



EXTERNAL REVIEW OF CULTURE AND ISSUES MANAGEMENT TO SUPPORT THE CFA OF THE FUTURE

DISCUSSION PAPER

OCTOBER 2021





The original artwork in our Acknowledgement of Country was produced by
Emma Walke.
Emma is a Bundjalung Aboriginal woman from northern NSW.



Quality
ISO 9001

Allen + Clarke has
been independently
certified as compliant
with ISO9001:2015
Quality Management
Systems

1. INTRODUCTION



Background

An independent Review Team from *Allen + Clarke*, which includes Dr Helen Szoke AO as Lead Reviewer, has been engaged by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to undertake a review of culture and issues management to support the CFA of the future (the Review).

The Review will seek to ensure that the CFA:

- has a robust and effective approach to issues management across a complex volunteer-based organisation
- sets and embeds behavioural and cultural expectations at all levels of the organisation
- efficiently and effectively manages issues when they do arise and supports members and leaders to work these issues through.

The Review will consider structural and systemic issues and improvements. It will not investigate individual reports of misconduct.

The final report and recommendations will be made available to the membership and employees of the CFA.

The Review Team will:

1

Consider the CFA's:

- Culture
- Management of issues relating to diversity, harassment, discrimination, and bullying
- Organisational approach to promoting diversity
- Systems and processes to prevent harassment, discrimination and bullying

2

Identify any opportunities to improve and address any barriers to improvement in these areas

3

Consider and recommend measures as appropriate

Sources that will inform the Review



Establishing the Baseline:

- Desktop review of current policies, procedures and climate surveys
- 20 meetings with key stakeholders



Understanding best practice:

- Review of Australian comparator organisations
- Review of international comparator organisations
- 120 stakeholder interviews with CFA leaders, members and other stakeholders
- 24 focus groups with CFA leaders, members and other stakeholders
- Identifying practices that best suit the CFA context



Developing and testing recommendations

- 20 roundtables with CFA leaders, members and other stakeholders
- 20 interviews with CFA leaders, members and other stakeholders

Purpose of this Discussion Paper

This Discussion Paper builds upon and is informed by the valuable feedback already provided to the Review Team during initial consultation and a high-level desktop review of the CFA's policies, procedures and other relevant documents. The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to provide the framing for the next stage of stakeholder consultation.

Stakeholder Consultation is central to the Review



Consultation with CFA members - both volunteer and paid - is central to the Review and the Review Team will listen to the experiences of CFA members to help shape recommendations for the CFA of the future.

The Review Team will invite participants to identify opportunities for, and barriers to, cultural improvement and issues resolution within the CFA.

The Review Team encourages participants to share their experiences, both positive and negative.

2. HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THE REVIEW



Consultation with CFA volunteers, employees, secondees and other stakeholders across the regions is a key part of the Review. Between October and December 2021 the Review Team will consult with participants through interviews, focus groups and meetings, preferably face to face but potentially via telephone, or online. Where consultations are held face-to-face, the Review Team will comply with the relevant public health directives to help contain the spread of COVID-19. Interviews will be between 30-60 minutes. During consultations, the Review Team will ask a series of questions and invite participants to share their views and experiences. A sample of the sorts of questions the Review Team will ask appears in part 5 of this Discussion Paper.

How will your input be used?

Information you provide during consultations will be analysed, summarised and grouped by theme to inform the development of recommendations for the CFA of the future. An audio recording of consultations may be made with your consent for internal use to ensure the accuracy of the Review Team's notes and assist with analysis. Consultations may be transcribed before being de-identified. Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. The information you provide may be used in the final published report, but you will not be identified. Your name or the names of other participants will not be published in the final report. CFA members may have been involved in previous reviews. This Review is independent of other reviews.

Your safety and wellbeing during the consultation process

Participating in this consultation may trigger personal experiences or raise distressing subject matter. For this reason, we ask that you familiarise yourself with the following information and expectations, designed to protect your safety and wellbeing during the consultation process.

- You are welcome to leave the consultation at any time, without judgement, if you need to take a break or access support or if you want to stop participating. A list of free, confidential 24/7 specialist support services is provided below.
- To protect your confidentiality, during group consultations or focus groups, avoid disclosing specific cases of harassment, discrimination and bullying, including naming any individuals affected.
- If identifying disclosures are made inadvertently during the consultation, we ask that all participants treat these with the utmost confidentiality.
- The Review Team may have an obligation to report concerns to the CFA and/or the relevant authorities or relevant health authorities for example if someone's safety or wellbeing is at risk, or as otherwise appropriate. However, unless required by law or for the safety of an individual, individuals will not be named without their permission.

How to report instances of harassment, discrimination and bullying

The Review Team encourages people who wish to make disclosures or complaints about harassment, discrimination or bullying at the CFA to consider accessing support and making a report or complaint.

A list of CFA and external support services appears below.

CFA members can report harassment, discrimination or bullying via the following formal channels:

- to their line manager and/or Human Resources Department.
- to the police (in the case of criminal behaviour). Details of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams can be found at police.vic.gov.au or a call can be made to triple zero.

Depending on the type of misconduct involved, reports may also be made to appropriate external tribunals, agencies or regulators, such as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Australian Human Rights Commission, WorkSafe Victoria or the Fair Work Commission.

The Review Team cannot investigate nor make findings about individual allegations made during this Review.

Support services available

Specialist support services for those impacted by bullying, harassment and abuse:

CFA wellbeing Support Line: Phone: 1800 959 232 (free call)

CFA Member Assistance Program/ Peer Support Program/ Chaplaincy Support Program: Phone: 1800 959 232 (follow the prompts to reach the appropriate support service)

Member Wellbeing Advisors: Phone: (03) 9262 8939, wellbeing@cfa.vic.gov.au

1800RESPECT (National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling, Information and Support Service), open 24/7, free service

Phone: 1800 737 732, website: www.1800respect.org.au

No To Violence (for men concerned about their own behaviour), open 24/7 free, live web chat options

Phone: 1300 766 491, website: <https://ntv.org.au/get-help/>

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) or the **Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)** to make a formal complaint about unlawful discrimination, sexual harassment or victimisation and/or anonymously find out more about your rights and legal options.

Contact for VEOHRC: Phone: 1300 292 153, email: enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au; Contact for AHRC: Phone: 1300 369 711, email: infoservice@humanrights.gov.au

Lifeline provides 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services

Phone: 13 11 44, website: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Sexual Assault Crisis Line (crisis response phoneline for people who have experienced sexual violence), after-hours telephone crisis counselling support, information, advocacy and referral to anyone living in Victoria.

Phone: 1800 806 292 (free call), website: <https://www.sacl.com.au>

Further information or questions

Questions or concerns about the Review can be directed to:

CFAReview@allenandclarke.com.au.

THE JOURNEY TO SUPPORT THE CFA OF THE FUTURE

THE CFA'S INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT POSITIVE CHANGE

- Diversity, Inclusion and Fairness initiatives
- Women's Advisory Committee
- Youth Advisory Committee
- Support for leadership at all levels
- Development of behavioural standards and guidelines for complaints management
- Expansion of mediation services
- Aboriginal Engagement Guidelines and a Koori Engagement Plan
- Resources to support people experiencing family violence
- Allies of Inclusion Network and CFA Pride
- Disability Action Plan and Disability Confidence Training
- Support for multicultural groups
- Case tracking system for complaints
- Wellbeing education

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US ABOUT THE CURRENT CFA

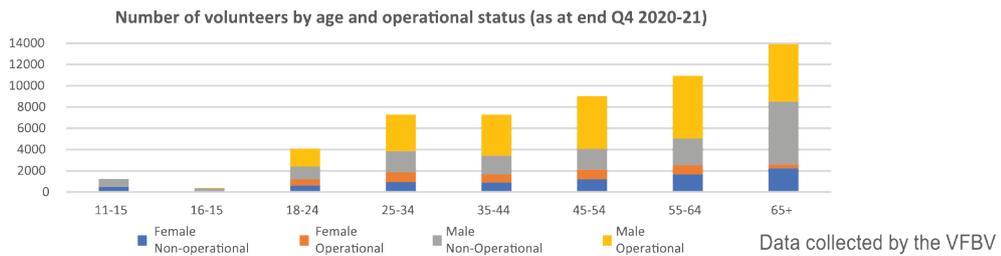
Women represent:

23% of CFA's volunteer membership	15% of CFA's operational volunteers	60% of CFA's permanent staff	6.4% of Leadership roles from Captain to 1st-4th Lieutenants
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In the Volunteer Exit Survey (July – December 2020)

harassment and bullying and the culture

of the brigade were identified as *two of the top five* reasons for volunteers leaving the CFA.



The People Matter Survey is an annual employee opinion survey run by the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC) for public sector organisations. **577 CFA** employees completed the survey.

	6% Identify with having a disability	5% Identify as LGBTIQ+	1% Identify as non-binary genders	1% Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	9% Speak a language other than English at home						
	24% have experienced bullying in the last 12 months.	8% have experienced sexual harassment in the last 12 months.	 Place of birth (in percentage) <table border="1"> <tr> <td>79</td> <td>13</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Australia</td> <td>Overseas</td> <td>Prefer not to say</td> </tr> </table>			79	13	8	Australia	Overseas	Prefer not to say
79	13	8									
Australia	Overseas	Prefer not to say									
	9% have experienced discrimination in the last 12 months.	10% reported that they had experienced workplace violence and/or aggression in the last 12 months.									

35% of respondents reported that they were experiencing **high, very high or severe levels of work-related stress** at the time of the People Matter Survey (June 2021)

3. A HIGH-LEVEL OVERVIEW OF THE CFA'S APPROACHES TO CULTURE AND ISSUES MANAGEMENT



This is a Review which is forward looking, drawing on the lessons learnt, and changes and improvements made across the CFA.

Victoria is one of the most fire-prone regions in the world and in recent years, the CFA and its members have come together as communities and fought and endured extreme fire conditions. The Review recognises the unitary purpose in protecting communities across Victoria and also that the nature of the work of CFA members as firefighters means that they may have been repeatedly exposed to trauma and its aftermath.

The Review recognises that the CFA and its organisational culture have undergone a period of significant change and that the CFA is currently operating within the context of a ten-year reform agenda for fire services in Victoria.

The Review will seek to build on the CFA's core strengths of fire safety, professional standards for fire-fighting, community connectedness and volunteering and will seek to highlight the importance of a positive, supportive and inclusive culture that is focused on increasing diversity, flexibility and inclusiveness to support the CFA of the future.

This Review is one of many initiatives that the CFA has implemented to support positive change. These include for example:

 INITIATIVES THAT THE CFA HAS IMPLEMENTED TO SUPPORT POSITIVE CHANGE		
<p>The development of an Inclusion and Fairness Framework and an Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2021-2025 and the development of an Allies of Inclusion Network</p>	<p>The creation of a CFA Women's Advisory Committee and a CFA Youth Advisory Committee to advise the CEO and the Chief Officer directly on systemic matters and issues which need to be addressed to support diversity and inclusion</p>	<p>A review of support to Brigade Management Teams to ensure that there is a clear understanding of CFA expectations for volunteer leaders in addressing behavioural matters and the help available to them to assist when matters arise</p>
<p>Expansion of mediation services across the State to support early intervention of issues</p>	<p>The development of behavioural standards and improved interim guidelines for the management of complaints</p>	<p>A Disability Action Plan (which is in the process of being updated) and Disability confidence training</p>
<p>Provision of more prominent and visible information on where CFA members can raise issues of concern, both internally and externally</p>	<p>Introduction of Family Violence resources including paid leave, family violence contact officers, training and resources for people affected by family violence and their managers¹</p>	<p>Delivery of tailored programs to multicultural groups through local brigades; and work to educate CFA members on understanding different faiths²</p>
<p>CFA Pride, a support network for CFA's LGBTIQ+ firefighters which received the 2017 Volunteering Victoria State Award for Inclusion³</p>	<p>An increase of investment in leadership development (including volunteer leaders)</p>	<p>Aboriginal Engagement Guidelines and a Koori Engagement Action Plan (which is in the process of being updated)</p>
<p>An independent review of training at the CFA⁴</p>	<p>Availability of wellbeing education and training and Matter of Respect training</p>	<p>A case tracking system for complaints, guidelines to promote a trauma-informed approach to the participation of children in the hearing process and the engagement of Kooyoora to focus on child related complaint processes</p>
<p>Identification of additional support to organisational leaders at all levels to ensure that there is a clear understanding of CFA expectations for staff leaders in proactively addressing behavioural matters and the help available to them to assist when matters arise</p>	<p>Regional and district training and leadership programs aimed at supporting women, including an annual event for women to learn burn off skills, and a Women's Challenge camp, which includes leadership development and physical activity⁵</p>	<p>A Diversity and Inclusion data collection process; an Inclusion and Fairness business rule to provide guidance in relation to enabling inclusive, safe and equitable work practices, Inclusion Advisory Councils and the appointment of Inclusion and Fairness Coordinators across the regions as well as regional and state Inclusion and Fairness Councils.</p>

Notwithstanding, we are told that there continue to be systemic and procedural issues and gaps relating to diversity, harassment, discrimination and bullying at the CFA.⁶ There are industrial agreements in place which have also been raised as features of the challenges and opportunities for the CFA.

A high level overview of some of these barriers is outlined below to inform consultation. These issues and solutions to overcoming them will be further explored during the course of the Review.

¹ AFAC. (2019) Male Champions of Change Fire and Emergency: Impact Report 2018-19. Retrieved from: <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Fire-Emergency-Impact-Report-2019.pdf>

² CFA Annual Report 17-18, p.21.

³ CFA Annual Report 2016-17, p.37.

⁴ Fire Services Implementation Monitor. (2021) 2020-21 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report Quarter 4. Retrieved from: https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2020-21%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%204_1.docx

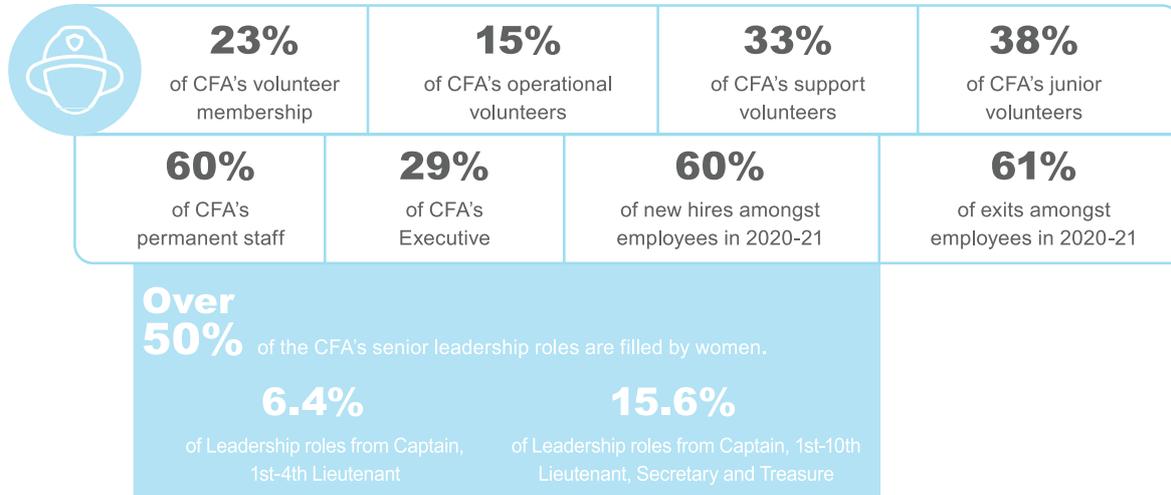
⁵ 2020-21 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report Quarter 4, above at 4.

⁶ The issues outlined below have been drawn from the initial consultation period as well as a desktop review of the CFA's policies, procedures and other relevant documents.

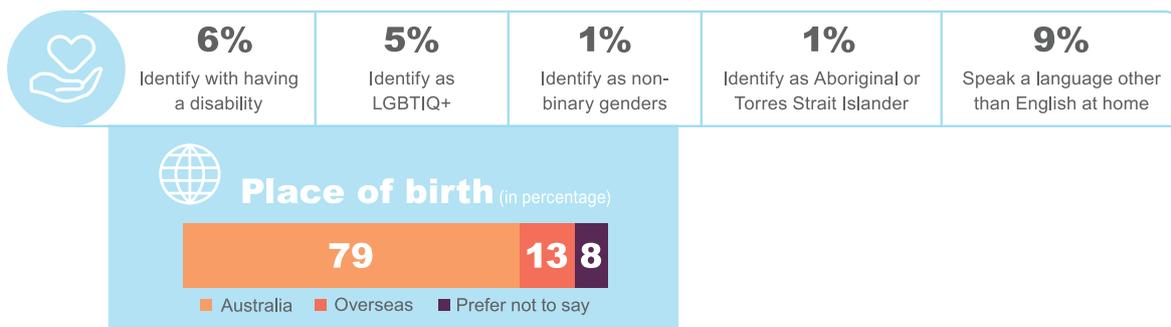
Diversity

The CFA's ability to connect with, attract and retain a diversity of members is a recognised challenge.⁷ Of 136 volunteers who completed an exit survey between July and December 2020, 23% were unsatisfied with the level of diversity in their brigade. The CFA has recognised that whilst some brigades seek out, recruit and make significant investment in retaining diverse volunteers, other brigades do not recognise the need to focus on inclusion and diversity.⁸

Women represent:⁹



Of 577 employees who responded to the People Matters Survey:¹⁰



Further, at least 70 per cent of CFA's volunteers are over the age of 40.¹¹

⁷ CFA Volunteerism Strategy 2015-2020.

⁸ Draft Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

⁹ CFA. (2021) CFA at a Glance. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/cfa-at-a-glance>; Statistics provided by the CFA; 2020-21 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report Quarter 4, p.7.

¹⁰ The People Matter survey is an annual employee opinion survey run by the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC) for public sector organisations. Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey.

¹¹ 2020-21 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report Quarter 4, p.7, above at 4.

Bullying, discrimination, harassment and stress

A high-level desktop review and preliminary stakeholder consultation identifies a range of concerns about workplace culture, misconduct, stress and unmet expectations suggesting that there is scope for further improvement on these matters. Key concerns are summarised below.

Volunteer concerns

Of 136 volunteers who completed an exit survey between July and December 2020, harassment and bullying and the culture of the brigade were identified as two of the top five reasons for volunteers leaving the CFA. The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey¹² found that volunteers thought there was a large gap between what the CFA was doing to actively discourage workplace bullying and CFA volunteers' expectations about what should be done.

The gap between volunteer expectations and organisational performance has recently been determined by the Fire Services Implementation Monitor to be at critical levels.¹³

Employee concerns

The 2021 People Matters survey showed that 71% of CFA respondents felt they were treated with respect in the workplace and community, and 73% of those who witnessed negative behaviours spoke to the person who experienced the behaviour. However, there is scope for improvement to ensure that the CFA creates a positive workplace free from discrimination, bullying and harassment.

Almost a quarter of employees who responded to the 2021 People Matters Survey indicated that they had experienced bullying in the last 12 months; 8% of employees indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment; 9% of employees had experienced discrimination in the last 12 months and 10% of employees reported that they had experienced workplace violence and/or aggression in the last 12 months. While the continuation of this behaviour is deeply problematic and concerning, there do appear to be marginal improvements in relation to previous years.

The People Matters survey also revealed that:

- 35% of CFA respondents were experiencing high, very high or severe levels of work-related stress
- the main causes of stress for CFA respondents were workload (49%); time pressure (32%); organisation or workplace change (28%) and job security (19%). 22% of respondents reported that they intended to leave the CFA, with 52% indicating that their reason for leaving was a lack of confidence in senior leadership.

¹² Conducted between November 2020 – January 2021

¹³ 2020-21 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report Quarter 4, p.7, above at 4.

Systems, Processes and Training

The recent introduction of the Behavioural Standards demonstrate that the CFA is investing in efforts to foster a safe, respectful and inclusive workplace for CFA Members, Officers and Contractors.

However, there appear to remain barriers to disclosures and reporting of complaints and grievances as well as delays in resolution.

The process for investigating and conducting hearings into allegations of workplace misconduct should protect the wellbeing of those involved and ensure that participants in the process are supported with due process and procedural fairness.¹⁴ However, a substantial number of employees have expressed a lack of confidence in the investigation process and fear of reprisals for complaints made.¹⁵ Volunteers have reported issues relating to timeliness, support and feedback throughout the Complaints process.¹⁶

Some employees have also identified concerns about accessing professional development and training. The 2021 People Matters survey showed a decline in how well employees felt they can learn and grow at the CFA. The Review Team has also been informed about barriers to women attending training which, in turn, impedes their career development.

¹⁴ VFBV. (2021) VFBV Quarterly Supplement. Retrieved from: http://vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202106-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_June2021-web.pdf

¹⁵ In the 2021 People Matters Survey only 28% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I am confident that if I raised a grievance in my organisation, it would be investigated in a thorough and objective manner', and only 44% of respondents reported being confident that they would be protected from reprisal for reporting improper conduct.

¹⁶ VBFV Quarterly Supplement, above at 14.

4. LEARNINGS FROM OTHER APPROACHES TO CULTURE AND ISSUES MANAGEMENT

There have been many reviews undertaken into workplace culture and issues management across a range of organisations and sectors. These reviews have recognised that a diverse and inclusive workplace is linked to a number of benefits not just for individuals, but for organisations and the broader community as well.

The reviews identify a range of factors and practices that help prevent disrespectful workplace behaviour and build and maintain safe, diverse and inclusive workplaces, including for example:

- strong and courageous leadership to drive reform
- the provision of support services to members including counselling, wellbeing support or other forms of support which is consistent with the adoption of a victim-centred approach
- structured recruitment and retention processes, including targeted recruitment of people from diverse backgrounds
- clear policies, guidelines, procedures and frameworks (with clear delineation of roles and responsibilities) aimed at supporting diversity; preventing bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation; and providing appropriate mechanisms to make disclosures and raise and resolve complaints
- formal and informal professional development and training opportunities for all members of the workforce, to support professionalism, and ensure a clear understanding of expected standards of behaviour and processes for raising concerns
- recommendations in relation to updates that might be required to legislation, regulations, policies, procedures or other documents to support an inclusive culture
- supporting local managers and supervisors to ensure workplace safety and welfare
- addressing barriers to reporting and disclosure, including by ensuring that complaints and resolution processes are timely, victim-centred and trauma-informed and provide options for anonymous reporting
- ongoing data collection and reporting to leadership on key complaint statistics, and diversity and workplace culture metrics, as well as monitoring and evaluation to support continuous improvement and best practice.

5. QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

Consultation questions will relate to the following themes and may cover the following questions:

Current CFA culture

- what constitutes a safe and diverse workplace and to what extent the CFA is achieving that aim
- positive and negative experiences of CFA culture including what is and isn't working well, what members like most and least about being part of the CFA
- actions taken by the CFA to promote diversity, and prevent harassment, discrimination, and bullying
- prevalence of harassment, discrimination, and bullying by CFA members
- the impact on culture of a workplace that includes volunteers, employees and secondees and operates within a command-and-control structure.

The role of CFA leadership in embedding behavioural and cultural expectations and creating an inclusive organisation

- the extent of visible leadership and gender and diversity representation in CFA leadership roles
- management responses to reported instances of harassment, discrimination, or bullying and any variation between locations/brigades
- bystander awareness and intervention.

Current CFA systems and processes for managing disclosures and complaints relating to diversity, harassment, discrimination and bullying

- reporting structures and support systems and the degree to which they are clear, culturally appropriate, inclusive, and accessible in regional, remote, and rural locations
- clarity and accessibility of relevant policies and procedures
- timeliness of finalisation/resolution of reported matters, and communication of outcomes.

Preventing harassment, discrimination and bullying

- training
- communities of practice and opportunities for sharing between Brigades
- the role of leadership.

Barriers to improvement

- structural, legislative, cultural or other barriers
- patterns of perpetrator behaviour and treatment of inappropriate behaviour by 'high value' individuals
- any recriminations for complainants who have reported harassment, discrimination, or bullying.

Recommendations for improvement

- opportunities to address concerns, gaps or issues.