

From the Chief Officer

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Regional Radio Dispatch

Regional Radio Dispatch has had a great start in a number of Districts across the state. The feedback from CFA members has been overwhelmingly positive (one quote: *“There is a God, its name is Regional Radio Dispatch”*). RRDS is now operational in Districts 12, 15, 2 and 20 with district 16 transitioning this weekend. By the end of August, all CFA Districts (excepting those on Metro CAD) will be on RRDS. This will, in effect, mean that all CFA Brigades will be Category 1 Brigades – able to give turnout messages direct to VicFire. The radio coverage of the new system is significantly better. We also believe that many hard to solve radio “black spots” will be alleviated by the introduction of RRDS. Work is close to being finalised on a new scanner capable of scanning the new digital frequencies. It will also be possible to scan CFA digital frequencies by streaming the internet. More detailed information on how to monitor the new digital frequencies will be released soon. However it is important to understand that, for the time being, radio transmissions on digital frequencies are “patched” to the old analogue frequencies. This means that the existing scanners still operate. The next phase of RRDS will be to operationalize Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL). AVL will be a big advantage for command and control and to ensure that vehicles are not in locations where they may be faced with increased risk. (For example, AVL will allow us to track vehicle locations in the period prior to a wind change affecting the fireground). Our thanks go to the RRDS transition team, to the many Brigade trainers, and to senior volunteers and District staff who have planned the transition.

What Can We Learn From Research?

CFA recently hosted a forum where bushfire and community engagement research leaders were invited to speak to practitioners and discuss current and future trends in bushfire management, prevention and community resilience. Speakers included Dr Kevin Tolhurst (University of Melbourne); Justin Leonard (CSIRO); Dr Jim McLennan (Bushfire CRC); and Alan Rhodes (Fire Services Commissioner’s Office). Attendees were drawn from all Victorian fire agencies, Police, and representatives from Tasmania, New South Wales and South Australia. CFA had a range of staff and volunteers attend. The feedback was so positive, that we are now thinking of repeating the day – but out in Regional Victoria.

Creating Our Future Together – Where Are We At?

We are conscious that there are questions being asked about progress to implementation of the Creating Our Future Together strategy. The Fire and Emergency Management team, like many in CFA, had a busy fire season. The Hazelwood Mine fire and the return to “normal” business have taken a substantial commitment. As a result, Fire and Emergency Management has had to work very hard to catch up with other Directorates in developing functional maps and proposed organisational designs. Our goal is to transition from the current 8 “Fairer Victoria” Regions to a 5 Region model. The immediate task is to develop organisational structures at State, Directorate, Regional and District level. This organisational design will reflect a move to adopt an “embedded” model for some functions. “Embedding” means centralised control of the function, but delivery from field based CFA members. (An example might be Asset Maintenance Coordinators who work in the field but report to the Executive Manager Building Services). For Fire and Emergency Management an important change will be the appointment of an Assistant Chief Officer to head up each of the five Regions. The AC/O will be someone with extensive operational experience. The AC/O will have emergency management and business services support. District Operations Managers will report to the AC/O. We are well progressed in the process of selecting the new Assistant Chief Officers, who we expect will be on deck in early July. We are also getting close to presenting structure options for broader discussion. Changes to the Fire and Emergency Management structure are envisaged in CFA Headquarters, Regions and Districts. It is very important to recognise that there will be a period of formal consultation prior to implementing the proposed new organisational structures. Having said that, each Directorate has been developing design options in a process that involves a cross section of staff from each Directorate. We recognise the need to make progress on these changes. It is very important to do this properly though. We must get the new organisational design right.

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”

– Proust