

Again, it is our view that the blame for these arrangements lies squarely with the Victorian Government for agreeing to these arrangements in the first place. These arrangements are unprecedented, and no other Australian State or Territory government has ever transferred management control of an emergency service to a third party.

It is a complete travesty for a government to shirk its responsibilities to the people of Victoria by implementing completely unworkable arrangements that have been proven to be intractable and unworkable for decades. And it's not as if they weren't warned. Judge Gordon Lewis first reported on these problems back in 2008, a whole six years before the Andrews Government was even elected, warning how these processes can be abused and lead to the complete deterioration and paralysis of decision making. Findings the independent monitor has echoed today, some 16 years later.

Enough is enough, and VFBV is calling on the Premier to intercede and commit to fixing these issues once and for all.

Both Premier Allan and Minister Symes inherited these ridiculous arrangements and have diligently done their level best to make them work. But it is now time for this chapter to be closed, and we are respectfully requesting an immediate commitment to



fixing it. The government must restore the CFA Chief Officer's control of his operational workforce.

In addition, we are calling on the Victorian Government to implement immediate transparency measures that will force the public reporting of the weekly vacancies from here on in. Sunlight is the best antiseptic, and if they are serious about fixing the problem, they should be accountable for it.

VFBV will continue pursuing CFA's deteriorating budget situation that we updated you on back in July, and the chronic underfunding of CFA's truck fleet that is seeing 34 year old fire trucks still in service. These trucks belong in a museum, not a modern fire service that the governments reform propaganda promised.

CFA must be fully funded and supported as we head into this and every other year's Fire Season. CFA volunteers and the Victorian public deserve no less.

The FSIM is providing government with a generous opportunity to save face and course correct. The time to do so is now, not following the next major disaster and at the business end of a resulting Royal Commission.

As I was pondering why the FSIM may not have made specific recommendations that go to the heart of the problems, I was reminded of the limited scope provided in the legislation as to his role as monitor, but also the criticisms we levelled at government around their reforms in the first place.

These arrangements were never consulted on, and never discussed within the Victorian fire services. No wonder they haven't worked. They were doomed from the get-go because the architects failed to harness the true depth of local expertise and knowledge across our respective cohorts.

In a 2021 article for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, former economist, public servant, adviser and minister's minder the late Dr Peter McCawley AM opined "...handling truth needs a touch both tough and delicate. The art is to uphold the gold standard while upholding the minister, point to where the trash is buried, take the chance to confess to errors, and even hint at what good policy might look like."

Perhaps then the monitor has provided the government a blessing in disguise.

As we see off 2024, I hope all members have an opportunity to get some rest over the festive season, and to all those on our firegrounds over summer - stay safe, and please look after yourselves and each other.