

VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



Welcome to the March edition of the quarterly VFBV feature supplement. The supplement includes relevant news, updates and information on current issues being pursued by VFBV on behalf of members.

VFBV is your association, so please stay connected, respond to feedback requests and get involved.

Adam Barnett

CEO, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

Additional Resources and Updates Available Electronically

Feedback: Revised Radio Allocation Policy	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup37
Feedback: Draft CFA Alcohol & Other Drugs Policy	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup38

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

This month's enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. Board Positions – invitation to apply	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
2. Editorial: The promise of a new year	Please table and note
3. Editorial: From the ashes	Please table and note
4. Joint Committee Changes	Please table and note
5. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee's)	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
6. 2023 State Championships	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard

Board Positions

INVITATION TO APPLY

CFA Volunteers are invited to apply for upcoming Board positions.

VFBV Board

Vacancies for four board members will arise when the terms of four VFBV Board members expire on 1st October 2023. Of the four members whose terms are expiring, two are eligible for re-appointment.

Terms on the VFBV Board are for two years, and these are honorary positions with no honorarium paid.

CFA Board

The CFA Act recognises that it is important that the CFA Board has strong volunteer expertise, knowledge and an understanding of CFA volunteers. To support this, four of the skills based CFA Board members are appointed by the Minister for Emergency Services from a panel of names submitted by VFBV.

This year, the terms of two volunteer nominees will expire in December 2023, with both members eligible for re-appointment. One is for a volunteer from brigades predominantly serving rural communities, and the other being for a volunteer from brigades predominantly serving urban communities.

VFBV is seeking applications from gender and culturally diverse candidates, in addition to a diverse range of skills and experience including applicants from a broad range of brigade type and classifications.

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





EDITORIAL

THE PROMISE OF A NEW YEAR

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' January 2023 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

It was American columnist Bill Vaughan who quipped "An optimist stays up until midnight to see the new year in. A pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves." Which were you this year?

Reflecting on the year just gone, I share a great sense of hope and optimism for the year ahead. We have made some great progress in recent times, and efforts that have been in train for a while now should hopefully start producing some results throughout 2023.

Shortly, I am hoping the draft five-year implementation plan to address the recommendations made by CFA's culture and issues management review will be ready for wider consultation and review by volunteers. I have been very pleased to see the early efforts made internally within CFA to build a set of draft actions that seek to address the various findings.

CFA has committed to undertaking broad consultation on the draft plan and I am looking forward to those continuing discussions. The proof of course will be tangible outcomes and progress that can be felt at all levels of the organisation. Actions range across culture reform, improved diversity and inclusion programs, embedding the behavioural standards, improved conflict management and disciplinary processes, improved consultation and respect for the Volunteer Charter, new processes to help brigades and groups quantify what support they need, improved induction for new volunteers and staff and fairer and more transparent access to training, endorsements and appeals processes.

VFBV has challenged CFA to articulate and quantify how the various actions will result in an improvement, and how each will be felt, heard and seen by individual members in order for the results and progress to be judged against. Too often in the past, actions from various reports have just been paid lip service or wrapped in corporate speak which has not resulted in any definable or quantifiable improvements. We hope to change this, and I have been very pleased to observe the level of support within the CFA executive to bolster actions.

Similarly, our new Joint Committee processes kick in this year, with refined terms of reference for the eight CFA/VFBV Joint Committees and a renewed commitment by the CFA CEO and Chief Officer to strengthen these critical consultative mechanisms. The new commitments include a renewed focus on genuine engagement, transparency and accounta-

bility with new mechanisms to provide oversight and escalation where necessary. State Council has also agreed to refined processes to improve collaboration across the committees and greater use of short-term working parties to progress specific issues that may require the input of one or more committees.



Natalie, Jason and myself have each worked personally to reinvigorate the Joint Committee processes and agree to the overarching governance arrangements to ensure they are setup for success and taken seriously.

We have worked together to find common ground and a structure that isn't overly bureaucratic but yet still provides appropriate checks and balances.

I am hopeful that this high level of commitment and leadership sends a powerful message that we are serious about using the committees to genuinely work together and solve problems, making CFA a terrific place to volunteer and work. In the spirit of the mutual respect laid down by the volunteer charter, our committee structures don't rely on us always agreeing, but rather provides a formal mechanism for each of our organisations to know exactly where the other stands on a particular issue leading to a better understanding of what we are each trying to address.

Regular readers would be aware that I don't place my trust or optimism lightly, but you should draw confidence from recent actions that demonstrate that CFA is becoming more responsive.

Members would note that following broad consultation with VFBV and drawing on the work we did with Brigade Captains across the state, CFA and other volunteer emergency services (CFA, SES and LSV) recently relaxed its vaccination mandates, aligning themselves with community settings. CFA should be commended on listening to the feedback and responding appropriately.

Similarly, just before Christmas I was pleasantly surprised to receive a detailed response to the VFBV feedback we provided on SOP 5.04 on hose testing. While a lot of effort goes into providing, analysing and consolidating the results of volunteer feedback, sadly it has not always been routine to get

a detailed response and learn how the feedback has been considered.

To the credit of the Fire Equipment Maintenance (FEM) team, most of the feedback has been taken on board and incorporated into a new revised SOP which is now going through its approval processes with the Chief. This includes improvements to better clarify PPC requirements, incorporating the use of hose test trailers into the SOP, aligning test pressures with brigade capability rather than a generic brigade classification, and modifying the existing requirement to test all hose after each use with a more common-sense inspection process to determine after use servicing and testing requirements based on how the hose was actually used.

And while consultation takes time, the provision of suitable time to conduct broad field consultation and discuss the issues with brigades and groups has led to a much-improved piece of doctrine, which is now vastly more intuitive and user friendly and far more likely to achieve the improved safety outcomes that were sought. The FEM team should be congratulated for their approach, and I thank them most sincerely for the collaborative and respectful manner they have conducted their review.

Presumptive Legislation

In further welcome news, on the 15th December amendments to the Commonwealth Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Prescribed Cancers) regulations received royal assent by the Governor General. This amendment added a further eight new cancers to the Commonwealth's firefighter presumptive (cancer) legislation. The new cancers added are lung, skin, cervical, ovarian, penile, pancreatic and thyroid cancers as well as malignant mesothelioma. The new cancers include the addition of specific female reproductive cancers, taking the total number of cancers covered by the federal scheme from 12 to 20.

While this does not directly affect Victorian firefighters just yet, it adds much needed impetus for the Victorian scheme to be updated.

Members would recall that independent MP Tania Maxwell (and fellow CFA volunteer) introduced a private members bill last year seeking to include three female reproductive cancers. While the bill was opposed by both the Government and the opposition, Minister Symes (Emergency Services Minister) did commit to further work to pursue their inclusion.

Since that time, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) conducted its review of available scientific literature and determined that the cancer risk for firefighters should be reclassified as group 1, acknowledging that the work performed by firefighters is carcinogenic to humans.

This, along with the amendments made to the Federal scheme, should now provide the Victorian government all the evidence it needs to update the Victorian scheme to ensure our firefighters receive the same protection as their federal counterparts. I have recently re-written to the Minister seeking her support.

I have also sent my thanks on behalf of Victorian volunteer firefighters to Australian Senator David Pocock who negotiated the amendments to the Commonwealth presumptive legislation scheme as part of the negotiations over the Australian Government's recent IR law changes, noting it will significantly assist our advocacy for the additional cancers to be

added to the Victorian scheme.

Senator Pocock is the independent Senator for the Australian Capital Territory and has been a staunch ally of volunteer firefighters, fighting to have ACT volunteer firefighters recognised by the Commonwealth legislation, just as Victorian volunteer firefighters are under the Victorian scheme. He has worked closely with our friends from the ACT Volunteer Brigades Association, whom we work closely with through our national body - Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA).

While this likely has some way to go here in Victoria, these are important milestones that will assist our continued advocacy and I will keep you updated on progress. While we hope no-one ever has to use these protections, the reality is when they are needed – they provide an enormous peace of mind for the individual and their families allowing them to concentrate on their treatment and wellbeing during what is often a fight for their life. It's not a hand out, and simply provides firefighters with the same entitlements that other workers are entitled to when they are injured in their workplaces. For volunteer firefighters especially, who often don't have any sick leave or paid leave to draw upon – these protections are crucial.

Survey

And a final reminder that our annual volunteer survey will be closing shortly. The survey has been open since the 27th October and if you have not yet completed it – time is running out.

I have yet to meet a volunteer who does not have an opinion on how well or how poor things are going within CFA, so I urge you to please contribute so that you can help us make a difference.

Please don't just leave it for others to comment. Every response adds credible weight to the results and improves our ability to use the results to effect real change.

CFA is using the results, and many of the indicators directly influence CFA programs and priorities, including funding bids for initiatives that seek to address the problems raised.

The survey asks for your opinion on most aspects of your CFA experience. From training, consultation, people management, support from and cooperation across CFA, culture, how well volunteers are respected and how you feel about the future.

We take your privacy seriously with all your answers being confidential, and we never share your personal details with anyone including CFA. All results are deidentified, yet every comment and every response are analysed to understand what is working well and what isn't.

FIRE SEASON

As predicted, the later than usual fire season commenced, with the first total fire ban days declared over the new year. Thank-you to all members who attended incidents over the Christmas and New Year periods.

While there is never a good time, the sacrifices made by members to attend to emergencies during what are among the most treasured family times is greatly appreciated and respected. Welcome to 2023 and thank-you for all you do. Stay safe.



FROM THE ASHES

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' February 2023 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

There is a quote attributed to 'The Second Ash Wednesday' by Bardsley, Fraser and Heathcote that says 'the lesson of experience is that we do not learn from experience.' There is a more poetic version used by University of Wollongong academics Eriksen and Head that describe the 'repetitive rhythm in its findings' to describe Australian bushfire research, reviews and the topics that arise following major bushfires in Australia.

I don't use these quotes to suggest that we have learned nothing from previous fires, in fact the contrary would be true. And fire services in particular have often led the charge. But how about the wider emergency management sector and instrumentalities including local government?

I pose the question of whether we have maximised the learnings of these disasters using the benefit of time and hindsight long after the public focus fades from memory? Have we really done enough to embed these learnings into today's context, especially given the very high price we have paid in terms of the loss of precious life from many of these disasters.

In the forward of 'Ash Wednesday in Upper Beaconsfield' published nine years after Ash Wednesday in 1992, Ian Symons AFSM, who was at that time a CFA Chief Superintendent and OIC of the then Region 8 writes; "This book provides a picture of what did happen almost ten years ago and how today's community grew out of the ashes. It also provides a stark warning of what could happen again if we forget the lessons of the past." Ian, who continues to be a committed CFA volunteer today, rounds out his foreword with the following sage advice: "I hope that those who read it will be motivated to take whatever preventative measures and actions they can to help avoid such devastation and community disruption from occurring again."

This month will mark 40 years since the Ash Wednesday fires of the 16th February 1983.

For a quarter of a decade, these fires were the deadliest bushfires in Australian history until the Black Saturday fires of 2009. Across Victoria and South Australia, a total of 75 people died, including 14 CFA volunteers and 3 CFS volunteers.

The lead up to Ash Wednesday depicts the perilous state of affairs that preceded that fateful day. Victoria was in drought. Rainfall was low, and summer rainfall in particular was down 75% from previous years.

The Victorian bushfire season commenced in November 1982, and the earliest total fire ban day ever declared at the time, was made on the 24 November 1982. There were to be 22 total fire bans declared during the 1982/83 fire season.

Large fires burned from 3 December to 1 February 1983 affecting Ballan, Cann River, Mount Donna Buang, and Mount Macedon.

On the 9th February 1983 strong wind gusts lifted over 200,000 tonnes of soil and dirt into the air and mixed it with the smoke from the fires to create a vast dust storm that blanketed southern Australia.

By early morning on Ash Wednesday, 104 fires were already burning across Victoria with many of those controlled by 2pm. A hot dry northerly pushed temperatures into the 40s and humidity levels dropped below 15% creating a tinderbox of fine fuels across the State.

By 3pm a cold front hit South Australia with a change of wind direction and winds of up to 100km per hour that then travelled towards Victoria reaching the Victorian fire fronts in the late afternoon and early evening. The wind change caused fires to merge and caused the long flank sides of many of the running fires to become the front, with the wind fanning extreme conditions. Most of the losses of life occurred in the hour following the wind change.

CFA attended 180 different fires throughout the State on that day, eight of which were considered of major proportions affecting Cudgee/Ballangeich; East Trentham/ Mount Macedon; Otway ranges; Belgrave Heights/ Beaconsfield Upper; Cockatoo; Monivae; Branhholme; and Warburton.

In addition to the fatalities, the statistics of that fire season are confronting. On Ash Wednesday alone, 2,080 homes were destroyed or damaged; 32,750 head of stock were lost; 8,000 kilometres of fencing were burnt, and 200,000 hectares were burnt. When accounting for all fires over the

606,000 hectares (including 486,000ha of parks and forests) were burnt. For comparison the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recorded 173 fatalities and 430,000 hectares burnt.

From Ash Wednesday came many improvements to the fire services. Refined 'Red flag' warnings and the intricate processes to ensure all crew members are advised of changing conditions is one example. Another example arose from CFA highlighting the problems arising when police refused access to CFA volunteers and CFA tankers into the fire areas on the grounds that the conditions were too dangerous. This highlighted that police had taken on a controlling role under DISPLAN rather than a coordinating one, and had unilaterally overridden the statutory powers of the CFA Chief Officer and impacted fire suppression. This was rectified with haste ensuring all agencies understood that CFA has by law unfettered access to all fire areas under direction of the Chief Officer.

The lack of a dedicated fire prevention department within CFA was also highlighted, which resulted in the commissioning of comm safety and fire prevention officers within CFA and what we know today as the community preparedness directorate to lead public education and safety messages.

As too were improvements in heat shielding and ensuring all tankers were fitted with heat shields to protect crews. The vapourisation of fuels that inflicted CFA tankers highlighted the need to transition to diesel fuels which had much higher flashpoints.

One only needs to look at the pictures of Ash Wednesday to observe the standard of personal protective clothing in use at the time. To quote the bushfire review committee "Adequate protective clothing is needed for all firefighters and should include helmet, overalls, gloves, boots and suitable eye protection."

And training was identified as a major issue, with the committee recommending the need for wider use of survival training for individual firefighters. One only needs to review CFA's current recruit training and annual burn over drill requirements to see the genesis of these modern-days safety improvements. So, what are some of the things that might be worth revisiting?

The Ash Wednesday fires bought to light the perilous state of municipal disaster plans. The report into the bushfires found that only 41 out of the 211 municipalities were reported as having disaster plans.

Given that the requirement to have regional and municipal fire prevention committees was excised from the CFA Act in 2018 and replaced with broader 'emergency management plans' under EMV - how confident are we these plans are actually an improvement and are adequately setting in motion the required annual works to mitigate and treat bushfire risks on public and private property?

The actual recommendation from the bushfires review was "Local authorities must heed the advice of Regional and Local Advisory Committees concerning fire hazard control and take action accordingly; if necessary, local authorities should be placed under stronger mandatory requirements." And "Some municipal fire prevention plans are below the required standard because of inappropriate proper officers, or

no proper officers at all. Proper officers should be replaced by full-time Fire Prevention Officers with independent powers."

And then there are these two recommendations: "Responsibility for roadside fire prevention measures must be clearly defined, and implemented accordingly." Followed by "Local government legislation should be amended so that conservation interests cannot overbear sensible fire prevention and protection measures."

Forty years on – how do we think progress on those last two recommendations would be judged? The same difficulties of planned and fuel reduction burning that we are reporting today echoes throughout the bushfire review committees final report. The report also articulates the value of the CFA model and is worth quoting in full.

"The intricacy and breadth of activity involved in preparedness and response at local community level underlines the value and indispensable nature of the voluntary effort which is forthcoming from within the community itself. This is particularly so in the case of CFA but the contribution made by other community-related organisations (such as local SES units, Red Cross, Country Women's Association, Church bodies, WICEN, hospital auxiliaries) must not be overlooked. In a very real sense, therefore, the local community participation constitutes a resource without which successful counter-bushfire and other-disaster action cannot be achieved."

"A viable alternative to the current CFA system would, in the view of the Committee, be difficult, if not impossible, to find and would be prohibitively expensive. This local resource and contribution must be preserved. Moreover, it must be given all possible support and assistance to function effectively. Thus policy and organisational measures which are applied from regional and State Government level, must be designed to give proper weight to the CFA system."

How would current policy be judged against this wisdom paid for by the blood and sweat of the thousands of Victorian's involved in the 1983 bushfires?

To all those members who were involved in the Ash Wednesday Fires, and those of the 1982/83 bushfire season, we pause this month to remember and pay tribute to your sacrifice and tremendous efforts. On behalf of all volunteers I say thank-you.

To policy makers and those in positions of authority, please honour our fallen and the sacrifices of the living by heeding the wisdom and foresight of these past disasters and reviews so we are not doomed to repeat them.

I close this month's column with the words from the Spirit of CFA to honour all members who stand in defence of their communities.

Hailing from all walks of life, you are our fathers and mothers, our brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, our grandparents, neighbours and our friends. You help and protect us, without wanting or recognition of reward. In our time of need you are there. Your courage and compassion are inspiring, your loyalty unquestionable. You comfort us with a tender hand; you stand at the face of nature's beast and fight for our lives and our land. You are the essence of the true meaning of community. You epitomise the Australian spirit, the spirit of CFA.



SPECIAL NOTICE

Joint Committee Changes

In an effort to strengthen and improve our joint consultative arrangements, CFA and VFBV have revised our Joint Committee structures. As at the next edition, the seven existing committee's will transition to eight committee's:





VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

2 Minute Briefings March 2023

The 2 Minute Briefings are a quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

They are intended to update members on key issues that have recently been discussed. Effort is made to include any related items that may have been progressed out of session or through other avenues that are related to each committee's subject matter. Priority is given to topics where recent progress has been made. Topics where no progress has been made or where there are differences of opinion are sometimes included to ensure members are aware of VFBV efforts in continuing to advocate for progress or outcomes.

Joint Committees are formal committees between CFA and VFBV made up of VFBV delegates appointed by VFBV State Council, and CFA management representatives appointed by CFA. They are a critical loop in our consultative structures. They endeavour to work collaboratively and cooperatively on issues but may also be required to escalate issues where resolution or common ground cannot be found - requiring executive attention.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

MAPPING SYSTEMS

The committee is discussing the various mapping packages that are used within CFA. Each package has benefits and limitations, and therefore CFA does not believe it can standardise to only one product at this time. CFA's current position is members should use the package that they feel most comfortable using as long as the data can be exported in a format that is usable by CFA systems. The two most popular packages in use are Fire Mapper and Avenza. Fire Mapper is being trialled across the State by 20 Brigades and is used by Air Observers and Ground Intelligence Units. Avenza has good support for QR codes and reading Incident Action/Shift Plans. It also allows for using geo-referenced pdf documents offline however data synchronisation can be challenging. Other products in use include the VicMap Viewer – allowing the download of topographical maps onto smart phones, EM-COP and eMap Online Interactive found on the Members On Line (for planning). EMap log ins are now available to all CFA members by applying for a FireWeb log-in at <https://fireweb.ffm.vic.gov.au/Account/UserRegistration>

FIRS APP IMPROVEMENTS

Delegates have requested some improvements to the FIRS app that is currently available for brigades to enter their fire reports. The requests address concerns raised by volunteers over the increase to the number of questions required for inputting details into the FIRS App for a home Brigade report of a Structure Fire. Historically, when done over the phone - the FIRS call takers would skip over obvious questions not related to the call when talking directly to the Brigade saving time. However, the current App is not that intuitive and does not filter questions based on relevance to the details already entered. CFA has committed to investigating options and the Committee will track progress. The Committee has also suggested there should be some notes or prompts to assist Brigades submitting details, that would assist with data quality.

ALERT CONFERENCING SYSTEM

CFA has advised that some Brigades are using the Alert Conference line for more general teleconferencing purposes such as pre-summer preparedness. CFA has requested our assistance to ensure brigades are aware that the use of the Alert Conferencing System is an emergency redundancy for the EAS Paging system only and its use should be restricted to only those occasions where EAS is down. If brigades need access to a general teleconferencing line, these are available by contacting your Group, District or catchment officer for the number and details.

CONNECTED BRIGADES

The Committee continues to monitor the progress of the 'Connected Brigades' project. During the early phase of this project there were 115 Brigades that opted out and did not take up the offer to be part of the original project that seeks to improve internet access to brigade facilities. CFA has begun to re-contact those brigades to ensure they don't require assistance. The next phase of funding has now been finalised and under the new contract some LCF's particularly in Districts 22 and 23 will have their current inadequate connections upgraded.

TRIPLE ZERO MESSAGING

As part of the Committee's strategic outlook of future technology, work is underway on the ability for the public to use SMS on mobile phones to contact emergency services via Triple Zero. This functionality has the potential to provide much needed alternative pathways for people with speech difficulties/impairments, or for people in desperate situations such as siege, hostage or terrorist events. This work is being driven at the national level by the National Emergency Communications Working Group (NECWG-ANZ). We will provide updates as this work progresses.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

SCHOOLS IN FIRE COUNTRY

Earlier last year we reported on the development of the Schools in Fire Country program. Since then, further work has been completed, including the pilot program in conjunction with Harkaway Primary School. The pilot ran over three terms and was delivered to year 5 and 6 students. The program is designed to be delivered in the following three phases.

Phase 1: Discover – Students develop their knowledge and understanding of bushfire through learning about fire behaviour, fire ecology, Indigenous cultural burning as well as bushfire risk and hazards. Students also assess their local bushfire risks in their community and what can be done to reduce those risks.

Phase 2: Investigate – Students apply what they have learned to identify a specific problem in their community or local area. They will develop a possible solution to address that problem. This is done by students having conversations with subject matter experts and those who have a good understanding of the local area.

Phase 3: Take Action – Students continue to develop the solution they have identified and put it to the test before making further refinements to their solution. The program concludes with students presenting the problem they have identified and their solution to that problem to the wider school community.

Despite early nerves, the feedback provided by the participating students and those who were involved in the program delivery has been excellent. CFA is now working with other schools for the delivery of future programs.

To compliment the program an agency induction package is in production as well as a professional development package for school teachers. Further information will be provided to brigades on how this program can be used in schools in their local community and the benefit it will bring to students. As the Schools in Fire Country program is rolled out it will allow brigades to partner with local schools to be part of the delivery of this program. It will also allow brigade members to act as subject matter experts on how fire is likely to behave in their local area, the risks, and possible solutions to addressing those risks.

MOBILE ENGAGEMENT VEHICLE BOOKING CALENDAR

Delegates had previously requested that an online MEU booking system be developed to assist Brigade Community Safety co-ordinators to easily book a vehicle for their community activities. We can now report that the online booking system for MEUs is now live. Members are now able to log into Members Online and find a link to the calendar through the MEU information page. At least a month's notice from the date of your booking will need to be provided, as well as details about the event that the vehicle is to be booked for.

A confirmation of the booking will then be provided by email along with information about where the vehicle can be collected from. Eight Mobile Engagement Vehicles are located across the state and available for brigades to use for their community events.

PLANNED BURNS PROGRAM

CFA's planned burns program treated over 3000 hectares of land last year, well up on the year before. This year aims to be even more ambitious with 5,605 hectares being the target with over 300 burns as part of the program.

Planned burns that are part of this program will be prioritised to deliver burns that address the greatest risk to communities and infrastructure (e.g. schools, hospitals, road networks etc). Work is also being done to provide training and accreditation for burn controllers as well as the recognition of prior learning. We will continue to keep you updated throughout the year on the progress of the planned burn program.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

ONLINE CFA APPROVED EQUIPMENT REGISTER

Some time ago, VFBV requested CFA develop an online register where members could access an up-to-date equipment register of all approved CFA equipment, along with ordering and supply details to address the issue that brigades currently have no source of truth for purchasing and replacing non-stores equipment, or a way to stay abreast of what is CFA approved equipment. While CFA agreed to this request and some initial work had commenced on the register, with personnel changes and the passage of time, progress has been slow, and CFA has now confirmed that the proposed prototype didn't progress due to funding constraints. Delegates expressed disappointment and stressed the value add for members and improved safety outcomes of ensuring brigades had easy access to this information. Discussion also covered the advantages of regular market scanning for improved products and assessing existing equipment for effectiveness and risk association. Delegates suggested that as specialist equipment does currently have a form of online register for rescue brigades which has the current equipment available, perhaps that template could be expanded. Delegates will continue to pursue, and will keep you informed on any progress that occurs over 2023.

PURPOSE BUILT DRIVER TRAINING VEHICLES

Two purpose-built driver training vehicles have been completed and delivered to the Central Highlands Training Ground at Ballan and will be available for use on driving courses this year. A timeline is still to be determined for the build and rollout of the further 8 vehicles required. The intent will be to have these vehicles located at the various training grounds around the state and for them to be available for volunteer driver training. The training department is currently developing a booking system for these vehicles.

The new vehicles consist of a 13T Hino GT 1528 4x4 Crew Cab Chassis with an automatic transmission and a 7.5T Isuzu NPS75-155 4x4 Crew Cab Chassis with a manual transmission and both vehicles have tray frame and chained concrete blocks (to simulate load to full GVM allowing for 5 x 100kg crew). Other features are a tray mounted Roll Over Protection Structure (ROPS) and reversing camera integrated into OEM multi-media display. Delegates are pleased with progress and are looking forward to the remainder of the driver training vehicles to be completed so that volunteers can make full use of their availability to improve driver safety.

ULTRA HEAVY TANKER

The members of the Ultra Heavy Tanker (UHT) working party have been very busy, having attended 9 meetings in the consultation process on the first UHT. CFA committed to the construction of 29 UHT in this round of funding, hoping they will be all completed for the 2023/24 fire season. Brigades in the far west who have had access to the first prototype since the busy 2019/20 fire season have reported many positives and provided valuable feedback to this type of vehicle and many across the state are looking forward to the new improved version. The prototype has now completed its quality assurance and final checks. We will continue to keep you updated as the first vehicles become operational.

CAFS TANKERS

We reported in the December 2-minute briefings CFA's intent with improving the fleet of appliances with Compressed Air Foam Systems (CAFS). The volunteer representatives on the CAFS working party can now report good progress, with the ex-Tasmanian Fire Service CAFS 8.1 Heavy Pumper Tanker purchased by CFA in 2022 is currently at the body builders undergoing modification in line with CFA build requirements and standards. One of the 2 x 4.4R Heavy Tanker CAFS retrofits is nearing completion pending changeover and Unit 2 is still under modification subject to release. The retrofit 3.4C Heavy Tanker Conversion will commence pending availability of appliance. The resource for development of training documentation has commenced and should be completed shortly allowing all vehicles to be operational.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

CFASafe – IDENTIFYING AND REPORTING HAZARDS

VFBV and CFA have recently discussed the issue of under-reporting on hazards, near misses and incidents. This under reporting has become quite evident when reviewing the low number of recently reported hazards. Given the recent flood deployments, on top of normal CFA turnouts, training and activities, both VFBV and CFA believe the numbers to be unusually low. Both CFA and VFBV agree that volunteers often adopt an attitude of 'get on with business' and in doing so, when identifying a potential hazard, will go ahead and remedy the problem without then reporting the original hazard. This is understandable and admirable but inadvertently undermines the objective of collecting information and data around safety of volunteers and the equipment and procedures we use every day. The dislike of 'paperwork' and forms that seem to constantly grow is also a big turn-off for volunteers. When a problem is fixed and no report is made, CFA are unable to track trends, and see if similar problems exist across other brigades or other areas. Hazard reports often inform safety bulletins and other remedial actions to improve safety across the whole of CFA.

Regardless of whether the problem is fixed straight away or not, we recommend all hazards or potential hazards should be reported to CFA via CFASafe, or the more recent addition of the Pocket Safety mobile phone app or via the Salmon card when on deployment. VFBV would encourage volunteers to report all matters of safety immediately. Also, consider whether a matter is more appropriate to report as a hazard report or a maintenance report. If a matter has been reported to CFASafe, action should be taken by CFA within 48 hours. If this does not occur, volunteers are urged to follow up with the District Office.

OH&S COMMITTEES

Members would recall that VFBV delegates have been raising concerns for some time around the inconsistency of the structure of District based OH&S committees and the regularity of meetings of those committees and their reporting lines. VFBV continue to stress the importance of the need for these committees to meet regularly and inform CFA of potential themes and issues that exist across each District and Region. CFA has advised that they have resumed work on building a framework to standardise the structure of all OH&S Committees across the State.

Delegates suggested a senior officer such as the ACFO should be accountable for ensuring meetings take place and are attended by a Chair, volunteer OH&S delegates, VFBV representatives, CFA management and staff, consultants etc. The question was raised as to whether the committees should be Regional or District level. The consensus of delegates was that a District level committee would be preferred as a regional perspective may be too large and broad and creates increased travel impositions on many attendees. CFA will draft a policy for consultation addressing governance structure, terms of reference and possible guiding templates. As soon as the draft is provided, we will seek broader volunteer input and feedback.

PRESUMPTIVE LEGISLATION CLAIMS

In a further update, a draft brochure outlining the Gallagher Bassett (GB) procedure for volunteers when making a cancer claim is being reviewed. This brochure was requested by VFBV to improve the volunteer claims experience and to remove a lot of the confusion volunteers have been reporting. Gallagher Bassett is the external law firm engaged by WorkSafe to manage the claims. It is CFA and VFBV's intention that CFA will be overlooking the GB 'end to end' process for volunteers, to ensure GB is making the process as seamless and easy as possible for volunteers and that CFA is appropriately supporting its members throughout the process, acknowledging these members will often be in distress or unwell as they undergo treatment.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

CHANGES TO OPERATIONS JOINT COMMITTEES FOR 2023

As part of VFBV and CFA's review and strengthening of our joint committee consultative arrangements, the Joint Operations Committee has been divided into 2 committees, with the new Joint Operational Capability consultative committee focussing on building brigade and group capability, addressing gaps in service delivery as well as covering protective clothing and equipment and specialist response such as road accident rescue, EMR/FMR, alpine and aviation. The Joint Operational Performance consultative committee will continue the great work already achieved in development and review of operational policy, doctrine and standards as well as ensuring continuous improvements in operational compliance, fire investigation, joint SOPs and monitoring operational performance.

VOLUNTEER FIRE INVESTIGATORS

In previous 2 minute briefings we reported that there had been some welcome changes to the way CFA Fire Investigators would be involved after the changes that came about due to Fire Service Reform. Following reform, volunteer fire investigators reported significant barriers and exclusion even though CFA co-signed an inter-agency agreement in 2016 that would see greater co-operation between agencies in investigating fires and reduce the agencies operating in isolation. It is pleasing to report that since raising these issues and working with CFA to strengthen fire investigation and its support to volunteers, the relationship between agencies has markedly improved over the course of 2022 with over 319 fire investigations conducted in the country area of Victoria. Over 235 of these were fire investigations conducted by CFA volunteer Fire Investigators. There were also 214 structural fire investigations conducted by CFA highlighting that volunteers continue to deliver an outstanding service and why CFA needs this critical capability and the need to continue to build training opportunities for new investigators.

CFA is close to releasing the Fire Investigator training package after its upgrade to PUA19. CFA reported that courses will be run in early 2023 at the updated Huntly training facility however it was noted by members that initial courses are being run during the week which makes it difficult for volunteers to attend and hard to get new members interested in fire investigation. VFBV will continue to advocate for volunteer friendly course scheduling and has asked CFA to schedule evening and weekend courses as a priority.

FIREGROUND TABARDS

As members may recall, a review paper from Emergency Management Victoria in 2013 on the use of tabards within the emergency management sector was completed and issued to agencies. In short, the paper outlined the scope, standards and key requirements for each agency to follow in relation to tabard design, colour, fabric and labelling. CFA developed its own paper in 2018 that outlined how it was going to incorporate the specifications and minimum requirements of IMT tabards into its operations. Despite all this, very little progress has been made in transitioning to the new standards and colours. Delegates have continued to raise concerns about the availability of tabards and the time it has taken to finalise the tabards for operational roles for identification on the fireground. The Committee has continued to advocate on this issue for many years now as it directly addresses the volunteer feedback and criticism that the current lime-green tabards in use across CFA can make it difficult to identify the incident controller at structural incidents due to the tabards being a similar colour to the PPC worn. The new tabards are easier to identify and are made of a lighter fire retardant woven material to reduce discomfort to the wearer and comply with AS/NZS standards and have interchangeable titles.

Progress has finally been made, with the new tabards changing to a more distinguishable red in line with the standards to ensure there is no confusion as to who the incident controller is. CFA has funded an initial rollout to primary appliances in category 3, 4 and 5 brigades and have identified a funding source for allocation to Road Rescue brigades. Further funding is being sought to complete the rollout to the rest of the fleet. The old tabards continue to meet the CFA requirements and are still ok to use for strike team and sector commanders as they are easily identifiable against the wildfire PPC.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

STRUCTURAL THERMAL IMAGING CAMERA TRAINING

The committee is working through an issue regarding the prerequisites for the Structural TIC training course. Conduct Search and Rescue (from PUA12) should have been a prerequisite for Structural TIC but was not listed in LMS until the problem was identified late last year. This is due to the competency requiring students undertaking the structural TIC training to operate in a hot internal environment.

Members who currently hold the Search and Rescue competency will be able to undertake the Structural TIC Course immediately. However CFA has advised that members who do not currently hold the competency will have to undertake the new Respond to Urban Fire course, once it is released in early 2023, before they can enrol in the Structural TIC course. VFBV delegates will continue to monitor and are discussing with CFA the potential for gap training given how long it has taken for the respond to urban course to be developed, and the lack of search and rescue courses (internal BA) in that intervening period.

All members who have completed GFF, Tree Hazard Awareness and have experience responding to bushfires will still be able to undertake the TIC General Course, as this does not require students to operate in a hot internal environment.

2023 TRAINING COURSE RELEASES

With significant CFA resources being consumed during 2022 to the process of upgrading training packages from the old PUA12 standard to the new PUA19 standard and CFA's response to the RTO audit, there has been a delay in the release dates for many training packages. Understanding the importance of these courses to Brigades, VFBV has been pursuing CFA for an updated schedule of Training Package releases so that brigades can plan. At the last meeting for 2022, CFA presented members with their planned schedule for the first half of 2023. Courses planned to be ready for release during quarter 1 are; Respond to Urban Fire, Operate Pumps, Driving Policy and Legislation (online course) and Crew Leader. The courses planned for quarter 2 are; Strike Team Leader, Sector Commander, Fire Weather, and IMT prerequisites. Delegates will continue to work with CFA to ensure the timely release of packages throughout the year.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

Towards the end of 2022, delegates were updated on the program to start running Professional Development (PD) sessions for Trainer Assessors (TAs), something that VFBV delegates have been pursuing with CFA for quite a while. These are important sessions as all TAs in a Registered Training Organisation must be able to demonstrate ongoing personal development in their field of expertise to maintain their qualification to deliver training.

Delegates will be looking to suggest appropriate topics for these sessions, and are asking TAs for suggestions for possible inclusion. Please send your suggestions to VFBV Support Officer Max Blackmore via m.blackmore@vfbv.com.au

IMPROVEMENTS TO TRAINING RELEASE PROCESS

Concerns about issues that have occurred with uploading some training packages into LMS have been discussed. Recent notable examples being, the incorrect BA package being uploaded causing scheduled courses to be cancelled and a missing prerequisite for the Structural TIC course leading to members enrolled in the course not being able to attend. Delegates have highlighted to CFA the negative impact that these problems have on volunteers with members arranging CFA training around family and work commitments to attend courses that were cancelled at the last minute and brigade capabilities suffering as they are not able to get members on to a course to gain the skills they need. CFA have now undertaken a review of its processes and have changed their process to now include an extra quality assurance step with the Manager, Quality and Evaluation for Operational Doctrine and Training now having to review course details and signoff before materials are uploaded into LMS. Delegates hope that this will avoid these errors from occurring again and will monitor.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

NAME CHANGE

As part of VFBV and CFA's review and strengthening of our joint committee consultative arrangements, the Joint Volunteerism Committee will transition to the Joint Member Services Committee in 2023. The new committee will continue working on recruitment, retention, youth, events, championships and recognition, while picking up member communications, brigade finance and fundraising.

CFA MEMBERS POCKETBOOK

Discussions continue on the possible formats of providing important information operational & administrative in easily understood and accessible means electronically. Delegates are looking into the use of technology as part of these methods including a Phone App, as many members have access to a smart mobile phone technology a CFA app could deliver the information contained in the printed version of "Tactics & Administration in the Field Volume 3" and the Brigade Management Manual (BMM) for example.

An app or 'pocketbook' would be readily updatable and be available to all members via their smart phone. Although the advance in accessible technologies is not meant to replace any printed documents, as internet access improves across Victoria more online facilities will become available to members to use should they wish to. Members are constantly being updated on new innovations through the committee working parties. The committee continues to monitor developments in this space with other emergency services.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RECOGNITION

Brigades continue to highlight the need for assistance with their recruitment programs and are concerned about the delay in rolling out the "Give us a Hand" campaign. CFA along with the other State volunteer organisations are still awaiting the launch of the campaign. Delegates have been assured that CFA Communications has developed the material to support the campaign and it is available on Members Online and consists of a TV campaign, online videos, and targeted advertising material. The District Offices will have access and brigades will be able to seek assistance from your local BASOs.

Recent figures from CFA still show a continuing downward trend in overall brigade membership with an imbalance between members leaving the organisation verses those joining. Whilst it is very important to have a recruitment strategy it is equally important to have a retention strategy. Delegates will continue to advocate for greater support to brigades.

CHAMPIONSHIPS

Recent inspections of the Mooroopna facilities have been carried out after the devastating flood impacts in the later part of 2022, with many venues continuing the recovery process, some minor damage to the track and facilities are on track to be fixed prior to the 2023 State Championships in March. The dates for the 2023 events are March 18th and 19th for the running of the Urban Junior Championships and March 25 and 26 for the Urban Senior Championships and the Rural Junior and Rural Senior events.

RECOGNITION OF AUXILIARY SERVICE

VFBV continues to receive reports of members having difficulty having their previous auxiliary service recognised in their service history. Members are reminded that they can have their records updated if their service is not showing, and delegates have requested this advice be included in the Brigade Management Manual (BMM) to clarify how the recognition of Auxiliary Service is managed along with the process to recognise members that have died in the line of duty. This latter issue has been raised by brigades that have become aware of a member that historically has been missed when CFA undertook the process of this recognition. If you need assistance, please speak to your BASO or District Office.



STATE FIREFIGHTER CHAMPIONSHIPS

Urban Junior State Championship	18 and 19 March 2023
Urban Senior State Championship	25 and 26 March 2023
Rural Senior State Championship	25 March 2023
Rural Junior State Championship	26 March 2023

The CFA-VFBV State Firefighter Championships will be held at Mooroopna later this month on consecutive weekends.

The first weekend of action will see 41 teams compete for the State Urban Junior Championship across 18 events on the weekend of 18 and 19 March.

Action on the following weekend will see 70 senior teams and 40 junior teams take part in the State Rural Senior and Junior Championships and the State Urban Senior Championship, competing across both urban and rural tracks in a celebration and showcase of CFA and championships.

On the evening of Saturday 25th March the spectacular Torchlight Procession will again be held with brigades marching around Victoria Lake Park in Shepparton in an impressive display of CFA to the community. This year will also mark 150 years since the first demonstration and display of Victoria's volunteer firefighters was held in Melbourne in 1873 which included Torchlight Procession through the streets of Melbourne.

Any brigade not competing at the State Championships are invited to participate in the Torchlight Procession, if your brigade would like to participate please contact Peter Davis peter.davis@cfa.vic.gov.au or 0458 933 797 as soon as possible.

Travelling across to compete in the Urban Championships this year are Harvey and Kellerberrin from Western Australia. Kellerberrin is competing in the Urban Junior Championship while Harvey has a team competing in both the Urban Junior and Senior Championships.

To ensure the successful conduct of the Championships, more than 200 VFBV Judges and Officials volunteer their time and expertise to ensure that the State Championships maintain the high standard developed over many years. VFBV thanks all these members for their commitment and encourages any new members interested in nominating as a Judge to contact VFBV at championships@vfbv.com.au