



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



2025 State championships

The State Championships will be held on the weekends of 22 and 23 March (Urban Juniors) and 29 and 30 March (Rural Juniors and Seniors and Urban Seniors) in Mooroopna for the fifth year in a row. The Torchlight Procession will also take place on the evening of 29 March in Mooroopna and all brigades are encouraged to participate even if they are not participating in the Championships. If you would like further information on the Torchlight Procession please contact the VFBV office via championships@vfbv.com.au

We are also calling for any members interested in becoming a judge or official to please contact us urgently. Each year's Championships relies on more than 200 volunteers and we need your help.

If you are interested in becoming a judge or official please contact the VFBV office on (03) 9886 1141 or championships@vfbv.com.au

FINAL CHANCE



The 2024-25 annual VFBV Volunteer Survey will close shortly.

Scan the QR code at left or visit the VFBV website to take part in the survey today.

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

THANK YOU

Thank you to all members who completed this year's VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey. You are helping us make CFA a better place to volunteer.

As soon as we have finished compiling and analysing your responses, we will publish the results.

International Women's Day

Each year on March 8 International Women's Day celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women as well as calling for action to accelerate women's equality.

The theme for International Women's Day this year is #AccelerateAction. This year's theme asks us to imagine a gender equal world, one free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. A world that is diverse, equitable and inclusive.

Throughout CFA and VFBV, there are countless examples of the contribution women make to our communities and our fire services. The work and decisions being made today to embrace diversity and inclusion will ensure more women are supported and encouraged into the fire

services for future generations.

To each of the dedicated, highly skilled and much appreciated women in CFA and across all fire and emergency services, thank you for the contribution you make to making communities safer today and every day of the year.

Each of us can play a part in actively supporting and embracing equity within our own sphere of influence. This can include simple steps such as challenging stereotypes, calling out discrimination, drawing attention to bias and actively seeking out how to include others within our brigades, workplaces, communities, CFA and the wider emergency services across Victoria. We all need to take action to forge gender parity.

CALL FOR TRUSTEES

VFBV is calling for nominations from volunteers interested in being a VFBV appointed trustee to the CFA and Brigades Donations Fund.

The Fund was established in 2004 to ensure brigades continued to have deductible gift recipient status following the introduction of the GST and changes made to the charities law that required the associations to advocate for the retention of individual brigade charity status. The Trust's purpose is to raise and receive money and donations of goods and services from the public for distribution to Brigades to assist with costs of purchasing and maintaining firefighting equipment, facilities, training and resources and administrative expenses of Brigades which are associated with their firefighting functions.

Over recent years the Trust has been managing donations received following the 2019/20 bushfire season, this includes the brigade pick list program; breathing apparatus (BA) sets and additional cylinders; defibrillators for CFA vehicles; and the mobile data capability project. In total since 2020 the Fund has allocated \$19million to fund these projects.

Following nominations, fire new or reappointed members will be appointed by the VFBV Board to serve as VFBV Trustees on the Fund for a term of two years. All current Trustees are eligible for re-appointment. The Trust Fund committee meets quarterly, either virtually or at CFA headquarters.

Nominations close Monday 16th June 2025 and further information including how to apply can be found on the VFBV website.

WASTE AND INEFFICIENCIES

by Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

As we head into the last leg of this year's fire danger period, CFA budgets and fleet age continue to dominate discussions. In recent weeks, the Victorian Government has announced an independent review of the Victorian Public Service to identify overlaps, inefficiencies, functions and programs that can be streamlined or eliminated.

I was instantly reminded of the British political satire 'Yes Minister' revolving around cabinet minister Jim Hacker responsible for the fictional Department of Administrative Affairs. In one episode the Minister orders an economy drive to reduce government waste and slim down the civil service. The episode explores what lengths the civil service and the minister's private secretary 'Sir Humphrey Appleby' will go to in order to stymie progress.

In one exchange Minister Hacker is particularly taken with an initiative and explains – "It is very popular with the voters, Humphrey. Gives them a chance to help us find ways to stop wasting government money."

Sir Humphrey clearly exasperated exclaims – "The public doesn't know anything about wasting government money. We're the experts."

Efficiency is not a vague concept to CFA volunteers. When the most valuable resource a person can offer is at stake (their time) then ensuring that time is used wisely is one of the pillars of volunteer satisfaction. Given volunteers have not had an opportunity through the government's Emergency Services Organisation Finance Board discussions to provide its view, we'll take this opportunity to remind members of several initiatives VFBV has identified that we believe would achieve significant efficiencies and see precious funding freed up to enable government to redirect precious funding to CFA programs and the communities we protect all without extra tax hikes on our communities.

EMV (Emergency Management Victoria) remains an organisation of concern and classified as such by the VFBV Board following its disgraceful abandonment and disbanding of the sectors only Volunteer Consultative Forum (VCF) back in April 2023. The VCF was formed in 2013 and was heralded as delivering on the Victorian Government's commitment to consult emergency management volunteers across the sector. The forum was designed to provide a multi-agency volunteer feedback loop direct to the Minister for Emergency Services on issues affecting EM volunteers. It was made up of more than twenty emergency management volunteers and agency nominees drawn from CFA, SES, Life Saving Victoria, Australian Red Cross, Ambulance Victoria, VFBV, St John Ambulance, Volunteer Coast Guard, Salvation Army, VIC-SESVA and the Victorian

Council of Churches Emergencies Ministry.

It was unceremoniously dumped in April 2023. As we reported back in 2023, we took no comfort from Commissioner Crisp's protestations that EMV would conduct some future review and consider future arrangements further. Two years later, and ironically two Commissioner's later also - and surprise surprise - nothing. It confirms what we said all along - this was simply a smokescreen to avoid honouring the Victorian Government's commitments made under the Emergency Management Volunteer Statement and signed by Premier Andrews. A promise broken.

So, it is little wonder that EMV does not enjoy the support or confidence of volunteers, which is very sad given its origins.

Formed in July 2014, EMV began with a small, dedicated team of less than 12 people who had formed the Fire Services Commissioner's Office, and then morphed into a bureaucracy of several hundred, with its own CEO, Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners, countless executive directors, public servants, consultants and advisors overseeing an army of bureaucrats.

Given EMV's operating budget remains hidden but drawing from the fact that government withheld \$673 million last year from the CFA budget alone - we suggest EMV be disbanded and replaced with the office of the Emergency Management Commissioner, with a small staff of five or 10. A model similar to IGEM and the Fire Services Implementation Monitor's office, but with full budget and statutory transparency.

We continue to call for a full accounting of the \$673M of grants being withheld by the Department each year to justify government spokespersons recent assertions that this is all for frontline equipment that "directly" supports volunteers and simply gets paid for by other government bodies.

Which takes us to the \$36.2 million set aside for the State Control Centre workforce in the 22/23 Budget, and the \$8.3 million annual cost set aside for future years to simply replace the previous workforce contributed by each of the agencies through existing agency staffing and volunteer surge capacity. A surge capacity that continues to be undermined and neglected with a continued lack of any real action to address consecutive drops in endorsed level 3 incident personnel across the sector. Which gets us to the Community Safety and Building Authority, an entity created in 2019 to take over all CFA, FRV, SES and LSV station builds and upgrades.

Notwithstanding FRV is yet to transfer a single project - the CSBA was promised to deliver stations faster, cheaper and more efficiently. Volun-

teers on the frontline awaiting many of these projects report the complete opposite. Supposedly managing more than \$2.1 billion of infrastructure works, their last public progress report posted to their department website is dated June 2023.

And given the Department of Justice and Community Safety reduced its Budget Paper 3 output targets for emergency service volunteers back in the 22/23 Budget by 1,000 volunteers and missed its target for operational volunteers in CFA and SES by almost 7,500 people this year alone - then just like volunteers who are expected to do more with less, they shouldn't mind making do with less either.

And finally, as we briefed members on back in December, The Fire Services Implementation Monitor the Hon. Nial Blair has revealed that each week Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) fails to fill between 17 - 33 seconded positions to CFA, accounting for up to 20% of CFA's paid operation workforce remaining vacant every week.

VFBV is calling for the \$71.6 million that is allocated to FRV for CFA secondees to be transferred to CFA's budget, and FRV paid only for the positions they fill, with any savings to be directed to CFA's capital budget to help replace ageing fire trucks. Given it is volunteers who suffer when these critically important positions of ACFOs, Commanders and instructors are not filled - it is only fair that volunteers should be compensated when FRV is unable to meet its contractual obligations to CFA.

Pause for a moment to go back and re-read some of the \$ amounts I have outlined above in what are just the low hanging fruit of government waste and spin and then think about the extra \$10 million the Government recently announced for CFA's fleet budget.

Now there are some who would like you to only hear a figure of \$250M which they have on repeat at the moment. But when you look through the fine print you notice the \$250M is based on \$50M per year for the next five years split between CFA and SES. Of this \$50M, only \$10M is for CFA fleet, with \$15M going to double VESEP which includes CFA, SES, LSV, Coastguard and marine search and rescue and which volunteers co-contribute \$1 for every \$2 of grant monies. The remaining \$25M is allocated to SES.

At the same time they have announced collecting an extra \$610M in new taxes per year rising to an extra \$765M per year from 2026 onwards for their new "Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund" that will replace the Fire Services Property Levy.

If we were to use the same five-year formulae the government is using to announce the \$250M for volunteers, then this extra revenue equals \$3.6 billion in extra revenue, of which the \$250M only accounts as 7% for volunteer initiatives.

VFBV is continuing to educate the public on the serious state of the CFA truck fleet, with 743 CFA fire trucks over their maximum age limits. 230 of these are more than 31



years old with the oldest trucks now 35 years old having been built in 1990.

Let me put that into perspective.

In 1990, vehicles had cassette players in them. There were no airbags, ABS, reversing cameras, or emission standards. In 1990, 'Seinfeld' had just finished airing its first season, 'The Simpsons' were half way through its first season and 'Friends' and 'ER' were still four years away. Phil Collins 'Another Day in Paradise', Sinéad O'Connor's 'Nothing Compares 2 U', and Madonna's 'Vogue' all hit number 1 in the charts. Julia Roberts starred in 'Pretty Woman', Demi Moore and Patrick Swayze in 'Ghost', and 10 year old Macaulay Culkin starred in the first 'Home Alone'. Bob Hawke was the Australian Prime Minister, Sir John Major was Britain's PM, and US President George H Bush (Snr) was in the White House.

To expect CFA to attract the next generation of younger volunteers, when our trucks are museum pieces is just not realistic and setting CFA up to fail in what is one of the most fire prone places in the world.

VFBV is calling for a \$400 million urgent truck replacement program to start addressing CFA's ageing fleet and to arrest the critical decline.

We continue to encourage members to invite their local members of Parliament to come and visit one of the 870 single cab tankers still in the fleet in your local patch. Wait for a 40-degree day in the hot sun, or a cold, wet and miserable day in the middle of winter so they can experience the full immersive experience of how Victoria's volunteer firefighters are supported by their government and expected to ride to emergencies on the back of a 35 year old fire truck.

Thank-you to all members who continue to help spread the word and call attention to what is Australia's oldest emergency service fleet of fire trucks.

To advance the point made by Sir Humphrey Appleby - governments are most certainly the experts when it comes to wasting and spending other people's money. In the lead up to this year's State Budget, you need to make your local sitting government member aware of what you and your brigade expect from the hard earned taxpayer funds that are collected from your local community that is supposedly for their fire services. Ask them if they think it's fair for less than 25 cents of each dollar collected through the current Fire Service levy to actually go to supporting CFA and CFA volunteers. And if they raise the recent \$250M announcement, you are now armed with the facts that even Sir Humphrey might struggle to justify, but alas - I suspect...where there's a will, there's a way.

REGULATIONS

We are expecting new CFA Regulations to be released for public consultation early this month, following their 10-year sunset cycle.

Please monitor VFBV communications for when consul-

tation commences, and we will also notify you of key changes that you and your brigade should review and consider providing feedback on prior to them going to the Minister for Emergency Services for approval.