

INCREASED RISK OF FIRE

– continued from page 3

and supported by the Bureau of Meteorology along with state and territory fire and land managers.

Said Acting Chief Officer, Alen Slijepcevic: “While conditions remain dry with little

rain forecast in certain parts of the state over coming months, the fire risk will continue but our crews are ready and will adapt to changes as they develop through autumn.”

According to Deputy Chief

Fire Officer **Fiona Dunstan** (FFMVic): “The expected warmer maximum temperatures are likely to delay the start of planned burning across most of the state, except for East Gippsland, during autumn.”

“As soon as favourable weather and forest conditions arrive, we’ll make sure all available resources are delivering planned burning, including in areas that are often too wet in typical autumn.”



Playing a vital role

FFMVic’s highly skilled forest and fire plant contractors play a vital role in helping on-ground fire crews access and control bushfires across the State.

About 173 contractors from FFMVic’s external plant panel supported the fire response across Victoria during January. Among them are the 17 forest contracting businesses which transferred to DEECA in 2024 for fire suppression and bushfire risk reduction works following the end of native timber harvesting.

The type of plant required at fires varies based on the fire’s size and complexity, terrain, and conditions. Through the external plant panel, FFMVic has access to dozers, excavators, graders, harvesters, loaders, floats, skilled operators and other equipment used for direct attack on the fire, managing hazardous trees, and to protect vital infrastructure.

Thus far 151 dozers, 84 excavators, eight feller bunchers, 193 floats, 36 graders, 10 harvesters, 13 loaders, five skidders, one tractor, 44 water carriers and 416 support vehicles have been deployed to the State’s fires.

Dozers are used to construct mineral earth trails along the flanks of the fire and on spur lines, and to create access tracks that allow specialist firefighting vehicles to safely get closer to the fire. This machinery works alongside bulk water carts, 4WD vehicles, and transporter trucks to provide critical firefighting capability.

Forest contractors used their specialist equipment and experience of working with large trees in forested terrain at Walwa, Otways, Dargo, Orbost, Mallacoota and Longwood fires.

Contractors were also used to strengthen fallback lines to protect Melbourne’s Upper Yarra Water Catchment in the Black Range. They assisted Melbourne Water crews in preparing and improving roads and tracks so firefighters could safely reach the area if the Longwood fire ‘took a run’ closer to Melbourne’s drinking water catchments. All activity was confined to existing disturbed areas and delivered under strict environmental and cultural heritage protections to ensure the surrounding forest and waterways remain healthy.

A big shout out to these highly skilled and knowledgeable operators who often go unnoticed and unrecognised for their work supporting crews on the fire line and beyond.

Eddie’s Seat project reaches completion

The planning and construction of Eddie’s Seat has been a three year project of Nar Nar Goon Fire Brigade in memory of member Osborne Edward John Lowen who was tragically killed in the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983.

During the horrific fires at nearby Cockatoo, firefighters Eddie Lowen and Ranald Webster from Nar Nar Goon Brigade had made their way to the town where they were working on the fire at Baileys Road. They were working alongside members of Cockatoo Brigade.

A decision was made for all the crews where they were fighting the fire to relocate back to the main township due to the intensity of the fire. This is when in the heavy smoke conditions the van they were in ran off the road and was overcome by fire and smoke.

Tragically Eddie was killed as he tried to escape on foot. Ranald survived but was severely burnt and taken to the Alfred Hospital Burns Unit where he recovered. He later undertook support for burns victims.

Eddie’s seat is now in position in Wrights Forrest, Cockatoo – the location of his tragic death whilst in the line of duty. The seat is a place for remembering, reflecting and resting.

Nar Nar Goon Fire Brigade would like to thank Parks Victoria; particularly Ranger **Jack Dinkgreve** for permitting the brigade to locate the seat in the exact location to remember Eddie, and PV support to make this happen.

The brigade would also like to acknowledge the hard work of Cardinia Engineering which designed, made and helped install the seat.

Nar Nar Goon Fire Brigade held a memorial ceremony on 16 February at the location at which Eddie’s Seat has been installed. Captain **Justin Seddon** spoke at the gathering about Eddie Lowen’s service with the brigade and the cir-

cumstances under which he tragically lost his life.

He also detailed the significance of the seat and the entire project and thanked everyone involved with the project who have helped it come to fruition.

Donations to support CFA volunteers

VFBV delegates and officials are working with affected brigades to access support available through the VFBV Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust and VFBV Welfare Fund. With a large number of members directly impacted, VFBV is expecting high demand.

VFBV supports CFA volunteers who have been impacted by large bushfires and helps those that have lost their homes, fencing, machinery, stock, equipment and/or livelihoods.

There are two different donations mechanisms for people to choose from when donating. At this time, the preference is that donations are made to the **VFBV Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust** but welcome donations to either.

The VFBV Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust is only activated during large emergencies. It has previously been activated during the 2009 Black Saturday Fires, 2019/20 Bushfires, the 2022 Floods and now for the 2025/26 bushfires.

The Trust only maintains very small reserves of funds, and is completely reliant on public donations. Current reserves were made possible by a corporate donation from the Barlow Impact Group

which generously provided support during the 2019/20 Black Summer Fires.

With reserves low, support is dependent on donations being received. Currently, the Trust is supporting CFA volunteers who have lost their primary place of residence. After this work is complete, the Trust will consider broader support for members who have suffered property damage, rebuilding and other losses across the impacted areas.

During the 2019/20 bushfires, the trust provided high impact support grants, general support and relief grants and fast emergency relief payments. It also funded trailer mounted pumps for each of the Groups across the fire affected areas to provide legacy support for those brigades impacted.

All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

You can donate to this Trust via: <https://www.givenow.com.au/volunteersupport>

The **VFBV Welfare Fund** is a capital fund that is designed to last forever. It provides grants (up to \$5,000) for those volunteers experiencing hardship. It is only available to members, and brigades who pay an annual subscription fee to cover all their members, their families, and long-serving ex-members.

This year, 93% of CFA Brigades have chosen to cover their members. The Fund has paid out more than \$2.85 million in grants since its inception.

As a capital fund, all donations are invested in interest bearing government approved institutions (term deposits) and the interest each year is used to fund any

Welfare Grants. The capital is preserved, and keeps pace with inflation by each year calculating the gap between grants paid and the revenue required, with an annual subscription fee paid by brigades.

This year, that fee was \$80 per brigade which represents incredible value to cover every single member and long serving ex-members and their families. This model ensures the capital is preserved forever, and CFA volunteers now and into the future will always be protected.

The Welfare Fund is currently working in co-operation with the Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust to assist those members who have lost their homes.

All donations over \$2 are tax deductible. You can donate to the Welfare Fund via: <https://www.givenow.com.au/vfbv>

For any large donations, it is recommended members use direct deposit to the relevant bank account, to avoid transaction fees being deducted from your donation. Bank account details for each Trust can be found on the VFBV website.

Brigades and Groups are permitted to make donations under CFA’s Brigade Finance Policy, under clause (23) which specifically states: “(23) **Brigades may donate funds to the VFBV Welfare Fund, or VFBV Volunteer Support and Recovery Trust on approval via resolution at a Brigade meeting.**”

If you have any questions, please speak to your local State Councillor or VFBV Support Officer, or phone the VFBV office on (03) 9886 1141.

Unbelievable actions

With Catastrophic Fire Weather Ratings and a Statewide Total Fire Ban declared on 9 January, and the expansion of the Longwood fire on that day as well as the days following, resources in the southern part of District 23 were stretched to the maximum will a full commitment to the fires heading toward the area.

One fully crewed appliance was covering a great deal of space on the day and was committed to numerous calls in the area.

Later in the evening the crew was responded to a caravan park in Bonnie Doon which was under ember attack. Any remaining people in the caravan park were vacated as the fire was continuing to be pushed toward the area.

Later that night the crew received a call for a fire at Lake Nillahcootie, only 28 kilometres to the north east of Bonnie Doon.


Upon arrival of the crews it was quickly determined the group had a campfire burning (on a Total Fire Ban) and were some of the people evacuated from the Bonnie Doon Caravan Park when it was under threat a few hours earlier.

The group proceeded to argue the legitimacy of a campfire on a TFB with the responding crew and fortunately Police were quickly on scene.

In their discussion with the Police the campers explained to the Police the campfire was


to ‘cook the fish they were about to catch.’ When asked to produce their recreational fishing licences it was discovered none of the group had the licences required.

Despite the warnings of various types in the days leading up to 9 January and TFB also declared, it was extremely disappointing for the fire crews, and obviously Police, to be responded to this type of event.



VFBV VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

2025/26 Annual Survey



We want to know your views on your CFA experience, good and bad.

Our annual survey gives you the opportunity to provide feedback confidentially, but in a form that allows us to use your feedback to effect real change.

Tell us about CFA Training, your brigade, how well consultation is working, and whether you feel adequately recognised and respected by CFA and the Victorian Government.

Last year, more than 2,000 volunteers participated. Make your opinion count and take the survey today.

Scan the QR code or visit <https://www.vfbv.com.au/cfa>

