



**VFBV** | VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA



## **2014** Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey



# CONTENTS

Message from the CFA CEO	3
Executive summary	4
Introduction	6
Data collection	8
Data integrity	9
Observations	10
Analysis	12
Demographic variations	26
Conclusion	34

## MESSAGE FROM THE CFA CEO

On behalf of the Country Fire Authority, I thank CFA volunteers and VFBV for their essential role in protecting the Victorian community.

CFA is a volunteer and community based fire and emergency services organisation, providing professional standards of emergency response every day and night of the year to the 3.3 million Victorians in suburban Melbourne, regional cities and country Victoria.

CFA volunteers are in essential roles during all manner of emergencies, from front line firefighters through to technical and support roles, to the highest levels of incident control. They also contribute experienced, practical knowledge throughout the year as members of VFBV/CFA Joint Committees and on a wide range of technical committees and working groups.

Integral to supporting and growing volunteerism are the values by which we deliver our mission and serve our communities:

- We put **Safety** first
- We work **Together** as one
- We are **Adaptive** and agile
- We act with **Integrity**
- We **Respect** each other

As part of maintaining that essential volunteer resource and giving Victoria a very effective emergency service, CFA regularly works with volunteers at the highest level through ongoing regular consultation with VFBV on matters affecting the welfare and efficiency of volunteers.

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is another useful channel of communication that puts CFA in better touch with the volunteers at the practical end of emergency services delivery. Now in its third year, the survey helps CFA's decision makers to encourage, maintain and strengthen the large scale volunteer capacity that is essential to emergency management in this state.

I would like to thank the many volunteers who took the time to respond to this survey and contribute to the results, and I applaud the work of VFBV, in its service to volunteers and the people of Victoria through the conduct of this survey.



Michael Wootten  
Chief Executive Officer  
Country Fire Authority

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides comment & detail on matters considered to be important to CFA Volunteer's welfare and efficiency, as measured through the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey.

The report uses survey data provided by a series of statements rated by volunteers for importance and performance. The report also uses information gathered from written response comments against the survey statements.

Observation against the 2014 survey results are presented by survey theme, with comments on both the survey scores and the written comments received.

As with the previous two years, survey data is collated and analysed for trends, outliers and exceptions that guide us to particular issues warranting further analysis. The survey results are compared against demographic profiles that include gender, age, length of time as a volunteer and brigade type.

The survey data is also compared to previous year's results to determine if changes have occurred and whether reasons for these changes can be identified.

Observations from the survey results that may warrant further investigation and possible actions include the following.

## 1. Training needs and expectations.

The 2014 survey results identify training by CFA as the biggest issue, with the survey gap at 3.0. This remains the most important issue for CFA volunteers and the issue least meeting volunteer expectations.

## 2. Variation between brigades.

Brigades with an integrated volunteer/career mix of personnel are more concerned with performance in relation to people management within their brigade, cooperation and respect and professionalism. Survey comments point to ongoing issues at integrated brigades that require further attention.

The integrated volunteer/career survey responses consistently scored lower on importance and more so on performance. Integrated brigades scored poorly on performance in relation to workplace bullying, conflict resolution, volunteer consultation, morale and supporting new volunteers. These particular statistical results point to ongoing issues within integrated brigades that require specific attention.

## 3. Equity, diversity and workplace behaviour.

Survey results show that equity and diversity across gender, race and religion are important issues to volunteers. Generally, female survey respondents rated CFA respect, professionalism, volunteer support and brigade support more highly than males across both importance and performance. The differences occur when the questions relate to CFA's performance in conflict resolution, bullying and harassment, in which case, females rate the management of such issues lower than males.

When tested against gender – female respondents rated both importance and performance lower than male respondents in relation to the statement "*there are no barriers to the roles women can occupy in my brigade*". The gap between importance and performance for female respondents was higher than male, signalling that male respondents are more optimistic about how gender, equity and diversity issues are being managed and may not realise areas of deficient approach.

Whilst CFA performance in this area is scored comparatively well against other areas, it remains an area that shows that a gender perception gap still exists in brigades and will require ongoing support.

## 4. The importance of consultation with brigades.

The value volunteers place on consultation both within their own brigade and with CFA is expressed in the survey results where statements referring to consultation within brigades receive good performance scores. Conversely, statements regarding effective consultation at CFA District, Region or Corporate level, receive the lowest performance scores and high gaps.

Written comments from survey respondents refer to issues where inadequate consultation may be the root cause, further suggesting that more work is required to improve consultation between CFA and volunteers.

### 5. The influence of volunteer length of service.

Volunteer length of service has created a distinct pattern across the question responses. Volunteers who have served with CFA for less than one year are the most positive about the organisation and their brigade on nearly every question. The gap sharply increases after their first year of service, i.e. their level of satisfaction drops sharply after one year and then again after more than five years' service.

### 6. Satisfaction.

80% of 2014 survey respondents are satisfied with their role as a CFA volunteer and 87% intend to continue their membership. The overwhelming reasons for being a CFA volunteer are *“to help protect the community I live in”* or *“a sense of fulfilment in supporting my community in a meaningful way”* (total 94%).

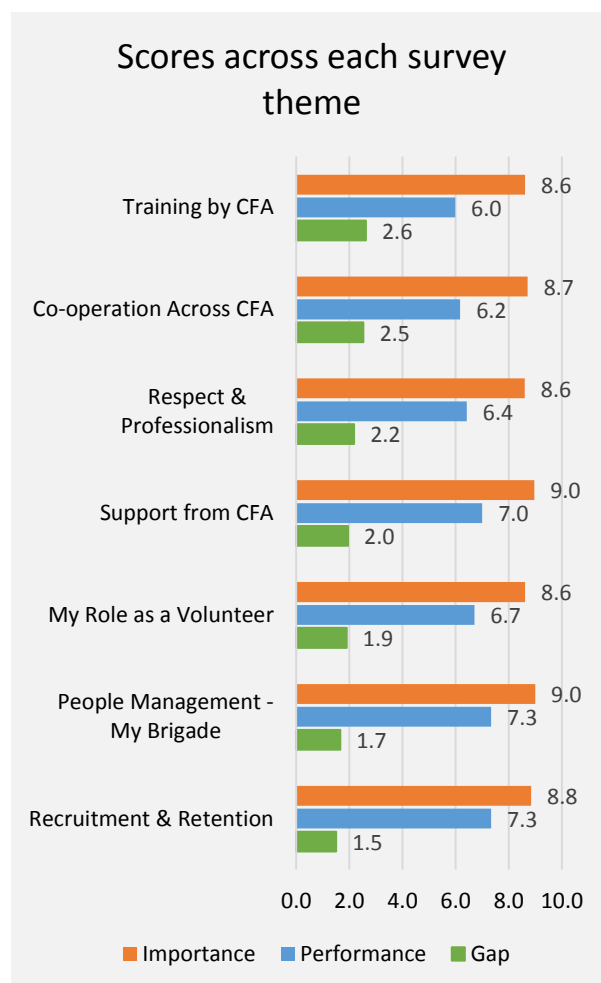
Only 59% of volunteers are satisfied with the way they are treated by CFA, this comparatively low satisfaction score suggests that the greatest potential impact on future volunteer welfare and efficiency sits with CFA in the success or otherwise of their partnerships with volunteer brigades.

### 7. Overall.

Overall results across the survey themes show the greatest gaps to be in the training and cooperation themes, and the smallest gap in the recruitment and retention theme. Specific responses within each theme are explained in greater detail in the body of this report.

The analysis of the survey results shows that there are still differences of opinion between genders as to how women are treated in CFA, between volunteer and integrated brigades on how CFA staff treat volunteers, and difference of opinion on how well CFA is performing depending upon how long the volunteer has known CFA.

These differences point to an ongoing need for CFA to improve its culture. The attitudes and norms and across CFA need to become more inclusive and more respectful – in terms of volunteer value to the organisation.



## INTRODUCTION

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) is a community and volunteer based emergency service, consisting of 60,000 volunteers and 1,300 paid operational and support staff. CFA Brigades protect 60% of suburban Melbourne, regional cities and all of country Victoria every day and night of the year.

CFA's volunteer based resource model is the only approach capable of economically and practically dealing with the quantum, scale, spread and simultaneous occurrence of fire and other emergencies experienced in Victoria while still providing day to day emergency response.

CFA's unique integrated volunteer and career staff operating model is fundamental to the surge capacity required to deal with large scale incidents while still providing professional standards of emergency response in Brigade service areas across the state.

The CFA volunteers' contribution to the community is incalculable – the value of their labour alone is estimated at one billion dollars a year, without considering the replacement cost of their expertise, local knowledge, fundraising, leadership and the substantial losses that would be suffered through fires and other emergencies if the volunteers were not there.

CFA volunteers work at all levels of emergency response, from the frontline crews, through experienced volunteers in specialist and support roles, to the highest of senior incident management roles.

The need for that resource of trained, experienced volunteers is growing. Already one of the most wildfire prone areas in the world, Victoria faces the twin challenges of a rapidly growing population and increased urbanisation within an expanding metropolitan Melbourne and regional cities.

In 2012, the Victorian Parliament unanimously supported changes to the CFA Act to enshrine the requirements for volunteer support and recognition in legislation.

These important changes recognise that CFA is first and foremost a volunteer-based organisation, in which volunteer officers and members are supported by career staff in a fully integrated manner.

The CFA Act also reinforces the requirement for Government and CFA to encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers to provide the Authority's services, and to consult with VFBV on all matters which may impact upon volunteers.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) is the voice of CFA Volunteers. It is established under Victorian law, the Country Fire Authority Act, to represent the volunteers on all matters that affect their welfare and efficiency.

As an organisation made up of the CFA volunteers it represents, VFBV works in partnership with the State Government, Emergency Management Victoria, the CFA Board and Management, Members of Parliament, official inquiries, municipal councils and instrumentalities, business and the public to proactively shape the future of emergency management.

VFBV is active in partnering with Government and emergency management agencies to ensure that volunteers remain actively involved in emergency management decision making at every level; through day to day practical work in VFBV/CFA Joint Committees, through the Ministerial level Volunteer Consultative Forum, and in working to ensure positive, practical results from reviews such as the Jones Inquiry and the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) report on Managing Emergency Services Volunteers.

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey takes this important work another step forward, by addressing a significant gap in the information available to the state's decision makers.

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey, now in its third year, is designed to better understand the issues as volunteers see them, and is used by VFBV to bring the frontline volunteers' opinions and advice on matters affecting their welfare and efficiency directly to the state's decision makers.

The purpose of the VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is to ensure that volunteers' needs and expectations are sought, analysed and available to Government and CFA so the very foundation of this volunteer-based emergency service continues to be recognised and supported to meet the future emergency services needs of the Victorian community.

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey presents an opportunity for Government and CFA to embed performance measures linked to volunteer welfare and efficiency into CFA organisational, departmental and individual work plans, to the benefit of the Victorian community.

Because volunteers are fundamental to Victoria's emergency management capability, fundamental to community resilience and at the core of communities sharing responsibility for their own safety, it is vitally important to measure and deeply understand how satisfied volunteers are with arrangements in place to support, encourage and enable them to do their work.

If the CFA and State Government wish to retain what is a highly valuable volunteer fire service, the expectations of volunteers, identified by them through this survey, need to be understood and acted upon. A commitment must be made by CFA, VFBV and State Government to meet or exceed the expectations of volunteers on all 33 items. This is fundamental to ensuring the welfare and efficiency of volunteers and their continuing availability as an unpaid emergency service.

*"The dedication, hard work and community spirit of our volunteers is a significant contribution to the shared responsibility that government and communities have for creating a safe community.*

*Put simply, volunteers are the lifeblood of our organisation.*

*Supporting our volunteers is everyone's responsibility at CFA".*

*(CFA Volunteerism Strategy – 2014).*



## DATA COLLECTION

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey was from the outset, designed and detailed by CFA volunteers.

In 2012, with the assistance of a professional survey development consultancy, VFBV workshopped with volunteers from across Victoria, to identify key issues considered to be the key factors underpinning their welfare and efficiency. Key recurring themes emerging from the workshop with this group were then used to construct the survey.

The survey consists of 33 statements addressing the welfare and efficiency of CFA volunteers. Survey respondents are asked to score each statement twice: firstly on how **important** it is for the statement to be true and secondly, how they perceive **performance** against that statement. Scores are applied to a 0 – 10 sliding scale where for importance, 0 is 'not at all important' and 10 is 'very important – and in the case of performance, 0 is 'strongly disagree' and 10 is 'strongly agree'.

Scores for importance are regarded as the expectations of CFA volunteers. Where scores for performance are lower than those for importance, the result suggests that expectations are not being met. The difference between importance and performance in the survey results for each question is referred to as the **gap**.

The chart below indicates a typical survey response against a given statement, where the total number of responses to the statement produce an average gap between importance and performance (in this case '2').

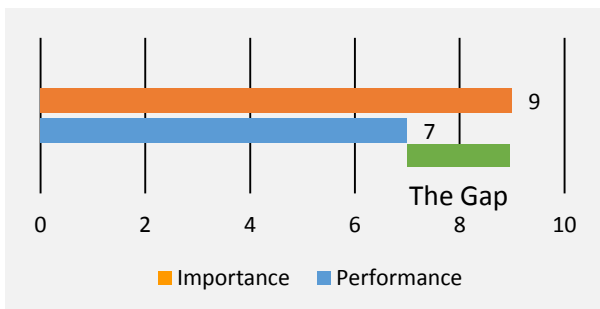


Figure one – demonstrating the gap from survey results.

The 33 survey statements are grouped into seven themes for analysis of the results. Statements are randomly listed in the survey to avoid leading the results. The results are then re grouped under seven themes for analysis purposes.

The seven survey analysis themes are:

- Respect and professionalism
- My role as a volunteer
- Cooperation
- Support from CFA
- Training by CFA
- Recruitment and retention
- People management – my brigade

The survey design allows each theme to be explored for variations between respondents, including brigade service/risk environment (rural, urban or integrated), gender, volunteer age and length of service.

The results can also be analysed from Region to Region, with CFA's Regional structure allowing for the identification of examples of good practice or conversely, areas where a lacking performance needs most attention.

Whilst the survey collects quantitative data that is easily expressed in results that measure importance, performance and gap, the survey also provides the respondent the opportunity to reply to any of the statements with their own thoughts and opinions. In this way the survey also collects some qualitative data than can be used to gain insight into what sits behind the numerical results.

With survey results from the past three years, VFBV is now able to observe trends over time.

Recently, further work has also been undertaken with the assistance of university researchers with expertise in quantitative survey analysis to drill down into the survey results and explore specific demographic trends or patterns that emerge.

## DATA INTEGRITY

The first survey in 2012 attracted responses from 805 CFA volunteers. Subsequent surveys using the same format have seen the survey result increase to 1,652 volunteer responses in 2014.

Given the high number of survey responses against the number CFA volunteers, this represents a very robust sample of the views of CFA volunteers and can be treated as a 'statistically significant' response.

Sample size calculators<sup>1</sup> indicate that 1,652 valid survey responses from a CFA volunteer 'population' of 60,000 provides a 95% level of confidence (getting the right answer 95 times out of 100) in the survey results, as representing the views of CFA volunteers.

Previous survey analysis for VFBV by Dawson McDonald<sup>2</sup> demonstrated the statistical significance of the survey results against well-known Australian surveys. The VFBV survey results in 2013 achieved a 95% confidence level with a confidence interval of +/- 2.6%, considerably greater than many national surveys.

Survey respondents were given the option of responding anonymously or leaving their email address if they wished to be kept informed on progress with the survey results. This ensured that the survey respondents could provide their honest and open opinions in their written responses to the survey statements.

For security purposes, all online survey responses are entered into a securely encrypted electronic survey record system. All physical survey responses are also entered into the online system and destroyed once the data is recorded.

Survey	Population	Sample	%
The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes	22,785,500	6,250	0.0003
Lowy Institute Poll	22,785,500	1,005	0.0004
Grey's Eye on Australia	22,785,500	1,000	0.0004
VFBV 2013 Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey	55,000	1,452	2.64

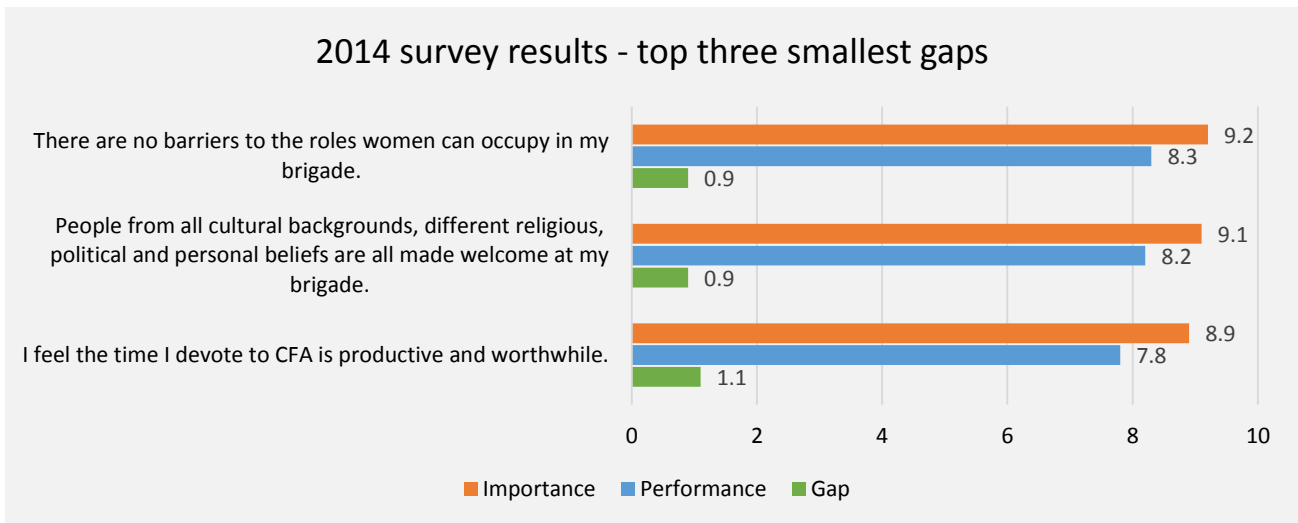
Confidence interval comparison table - VFBV 2013 Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency report.

<sup>1</sup> The Survey System – Sample Size Calculator. [www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm](http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Dawson McDonald – 2013 VFBV Volunteer welfare and efficiency report.

# OBSERVATIONS

## 1. Strengths.



In 2014, the ‘top three’ smallest gaps (i.e. highest satisfaction levels) between importance and performance, were for the survey statements listed above. When compared against importance scores for statements, the equal highest importance score was against the statement *“there are no barriers to the roles women can perform in my brigade”*.

For the performance scores, the two highest scores were against the statements *“there are no barriers to the roles women can perform in my brigade”* and *“people from all cultural backgrounds, different religious, political and personal beliefs are all made welcome at my brigade”*.

This is consistent with 2013 survey results where the same questions scored highly in importance and performance, as well as having small gaps.

Written comments from respondents support the overall CFA approach to encouraging diversity and addressing poor workplace behaviour, but some of the comments refer to ongoing workplace behaviour issues at specific brigades that are being poorly managed or ignored.

The statement *“I feel the time I devote to CFA is productive and worthwhile”* scores consistently high on importance and performance and records the third smallest gap across the last two surveys. This is reflective of the survey results for volunteer satisfaction with their role in CFA.

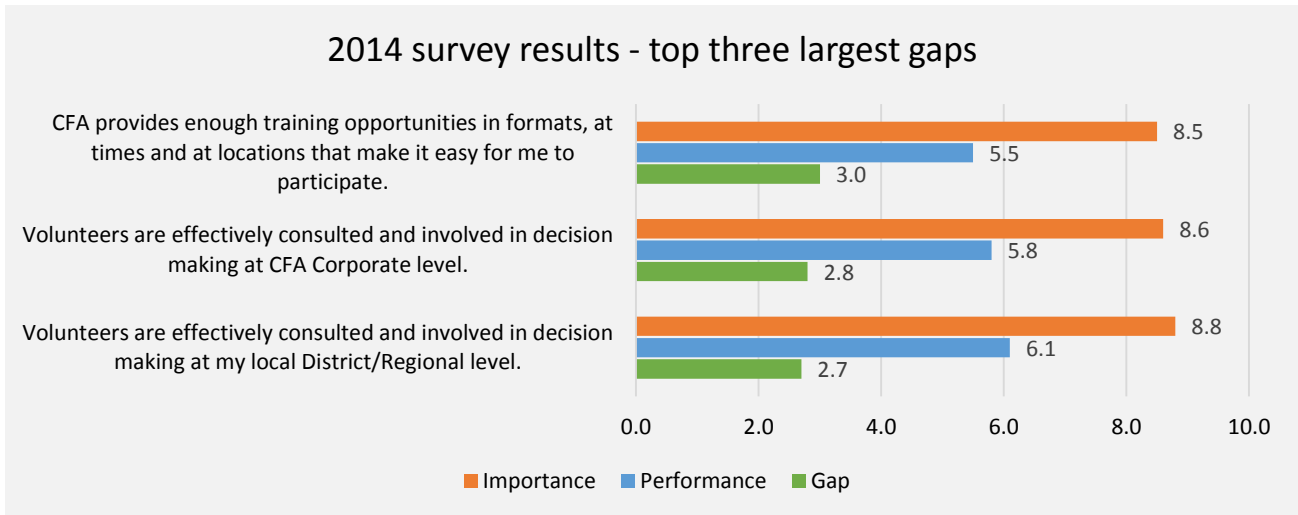
### What do CFA volunteers consider most important to them?

- Gender equity, opportunities for women to be more involved in brigades.
- Workplace behaviour, effective management of bullying in brigades.
- A volunteer friendly environment both in their brigade and across CFA.

### What do CFA volunteers consider to be the best performing areas in CFA?

- Gender equity, opportunities for women to be more involved in brigades.
- Support and encouragement of diversity in brigades.

## 2. Weaknesses.



In 2014, the ‘top three’ largest gaps (i.e. lowest satisfaction levels) between importance and performance, were for the survey statements listed above.

The largest gap between importance and performance for a single statement was a score of 3.0 for the statement *“CFA provides enough training opportunities in formats, at times and locations that make it easy for me to participate”*. This is consistent with 2013 survey results for the same statement having the largest gap and low satisfaction levels.

The two statements considered as the worst performing by 2014 survey respondents were *“CFA provides enough training opportunities in formats, at times and locations that make it easy for me to participate”* and *“volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at CFA corporate level”*. Both statements scored below 6 for performance, the only two to do so in 2014.

The biggest improvement in gap, between importance and performance for a statement from 2013 to 2014 survey results, was the decrease in gap for the statement *“volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at CFA corporate level”*.

Whilst this may be seen as a positive, this is the only statement to score below 5 in importance in 2013 and the improvement to a score of 5.8 in 2014, the improvement is coming from a very low base and remains an issue for volunteers.

*Where do CFA volunteers see the greatest gap between what they need and what they get?*

- *CFA failing to provide training in a format that meets volunteer needs and availability.*

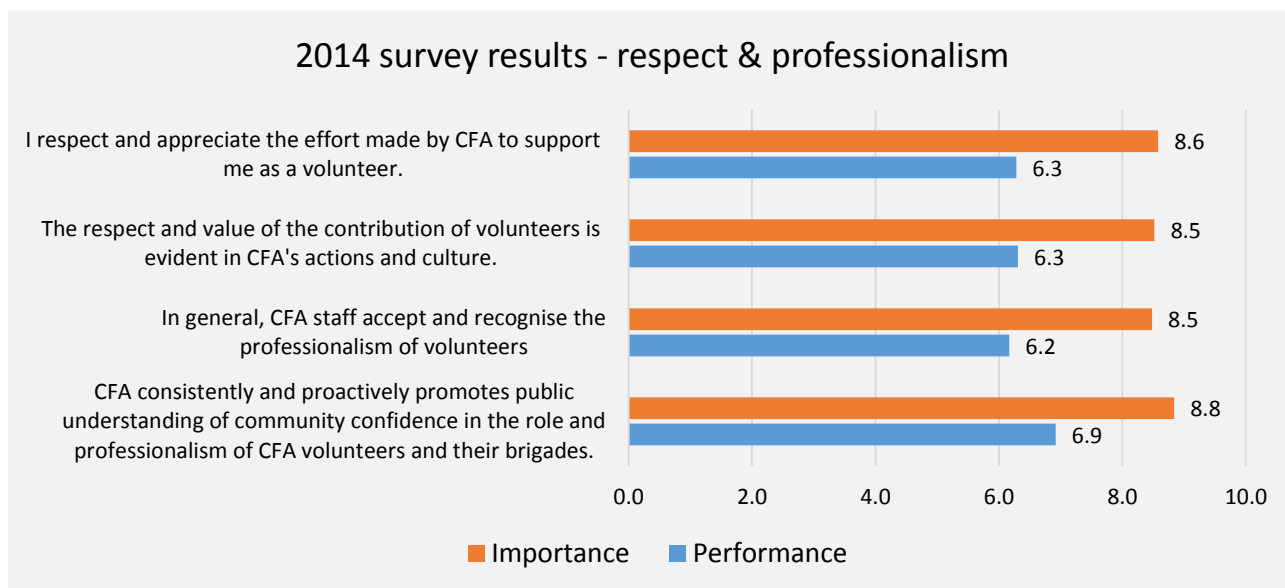
*What do CFA volunteers consider to be the poorest performing areas in CFA?*

- *CFA failing to provide training in a format that meets volunteer needs and availability.*
- *CFA management not consulting with volunteers on matters that affect them.*

# ANALYSIS

Analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative survey results against the seven themes can reveal more detailed observations on the issues that may be impacting on volunteer welfare and efficiency.

## 1. Respect and professionalism.



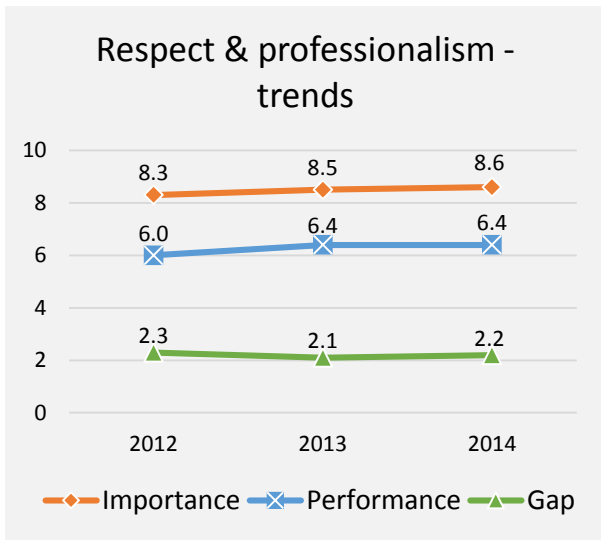
The 2014 survey results for this theme are reasonably consistent with previous years, a notable trend however, is that the respondents feel the issues underpinning respect and recognition of their professionalism are even more important than previous surveys.

Survey results within this theme indicate CFA performing strongest in the statement *'CFA consistently and proactively promotes the public understanding of community confidence in the role and professionalism of CFA volunteers and their brigades'* and conversely, poorest in the statement *'the respect and value of the contribution of volunteers is evident in CFA's actions and culture'*.

The majority of the comments on respect and professionalism were about how volunteers feel they are being treated within CFA. A number of negative comments referred to being treated as 'second class' by CFA organisationally, when compared to the way CFA manage and support their paid operational staff.

This is also expressed in the way volunteers see themselves treated as 'second class' by CFA operational staff in the field. The comments express a frustration with an established culture amongst some CFA paid staff, in the way they treat volunteers.

Specific major incidents were mentioned in the negative comments as examples of where volunteers felt they were not treated with respect, provided the same regard as paid staff to contribute to the event response or given the same level of support as that received by paid staff.

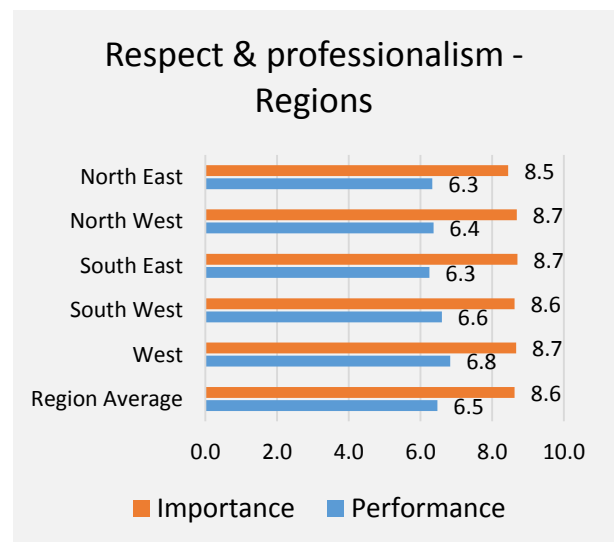


Importance has increased steadily over the past three years, with an initial improvement in performance from 2012 to 2013 then remaining the same for 2014. This has resulted in a marginal gap increase in 2014.

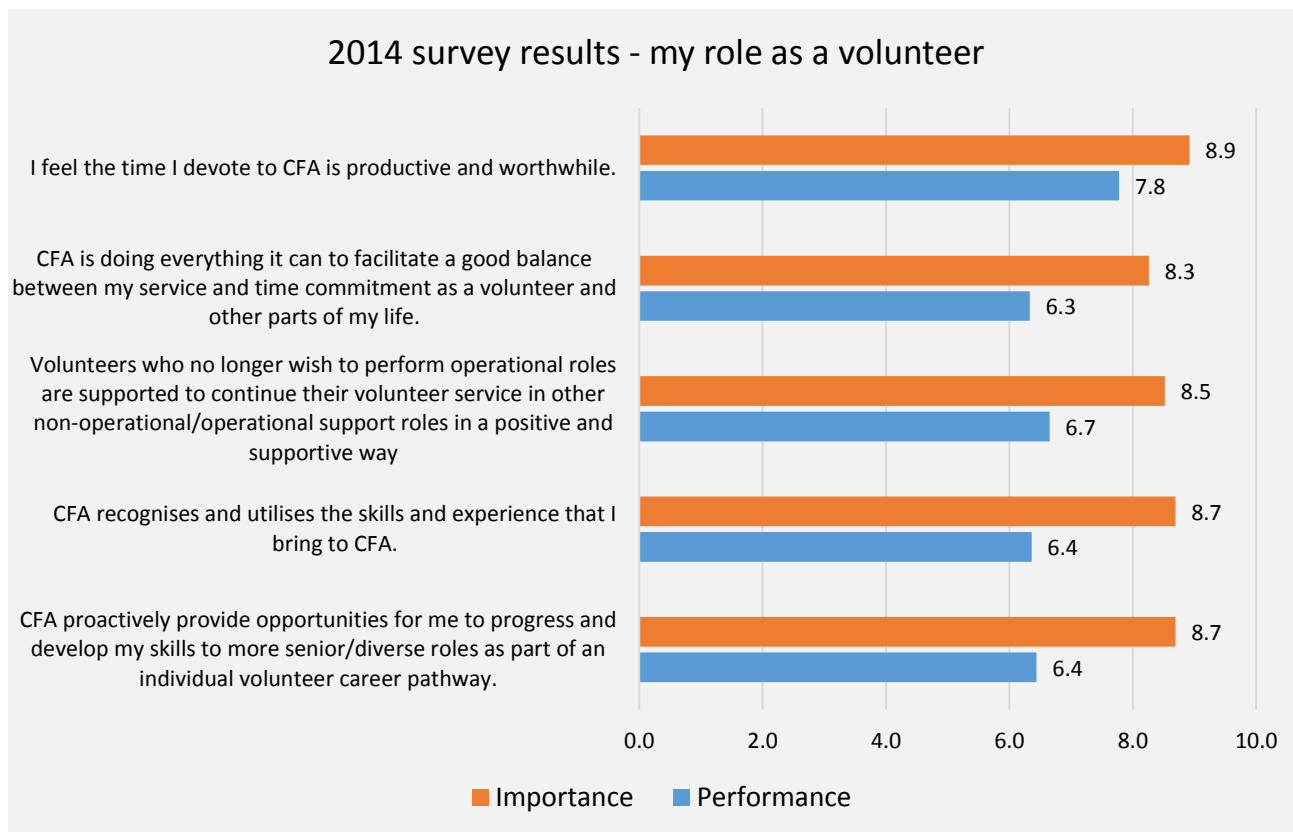
The 2014 survey data was collected against the eight former CFA Regions, and when tabulated by those Regions, it showed significant differences in survey results between the former three 'Outer Metropolitan' Regions (Yarra, North West Metro and South East Metro) and the five other Regions.

When reallocated against the new CFA five Region model, the survey result differences become less apparent as they are 'absorbed' into the new Regions' geographic coverage.

Regional variation should be of concern to CFA, given that the more urbanised areas can generate a higher CFA service demand. Volunteers are generally managing higher activity levels and certainly requiring highest possible levels of volunteer motivation, satisfaction and a feeling their volunteer skills and experience are utilised optimally and their capacity and professionalism is respected and welcome.



## 2. My role as a volunteer.



For 2014, the largest individual survey question gaps for this theme appear against the statements *“CFA recognises and utilises the skills and experience that I bring to CFA”* and *“CFA proactively provide opportunities for me to progress and develop my skills to more senior/diverse roles as part of an individual volunteer career pathway”*.

This is consistent with the survey results generally poor performance in the survey questions relating to CFA training (see page 20).

The survey comments are along similar themes to respect and professionalism, with a focus on low levels of support to volunteers, the desire for recognition and appreciation, and comments on poor treatment by CFA paid staff.

The increasing non-operational workload for volunteers continues to be an issue, with a number of survey responses citing the increasingly unsustainable workload around meeting attendance and participation in CFA projects.

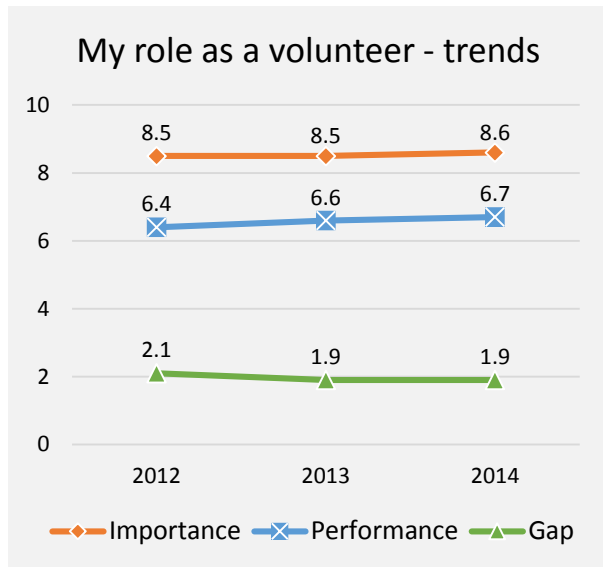
These comments include statements that volunteer activity outside the traditional response activity, is not adequately recognised and supported by CFA.

Survey comments indicate that undertaking strike team activity as an emergency response and then spending considerable time on scene waiting to be tasked, continues to frustrate volunteers who then feel, that the limited time they have available to volunteer, is not being effectively used by CFA.

In some cases, these comments are followed by a statement that the problems are repeated year after year and if not fixed, the volunteer will not attend strike teams in the future and only support local brigade call outs.

Some of the positive comments relating to this theme were that respondents enjoy being a volunteer member of CFA and state, how joining a volunteer brigade ‘was the best thing they ever did’. These positive comments cover both male and female respondents and include statements from both new and long serving members.

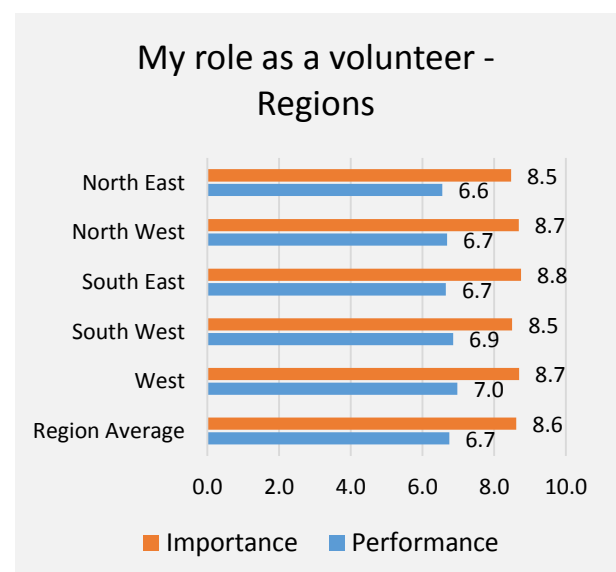
The 2014 survey results indicate that volunteers think CFA could do better with regard to recognition of the skills and experience volunteers bring to CFA. The results also suggest volunteers believe that CFA could improve its efforts in developing volunteer skills and providing individual volunteer pathways across the diverse roles required in CFA.



Overall performance in this theme has improved slightly over the past three years. Respondents indicate that the statements listed in the survey are growing in importance and pleasingly also reported a sense that things have improved since the 2012 survey.

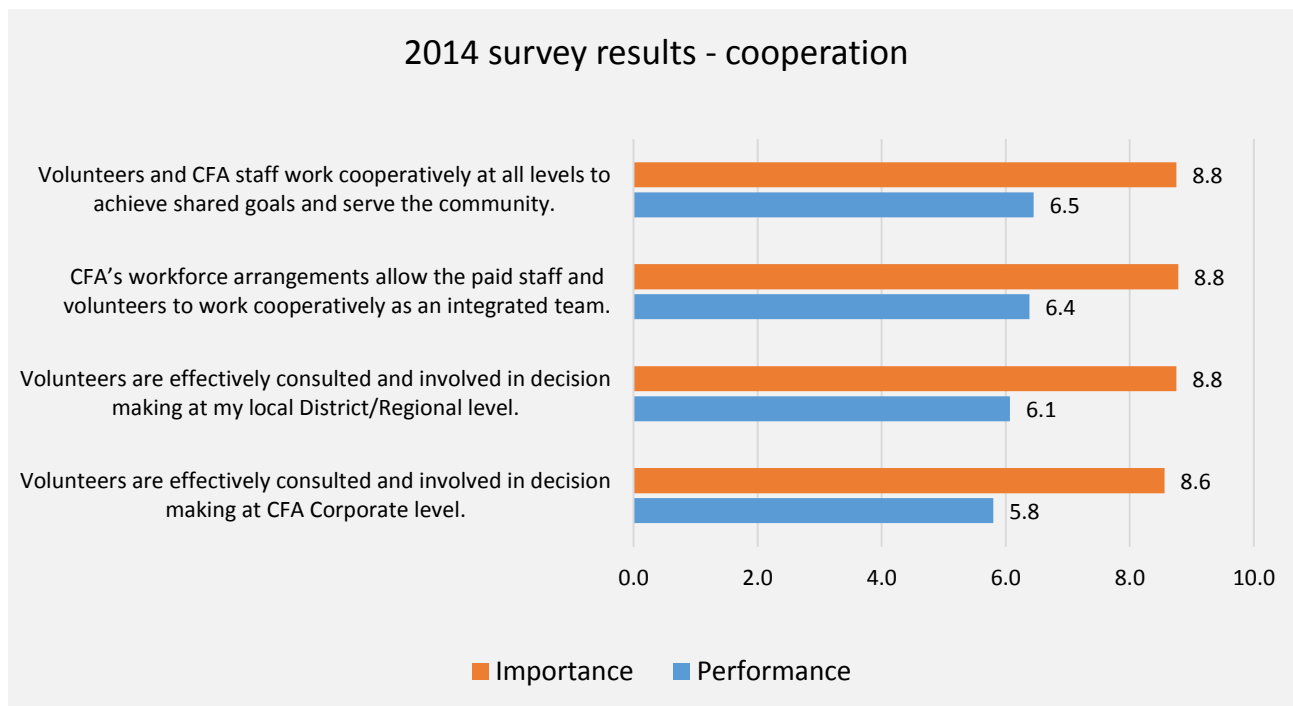
As discussed on page 13, initial Regional variations in the former eight Region model showed variation between outer metropolitan Regions and other Regions.

Regional gap variations across the theme are similar in range to the previous theme, with gaps ranging from 1.9 to 2.1 in the more urbanised Regions as compared to 1.6 to 1.7 in the less urbanised Regions.





### 3. Cooperation.



Within the Cooperation theme, the poorest performing aspect relates to how volunteers feel about the way they are consulted and involved in decision making at the CFA corporate level.

Despite improvements in the performance scores for all four statements in this theme in 2014, scores for this theme are generally low for both 2013 and 2014 results as compared to the rest of the survey.

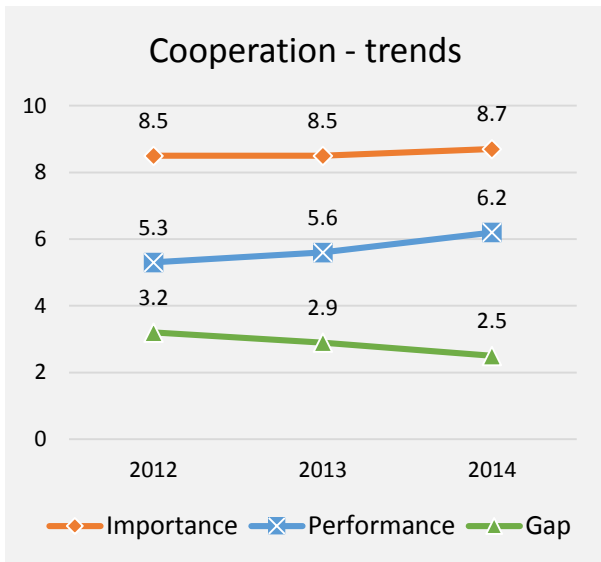
The statement “*volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at CFA Corporate level*” had the lowest performance score of the survey in 2013 and created the largest gap, however the gap score against this statement has improved. In 2014 this statement ranked second lowest in performance scores and had the second largest gap score, therefore is still an issue of concern for volunteers and should be an equal issue of concern for CFA.

It is important to note however, this aspect also shows the best improvement since the 2012 survey, indicating that whilst volunteers still feel there is a lot more to be done – things are improving.

The survey results confirm volunteers place a high value on being consulted and involved in decision making at all levels of CFA and expect CFA to perform well in this area. Volunteers’ place a very high importance on all CFA people (volunteer and paid staff at all organisational levels) working cooperatively towards shared goals.

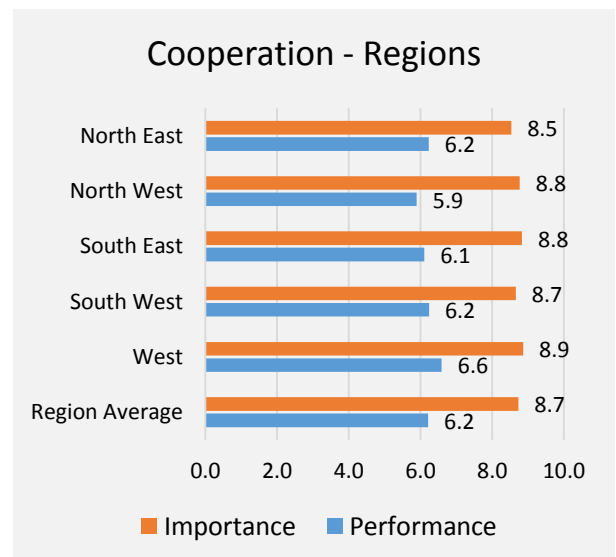
The written survey responses in this theme discuss issues relating to perceptions of volunteer poor treatment and lack of respect from paid CFA staff. A common theme is about CFA staff attitude to volunteers on integrated stations, and in some cases the conduct of operations officers in the field. Negative comments are also made in regard to CFA management’s lack of connection with volunteers.

Some survey responses also refer to an established ‘them and us’ culture amongst CFA paid staff and volunteers, manifesting in the service and treatment of paid staff at major incidents as compared to volunteers.

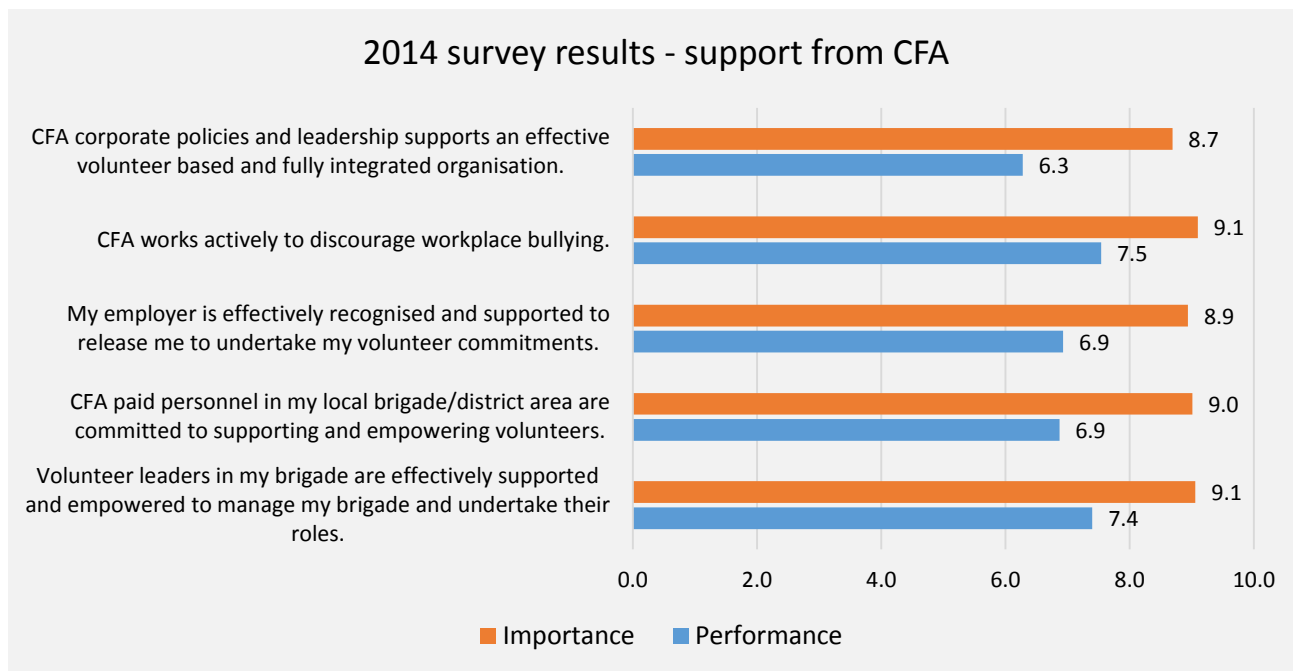


A significant improvement in the performance score over the past three years has seen the gap reduce from 3.2 to 2.5. This improvement is mainly influenced by the decrease in the 2014 gap scores for the statements *“volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at CFA corporate level”* and *“CFA’s workforce arrangements allow the paid staff and volunteers to work cooperatively as a team”*.

Survey result variations between Regions show West and North East Region gap scoring less than the other Regions, it would be insightful to explore the factors or initiatives underpinning this result.



#### 4. Support from CFA.



The 2014 survey scores demonstrate that volunteers continue to rank support from CFA to be highly important. Survey scores show that the respondents have recognised overall performance improvements, whilst at the same time being critical in their written comments when there is a specific lack of support from CFA.

The 2014 survey results for the ‘support from CFA’ theme saw a performance improvement for the statement *“CFA paid personnel in my local brigade/district area are committed to supporting and empowering volunteers”*, with the 2013 score of 6.2 rising to 6.9 in 2014.

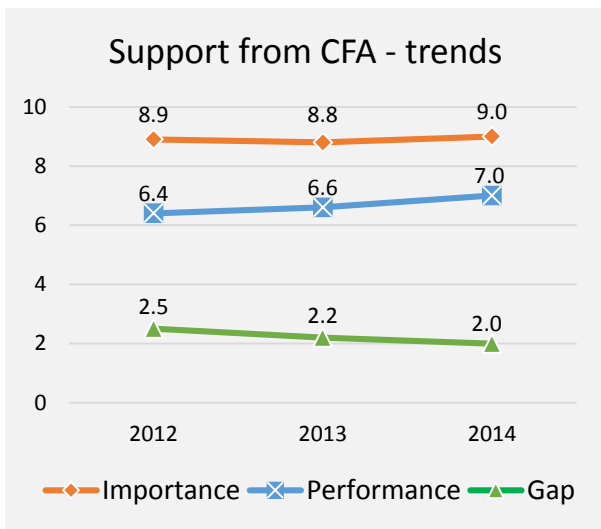
This theme scored increases in performance from 2013 to 2014 across all five statements, whilst at the same time scoring importance for two statements above 9.0 and ranking equal highest on theme importance scores with the theme ‘People management – my brigade’ in 2014.

The respondents evaluation of the importance and performance of CFA support to volunteers in the survey scores is supported by the number of written comments received relating to this theme.

This theme, more than any other, has generated survey responses relating to specific brigade or individual member issues. Issues raised, include the lack of CFA support for the resolution of management issues at brigade level, a high level of CFA staff turnover at Region and District level impacting on support to brigades and budget cuts impacting on resources for volunteers.

Survey comments for this theme are consistent with previous themes in relation to perceived differences in the level of support provided by CFA to paid and volunteer members, and the general feeling that CFA volunteers are being treated as ‘second class’.

Other notable survey respondent comments include a desire to see more CFA staff working in support of brigades rather than in CFA headquarters on projects, a concern regarding the lack of training for volunteers in administrative roles, and a number of comments that CFA is too focussed on the metropolitan area and not providing sufficient support to regional Victoria brigades.

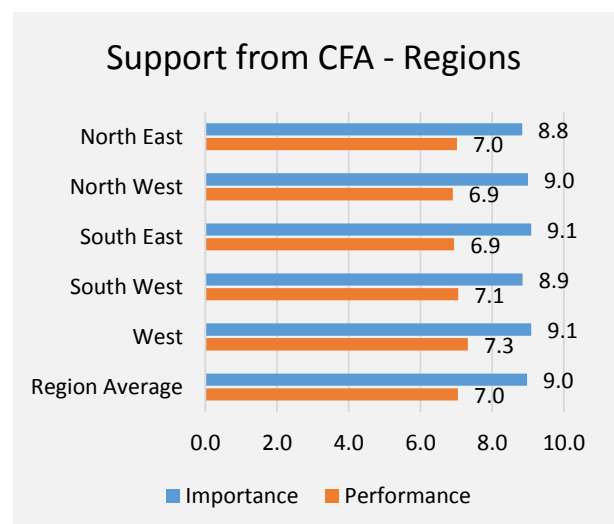


Whilst performance has improved over the past three years (6.4 to 7.0) resulting in a smaller gap, importance has remained consistently high, reinforcing the fact that support from CFA remains a high priority for volunteers.

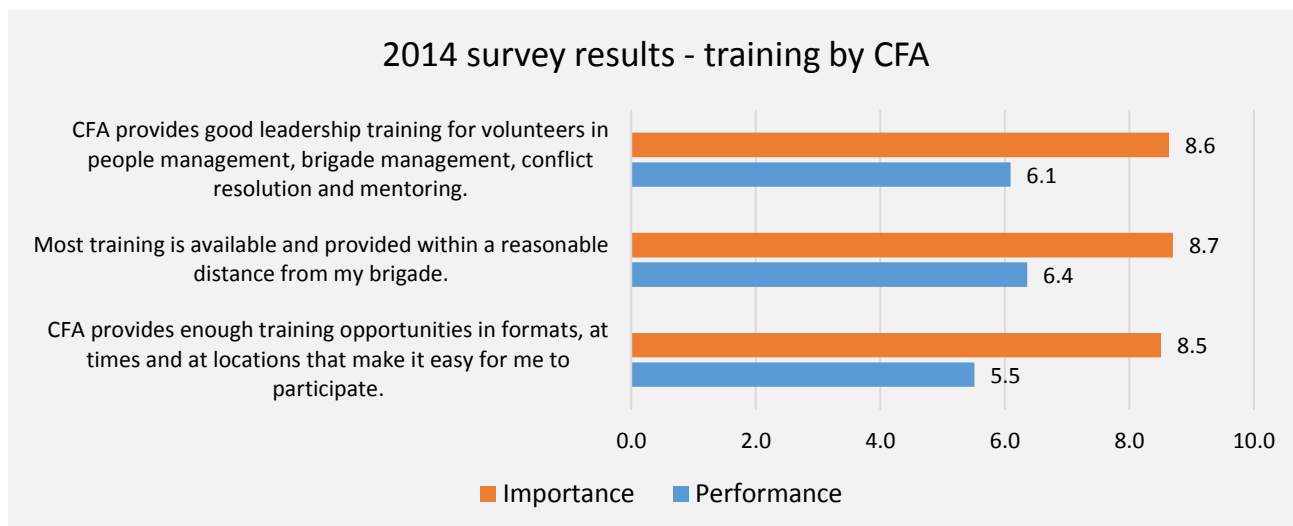
The gap improvement from 2.5 to 2.0 is driven by improved performance across all statements within the themes. Statement performance scores all improved between 0.2 and 0.7 in 2014 as compared to the 2013 results.

The statement *“CFA paid personnel in my local brigade/district area are committed to supporting and empowering volunteers”* improved in performance score by 0.7 from 2013 to 2014 – the equal highest statement performance improvement in the 2014 survey.

There are minor variations in the Region scores as compared to other themes. As previously discussed in the cooperation theme observations for Regions (p.17), further analysis of the factors influencing these results may reveal more valuable information.



## 5. Training by CFA.



Within this theme, survey responses for the statement *“CFA provides enough training opportunities in formats, at times and at locations that make it easy for me to participate”* have generated the largest gap for the 2014 survey, consistent with having the second largest gap in 2013.

This same statement also received the lowest performance score for any survey statement in 2014 and second lowest score in 2013. The respondents scoring against this statement clearly indicates an ongoing dissatisfaction with the current level of service received from CFA in respect to training.

While written comments for other themes in the survey are brief and sometimes quite individual, the commentary for ‘training by CFA’ is detailed and focussed on common recurring concerns.

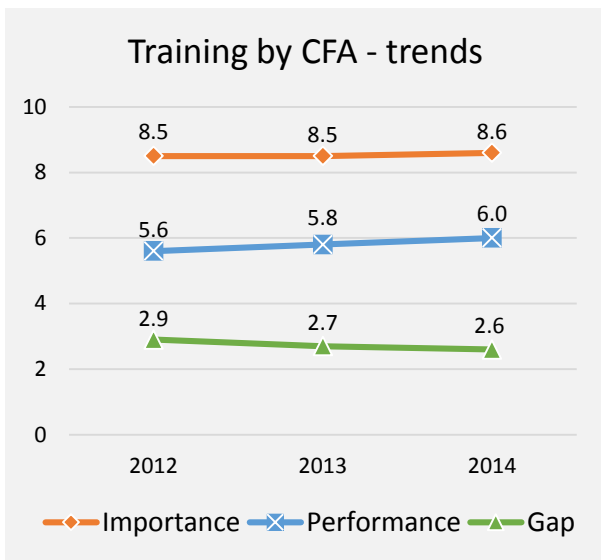
These recurring comments refer to a lack of training availability and opportunity, with negative comments on the frequency and timing of courses. Some comments refer to unsuitable training formats and a lack of access to specific training requirements outside of the standard operational training packages, such as leadership training and conflict resolution training.

Written comments also refer to the time taken between attaining qualification and receiving the personal protective equipment required to turn out, once qualified.

Survey responses express this as creating a frustration in volunteers who have made time available to train but are then unable to utilise their training and support their brigade.

These written comments in the training theme are reflective of responses under other themes relating to sense of worth, recognition and treatment of volunteers.

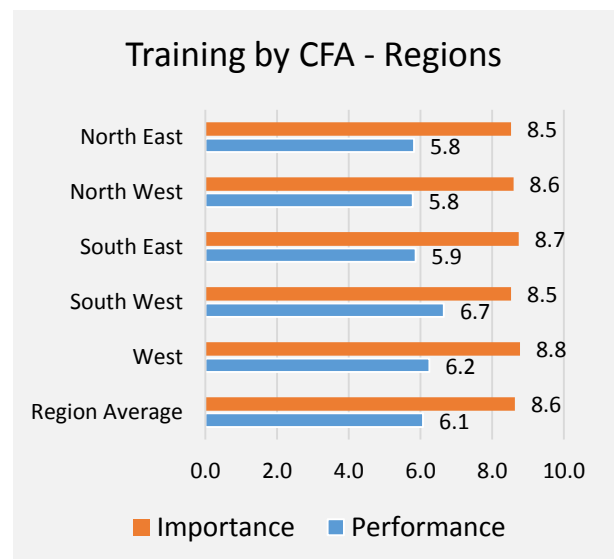
Of the written comments received, few were positive. One of the positive comments reflected an appreciation of the size of the training tasks in CFA and suggested that volunteers and brigades could be more proactive in identifying solutions.



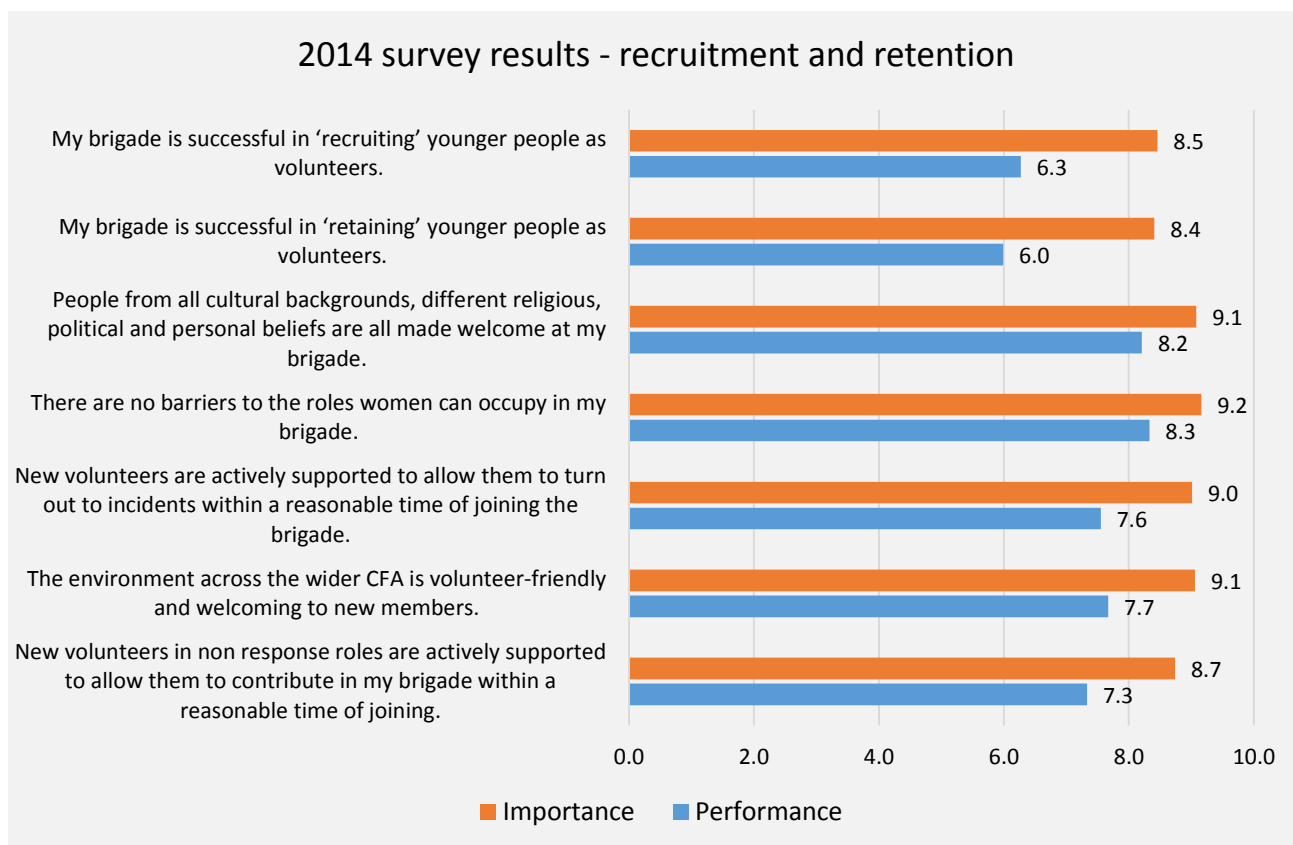
An improvement in performance scores against a stable importance score has seen the gap decrease over the past three years. The biggest influence underpinning this improvement is in the area of leadership training for volunteers, people management and conflict resolution and mentoring.

The difference between gap scores Region by Region for this theme are greater than any other.

South West Region's positive performance and markedly smaller gap in relation to training may warrant further investigation to determine what is contributing to the success.



## 6. Recruitment and retention.



2014 survey result scores for importance in this theme produced the equal highest score for a single statement, that being *“there are no barriers to the roles women can occupy in my brigade”*, scoring 9.2. This is consistent with the same statement scoring the highest performance score in 2013 (9.3) and demonstrates how highly survey respondents value diversity within their brigades.

Following closely behind this score in the same theme is the statement *“people from all cultural backgrounds, different religious, political and personal beliefs are all made welcome at my brigade”*, which scored 9.1 on importance and 8.2 on performance.

The recruitment and retention theme received a comparatively small number of written comments as compared to other themes.

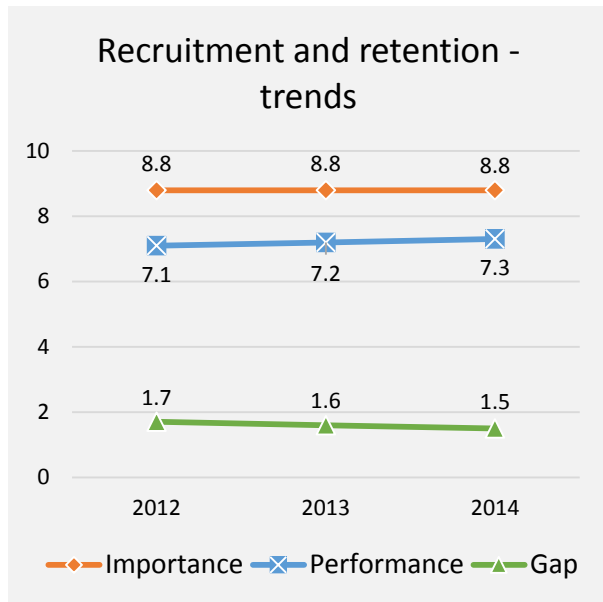
Of the negative comments received, there were several around CFA’s need to improve the respect for and treatment of females and that there are still pockets of unacceptable behaviour towards females. These comments support the high importance placed on gender equity in the survey scores.

There were comments acknowledging CFA’s ability to recruit, including younger members and people from more diverse backgrounds and roles however, a frustration exists in that training can be difficult to access or not matched to an individual’s progression in CFA, resulting in keen volunteers not staying or not being utilised.

The most common underlying factor present across most of the negative comments, is a frustration with CFA training, which leads to a negative force jeopardising volunteer retention. Ongoing issues with the difficulties associated with getting onto courses, the flexibility in recognising prior learning beyond the prescriptive CFA training and poor course organisation, were all mentioned.

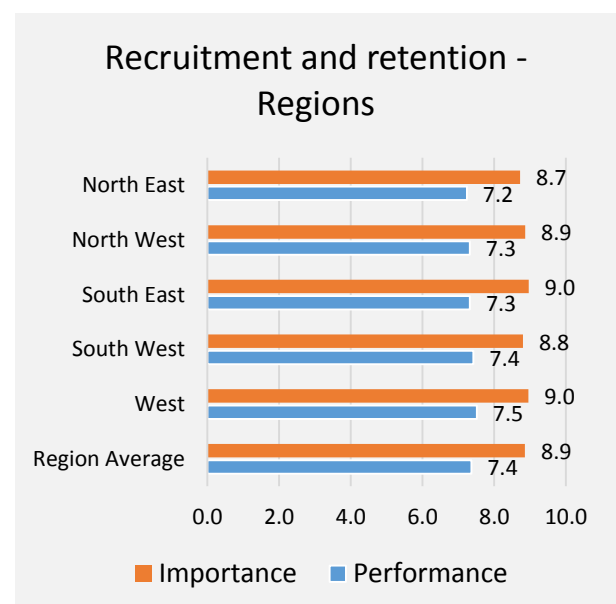
Some comments expressed an opinion that the culture within CFA paid personnel is not volunteer focussed, and that an ‘us and them’ attitude dominates. One response suggests that CFA needs to incorporate a performance measure relating to volunteer training and retention into CFA staff performance, particularly for staff at integrated brigades.

Other comments suggest that CFA’s senior volunteers should have a stronger focus on mentoring new members. Some comments reflected on the personal experience members had over years of service with CFA and their desire to see future generations benefit from the experience.



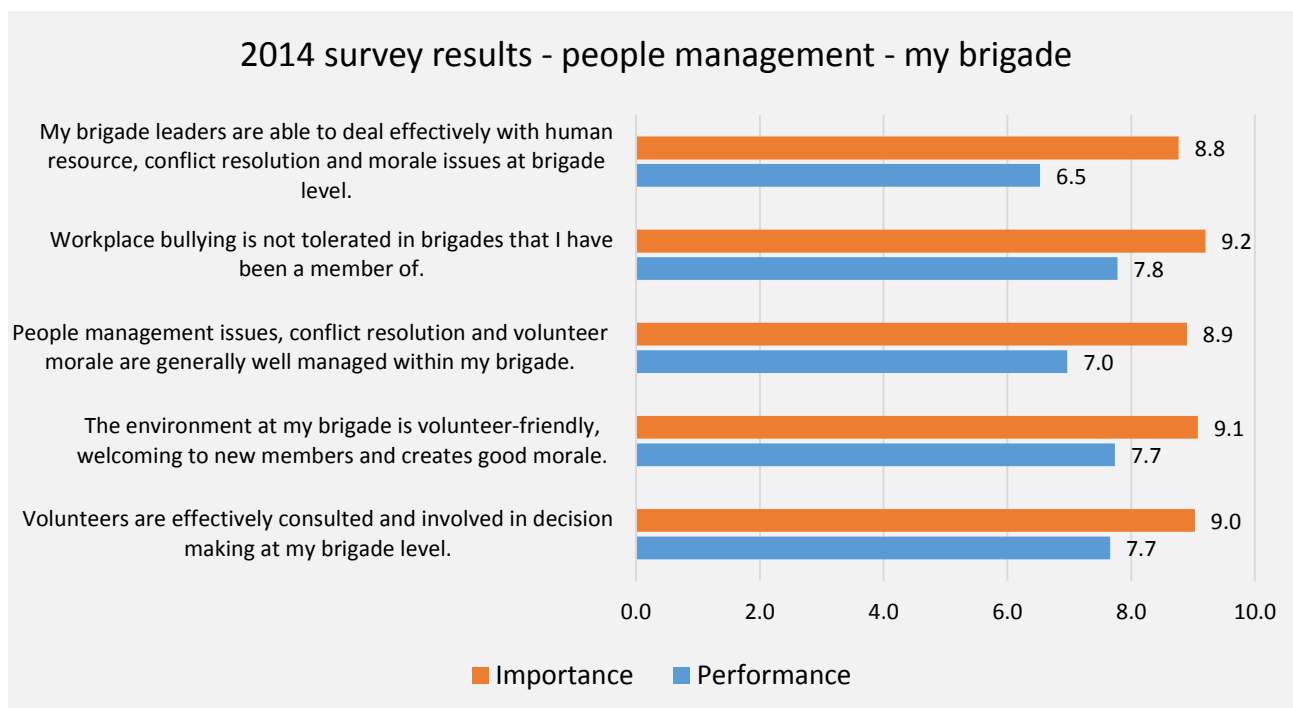
2014 survey result scores for importance and performance in the ‘recruitment and retention’ theme produced the smallest gap across all seven survey themes. A gradual increase in performance against a consistent importance score over the past three years has continued to decrease the gap.

The gap between importance and performance scores across all five Regions varies only slightly (0.3), and are the closest gap scores Region by Region for the seven survey themes.





## 7. People management – my brigade.



The 2014 survey scores for importance against specific statements in the ‘people management – my brigade’ theme scored equal highest against statement scores across the survey.

The statement “*Workplace bullying is not tolerated in the brigades that I have been a member of*” scored 9.2 for importance in the 2014 survey, consistent with the score of 9.3 received in 2013. The statement “*the environment at my brigade is volunteer friendly, welcoming to new members and creates good morale*” scored 9.1 for importance in the 2014 and 2013 surveys.

These scores are supported by written comments received from respondents that relate to their own brigades, with comments relating to a high level of importance amongst volunteers for a safe and welcoming brigade environment, free of bullying or other forms of harassment.

In the written comments, there is a common and substantial concern raised about bullying and harassment, and the poor level of response and support for resolving conflict when it does occur.

One interpretation of the spread and the tone of the commentary could be that when things are going well there is generally a high degree of satisfaction.

However, when there are problems in particular brigades or locations, these have a specific impact on the people involved and are generally not managed as well as they should be.

The comments are consistent with written survey responses to statement fourteen, suggesting that some brigades need more support in this area.

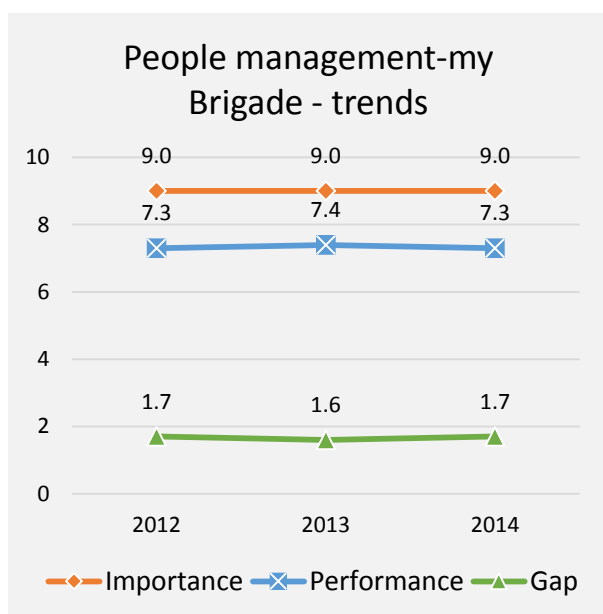
Comments also suggest that there are ‘cliques’, instances of ‘them and us’, ‘clubs’ and other cultural elements that negatively impact on volunteers generally as well as impacting on teamwork and the effective utilisation of many willing volunteers.

There are several comments suggesting conflict situations, problem individuals (both paid and volunteer) and problem cultural elements are not dealt with as quickly as they should be.

There is also a concerning trend suggesting that people are discouraged from speaking out and a repeating concern that officers responsible for dealing with conflict are not objective. A theme recurring through many responses is the need for better leadership development and a more effective process for dealing with conflict resolution that includes a safeguard against subjectivity (described as favouritism by some).

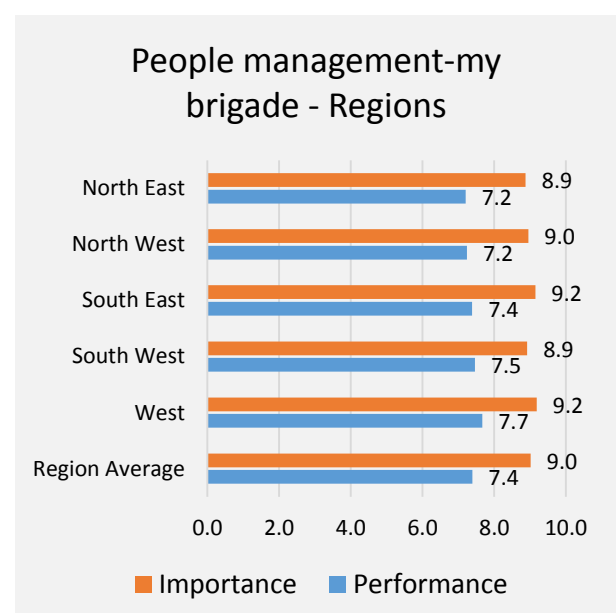
The commentary suggests that when things are working well (which is the predominant assessment across the survey) service as a CFA volunteer is reasonably comfortable, but when conflict escalates, the current approach does not cope as well as volunteers expect it to, leaving issues to escalate and cause long term impacts.

Some of the comments suggest a desire for CFA leadership and support staff to take a more active role when conflict resolution is required. Several comments seek a mechanism whereby VFVBV or some other independent organisation can ensure reasonable protocols are in place and that appropriate support is provided to individuals in conflict or bullying situations.



Survey performance scores have dropped slightly from 2013, resulting in a gap score of 1.7. This theme is one of only two to see an increase in gap from 2013 to 2014 (respect and professionalism being the other theme with an increased gap).

West and South West Regions have lower gap scores than other Regions. Further analysis of the factors influencing these results may reveal more valuable information.

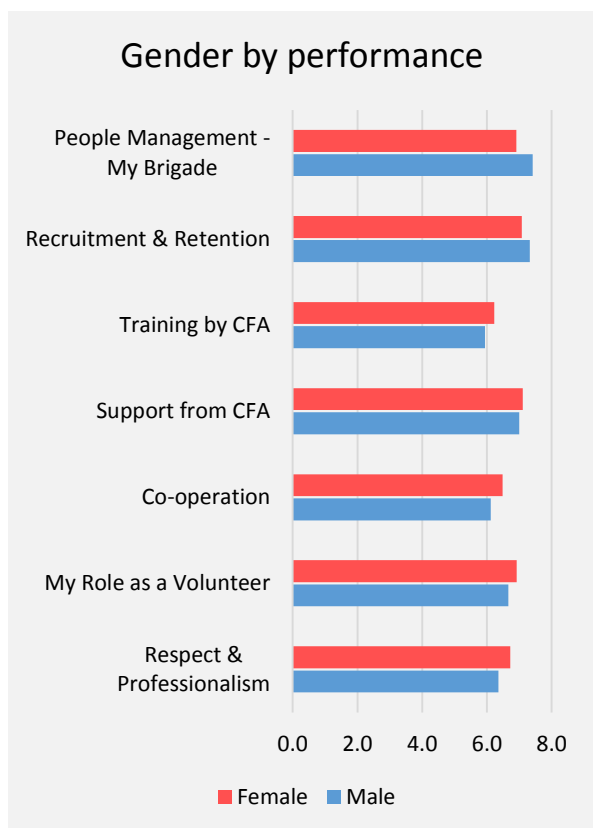
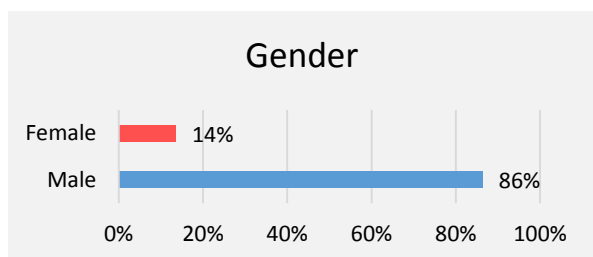


## 8. Demographic variations and observations.

Survey respondents provide information that identifies their age, gender, length of time as a volunteer with CFA and brigade type. This information is collated and used to provide material for further analysis.

### Gender

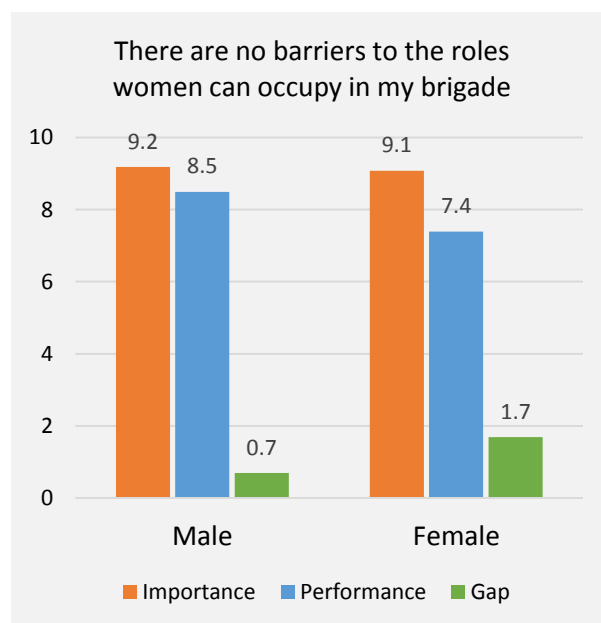
In 2014, 86% of survey respondents were male, and 14% female. This is an under representation of the total CFA female volunteer membership, as CFA data indicates that 20% of CFA volunteers are female<sup>3</sup>. The promotion of future surveys to encourage an increased female representation closer to the total membership percentage would benefit the results.



Female survey respondents rated 'people management – my brigade' and 'recruitment and retention' performance lower than male respondents across the seven themes.

The differences occur when the questions relate to CFA's performance in conflict resolution, bullying and harassment, in which case, females rate the management of such issues lower than males.

The most telling survey response was in response to the statement "there are no barriers to the roles women can occupy in my brigade". Females feel that importance and more so performance against this statement are lower than their male counterparts, therefore female respondents see a greater gap.



Nine other survey statements relating to recruitment, retention and brigade behaviour were tested against gender responses; none of the tested statements showed a gender influenced 1.0 gap difference in the above statement. No other statement showed more than 0.5 in gap difference when compared across gender.

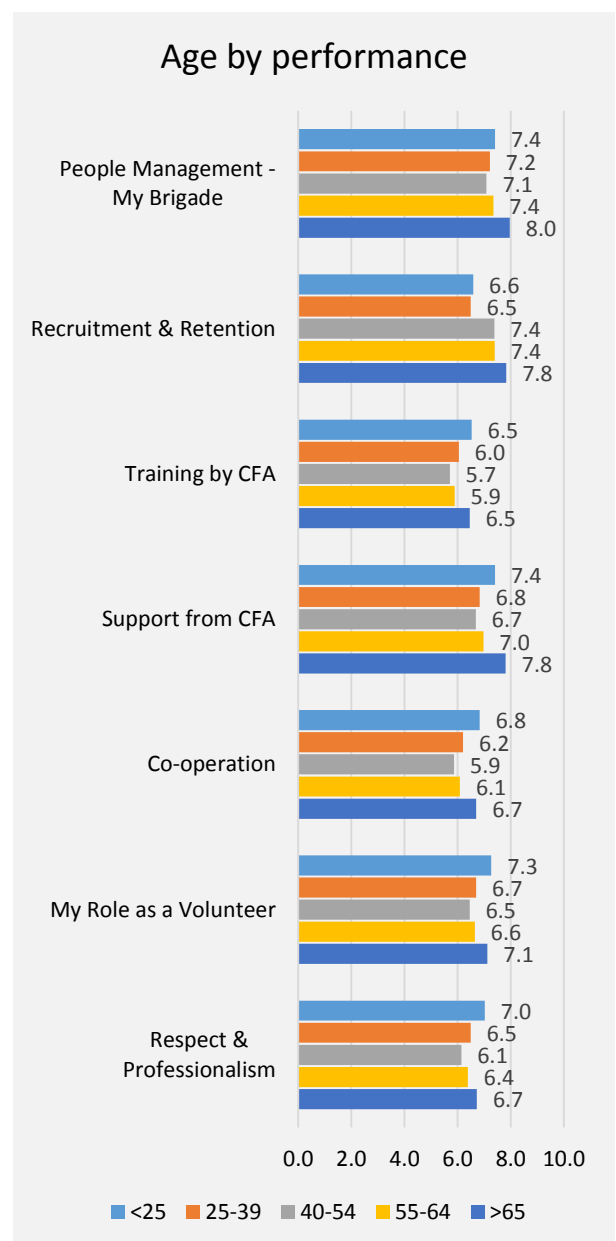
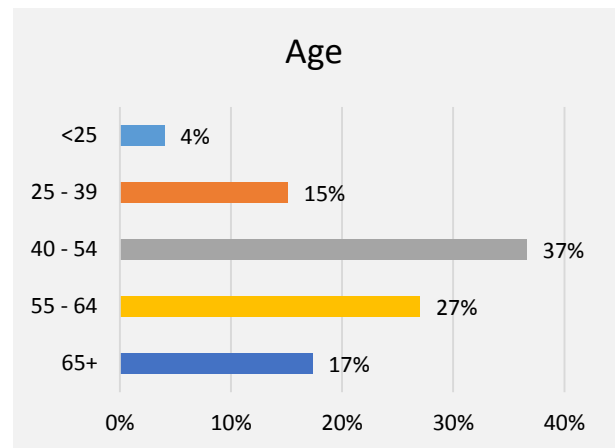
<sup>3</sup> CFA News, 6 March 2015 – Celebrating CFA Women. <http://news.cfa.vic.gov.au/news/celebrating-cfa-women-6207.html>

## Age.

More than one third (37%) of survey respondents were in the 40-54 age cohort, which is reflective of the 2010 volunteer participation rate by age as illustrated in the Victorian Auditor General Office 2014 audit *Managing Emergency Services Volunteers* (p.2)<sup>4</sup>.

Survey results broken down by the age range of the volunteer against performance scores show that the overall satisfaction in CFA and brigade is highest in the +65 age group. This may relate to a broader point in life where such views are possibly held on most issues.

The second highest age range to rank CFA highly is the under 25 year old group, this may relate to length of service and a sense of optimism and future reward within CFA.



<sup>4</sup> Victorian Auditor-General's Report. *Managing Emergency Service Volunteers*. February 2014. [www.audit.vic.gov.au/reports\\_and\\_publications/latest\\_reports/2013-14/20140205-emergency-volunteers.aspx](http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/reports_and_publications/latest_reports/2013-14/20140205-emergency-volunteers.aspx)

## Length of service as a volunteer.

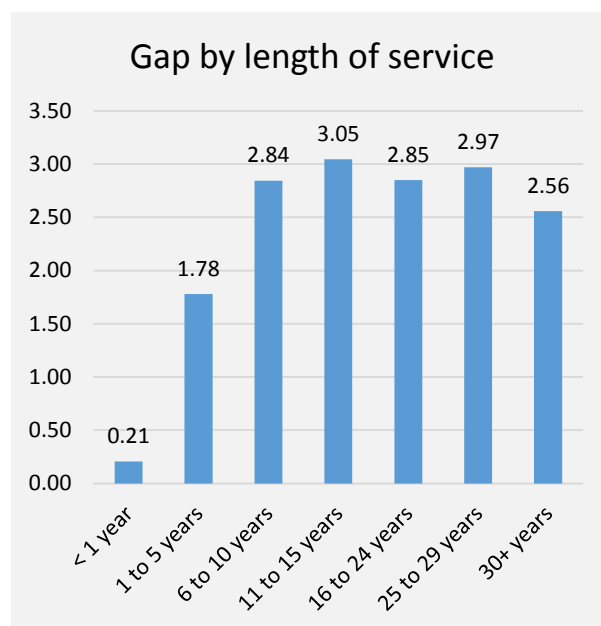
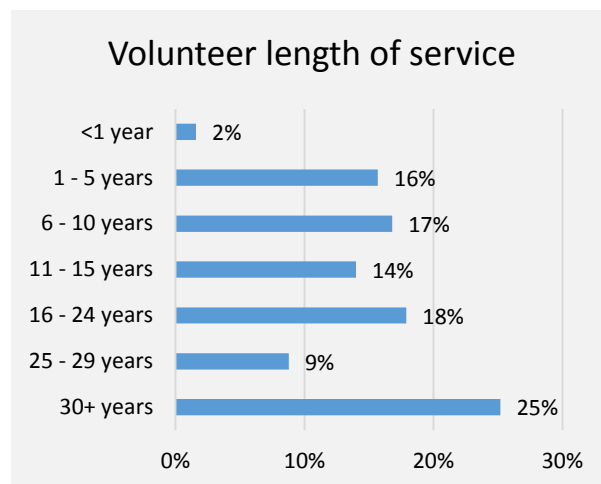
One quarter of survey respondents have spent more than 25 years as a CFA volunteer, the largest length of service group in the survey, whilst 2% had spent less than one year in CFA as a volunteer and 16% less than five years.

Survey results for gap scores were tested against respondents' age range to see if trends could be identified.

Volunteer length of service created a distinct pattern across the question responses. Volunteers who have served with CFA for less than one year are the most positive about the organisation and their brigade on nearly every question.

Two distinct increases in the gap between importance and performance occur; firstly in respondents with more than one years' service and then again in volunteers with more than five years' service. The gap sharply increases after their first year of service, i.e. their level of satisfaction drops sharply after one year and then again after more than five years' service

Length of service related positivity then begins to reduce the gap back up to the 30+ years' service mark.



## Brigade service/risk environment.

Volunteer membership of four types of brigade service/risk environment could be nominated by the survey respondents, these being;

- Rural/predominantly bushfire risk profile.
- Urban/predominantly structural risk profile.
- Integrated volunteer/career.
- Coast guard brigade.

Only one survey response was received from a coast guard brigade member, therefore this response has little impact on the brigade service environment analysis.

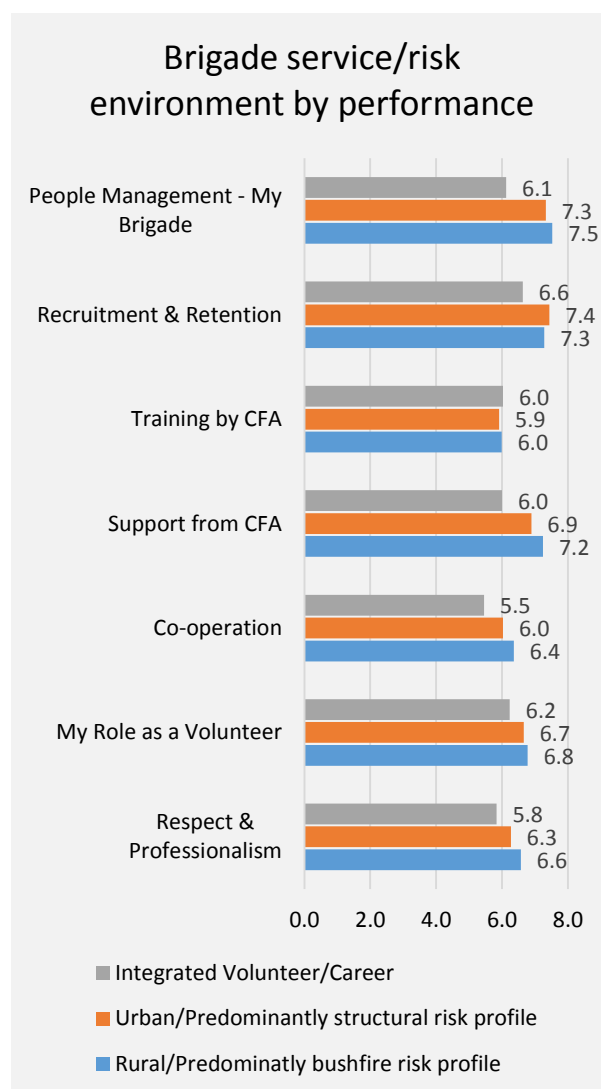
The integrated volunteer/career survey responses consistently scored lower on importance and more so on performance. Integrated brigades scored poorly on performance in relation to workplace bullying, conflict resolution, volunteer consultation, morale and supporting new volunteers. These particular statistical results point to ongoing issues within integrated brigades that require specific attention.

When the nominated brigade service/risk environment responses are tested against performance scores for the survey themes, the results generally show (for five of the seven themes) that brigades with a predominantly rural/bushfire risk rate CFA performance more highly and integrated volunteer/career brigade rate CFA performance the lowest. The only two variations in this trend are where all three brigade service/risk environments rate training performance very closely (6.0, 5.9 and 6.0) and where urban/predominantly structural risk brigades rate recruitment and retention performance higher.

The most marked variation in performance scores between brigade service/risk environments is in the 'people management – my brigade' theme where volunteers in integrated volunteer/career brigades rated performance 1.2 below urban/structural risk and 1.4 below rural/bushfire risk types.

The survey performance scores by brigade service/risk environment are reflected in some of the written survey comments, where volunteers feel that the treatment they receive and the relationship they have with career staff are not as good as they should be.

The survey results suggest that further work in understanding the specific issues facing integrated volunteer/career brigades is required in order to improve working relationships between CFA volunteers and CFA career staff.



## Reason for being a volunteer.

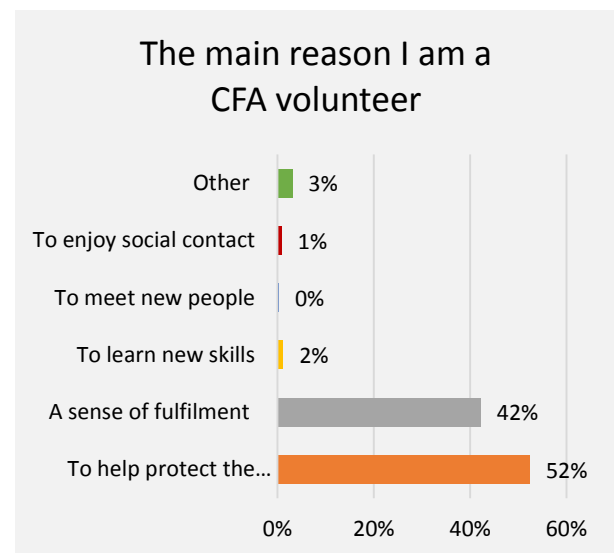
Survey respondents are asked to select their main reason for being a CFA volunteer from six listed options.

Slightly more than half the survey respondents (52%) nominated *“to help protect the community I live in”* as their main reason, whilst a considerable proportion (42%) nominated *“a sense of fulfilment in supporting my community in a meaningful way”* as their main reason.

These results are highly aligned to the 2013 survey results, where 50% of respondents nominated *“to help protect the community I live in”* as their main reason and 44% nominated *“a sense of fulfilment in supporting my community in a meaningful way”*.

The other four options for both the 2013 and 2014 survey results rated very low by comparison, (4% combined in 2013 and 6% combined in 2014).

When compared to satisfaction levels against the statement *“I would recommend being a CFA volunteer to people I know”* these results suggest that volunteers play an important part in recruitment, as they are highly motivated by their volunteer experience and keen to see others enjoy the same experience.



## Awareness of VFBV.

The number of respondents with reasonably high awareness of VFBV had grown from 71% to 76% compared to last year. There are still many volunteers with either low or only moderate awareness of VFBV, so this is an area for continued attention.

The comments received suggest that many volunteers feel a low awareness of VFBV or being aware of the VFBV overall but not feeling a good enough understanding of what VFBV does. Also, how processes work or how they easily access information on particular issues.

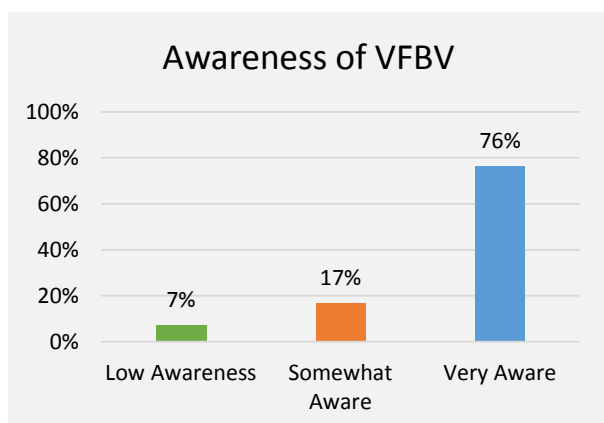
Consistent with previous years there is a diverse spectrum of comments regarding whether VFBV should be more forthright in representing volunteers through to some thinking VFBV is too assertive. Comments describing a tension between pursuing a fair go for volunteers and maintaining harmony, particularly regarding issues where CFA workforce culture, arrangements and industrial agreements impact on areas that also directly affect volunteers.

There are also a mix of comments regarding how VFBV should work as a close partner with CFA and Government versus VFBV needing to be more independent and more publically critical of policy and direction that is not good for volunteers.

Comments reinforce the desire of volunteers to have a grass roots connected, well organised, well-resourced volunteer voice but at the same time a strong concern that the funding of such a voice must not erode VFBV's independence and objectivity.

There are many comments recognising improvements in VFBV engagement and visibility amongst volunteers and also many comments asking VFBV to communicate achievements more broadly and increase the profile of VFBV at brigade level.

A number of comments express a frustration that VFBV is not vocal enough in the public and media debate complaining of the absence of a strong CFA leadership voice. VFBV needs to do more to educate the community about the importance of CFA volunteers and to defend the reputation of volunteers, when it is put down by interest groups with particular agendas.





## Volunteer satisfaction.

Survey respondents are asked to rate their satisfaction with their role with CFA, the way they are treated by CFA, their intentions to remain a CFA volunteer and their likelihood to recommend being a CFA volunteer to others.

The 2014 survey results across the four satisfaction questions are highly aligned to the 2013 results. 80% of respondents are satisfied with their role in CFA in 2013 and 2014, whilst there is a 2% shift in 2014 from 'unsure' to 'dissatisfied'.

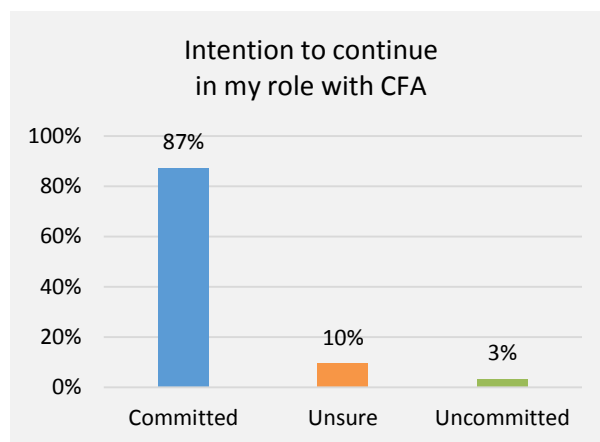
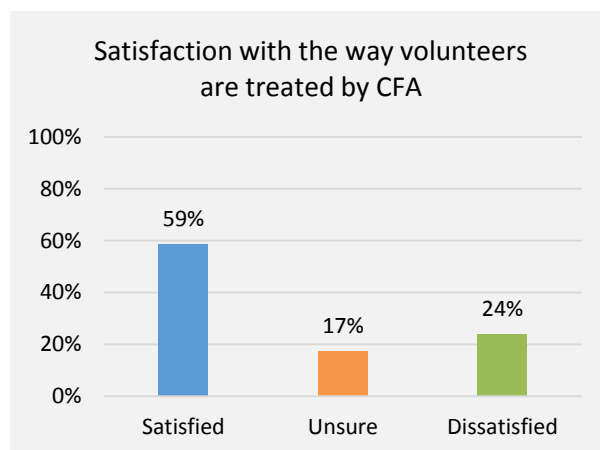
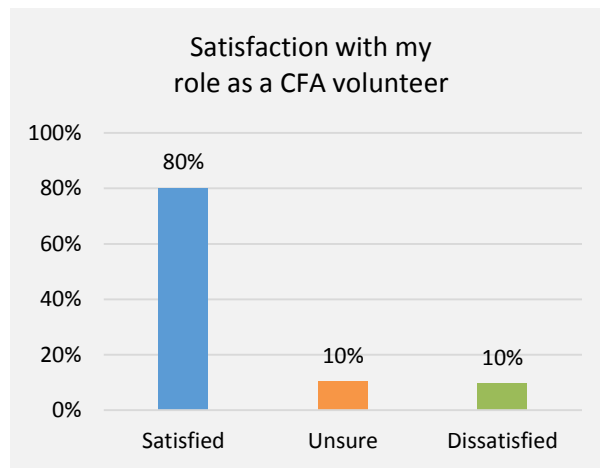
A 2% shift in 2014 from 'dissatisfied' to 'satisfied' has increased volunteer satisfaction with the way they are treated by CFA from 57% to 59%.

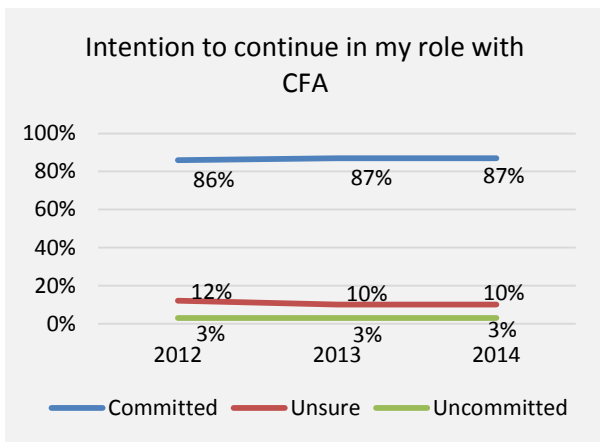
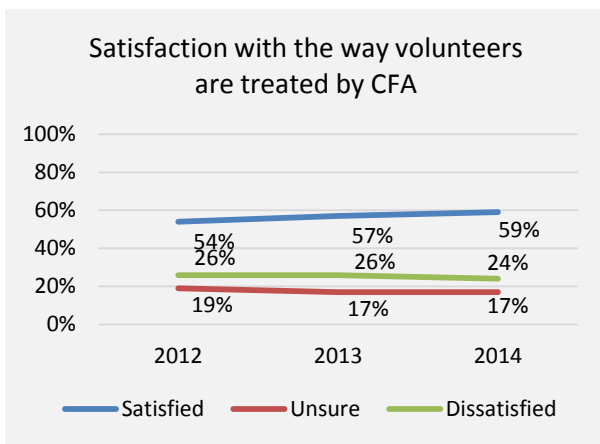
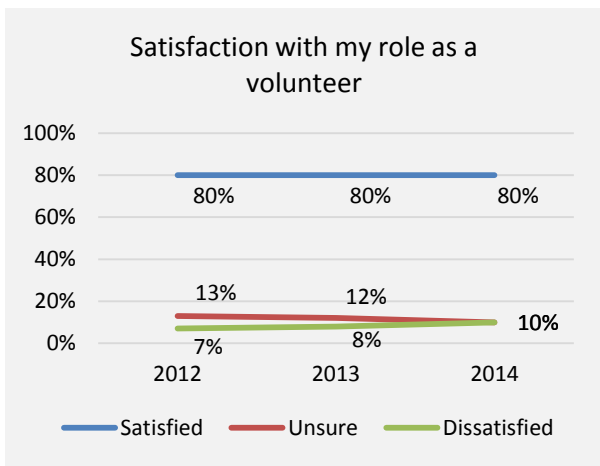
Satisfaction levels with the way volunteers' rate their treatment by CFA shows the greatest improvement across all satisfaction measures – with a 5% increase in satisfaction from 2012 to 2014.

The 'intention to continue my role with CFA' results are identical for 2013 and 2014.

A 1% change in the 2013 and 2014 results for the satisfaction statement 'I would recommend being a CFA volunteer to people I know' sees the yes score increase to 81%.

As stated previously, the comparatively low satisfaction score with the way volunteers feel they are treated by CFA suggests that the greatest potential impact on future volunteer welfare and efficiency sits with CFA in the success or otherwise, of their partnerships with volunteer brigades.





In addition to the broader satisfaction questions, survey results against each statement for the past three years can be compiled to observe trends in active satisfaction and active dissatisfaction.

Survey results suggest that whilst volunteers continue to be most satisfied with the support and encouragement they receive at **local brigade level**, they remain actively dissatisfied with CFA’s performance in relation to consultation at a District, Regional and Corporate level.

Eleven survey statements scored satisfaction levels markedly higher than the rest of the survey. The same statements have also scored consistently higher for the past three years and in most cases, have shown an improvement in satisfaction levels over that time. These statements relate to the range of factors that contribute to a welcoming and rewarding local brigade environment, that is supportive of volunteers and operating well at a local brigade level.

One statement “*volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at CFA Corporate level*” scored dissatisfaction (37%) higher than satisfaction (21%) as well as achieving the lowest satisfaction rating. The same statement scores the second largest gap in survey results and demonstrates an ongoing need for improved consultation between volunteers and Corporate CFA.

Two other statements scored dissatisfaction levels just below satisfaction, consistently over the past three years. Both statements also relate to CFA policies, practices and workforce arrangements that integrate volunteers and paid staff and the impact these have on volunteer consultation and cooperation.

These results suggest there is an ongoing need for improved effort by CFA to build an effective volunteer-based organisation, in which volunteers are supported by employees in a fully integrated manner.

Given this is a fundamental obligation of CFA as described in the CFA Act, this is an area warranting close attention.

# CONCLUSION

The 2014 VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey results have provided valuable information direct from CFA volunteers which is vital to informing the emergency management sector on what volunteers need to remain viable and valuable contributors to community safety.

Key observations from the survey results that may warrant further investigation and possible actions include the following.

## 1. Training needs and expectations.

The 2014 survey results identify training by CFA as the biggest issue, with the survey gap at 3.0. This remains the most important issue for CFA volunteers and the issue least meeting volunteer expectations.

## 2. Variation between brigades.

Brigades with an integrated volunteer/career mix of personnel are more concerned with performance in relation to people management within their brigade, cooperation, respect and professionalism.

## 3. Equity, diversity and workplace behaviour.

Survey results show that equity and diversity across gender, race and religion are important issues to volunteers. When tested against gender – female respondents rated both importance and performance lower than male respondents in relation to the statement “there are no barriers to the roles women can occupy in my brigade”, and the gap between importance and performance for female respondents was higher than male, signalling that male respondents are more optimistic about how gender, equity and diversity issues are being managed and may not realise areas of deficiency. Whilst CFA performance in this area is scored comparatively well against other areas, it remains an area that will require ongoing support.

## 4. The importance of consultation with brigades.

The value volunteers place on consultation both within their own brigade and with CFA, is expressed in the survey results where statements referring to consultation within brigades receive good performance scores whilst conversely, statements regarding effective consultation at CFA District, Region or Corporate level, receive the lowest performance scores and high gaps.

Written comments from survey respondents refer to issues where inadequate consultation may be the root cause, further suggesting that more work is required to improve consultation between CFA and volunteers.

## 5. The influence of volunteer length of service.

Volunteer length of service has created a distinct pattern across the question responses. Volunteers who have served with CFA for less than one year are the most positive about the organisation and their brigade on nearly every question. The gap sharply increases after their first year of service, i.e. their level of satisfaction drops sharply after one year and then again after more than five years’ service.

This warrants further investigation to determine the causes of the change in expectation.

## 6. Satisfaction.

80% of 2014 survey respondents are satisfied with their role as a CFA volunteer and 87% intend to continue their membership. The overwhelming reasons for being a CFA volunteer are “to help protect the community I live in” or “a sense of fulfilment in supporting my community in a meaningful way” (total 94%).

Only 59% of volunteers are satisfied with the way they are treated by CFA, this comparatively low satisfaction score suggests that the greatest potential impact on future volunteer welfare and efficiency sits with CFA in the success or otherwise of their partnerships with volunteer brigades.

## Survey results across all statements by gap







---

VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

9/24 Lakeside Drive Burwood East Vic 3151  
Tel: 03 9886 1141 | Fax: 03 9886 1618

P O Box 453 Mt Waverley Vic 3149  
email: [vfbv@vfbv.com.au](mailto:vfbv@vfbv.com.au) | website [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au)