

**Submission
No 408**

INQUIRY INTO THE 2026 SUMMER FIRES ACROSS VICTORIA

Organisation: Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV)

Date Received: 19 April 2026



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

VFBV **SUBMISSION**

Strong Volunteerism, Embraced to Build Community Resilience for a Safer Victoria.

Prepared for

**Parliamentary Inquiry into the
2026 Summer Fires Across Victoria**

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria



www.vfbv.com.au

**Date of Issue:
19 April 2026**

”

This is the volunteer fire fighter. An “organisation person” if ever there was one, for without the organisation provided by the CFA the volunteer would not be the force in the defence of their community that they are today. But, more important, without them the CFA would not have achieved its present standing.

In the fully rounded description they cannot be seen apart, for each has helped in the evolution of the other. Without this united force it would be the people of Victoria who would be the losers.

”

Adapted from 'Victoria's volunteers against fire' a 1973 Victorian Government publication.

Foreword

**Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002**

Dear Committee,

VFBV welcomes the opportunity to make submission to your inquiry.

Like all times prior, CFA volunteers have answered the call for help from the Victorian Community.

CFA volunteers join CFA to help people. That is their primary goal and motivation. They did their best with what they had. The frustration of many, is what they have is not always enough.

CFA volunteers have borne the brunt of reduced funding and resourcing of recent years. The things they depend on, are not things for themselves. They are things they want to best be able to assist their communities in their time of need.

The brigades who are forced to turnout 37-year-old tankers know their communities deserve better. The brigades who just get tin sheds to store the bare necessities, some without even mains power or water know that it is going to be difficult to attract the next generation of volunteers when community members take one look at the resources provided to these small volunteer fire stations and decide it is not for them.

There are many examples of modern and contemporary trucks and stations that have been built over the years and are the pride of those communities. This is not a government doing nothing – it is however a government not doing enough. It is this divide that there is simply not enough to go around to ensure that every community will get the equal hand of support from the State - that hurts volunteers the hardest and demoralises them.

How can it be that facilities that should be a beacon of hope and encourage everyday community members to volunteer their time and safety – that saves the State billions of dollars each year – is not treated with the respect it deserves? Make no mistake, a big bucket of money won't fix every issue. Volunteers know investment must be sustainable and is the most precious thing we can ask from the taxpayer. But the unfairness of the current system and the waste in others is just too bitter a pill for volunteers to swallow.

Fairness is considered a foundational and innate human drive that is essential for social cooperation. That's all CFA volunteers want. A fair go – and a fair chance to help their communities when they need us the most.

Foreword

VFBV makes this submission with best endeavour recognising the unavailability of crucial information and when considering the workloads of our long and exhausting fire season.

CFA volunteers have made strong representation to VFBV that the timing and calling of inquiries during the Fire Season is a matter of deep concern and limits the opportunity for volunteers to prepare, reflect and contribute to these most important inquiries.

This in no way detracts from the importance of early engagement with those directly impacted during this season's bushfires and we acknowledge that for some there is closure and healing by being able to share their stories early.

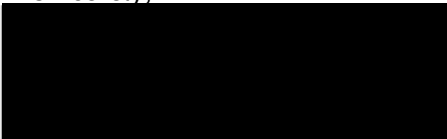
We also fully appreciate the intent of the Committee and the need to learn lessons now in time for next year's fire season. We raise this not as a complaint, but as a cautionary tale that engagement with volunteers is likely to be limited due to competing time pressures.

In practical terms, this has also resulted in a significant gap of knowledge that would normally be gleaned from post-season debriefs and after-action reviews. As at the date of submission VFBV has not yet received any review or analysis from the agency or sector's debriefing/after-action processes. As a result, this submission has been significantly affected. This submission is made in acknowledgment that many topics that deserve more analysis and research has simply not been possible within the timelines.

We acknowledge the difficulty these factors place on your inquiry also and have a deep empathy for the difficult task ahead for you.

While the agencies are the public faces of each volunteer service, and should be the principal advocate for their volunteers, the interests of the agencies and their volunteers are not always identical, and there are at times a divergence of interests and opinion. VFBV shares the frustration of many volunteers who have participated in a plethora of reviews, often with perceptions of little ultimate improvement to the support of volunteers and their communities.

On behalf of all CFA volunteers, we wish the Committee all the best and thank-you in advance for your thoughtful care, empathy and deliberations. We stand ready to assist in any way we can.
Sincerely,


Adam Barnett
Chief Executive Officer.

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About VFBV

Strong Volunteerism, Embraced to Build Community Resilience for a Safer Victoria.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) is the CFA Volunteer association and peak body with statutory recognition established under the Victorian Country Fire Authority Act 1958 to specifically represent CFA Volunteers and ensure there is meaningful consultation with the elected representatives of Volunteers on all matters which may affect them.

More generally, under the CFA Volunteer Charter that is enshrined in Section 6 of the CFA Act, VFBV is recognised as the association representing all CFA volunteers, providing for their general representation to the CFA Board, management and to governments, ministers, members of parliament, councils, instrumentalities, business and the public.

VFBV is not a trades union, and our history predates CFA, with our predecessor associations being formed back in 1885. We are the peak body for CFA Volunteers and operate in the spirit of mutual respect and goodwill to work in harmony and consultation together with CFA and the State of Victoria to resolve any differences of opinion which may arise.

Whilst independent of the CFA, VFBV works closely with CFA and other key stakeholders to engage volunteers and develop policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of



volunteers to provide CFA services to the community.

VFBV also represents Coast Guard brigades in Victoria and has close working relationships with other emergency service volunteer associations across Victoria and Australia.

VFBV and volunteer fire brigade associations in all states of Australia work together on issues of common interest and/or national relevance through the Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA).

VFBV is an organisation made up of the CFA volunteers it represents.

Through a state-wide network of District Councils and elected volunteer representatives, VFBV maintains direct links with grass roots volunteers over their issues, needs and concerns.

CFA Volunteers and the commitment they bring to the protection of the Victorian community remain the core strength of CFA.

Strong Governance

The VFBV Board operates as the governing body for strategic consultation on matters impacting on CFA volunteers. State Council operates as our peak State volunteer forum to discuss key issues escalated through VFBV's 21 District Councils where volunteers work tirelessly to resolve issues at the local level.

Effective Partnerships

VFBV works in partnership with the State Government, Emergency Management Victoria, 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. This is achieved through day-to-day practical work in CFA/VFBV Joint Committees, and sector level consultative forums. We work to ensure positive, practical results from reviews. VFBV is strictly non-party political and works with all parties, MPs, Senators and candidates.

Peak Body Knowledge

Given its organisational background, expert knowledge, access to local information and depth of experience in matters affecting volunteers and the provision of a volunteer-based service model, VFBV is best placed to provide advice on matters affecting CFA volunteers. VFBV facilitates numerous regular state and local consultation forums and engagement activities to ensure that the views of volunteers are known and represented.

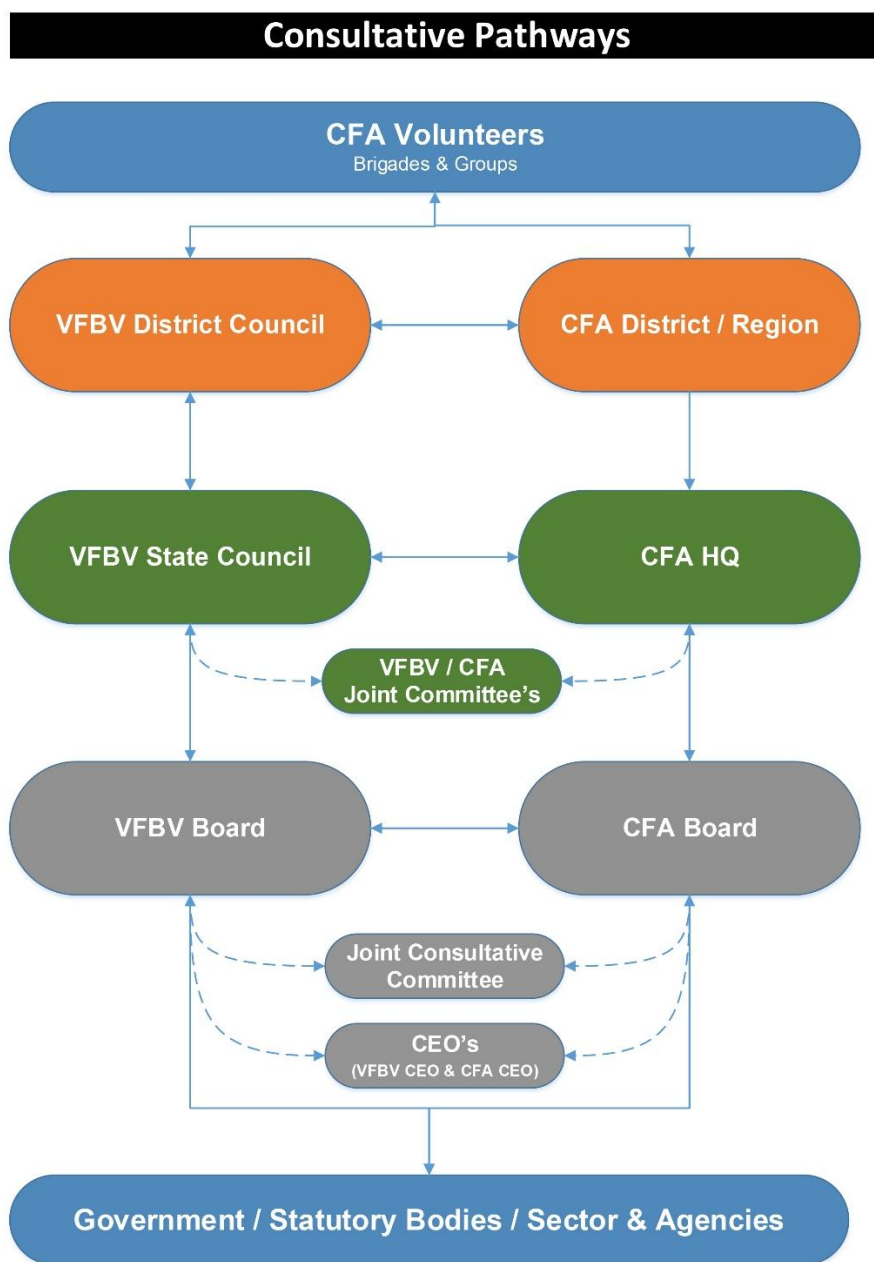
Safer Communities

VFBV seeks to promote and share with CFA a commitment to a community-based volunteer fire and emergency service which delivers a safer Victoria.

Consultative Pathways

Representing 52,000+ people can be challenging at times. CFA volunteers are not a monolith. They constitute a deeply diverse collection of individuals with different thoughts, background, culture, experience and perspectives. They come together to make a difference and protect lives and property. This broad diversity is one of their greatest strengths.

Our consultative processes are designed to encourage peer review and establish whether a particular view is an outlier, or whether it enjoys varying degrees of support or consensus. A foundation principle is that this analysis should be informed from a bottom-up approach, and all members should be given the opportunity to raise views, suggestions or proposals at the local level for peer review. VFBV's consultative structure allows ideas and suggestions to be tested, with an escalating process to test ideas as the impacts or benefits increase.



Statewide Consultative Structure

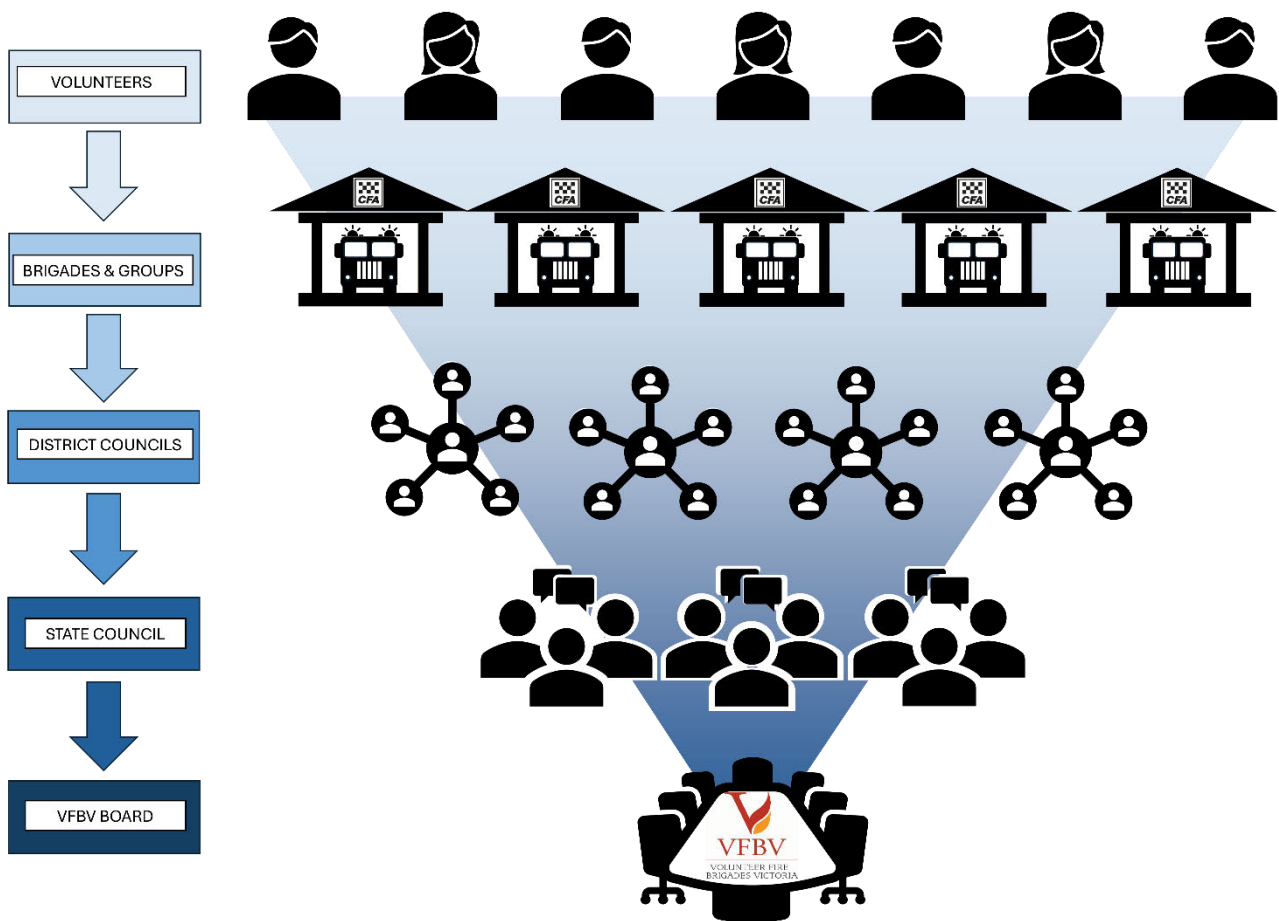
VFBV represents all volunteers as the elected representatives of volunteers under S6 of the CFA Act, and the Volunteer Charter. To achieve buy-in and ensure volunteers feel part and connected to their association, VFBV invites every brigade to affiliate and contribute to VFBV's running costs. Last financial year, more than 95% of CFA Brigades choose to affiliate with VFBV, marking the highest level of affiliation on record.

Each affiliated Brigade is eligible to elect two delegates to represent their brigade and actively participate in VFBV decision making via their District Council. Brigade delegates represent the Brigade at the District level and provide a conduit to support local leadership pursue matters of interest to the Brigade, and for linking the brigade back to the discussions held at District Council.

VFBV operates 21 District Councils across the State, which represents a VFBV District Council in every CFA District. Each District Council establish a volunteer executive, that are elected by each of the affiliated brigades in that District. Each District Council also elect two representatives to VFBV State Council, unless a higher number is authorised by State Council.

State Council is then made up of every elected State Councillor from each of the District Councils to establish a state forum, that has state-wide representation from every CFA District.

It is this statewide tiered representative consultative structure that gives VFBV credibility and authority to represent and advocate on volunteer's behalf. VFBV also maintains an open process for all Brigade and Groups to have input to VFBV consultation processes regularly, regardless of affiliation.



CFA and VFBV

VFBV is independent from CFA yet at the same time is an important part of CFA's foundation and future success.

CFA is the community-based brigades that form it. CFA management and staff support brigades by providing the framework, governance, leadership and systems to coordinate, support and empower this network of community-based CFA brigades to deliver a remarkable and world envied service to the community.

VFBV is an integral mechanism for enabling CFA to harness the leadership, knowledge and experience of volunteers and to engage volunteers in decision-making about matters that affect their welfare and efficiency. In an organisation such as CFA, genuine engagement with volunteers is vital not only to improve service outcomes but to maintain volunteer interest and their ongoing contribution.

Robust, meaningful, respectful, and honest communication and consultation is essential.

VFBV and CFA work hard together to maintain a good and collaborative relationship. This does not mean that CFA and VFBV always agree, nor need to agree, but the constructive and close relationship is fundamental to ensuring CFA volunteer views are known and considered well in CFA decision making.

Formal CFA/VFBV consultative processes and VFBV's volunteer engagement networks are also an essential ingredient for CFA engaging

and informing CFA volunteers. The relationship and processes are two way and focused on sustaining and strengthening CFA for the benefit of communities.

A good relationship is the foundation for CFA and VFBV to work through strategic challenges and opportunities constructively.

Often VFBV and CFA share the same frustration because not all issues can be managed within the CFA's sphere of influence.

Sometimes these shared frustrations manifest as a tension between CFA and VFBV when in fact the blockers to progress are externally caused or just plain difficult to resolve. CFA and VFBV have worked hard to significantly improve consultative effort and to build a robust, respectful and mutually beneficial relationship.

VFBV and CFA do have to deal with hard and sensitive issues, sometimes with quite different viewpoints, however the enormous amount of positive work and constructive advancement driven by the partnership between VFBV and CFA is the most valuable and rewarding effort.

CFA is an incredible organisation and the good work done by both volunteers and paid staff at all levels is something we are very proud of.

CFA Volunteers

CFA (Country Fire Authority) is a volunteer and community-based fire and emergency services organisation. It helps protect 2.2 million Victorians, and 97% of the land across Victoria.

The CFA is a statutory authority and has a nine member Board appointed by the Minister for Emergency Services. There are approximately 52,000 CFA volunteers.

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

CFA volunteers are among the best firefighters in the world. Every day they put their communities first, from highly complex bushfires to specialist response, road accident rescue, hazardous incidents and structural firefighting in highly urbanised areas.

They are well trained, well exercised and are sought after across the country for their knowledge, skill and experience. They are true professionals in every sense of the word, only as volunteers they do it without pay.

All recent inquiries and commissions have recognised the fundamental importance of the current volunteer arrangements. The need for 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.

CFA volunteers across the state, and a large portion of these coming from outer metropolitan Melbourne, give Victoria its most important asset in providing the very large surge capacity required to respond early and quickly to large scale bushfires and other major emergencies.

This depth of numbers of qualified volunteers means that Victoria can sustain its response over days, weeks and even months as demonstrated by this season's bushfires as well as in past years.

CFA is a fully volunteer fire service. They are ably supported by administrative staff who form the corporate CFA and provide the necessary organisational support. Together, CFA members protect lives and property all across Victoria.

The Sector at a Glance

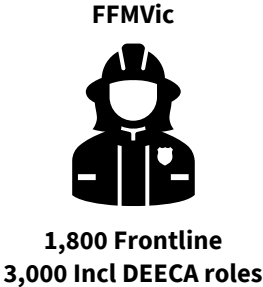
Fire Stations



Appliances



People



Preparation & Planning

1.1 PREPARATION AND PLANNING

Volunteers urge the Committee to look at both short-term preparations, and long-term preparations. From a volunteer perspective, and based on volunteer reports - VFBV contends that on the whole, short term preparations within the control of CFA and part of the usual fire season preparedness programs were mostly on track.

This includes fire season preparedness briefings, aircraft arrangements, community preparedness programs, review of endorsements, and preseason training activities, including the Chief Officer's minimum requirements. These activities occur each and every year, and while there were isolated reports from volunteers of difficulties or challenges, consensus was these activities for the most part tracked as normal.

That is not to say there is not room for improvement in the short-term planning activities, but VFBV will use the CFA After Action Review process that is currently underway to formalise and address these issues with CFA as they are raised by volunteers.

VFBV also acknowledges that the additional funding for water storage and transportation and expansion of CFA's 'Get Fire Ready' campaign that supports brigades and volunteers run community preparedness activities was welcome and worthwhile.

However, when it comes to medium- and longer-term preparedness, and factors that are outside of CFA's direct control, VFBV contends that there were serious and known deficiencies in preparation in the lead up to the 2025/26 Fire Season.

Expectations around longer-term preparations must take into account the Victorian Government's climate modelling that was predicting longer fire seasons, more frequent spike days, more intense fire behaviour, and an underlying drought that resulted in low levels of moisture in the topsoils.

In this respect, Victoria approached the 2025/26 Fire Season with historically low levels of volunteer firefighters, low volunteer morale, the lowest levels of Level 3 Incident Controllers since 2009, an ageing CFA fleet with no approved replacement program to bring the CFA fleet back into acceptable standards, aging infrastructure in the form of fire stations that do not meet contemporary OH&S standards and many aged well beyond their design life, and falling government base budget grant funding over successive years that leaves CFA having to find further efficiencies in base programs that volunteers and brigades rely.

1.2 MUNICIPAL FIRE PLANNING AND MITIGATION

Volunteers overwhelmingly believe moving from Municipal Fire Planning Committees (MFPC) to Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees (MEMPC) has been a retrograde step.

In 2018, the Victorian Government made significant changes to the Emergency Management Act (2013), through its Emergency Management Legislation Amendment Act 2018. These changes repealed Part IV of the CFA Act that had previously governed and established Municipal Fire Prevention Committee's (MFPC's).

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The older obligations in the CFA Act that required each municipality to prepare and maintain a municipal fire prevention plan for its municipality in accordance with specified requirements and to plan for fire prevention at the regional and municipal levels became redundant under the new arrangements. The 2018 changes repealed the arrangements for regional and municipal fire prevention committees and the obligation to prepare specific fire prevention plans.

The amendment abolished MFPC committee's and replaced them with generic "all hazards - all agencies" committee's called Emergency Management Planning Committee's (MEMPC). The legislation also transferred auditing of these committees from CFA and moved it to EMV.

Advocates of these changes claimed this would lead to new broader, integrated, coordinated and comprehensive planning arrangements under the Emergency Management Act and that EMV would lead a revolution of arrangements under the newly formed MEMPC model for all emergency management planning including mitigation, response and recovery across all hazards to be uniform, joined up and more effective.

The committee have the opportunity to evaluate if each of the Municipal Emergency Management Plans in place for each of the LGA's impacted by the 2025/26 fires meet these grandiose commitments.

At the time of the change in 2018, it was generally acknowledged that Victoria had a high level of standards and oversight of bushfire risk through the MFPC structure. Advocates of change argued that by moving to an all-hazard approach, coordinated under EMV, would result in other relevant hazards (such as flood and storm) benefitting and rise to the high level achieved for fire under the MFPC model.

In our view, rather than the other hazards rising to the previous high level of fire planning, our experience is bushfire planning and hazard reduction continues to drop to a worryingly generic and bureaucratic, low standard commiserate with other hazards. And while some municipalities do it better than others, volunteer feedback indicates low confidence in the new MEMPC model.

Volunteers have largely been excluded from the new MEMPC model, which now only grants one seat for each agency. Under the old model, every CFA Brigade was able to nominate two volunteers to represent each brigade on each MFPC and ensure local fire risks and prevention works were considered and prioritised.

In our view, the critical involvement of local brigades and therefore local community members embedded into the old MFPC model and the resulting accountability on municipalities and the State to manage roadways, rail corridors, private property and public spaces has been lost.

While acknowledging some municipalities have retained their old committees as subsets and have continued to integrate volunteers into the process, volunteers by and large often describe the new EMV led arrangements as a bureaucratic tick box exercise.

In defence of the municipalities, they have been encouraged to use the new EMV templates that encourage generic statements, and we have no doubt that rate capping and cost shifting has also

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played a significant role in reduced resources to councils to support these critical committees, prevention works and that little guidance, oversight or leadership is provided by EMV who are now responsible for leading and auditing these plans.

In further defence of the municipalities, under the new arrangements they lack the power to issue a fire prevention notice to any public body or entity, which often leaves them powerless over State managed land such as railways, arterials, and other significant assets publicly owned. As the State is the largest landholder in the State, this presents a glaring lack of accountability for what are significant swathes of land that directly impacts on community preparedness and fire prevention.

Specificity vs Generalising

The old legislation provided for very specific actions and accountabilities relating to fire prevention.

While volunteers did not object to moving to an all hazards all agencies approach, they warned of the dangers of moving to a more 'generalist' type model and argued the legislation should retain the requirements of the old Act that related to 'fire' and build similar protections for each of the other hazards.

Volunteers cautioned that the language inserted by the amendment, replaced all the specifics under the old legislation with very general and administrative type statements that are subjective and may result in emergency plans so general to be of little utility.

For example, under the old CFA Act (Part IV) that was repealed, Municipal Fire Prevention Committees were required;

- to plan the burning or clearing of firebreaks within the area for which it is appointed;
- to advise the appropriate authorities as to the existence of and steps to be taken for the removal of fire hazards within the area;
- to advise and make recommendations to the municipal council in the preparation of its municipal fire prevention plan;
- to recommend to the Authority or to the appropriate authorities (as the case may require) any action which the committee deems necessary or expedient to be taken for reducing the risk of an outbreak of fire or for suppressing any fire which may occur within the area;
- to advise the fire prevention officer concerning the removal of fire hazards under section forty-one of this Act;

Volunteers challenge the committee to review each of the Emergency Management Plans from each of the LGA's impacted by the 2026 bushfire season to fully appreciate the wide range in quality, detail and ultimate utility that is present. Upon review, it is VFBV's view that it would be very difficult for anyone to convincingly establish that there is a strong standard of integrated, coordinated and comprehensive planning arrangements in place under the Emergency Management Act as was envisaged.

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As a case in point, volunteers responding to the Longwood fires are at pains to point out the high fuel loads and poorly managed roadside along the Hume Freeway that in their view contributed to the fire spread.



VFBV highly recommend the Committee inform itself of whether the relevant Municipal Emergency Management Plans covered the level of detail mandated under the old standard, and if not, why this level of planning was deemed unnecessary when EMV endorsed them. We also urge the Committee to audit the currency and date of each of the plans which is the audit role EMV should be playing to evaluate the effectiveness of this audit regime.



We urge the Committee to audit the currency and date of each of the plans which is the audit role EMV should be playing to evaluate the effectiveness of this audit regime.

In addition, under the old Act - a Municipal Fire Prevention Committee was required to do a Municipal Fire Prevention Plan which had to;

- identifying areas, buildings and land used in the municipal district which are at particular risk in case of fire; and
- specifying how each identified risk is to be treated; and
- specifying who is to be responsible for treating those risks; and
- identifying all designated neighbourhood safer places in the municipal district or if no places have been designated, recording that fact; and
- identifying any places in the municipal district that are community fire refuges within the meaning of section 50A;

We again challenge the committee to find this level of detail in each of the corresponding plans applicable to the 2026 fires.

Compare the specific requirements in the above two tables from the old legislation with the new requirements listed in the Emergency Management Act 2013 covering the new Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees;

- a) to be responsible for the preparation and review of its municipal emergency management plan; and
- b) to ensure that its municipal emergency management plan is consistent with the state emergency management plan and the relevant regional emergency management plan; and

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- c) to provide reports and recommendations to the Regional Emergency Management Planning Committee for the region in which the municipal district is located in relation to any matter that affects, or may affect, emergency management planning in that municipal district; and
- d) to share information with the Regional Emergency Management Planning Committee for the region in which the municipal district is located and with other Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees to assist effective emergency management planning in accordance with Parts 6 and 6A; and
- e) to collaborate (having regard to any guidelines issued under section 77(2)(i)) with any other Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee that the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee considers appropriate in relation to emergency management planning, including preparing municipal emergency management plans; and
- f) to perform any other function conferred on the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee by or under this or any other Act.

As is clear, the specificity contained within the old legislation has been replaced by what most volunteers describe as meaningless motherhood statements no matter how well intended.

The argument by advocates for the changes at the time was that removing the specificity from the legislation was in keeping with modern parliamentary language and practice, and that regulation or operating procedures would then provide the more detailed and specific requirements.

One only needs to review the wide range of Municipal Emergency Management Plans to see how far from reality this objective appears to have landed.

Local knowledge and engagement

The second area of lost opportunity is around the removal of the requirement for local brigades to be directly involved.

As previously stated, under the old CFA Act, the MFPC's were required to have representation from each CFA brigade and each CFA group within the municipality. This ensured local knowledge was embedded into the committee structure and also ensured plans were robustly prepared, socialised and ground truthed. Compliance was also more robust as brigades were aware of what works were supposed to occur, and could then advocate to Council when it was not.

Under the new arrangements, this representation is no longer mandated, and instead was replaced with a requirement for just one representative from each responding agency. From a CFA perspective, this replaced what could have been 30 or more volunteers, with a single CFA representative, whom is often now an employee.

And while advocates at the time argued that nothing would prevent a CFA volunteer from assuming this role - as we predicted - arrangements now discourage volunteers with it now more of an

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administrative type committee, with only single reps from each agency, the Committee has moved from being predominantly volunteer/community representation, to overwhelming staff representation, with many meetings and proceedings moving to business hours and days that are not always appropriate to encourage volunteer involvement.

While some municipalities have retained their old committee structures as a fire subset, and some continue to encourage volunteer involvement – VFBV believe the lack of mandated brigade representation and the lack of accountability for identified hazards and treatment options are a serious lost opportunity and a retrograde step in emergency planning.

CASE STUDY

The Longwood fire impacted four local government areas: Strathbogie, Murrindindi, Mitchell and Mansfield. Of the four, Strathbogie and Murrindindi experienced the greatest impact.

A quick review of each of the Emergency Management Plans available to the public at time of submission from each of the municipality websites is summarised below.

Murrindindi Municipal Fire Management Plan 2020-2023

The Municipal Fire Management Planning Committee is made up of representatives from the Shire, CFA, DEECA and Parks Victoria. The documents main focus is bushfire but also considered structural fire and other hazardous materials.

Murrindindi's plan contains significant locally tailored content with regular reference to specific communities, local risk from fuel load, terrain, community vulnerability and infrastructure. The plan has a comprehensive list of risk categorised by prevention, preparedness, response and recovery as well as the responsible agency.

The Joint Fuel Management Program, historical fires, FFMV Fire Management Zones are also included alongside the Shire's Fire Prevention Program.

The Murrindindi plan demonstrates stronger integration of local knowledge, particularly through detailed references to towns, discussion of landscape and access issues and community risk profiles.

As this document expired in 2023 it is likely that it has been absorbed into the Municipal Emergency Management Plan, a document of similar length which covers all emergencies and not just fire (though fire remains the dominant hazard). The MEMP is still very locally focused.

Murrindindi still have a Municipal Fire Management Planning Committee which is reflected by the high level of locally specific content.

Strathbogie Municipal Fire Management Plan 2023-26

Strathbogie's plan is more generic in nature and contains a lot more template language. The Strathbogie plan contains a lot less local detail. There are fewer references to community, local infrastructure, fire history and local geography.

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Most of Strathbogie's references to specific locations are in risk tables, brigade names and infrastructure lists.

Most of document is focused on risk framework and planning arrangements. The Strathbogie plan focuses more on planning structures and coordination, with fewer locally contextualised explanations of fire risk.

Mitchell Fire Prevention Plan 2024-27

The Mitchell Fire Prevention plan is a very short document which gives a very broad overview of the risk of fire in the Shire and aspirational goals. The plan contains nothing specific relating to an individual community or geographical area.

Mitchell does however produce an annual fire plan. This document sets out the priorities for fire prevention such as fuel reduction programs and property clean up notices. The document does not set any specific targets or KPIs.

The document does discuss that the Shire has been working with local communities to create Community Emergency Management Plans. This has been completed in 7 communities.

The plan outlines firefighting infrastructure such as static water supply points (their size and location) and fire access routes.

The document as a whole covers fire planning and preparedness, it does not include response to fire or recovery.

Mansfield Fire Management Plan 2017

A 120 page document produced under the old legislation that provides heavy detail of geographic, climate and vegetation and its influence on fire behaviour. The plan treats bushfire as the dominant hazard in alpine landscapes. Plan includes fire danger rating trends and focuses on long-term fire patterns rather than specific events.

The plan has a high level of local context including, tree hazard management fire access roads and township protection plans. The plan also contains a comprehensive table of localised risks including impact, consequences, mitigation and responsible agency.

Like Murrindindi the plan it includes integrated DES Fire management zones, Victorian fire risk register, fuel loads, future planned burns and historical burns as well as other factors.

As this plan has not been updated since 2017 it is likely to have been incorporated into the Shire's MEMP. Mansfield's MEMP, like Murrindindi, treats fire as a hazard amongst others. This means that the focus on fire is heavily reduced in the document.

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Given bushfire remains the most significant natural hazard in Victoria, VFBV recommend legislation be amended to return to the previous requirements for a comprehensive municipal level fire prevention plan and committee, and that representation of these committees be returned to local brigades and groups.



We recommend that the auditing function of fire prevention plans and committees be returned to CFA, and for S43 of the CFA Act be amended to authorise and strengthen the CFA Chief Officer’s powers to audit and enforce S43 for untreated risks that represent an unacceptable fire risk.

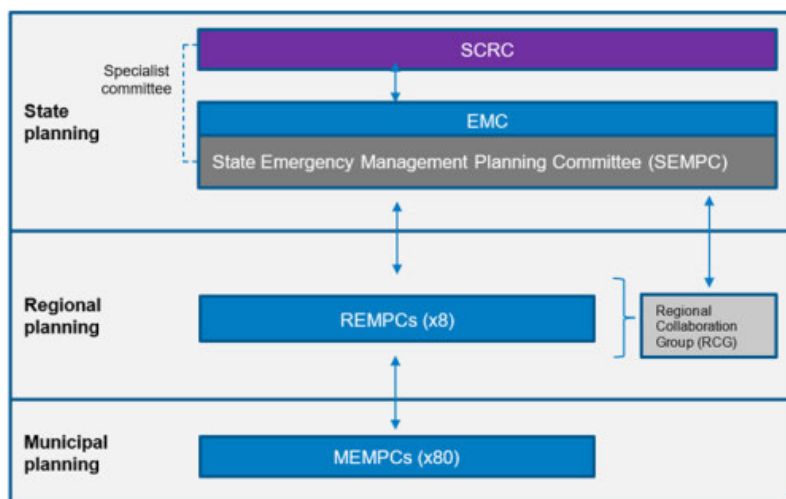


Regardless of what planning legislation remains in place, legislation should be updated to enforce clear expectations on ALL landholders (public and private) to undertake fire prevention activities within appropriate timeframes with transparent reporting for visibility and accountability.

1.3 STATE CRISIS AND RESILIENCE COUNCIL

The State Crisis and Resilience Council (SCRC) is formed under the Emergency Management Act 2013 and acts as the peak crisis and EM advisory body in Victoria responsible for providing advice to the relevant Minister in relation to whole of government policy and strategy for emergency management.

It is Chaired by the Secretary for Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Deputy Chair is the Secretary for the Department of Justice and Regulation.



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It is made up of the department head of each of the Victorian public service departments; Chief Commissioner of Police; CEO of EMV (who is a deputy secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety); the Emergency Management Commissioner; the Inspector-General for Emergency management (as an observer only) and the CEO of the Municipal Association of Victoria on behalf of local government.

In effect, the SCRC is overwhelmingly represented by departments responsible for Class 2 emergencies, and with the exception of the Chief Commissioner of Police and EMC, there is a distinct lack of operational knowledge on the committee. The Class 1 agencies being CFA, FRV, FFMVic and SES are not on the Council and are all required to be represented singularly by the EM Commissioner.

It is worth noting that only Victoria's first Emergency Management Commissioner has had any background in Fire, with half of the Commissioners since having come from Victoria Police.

Given the frequency of Class 1 emergencies in Victoria, the frequency of bushfire in Victoria and the role the SCRC plays as the peak crisis and advisory committee, VFBV believe the makeup of the Committee is no longer appropriate.



VFBV advocates that each of the Class 1 agency Chief Officers should be represented on the SCRC.

1.4 TRAINING

Volunteers remain deeply critical and highly dissatisfied with the training arrangements provided to them. In particular, volunteers year after year report through VFBV's annual survey that there are not enough training opportunities in formats, at times and at locations that make it easy for them to participate.

Simply increasing the number of courses will not solve the problem. There has to be a cultural and organisational change in the way CFA provides volunteer training. Long-term investment and significant organisational and cultural change as to how training is provided and delivered to volunteers is urgently required.

Career instructors may only be provided to CFA from FRV through the secondment agreement.

FSIM notes that the Secondment Agreement requires that any work, duties, or roles performed by secondees must only be work, duties, or roles covered by the relevant EA; however, the CO, CFA has the order and control of the work of all secondees. FSIM considers this arrangement may have the potential to cause a conflict or issue. For example, the CO, CFA may require a secondee to attend out-of-hours meetings or other activities to support a brigade, however the approval to undertake overtime is required from FRV.

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Removal of barriers such as restrictive training staff availability arrangements are urgently needed. This would allow more career instructors to be employed and available during hours that volunteers actually need them.

Investment in IT systems such as a contemporary learning Management System is also critical to address the myriads of problems volunteers raise with the current system.

While CFA Training has significantly improved in recent years and VFBV acknowledges there has been significant improvements and changes, volunteers continue to raise issues with training including the length of courses, too much theory and not enough practical, inflexible scheduling and poor consultation on course time and locations.



Victorian government consult (including with staff and their representative bodies) on greater flexibility for career instructors to better align work hours with periods volunteers are available.



Victorian government fund the replacement of CFA's Learning Management System to better support CFA training.

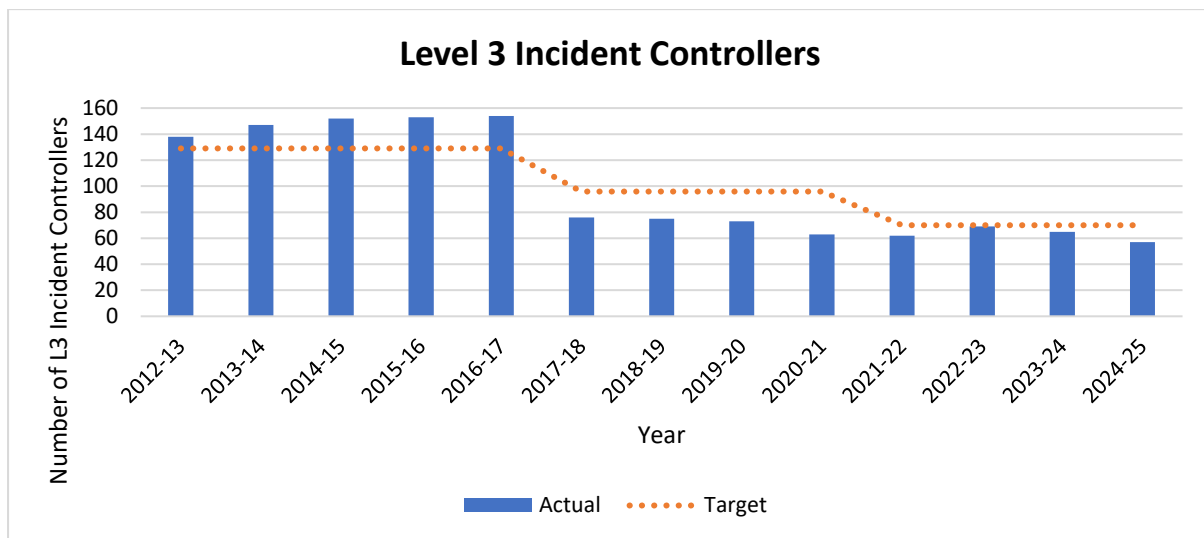
VFBV will continue to work with CFA to address volunteer dissatisfaction with training.

1.5 INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAMS (IMT)

EMV have failed to meet their level 3 incident management personnel (volunteers and staff) targets for successive years. Incredulously, rather than build new capability to address the gaps and emerging climate modelling predicting higher fire activity, EMV have continuously reduced their target for Level 3 incident controllers.

On Black Saturday, the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission reported there were just over 100 Level 3 Incident Controllers. Following recommendations by the Bushfires Royal Commission to increase this number, level 3 incident controllers were built up to 152 by 2014 and maintained.

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Then in 2017, as numbers started dropping and having missed its target - rather than build new capacity - EMV lowered the target to 96. When numbers dropped yet again and they kept missing that number, they again lowered the target to 70.

As of July 1, 2025 Victoria recorded only 57 level three incident controllers – just one-third of the capability that was built following the Black Saturday fires.

At a time when the number of major emergencies is increasing both in frequency and duration and Victoria is increasingly drawing on interstate and international personnel to fill gaps - it is incredulous to keep repeatedly reducing the targets of incident controllers.

And while VFBV supports the continued cooperation and involvement of interstate and international personnel sharing, the longer fire seasons caused by climate change is increasingly extending fire seasons between the northern and southern hemisphere and causing overlapping demand for resources. As the 2019/2020 fire season demonstrated during the eastern seaboard fires, Victoria must also plan for occasions where external assistance may not be available due to competing outbreaks in other jurisdictions.

And while the Department of Justice and Community Safety annual report attempts to dismiss these drops as simply being a result of workforce attrition and retirement, the long-term trends show rather than being isolated occurrences, there is a distinct lack of long-term workforce planning to prepare for these workforce attritions that are not only predictable but known.

What is not reported, is the number of personnel endorsed for the other level two and three IMT roles.



VFBV advocates that EMV be required to publicly report annually on the full spectrum of Level 3 and Level 2 Incident Management Team roles that require endorsement so the public can have confidence that the State's full capability levels are being appropriately managed and maintained.

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1.6 UNDER UTILIZATION OF VOLUNTEERS IN IMT'S

During its Operating Model review in 2022, EMV asserted that only 11% of Level 3 accredited personnel were volunteers. Given at the time there were more than 100,000 EM volunteers across the Victorian EM sector, this demonstrates a significant underutilisation of existing capacity and capability that is simply being ignored.

This concern was recently confirmed from observations and findings of the Inspector General for Emergency Management in his 'Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector' report that found ***“that agency-based volunteers are not provided with the same level of training and development afforded to paid personnel and volunteers hold concerns that they are under-utilised and undervalued by the sector.”*** (Finding 26)

VFBV asserts that EMV's Operating Model Review represents a serious risk to the future of emergency management in Victoria, and the sustainability of its IMT resourcing model. The proposal to replace the current model with a small pool of paid personnel represents a significant risk.

Some volunteers feel the current system is being left to wither and forced to the point of failure in order to advance the alternate public servant model being advanced by EMV.

Failure to run sufficient training courses, and a failure to run courses at times and locations suitable for volunteers has constantly been raised by volunteers as key barriers to volunteers achieving level 2 and level 3 accreditations.

VFBV holds significant concern that the model proposed through EMV's Operating Model Review will act as a further barrier to increasing the EM volunteer capacity across not only the level 3 incident level but may also have a flow on impact by discouraging a viable volunteer progression pathway from level 1 and 2 incident management layers that are crucial to building appropriately skilled and experienced level 3 operators.

The most significant barriers to volunteers progressing to level two and three IMT roles are;

1. Unavailability of courses scheduled at volunteer friendly times
2. Unavailability of pre-requisite courses that allow volunteers to attend the courses.
3. The lack of mentoring and professional development opportunities for volunteers to be identified and developed into these roles.
4. The lack of exercising opportunities provided to volunteers at volunteer friendly times to practice and develop their skills
5. Prior to fire services reform, volunteer development was done by qualified CFA Regional Commanders who have now been replaced with seconded staff from FRV who are not always qualified in these Level 3 roles themselves, and who are often not in the roles long enough to identify volunteers and assist them with their development journey.

The lack of volunteers in IMT's isn't just about a wasted resource, and lack of workforce planning but also represents a significant lost opportunity as volunteers frequently bring valuable local knowledge with them when undertaking these roles.

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The COVID19 pandemic response is a good illustration of the working of a Class 2 emergency and the inherent failures and risks associated with an IMT model that relied very heavily on public servants and government departments operating with differing levels of accountability.

Victoria's Hotel Quarantine and the associated inquiries demonstrated serious failings that resulted from blurred accountability lines, authorisations and delegations. This is not to say that public servants do not have a valuable role to play and should continue to play, but these experiences should act as a warning to those advocating this type of model for widespread adoption for future Class 1 emergencies as EMV's operating model review attempts to persuade.

Developing, retaining and effectively utilising the pool of experienced volunteers for the range of critical incident management, command and leadership roles is equally important as building standing resources and is an area highlighted in previous reviews as an area needing improvement.

Building and sustaining the pool of volunteers needed for incident management and leadership roles requires deliberate, proactive and accountable effort by agencies. Similarly oversight and tangible targets are required to be implemented to ensure that relevant effort is applied.

This includes proactive effort to target the development of volunteers for senior leadership and operational roles; training, recognition of prior learning and support to make this volunteer career progression as easy and mutually beneficial as possible; mentoring; and then utilising these volunteers after they have been trained and endorsed.

Issues associated with improving volunteer access to incident management training; the need for better utilisation of trained, endorsed and experienced volunteers; and the need for more volunteers to be trained in incident management roles was extensively canvassed during the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.



VFBV advocates that the Fire Services Implementation Monitor be tasked to audit and report quarterly on efforts made by the agencies and sector to encourage, nurture and rebuild Victoria's volunteer IMT capability, with the number of volunteers in these roles and their utilisation reported annually and with appropriate targets set to encourage increases over time.

1.7 INTEROPERABILITY AND AGENCY ATTESTATIONS

Each Victorian emergency management agency Chief makes attestations throughout the year to the Emergency Management Commissioner to acquit the Commissioner's preparation, assurance and audit functions of his role.

A serious communications failure occurred on the 7th January 2026, which resulted in EMV having to issue an-all-points bulletin to all CFA, FRV and FFMVic personnel on the 8th January resulting in a

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significant change to pre-planned communications plans in the midst of a going large scale emergency.

DEECA had transitioned to the new Regional Mobile Radio (RMR) network in late 2025. While CFA and FFMVic had all updated and reprogrammed all their agency radios with the new command channel usage as per protocol, FRV had not.

The issue presented as a serious safety risk on the 7th January, when FRV seconded officers working in their CFA command roles at the Walwa Fire, found they could not communicate with any aircraft or any other agency personnel on the new command channels, as their FRV issued radios had not been reprogrammed with the new command channels.

As a result, EMV was forced to issue a Safety Alert issued by the State Response Controller on the 8th January immediately rescinding the new DECCA RMR command channels that were in use, and directing all agency personnel Statewide to revert and only utilise CFA RMR Command Channels, and CFA/DEECA incident channels. The Alert required all agencies to revisit their default communications plans across the entire State, make changes and advise personnel accordingly.

This incident represents a significant failure of agency preparation, and the associated EMV assurance protocols that are supposed to ensure all agencies complete their pre fire season attestation responsibilities and preparation.

Volunteers believe the resulting confusion from last minute changed comms plans contributed to widespread confusion over the fire season about channel allocation and uses.



VFBV urges the Committee to review each of the agencies (CFA, FRV, FFMVic) Spring 2025 and Summer 2025/26 Attestations required to be made to EMV by Agency heads to review agency preparedness.

1.8 CFA/FRV SECONDMENT MODEL

The 2025/26 Fire Season was the first significant test of Victoria's new arrangements put in place as a result of the governments controversial fire service reforms in 2020. The previous significant fire season that occurred in 2019/2020 fires were operated under the old arrangements prior to reform. Implementation of the government's reforms commenced on July 1, 2020.

Volunteers continue to argue that the current policy settings in place are seriously handicapping CFA's ability to plan and respond to large scale emergencies, and setting CFA, and CFA volunteers up for failure.

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Volunteers have continued to report that the lack of suitably qualified and experienced CFA Command personnel seriously impacted CFA response to the 2026 bushfires.

CFA and CFA volunteers have consistently raised their concerns about the CFA/FRV Secondment model and the long-term vacancy and non-relief issues resulting from the requirement that CFA may only fill its senior operational roles from Fire Rescue Victoria. Similarly, CFA volunteers have consistently raised this as an issue impacting on CFA volunteers and brigades and the support they receive from CFA Command, including the long-term cultural issues associated with command staff being loaned from another organisation that has no background or experience with volunteers.

CFA reports that the vacancies have resulted in impacted CFA districts, groups, brigades and volunteers not receiving the dedicated operational support and leadership they need to ensure operational preparedness and readiness.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor Year 4 Annual Report – page 34

Under the Victorian Government's Fire Services Reform, S6F and S17 of the CFA Act were amended to prevent CFA from employing its own Assistant Chief Fire Officers and Commanders and is instead required to enter a secondment agreement for the provision of these staff from Fire Rescue Victoria.

Prior to this CFA employed and managed its own workforce of command personnel whom were trained, developed and mentored within the CFA volunteer and community culture and reported directly through the same CFA Chief Officer's chain of command that volunteers did.

The new arrangements prevent CFA from employing its own command workforce, and now relies on officers being seconded from an all-staff fire service. One that has a significantly different culture and operating model, is a predominantly centralised urban and metropolitan based and therefore with little exposure to Victoria's largest natural hazard risk of large-scale bushfires and a decentralised volunteer workforce.

The effects and dangers of this approach should be obvious.

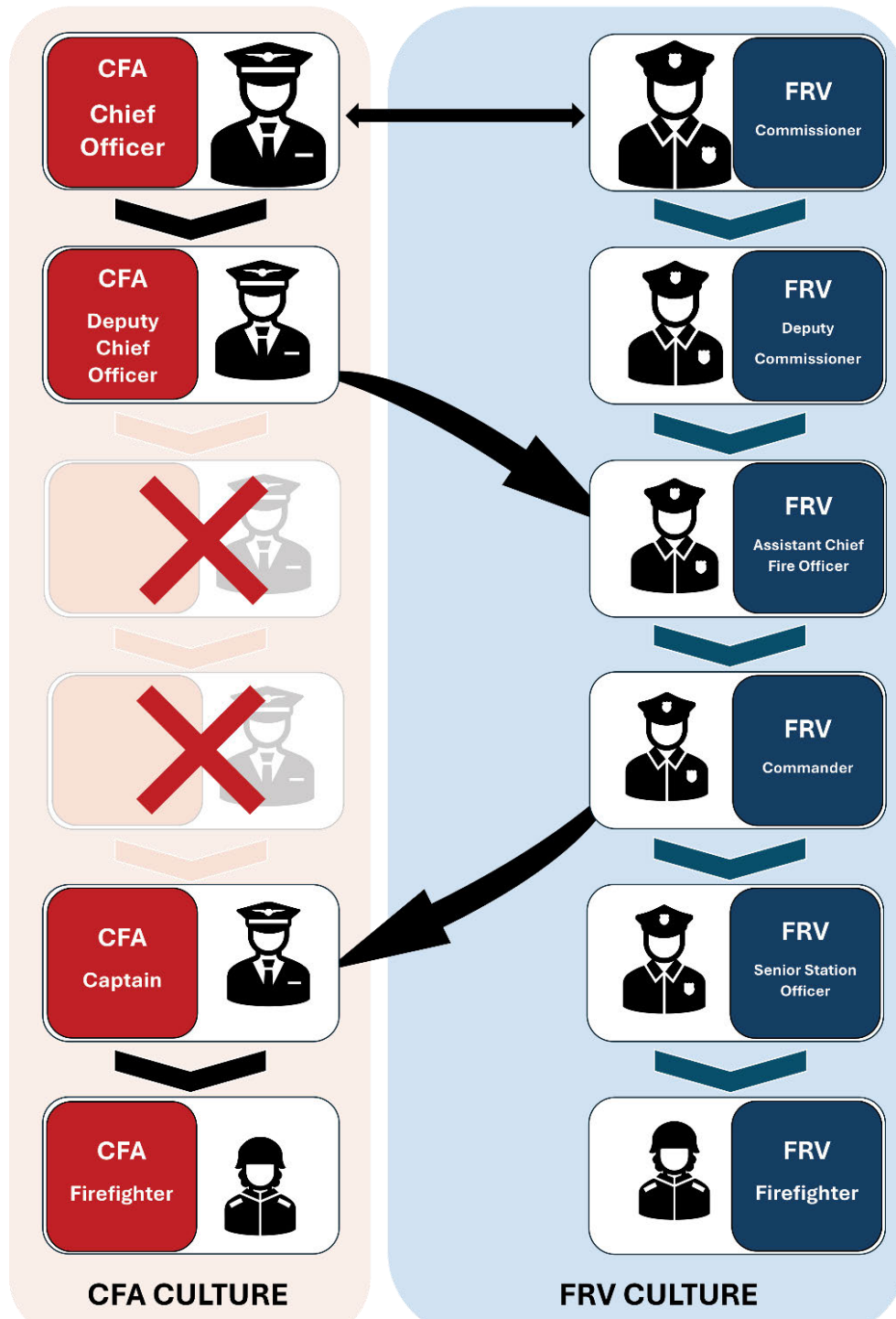
FSIM observed that under the Secondment Agreement, the CO, CFA has no formal input as to which FRV employees fill seconded positions and limited visibility of incoming secondees' capabilities. FRV advised that this is due to privacy obligations.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor Year 3 Annual Report – page 19

These arrangements dislocate the CFA Chief Officers chain of command, and causes significant impediments to the Chief Officers control and management of his/her workforce.

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CFA CHAIN OF COMMAND UNDER THE SECONDMENT MODEL



*All CFA Captains and CFA Firefighters are volunteers.

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It also significantly undermines volunteers trust and confidence that their chain of command is actually working towards CFA goals and that command officers have the requisite background, skills, experience and personal attributes suitable to managing an entire volunteer workforce and large-scale natural landscape risks and hazards.

This is not a reflection of the men and women who are seconded from FRV and for the most part, overwhelming do the best they can. Just as volunteers are setup for failure, so too are the FRV secondees who are not provided the tools, systems, skills and professional development to prepare them for the role.

CFA also reported that the vacancies are impacting on CFA's ability to maintain operations against its statutory obligations and provide safe systems of work in relation to fatigue management of its seconded workforce.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor Year 4 Annual Report – page 34

It should not be necessary to explain that a culture of a fully staffed, highly unionised and rostered paid service that mostly serves a highly centralised urbanised and structural environment might differ from a fully volunteer and community-based service that is decentralised and spread over more than 1,200+ locations across Victoria.

CFA notes that the capabilities and attributes of an ACFO in CFA differ from an ACFO in FRV; generally, FRV operational staff have less exposure to bushfire or prescribed fire in rural environments due to their work largely being based in Melbourne and peri-urban areas and are not responsible for the management of a volunteer workforce.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor Year 3 Annual Report – page 100

Under the new model, the CFA Chief Officer's entire middle and lower management levels are borrowed from another fire service. A fire service that could not be more different to CFA if it tried.

All officers at the rank of Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) and Commander are now seconded from FRV. Even when FRV are unable or unwilling to provide suitably qualified officers, CFA is not legally able to fill these roles from anywhere else.

While the full cultural impacts of this policy decision have been ameliorated to some degree in the short-term by the high percent of ACFO and Commanders who have had previous CFA experience prior to reform - as time goes on, the number of seconded officers who come into these roles with no experience of volunteers, community embedded fire brigades or CFA systems and processes will continue to rise.

At the end of the reporting period, CFA had completed a demographics analysis of (substantive) seconded staff, noting that approximately 48 per cent of current seconded staff (in FY 2022-23, age 60+: 24 per cent, age 55-59: 24 per cent) could potentially retire over the next five to ten years. At the end of the reporting period, FRV had yet to validate the age demographic data provided by CFA. However, FSIM considers this has the potential to result in a significant loss of capability, skills and knowledge

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of appropriately qualified and experienced operational staff, particularly with wildfire firefighting skills and experience in working with volunteers over a short period of time. As FRV has not yet incorporated CFA's capabilities into its workforce planning, it is unclear how FRV will mitigate this risk.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor Year 3 Annual Report – page 100

Under the Secondment Agreement executed between CFA and FRV on the 31 October 2020, FRV is contractually obliged to provide CFA with 45 ACFO's; 96 Commanders; 53 Instructors; and 29 PAD Supervisors/Operators.

The legislation provides CFA with no mechanism to fill unfilled or vacant positions, and while FRV has been in breach of these obligations for almost the entire duration of the secondment agreement, the Victorian Government has taken no tangible action to address the breach of contract that leaves not only volunteers, but the Victorian community at risk due to the high levels of unfilled or vacant command positions across CFA.

Successive reports from the Government's Independent Fire Services Implementation Monitor have raised serious concerns about the critical impact long-term unfilled and non-relief is causing.

I have been advised repeatedly by the CFA that its resourcing needs have not been met through the secondment model and that significant work is still required before this may happen.

The problem of filling vacancies and providing relief, including to cover long service and unplanned leave, at the commander and assistant chief fire officer levels in the CFA remains critical.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor Year 5 Annual Report – page 8

To add insult to injury, FRV are directly funded by Government for these positions and forms part of FRV's base budget. However, each time FRV fails to make a seconded officer available to CFA it pockets those funds for its own purposes and ultimately to CFA's detriment. This represents a financial disincentive for FRV to supply the full number of seconded personnel to CFA for deployment as it can redirect those resources to its own purposes with no consequence.

In 2023/24, CFA experienced a deficit of, on average, 17 senior operational leaders (i.e. Commanders and ACFOs) each week. This equates to 11 per cent of CFA's operational workforce. At its worst, CFA experienced a deficit of 33 operational positions (i.e. 20.6 per cent of its operational workforce) for one week in 2023/24.

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VFBV has long argued that should the secondment arrangements continue to be a Victorian Government policy, then funding for these positions should be supplied to CFA, with CFA only required to pay FRV for the provision of services it actually receives.

This not only would provide a financial incentive for FRV to fill these positions, but it would also provide compensation to CFA for unfilled positions, which could then be directed to CFA to try and mitigate the impacts of these unfilled positions.



That funding for the full complement of seconded positions be provided and allocated to the CFA Base Budget, with FRV only to be reimbursed by CFA for actual positions filled, with any unspent funds able to be reprioritised to other CFA areas.

CASE STUDY

In the week commencing 5th January 2026, coinciding with the start of the Walwa fire, volunteers estimated that CFA had approximately 11 vacant/unrelieved ACFO positions (25%), and 34 vacant/unrelieved Commander positions.

This represents a significant shortage of senior operational command roles at the most critical time and apex of CFA brigade and incident activity.

This represents a significant and critical shortage of required capability in CFA's senior operational leadership that directly impacted brigade and volunteer support and preparedness activities.

And while the impact on CFA capability is very serious, this rate of vacancy and un-relief constitutes a serious health and safety risk to the remaining seconded persons left in those roles, who were expected to manage their responsibilities and increasing workload with reduced staff.

This is consistent with CFA and FISM reporting.

The Secondment Agreement, a foundational element of reform, sets out the cohorts and numbers of operational staff that FRV will provide to CFA, including the key operational leadership roles of Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) and Commander. Ongoing patterns of vacancies and non-relief have continued to be experienced this financial year. Throughout 2024-25 the secondee non-relief rate has been as high as 20.6 per cent with an average of 12 per cent across the seconded ACFO and Commander workforce. This equates to an average of 19.4 ACFO/Commander positions being non-relieved weekly. Vacancy and non-relief capacity continues to be raised with FRV, Emergency Management Victoria, DJCS and the Fire Services Implementation Monitor.

CFA 2024/25 Annual Report, Page 45

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CASE STUDY

At the commencement of the Longwood fire (Berry's Lane) and its resulting rapid escalation, CFA District 22 (the District that the Longwood fire originated from) volunteers report it was operating at just **one third** of the required number of command personnel.

Where there should have been 5 seconded senior operational personnel in place (4 substantive and one reliever), only two were filled.

This put these two officers in an impossible position of having to manage 24hour availability during an escalating fire burning out of control, and the serious fatigue issues resulting. Volunteers simply had to go without command personnel for long periods of time while these officers managed their fatigue.

How were two people supposed to manage coverage of critical command decisions and responsibilities, while simultaneously doing the work of two other positions that were unfilled and do so safely? The system put them in an impossible position and raises serious health and safety concerns.

And whilst the CFA has operational oversight of seconded staff through the CFA Chief Officer, there are complexities that limit the ability to allocate resources to where they are most needed.

The flow-on effects are concerning, particularly in relation to fatigue management and reduced wellbeing outcomes for those who cover these vacant or non-relieved positions, particularly in the country area of Victoria (CAoV), where they may have to travel long distances. The community ultimately also experiences these consequences, with a lack of senior decision-makers available on the ground for operational incidents.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor Year 5 Annual Report – page 8



The Committee review and report on the full range of vacancy and non-relief that was experienced each week during the 2026 Fire Season.

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Recognising the serious implications of unfilled positions and the impact this has on CFA capability, support to volunteer brigades, and the serious health and safety implications on those fulfilling the roles - the Fire Services Implementation Monitor should be directed to report and table all vacant, unfilled and unrelieved positions on a quarterly basis for monitoring.

Volunteers have continuously raised the issues resulting from the resulting high turnover and churn in ACFO and Commanders. The CFA Brigade model, and the volunteer model in fire services across Australia, are very reliant on local relationships. Volunteers draw enormous confidence and respect from relationships established throughout the year, and conversely the system benefits from the intimate local knowledge that incumbent senior officers build up over time by the day-to-day interactions between senior volunteer leaders across a district.

Volunteers report on the “revolving door” of ACFO’s and Commanders and the highly disruptive impacts this brings on brigade planning and operations.

A revolving door of relievers can also impact the resolution of CFA’s volunteers’ issues or concerns, with a lack of CFA command staff at middle management levels. Volunteers face the prospect of having their issues delayed, and there are potential long-term impacts on recruitment if membership with the CFA is known to involve unrelieved stress and burnout. Noting that volunteer numbers improved in 2025, the challenges presented by the secondment model in conjunction with an ageing workforce, could drastically reduce recruitment in the coming years.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor Year 5 Annual Report – page 9

The high level of churn and short-term placements together with the exceedingly high rate of vacant and unrelieved positions is also resulting in an alarming rate of “dual commissioning”, where seconded officers are balancing the obligations of two organisations simultaneously. In simple terms – dual commissioning is the situation where one person is trying to serve two masters – the FRV Commissioner and the CFA Chief Officer at the same time. Emergency Services operate under very specific statutory provisions and delegations. Dual Commissioning creates a serious legal risk to both the agencies as well as those officers exercising these powers.

Dual Commissioning was explicitly banned under agency protocols due to the dangerous implications on statutory obligations and delegations, as well as the inherent conflict of interest it gives rise to. Steps to ensure seconded officers would never have occasion to be dual commissioned was supported by the whole of government implementation of fire service reforms. The fact that occasions are now arising where officers are potentially being dual commissioned is a worrying trend and represents a serious risk.

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CFA/FRV Culture

Because the volunteer based approach is core to achieving community capacity, community sharing responsibility and the service capacity required in Victoria, the CFA culture (and the emergency management sector culture overall) need to be deliberately designed and actively managed to ensure all personnel understand, are trained and are held accountable to act in ways that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers.

In addition to their firefighting or technical roles, this underlying role of maintaining and building volunteer (and community) capacity makes the contribution of paid staff even more valuable than many people recognise.

Certainly, volunteers know and value the contribution paid staff make, particularly at the brigade and local level and wherever it is working well, it is deeply appreciated by volunteers and VFBV.

The need for all personnel to be skilled and committed to encouraging, maintaining and building volunteer capacity means that CFA staff need to be carefully selected, highly trained, values driven and well recognised for the crucial role they perform in supporting and sustaining thriving volunteerism. This cannot be left to chance and requires active leadership from the top down.

Now in the sixth-year post reform, no-one can claim volunteers have not been patient. All their earlier predictions that were dismissed by government have been realised.

Since 2025, VFBV and UFU have worked together in good faith to try and address the vacancy and relief issues and also worked together to remove the ban on seconded officers from wearing their CFA uniforms.

We acknowledge the steps taken to try and solve these problems within the current model but also have to acknowledge that since this work commenced, and despite good intentions between the parties - the vacancy and relief issues have not significantly improved and have at times actually gotten worse.

As we move into the summer fire season, the vacancy and relief issue poses a significant challenge for both agencies. A concerted effort to address this issue is needed to ensure operational capability is available to adequately cover the whole state.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor Year 5 Annual Report – page 9

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This points to fundamental structural issues with the model, and VFBV respectfully argues that six years is long enough to see if something will work. Six years is an eternity for an emergency service charged with the responsibility of protecting life and property, and in volunteers view - the current arrangements are a clear and demonstrable risk and must be addressed.

There is very little sign of positive improvements to a system and arrangement that is fundamentally broken, cannot work, and in our view will never work.

Ironically, the government's own monitor, and the two Fire Service Chief's appear to have reached the same conclusion.

It is very disappointing that after four years of work to progress the reforms, guidelines for the everyday working of secondees, like OHS reporting, dispute and grievance resolution and relief management are not completed. Indeed, after four years, the only clear development in relation to secondees is the unanimous view held by stakeholders that the secondment agreement, as originally envisioned, is unlikely to be fully realised in the current industrial environment.

I share this view and believe that the future success of the secondment arrangement is now out of the hands of FRV and CFA. They have done all that they can do, in good faith, to have it successfully implemented and now must wait for the UFU to decide if they will allow the remaining issues to be resolved. The industrial environment and legislative limitations will curtail any further attempts to implement the secondment model, and the effort to try and work around these impediments does not present a cost-effective return. Something must change.

Indeed, from the information that I have gathered and reported on, it is clear the implementation of the reform is at a crossroad. Agencies can continue to work within the parameters that have frustrated progress for the past four years or look for new ways to get things done. It is nonsensical to expect different and better outcomes from the same approaches to completing actions in the implementation plan that have been adopted so far.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor Year 4 Annual Report – page 4



That the Committee urge the Victorian Government to review its secondment policy in full consultation with employees and volunteers with the view of CFA being permitted to employ its own workforce.

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1.9 PLANNED BURNING AND FUEL REDUCTION

There is strong consensus amongst volunteers that planned burning remains a fundamental and key activity to managing fuel loads and reducing the risk of bushfire. The most common complaint received from brigades concerning planned burns is the difficult and complex approval processes in place and the barriers to actually performing them.

VFBV supported the recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission to increase the annual target for planned burning on public land.

We further submitted that where public land adjoins residentially developed communities, fuel reduction measures should be undertaken with the sole and specific objective of affording maximum protection to that community.

Volunteers are of the strong belief that a significant increase in planned burning is necessary to reduce the impact of bushfire on lives, property and community infrastructure.

Because of the land tenure arrangements in Victoria, we have also previously spoken strongly on the need for tenure-blind planned burn planning that is more targeted, as well as the importance of treating private property in addition to public/crown land.

Whilst the impact of fire in any particular community may in some cases be transmitted from public land, the continued propagation of fire within a particular community occurs from either vegetation within the community, predominately on private land and from ember attack resulting from these and other urban fuels (house to house or structure to structure).

We submit that any debate on the issue of fuel management that does not consider the issue of fuel reduction on private land also - is seriously lacking as it fails to address the principal source of fire spread from uncontrolled fire in the urban rural interface.

VFBV has consulted extensively over the years with volunteers on their attitudes towards planned burning and provides the following high level summary:

- Burns conducted on high priority strategic area's (life and asset protection burns) are considered more important than low value broad scale burns
- Volunteers believe more planned burning needs to be done
- Road and rail corridors continue to be of significant concern to volunteers – with many believing them not to be adequately treated
- Volunteers do not believe that existing municipal emergency management planning processes and plans are identifying all the area's that require treatment

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- Volunteers believe that strategic burns on private land that contribute to life and asset protection within their communities - should be counted as part of the State's overall burn targets, as they are equally, if not sometimes more important than remote burns conducted exclusively on public land
- Overly conservative no-go conditions that cancel planned burns at short notice are a significant source of frustration for volunteers who have planned time off and are told they are no longer needed at short notice. More flexible resource planning that allows burns to proceed whilst mitigating any increased risks due to changed conditions would minimise no-go burns
- Volunteers have always considered planned burning to be very important. Results from CFA's 2005, 2010 and 2013 surveys continue to show over 90% of volunteers considering planned burning as important, with the 2013 survey results actually indicating an increase (to 95%) of volunteers rating planned burning between important to very important
- They consider their participation in planned burning to be important, not only from a risk reduction perspective, but they also believe it has significant benefits to their training and skills maintenance in improving understanding of fire behaviour

1.10 VOLUNTEER MORALE

CFA Volunteer morale has been significantly tested in recent years, with dropping morale evidenced by dropping CFA volunteer numbers that are reflecting the high level of volunteer resignations.

It should be noted that CFA volunteers are only reported as a moment in time measure, and CFA do not report new joins alongside these figures, so the drops recorded in CFA's total volunteer numbers masks the true level of volunteer resignations.

Volunteers have continued to report a further deterioration of volunteer morale since May 2025 commensurate with changes to Victoria's fire service levy and Parliaments passing of the Victorian governments new Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund legislation.

Despite strong objection by volunteers, the government pursued this legislation and significant changes to Victoria's fire services property levy, which itself was a recommendation of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission , without any volunteer or community consultation.

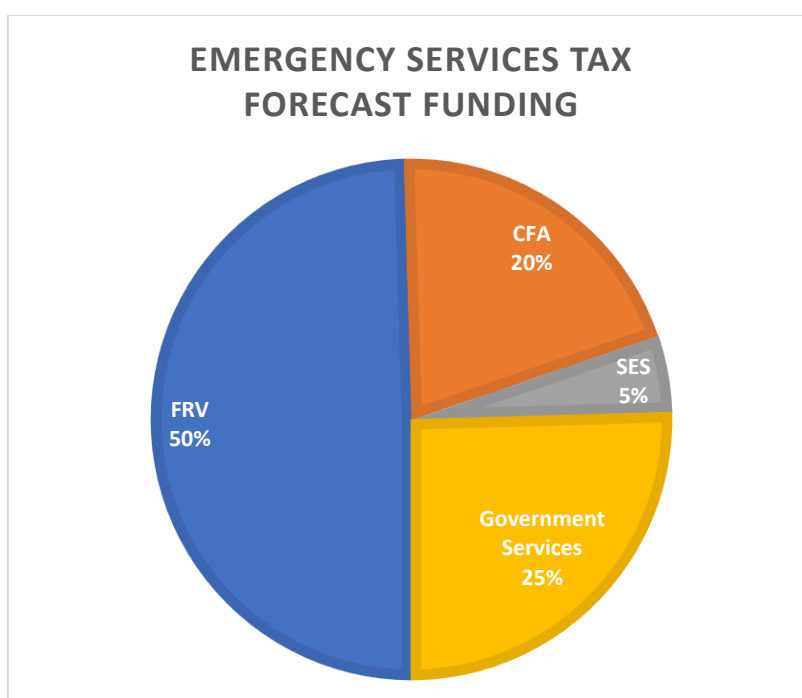
This directly violated the Victorian government's statutory obligations under Section 6 of the CFA Act, which requires the State of Victoria to consult with the elected representatives of volunteers (VFBV) on any issues which may impact upon them.

VFBV advocated for changes to the legislation, with our primary position being non-support for the Bill. However, on the basis that the Bill might be supported by other parties, we also advocated for amendments.

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One amendment was later introduced by Jeff Bourman MP with the aim of simply removing “volunteer” from the legislation, that would have seen the new tax called the “Emergency Services Levy” rather than “The Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund”.

Volunteers explained that the inclusion of “volunteers” in the name of the new tax would be detrimental to volunteer morale, and unfairly tied them to the governments new income stream. Volunteers pointed out that of the ten agencies to be funded from the new tax, only two (CFA and SES) were volunteer, and would account for less than one-quarter of the total funding collected.



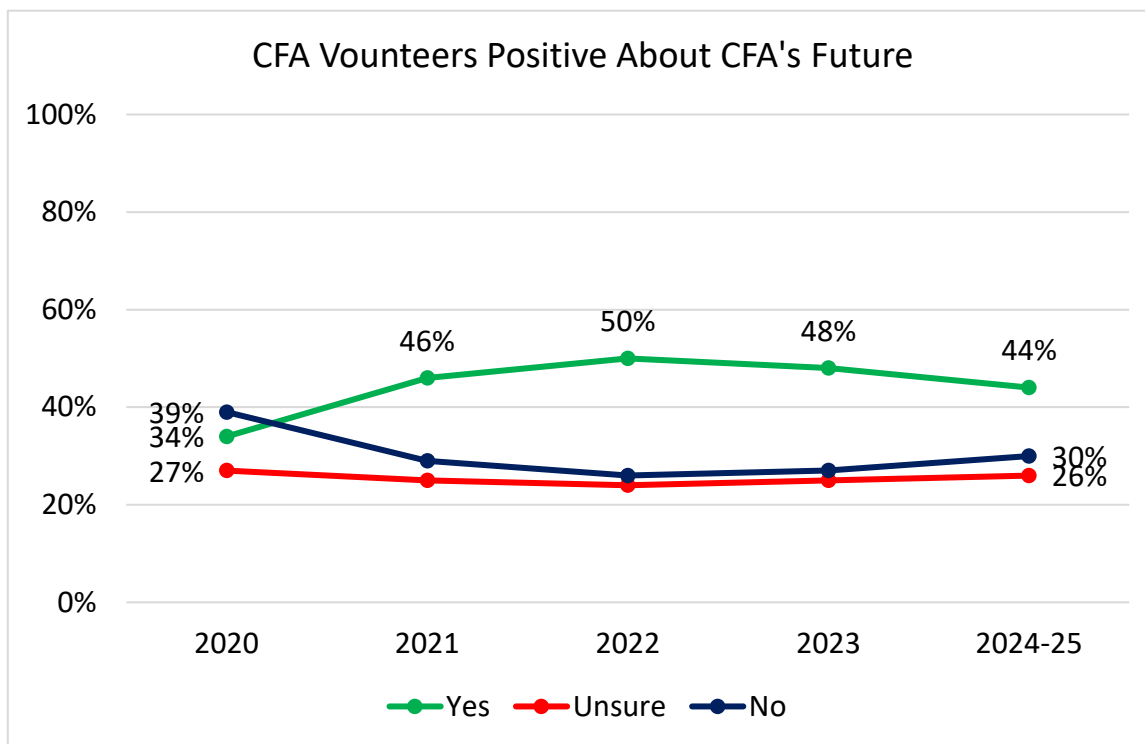
Volunteers believed that by referring to this new tax as a “Volunteer Fund” was trying to trick residents who would see this new tax on each years council rate notice, that all its income was going to volunteers, and would ultimately hurt their fundraising activities which they are still required to do due to inadequate government funding.

Sadly, neither the government and some members of the cross bench supported this reasonable and heartfelt amendment, even though the amendment would not alter the tax revenue collected, and therefore was an amendment that did nothing other than respect volunteers.

By not supporting this amendment, Parliament ignored the view of volunteers that this new tax would have considerable impacts on volunteer morale. History has shown how big an impact the new tax has had not only on CFA Volunteers, but the broader Victorian community.

Preparation & Planning

In a volunteer organisation, the satisfaction of volunteers is critical to any hope of retaining volunteers.



VFBV publishes the results of its CFA Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency survey, that is the largest of its kind across Australia. Successive years has shown the damaging low levels of morale among CFA volunteers.

One of the satisfaction questions asked volunteers “reflecting on the past 12 months, I am feeling positive about CFA’s future. Sadly, less than half of respondents felt positive about CFA’s future.

This low level of morale is a serious issue confronting CFA and will lead to continued high levels of dissatisfaction and dropping volunteer numbers if serious efforts are not made to better support and respect volunteers.

Disbanding of Volunteer Consultative Forum

The Volunteer Consultative Forum (VCF) was an initiative floated by VFBV during discussions of the Victorian Government’s White Paper on emergency management back in 2012. The concept was embraced and announced by the then Minister, the Hon Kim Wells MP. The VCF was officially formed on the 18th of November 2013 and was heralded as delivering on the Victorian Government’s commitment to consult emergency management volunteers across the sector.

The forum was designed to provide a multi-agency volunteer feedback loop direct to the Minister for Emergency Services on issues affecting Emergency Management (EM) volunteers. It was made up of more than twenty emergency management volunteers and agency nominees drawn from CFA,

Preparation & Planning

SES, Life Saving Victoria, Australian Red Cross, Ambulance Victoria, VFBV, St John Ambulance, Volunteer Coast Guard, Salvation Army, VICSESVA and the Victorian Council of Churches Emergencies Ministry.

The VCF was attended by the Minister and reinforced the importance of volunteers having input in ensuring the sustainability and effective utilisation of volunteers across the EM sector. It was widely acknowledged that EM volunteers face unique challenges that deserved dedicated and focussed efforts. Upon a change of Government at the end of 2014, the new Minister for Emergency Services, the Hon Jane Garrett MP regularly attended the VCF and echoed the importance of the VCF and acknowledged that ministerial involvement with the VCF would continue to be a priority under the Andrews Government.

One of the initiatives of the VCF was the establishment of the Emergency Management Volunteer Statement, that was signed by Premier Andrews, along with Minister Garrett and the Emergency Management Commissioner. The Statement that was an agreed commitment between the State of Victoria and emergency management volunteers that committed the State of Victoria to consult with EM volunteers and their representative bodies through the VCF on matters which affect them.

Without warning in April 2023, the then Emergency Services Minister the Hon Jaclyn Symes MP, unceremoniously disbanded the VCF. Having rarely attended a meeting of the VCF, nor explaining her reasons for its disbandment, the volunteers of the committee were simply informed at their last meeting that the group had been disbanded and will be no more.

This blatant disrespect of volunteers undermines all efforts to rebuild volunteer morale.

As volunteers pointed out at the time, EMV host a plethora of working groups and committees across the sector filled with agency representatives and employees, and therefore it was quite an indictment that the only committee dedicated to emergency management volunteers who make up more than 90% of the emergency management workforce gets dumped.

And while EMV has consistently reported to parliament that it was undertaking a review and intended on reestablishing the VCF, some three years later the government has still not reconvened a volunteer consultative forum.

Strategic Priorities for Emergency Management Volunteering in Victoria

In early 2014, the VCF completed two key pieces of foundational work as part of its establishment phase and to inform initial direction.

Two key documents were developed; the first identified the common barriers and enablers to volunteering across the sector from a volunteer's perspective, and the second detailed a range of successful volunteer initiatives that may be applied or used in other agencies.

Preparation & Planning

The information and insights from this work were then used to create the Strategic Priorities for Volunteering in Emergency Management. The Strategic Priorities identify thirteen common volunteer needs, and their value to volunteers.

These priorities are a strategic and business planning instrument for emergency management agencies across the sector, and to assist government. The priorities are informed directly by volunteers and identify needs that require additional focus across the sector, some things that need to be done better and some things that require a new approach if we are to realise the shared goal of a sustainable emergency management system.

Monitoring the application and utilisation of the VCF Strategic Priorities was to be embedded in the sectors Strategic Action Plan (SAP) processes, as opposed to creating separate processes and systems. Overall responsibility for monitoring of progress and the linking of SAP Actions to the VCF Strategic Priorities was to be coordinated by EMV



One of the factors creating tension in the VCF prior to its disbandment, was EMV’s failure to report on the thirteen strategic priorities or show any progress on how the volunteer priorities had been funded or actioned in any of the sectors planning processes.



That the Committee urge the Victorian Government to recommit to the thirteen Strategic Priorities developed by volunteers and task the Fire Services Implementation Monitor to regularly report on their progress.

Respecting and valuing volunteers requires far more than empty rhetoric and flattering speeches in Parliament. In order to rebuild volunteer confidence and morale, the Victorian Government must fully embrace and work with its volunteers to affect real change on the ground and ensure volunteers have meaningful influence and representation over the arrangements that most impact their volunteering experience. They have been ignored for too long and this must change if government has any hope of rebuilding volunteer morale and numbers across the emergency management sector.

Contributing Factors and Warnings

2.1 CLIMATE CHANGE

There is a high degree of general consensus among volunteers that climatic conditions are changing and evolving. To a certain degree, this concept should be unremarkable. Earth's climate has changed over millennia. From periods of high volcanic activity through to ice ages, changes to our climate are a regular feature of the history of our planet over many millions of years. This does not seek to underplay the influence of human behaviour on climate change but rather intends to demonstrate it does not require consensus on how human factors may accelerate this process to agree that our climate is forever changing.

Volunteers thinking on climate change is as broad and diverse as that of the general public. However, from a fire services perspective, we are able to focus on the areas where there is a high level of consensus.

It is VFBV's position that climate change is occurring and will continue to have a significant impact on fire services in Victoria.

Climate change is already increasing the risk of bushfires and will further rely on CFA's ability to maintain and strengthen the State's peak load capacity to deal with more frequent, longer running and concurrent disasters.

Climatic conditions have a significant impact on fire behaviour and are causing an increase demand for fire services. Recent fires have been influenced by record hot, dry conditions and in southeast Australia the fire seasons are becoming longer.

CFA recently contributed to research modelling that indicates a 10 to 20 per cent increase in extreme Forest Fire Danger Index. The greatest relative change was in the number of 'Very High' days per year in central and eastern parts of the state, with modelling suggesting a doubling and tripling in the number of 'Very High' days.

Australia, and particularly the southeast of Australia is one of the most fire impacted areas in the world. This is due in large part to a number of complex interactions but put simply involves our population, the location of human settlement, our flora, our climate, our weather, and our associated land use.

Other significant factors include the management of water storage, catchment and general water availability. Of similar consequence is the important role that management of public, private and crown land plays and how these impacts on fuel loads and the creation of fire breaks and buffer zones around human settlement.

From direct observation and experience, it is clear that the main effects of climatic changes impacting on the fire services can be summarised as:

- Longer fire seasons, with seasons starting earlier and finishing later;

Contributing Factors and Warnings

- Increased challenges to the conduct of planned burning and other fuel reduction practices reliant on weather and burning and reduced windows for burning;
- Greater frequency, duration and intensity of bushfires;
- Greater frequency of extreme weather events involving temperature, humidity, wind speed and the dryness of grass and flora;
- Periods of extended drought placing strain on water resources, land use, and the environment including a decrease in the resilience of the natural landscape to withstand and recover from fire; and
- A higher incident and frequency of storms, floods and other natural disasters which places further demand on emergency services;

These factors continue to have significant impacts on our fire services more directly such as:

- Greater frequency and intensity of fires requiring a corresponding increase of demand on resources;
- More difficult fire suppression leading to longer campaigns;
- More intense and erratic fire behaviour which increases the risk to firefighter safety;
- More prolonged mop-up and patrol of fire lines and impacted areas which further stretches resources;
- Increased fatigue and draw down of suppression resources and first responders;
- Increased demand for water and a higher incidence of dry firefighting techniques, chemical retardants and heavy machinery;
- More pronounced impact on community resilience with frequency and duration of fires increasing that will stretch and test community reactions to emergencies with communities needing to cope with more frequent disruption; and
- Higher demand for recovery and relief services to impacted communities.

The need for additional human resourcing is likely to be acute to deal with these changes and impacts. Higher demand for limited resources and equipment will naturally bring cost pressures and competing interests.

For example, over recent years the Victorian Government has prioritised investment and policy focus on structural fire services via a fully paid model to the exclusion of all others.

Contributing Factors and Warnings

Investment in resourcing has been heavily biased and done with little to no cost benefit analysis or understanding of resulting impacts on public value and community safety or resilience to deal with large scale emergencies.

Emergency management volunteers make up over 90% of the countries workforce to deal with these kinds of natural disasters and emergencies. It is therefore unavoidable that these impacts will bring with it a need for further increased numbers of emergency management volunteers and the importance of caring, nurturing sustaining and protecting them.

Because of their critical importance, their corresponding positive links to building community resilience and their generation of immense public value - all Governments and organisations will need to take positive and deliberate action to encourage, maintain and strengthen the involvement of emergency management volunteers.

In our view, the Victorian Government's climate policies and actions should be holistic and acknowledge the increased demand that is likely to be placed on emergency services. Many volunteers also feel many policies are too metropolitan based, and ignore regional and rural communities which arguably are more greatly impacted by large scale emergencies most common in Victoria.

When it comes to renewables and alternate energy, sufficient weighting must also be given to the requisite energy distribution infrastructure, and the increased risks this presents, including estimated increased demand on fire services to deal with new infrastructure.

With budgetary pressures, similar focus should be on how to build and strengthen the community based fire service model that encourages the community to share responsibility for their fire safety and embeds firefighting skills and experience into the very communities at most risk of disruption from large scale climate emergencies.

2.2 PUBLIC EDUCATION

There is no doubt that Victoria has progressively improved its warning systems since the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. Many of these changes came as a direct result of findings from the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission, and refined further following the 2019/2020 eastern seaboard fires.

The greatest challenge facing emergency services today is the dissemination of information and urgent threat messages during a dynamic high impact incident where intel is still being gathered and may be incomplete when warnings would be their most effective.

VFBV maintains that while warnings play a critical role during evolving emergencies - community education on how people read and act on warnings must be similarly funded to increase community penetration and understanding of what to do with emergency warnings.

Evidence accrued over many years indicates that an appropriate response to community information and warnings during emergencies will only occur if the community has participated in and understood programs designed to ensure adequate steps have been taken prior to the event.

Contributing Factors and Warnings

The reason community education and engagement programs are so important is that many members of the public are required to make decisions in emergencies without any personal experience or real understanding of the level of risk that they may face in a bushfire.

The factors that influence individual's decisions is premised upon a sometimes-unimaginable event and the quite separate factors that influence their behaviour when impact is imminent. These are extremely complex and multi-faceted.

Accordingly, there is no single program or "one size fits all" solution, and volunteers frequently raise concerns with the singular focus of State resourcing that appears to preference one size fits all advertising campaigns.

And while there is little doubt about the efficacy and preference of the "leave early" message, volunteers frequently express concerns that this simplistic message is of little help to those who cannot leave or find themselves stuck in place. Therefore, there must be community education around what to do when you can't leave.

Leave early messages are increasingly becoming the go-to messaging with little apparent thought on corresponding consequences or the practicality of the message.

CASE STUDY

On the 7th January 2026, the State Control Centre released a media release warning: "Victorians are being urged to prepare for worsening fire conditions on Friday, in particular for the Wimmera, Northern Country, and North Central districts with these districts forecast to reach a Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating."

The quote contained from the Emergency Management Commissioner was "Prepare now and enact your bushfire survival plan. If you are in an area of forecast Catastrophic fire danger, leave early to an area with a lower fire risk."

Messaging such as this needs to consider what practical steps more than half a million Victorians in these forecast areas to do. These are the questions volunteers are frequently asked, and volunteers would like to see more practical messaging that strengthens the communities understanding of what to do.

VFBV acknowledges this is a complex area, and we acknowledge the leave early messaging is well intended and most certainly the safest option. Volunteers however express concerns that simplistic messaging to a complex problem is insufficient and requires further consideration.

This in itself should underline that there is no simple magic bullet. The assumption that everyone across an entire fire district (or 3 in the example above) can drop tools and relocate on a day of Severe or Catastrophic fire danger is neither practical nor likely, so work needs to continue to mature community facing messaging and educate the public on a cascade of alternatives that improves their safety and resonates with a higher proportion of people.

Contributing Factors and Warnings

2.3 REVIEW OF WARNING EFFECTIVENESS

VFBV continues to call for the ongoing review of the structure of community warning messages and alerts that are provided to the community, particularly those that require an urgent appropriate response to threats arising from any emergency.

It is recognised that the construction and content of communication with members of the public during times of emergency when people are under significant stress requires particular analysis and an understanding of the psychology of human behaviour.

Further research and advice to ensure that messages not only reach their target audience but have the desired reaction is critically important.

People under pressure during an extreme event will seek information from wherever it is available. If they are unable to obtain up to date and accurate information quickly and simply from official sources, they will seek it from wherever they can.

If this alternative source does not have accurate and timely information, people may make decisions that place them at greater risk. Accordingly, every effort must be made to ensure that all official sources are able to perform effectively and meet the demands of the community regardless of the circumstances.

Volunteers continue to raise concerns raised with them by members of the public when using the Victorian VicEmergency app.

If messages are to be effective and save lives, then they must reach all those at risk. There were many instances this fire season where telecommunications were impacted by fire, and communities lost internet and phone services. New or enhanced multi-modal solutions are required that ensure that the whole community has access to information during an emergency regardless of the individual attributes and characteristics of the population.

Governments must provide the necessary budget appropriations to ensure systems and processes are implemented and further refined that embrace the community as a whole.

2.4 ACCURACY

While acknowledging the significant improvements to warnings since 2009, CFA volunteers often raise concerns about the accuracy of warnings, and ensuring they are used effectively and with precision. We heard similar commentary during the 2019/2020 fires and the 2022 flood event.

The fear of volunteers is that if warnings are overused, and are not precise or accurate, the community will begin to ignore them when they are issued. If a warning is urging communities to evacuate for example, acknowledging this is a significant disruption to families, business and other instrumentalities, the public must have confidence that the warning is both appropriate and proportionate to the risk.

As practitioners of emergency management ourselves, we appreciate how incredibly difficult and complex it is to predict areas of effect for rapidly developing emergencies. However, Incident

Contributing Factors and Warnings

management teams must ensure that local knowledge from those on the ground are used when preparing their assessments, to ensure warnings are both accurate and proportionate, including the size of the geographical areas covered by the warning. Similarly, warnings should be continually monitored and revised and contracted if needed to ensure they remain valid and accurate.

Volunteers regularly report community perceptions and confusion with the Victorian VicEmergency app. Issues such as not being able to see the actual fire perimeter, or bearing information, as well as overlapping zones and icons that often give conflicting messages.



That the Victorian VicEmergency app undergo public review so structured community feedback can be reviewed to scope future improvements and development.



That warnings include information on fire activity, speed and direction and expected changes to inform public actions to the warnings.

Funding and Resources

3.1 FUNDING

Volunteers' views on the adequacy of current CFA funding are very much based on their lived experience of volunteering within CFA. The fact that volunteers must rely on community donations and fundraising speaks volumes on the inadequacy of core CFA funding.

It is VFBV's position that CFA is neither funded, resourced or supported to the standard required to meet the expectations and legislative obligations required of it.

The fact that it has continued to achieve an equally comparable high standard as other agencies that are much better funded and resourced is testament to the hard work, skill and goodwill of volunteers, and the dedicated staff who support them.

For a service that is required to attract community members willing to donate their time and put themselves in harm's way, CFA resourcing should ensure investment in buildings, amenity, trucks, equipment and protective clothing is at the very least commensurate with paid services. The fact that it is not is a significant driver of poor volunteer morale that impacts on volunteer recruitment and retention.

As too does the fact that CFA volunteers are required to use trucks as old as 37 years old, aged well beyond their design age.

CFA base budget is the largest determinant of the programs, systems and resources that volunteers rely year-on-year. CFA funding is cloaked in secrecy, and has become more and more difficult to ascertain due to the Victorian government's increasingly reliance on one-off or time limited funding, supplementary funding, treasurer advances and various other methods, which then mask each programs impact on base budget. One off funding that then leaves residual demands on funding, undermines base funding and programs, and causes cuts to other areas and programs that often affect volunteer funding.

Government does not declare CFA's base budget, nor a split between operating base and capital base in its annual reporting.

This makes it difficult for both volunteers and the general public to ascertain true funding levels. This lack of transparency leads to a significant loss of confidence when government or agency media releases and spin do not reflect the lived experience of those on the ground.



That the Victorian Government be required to table and report against comparable base budgets each year for each of its Fire Services (CFA, FRV and FFMVic) that separates ongoing funded, opex, capex and clearly differentiates between project or time limited funding.

Funding and Resources

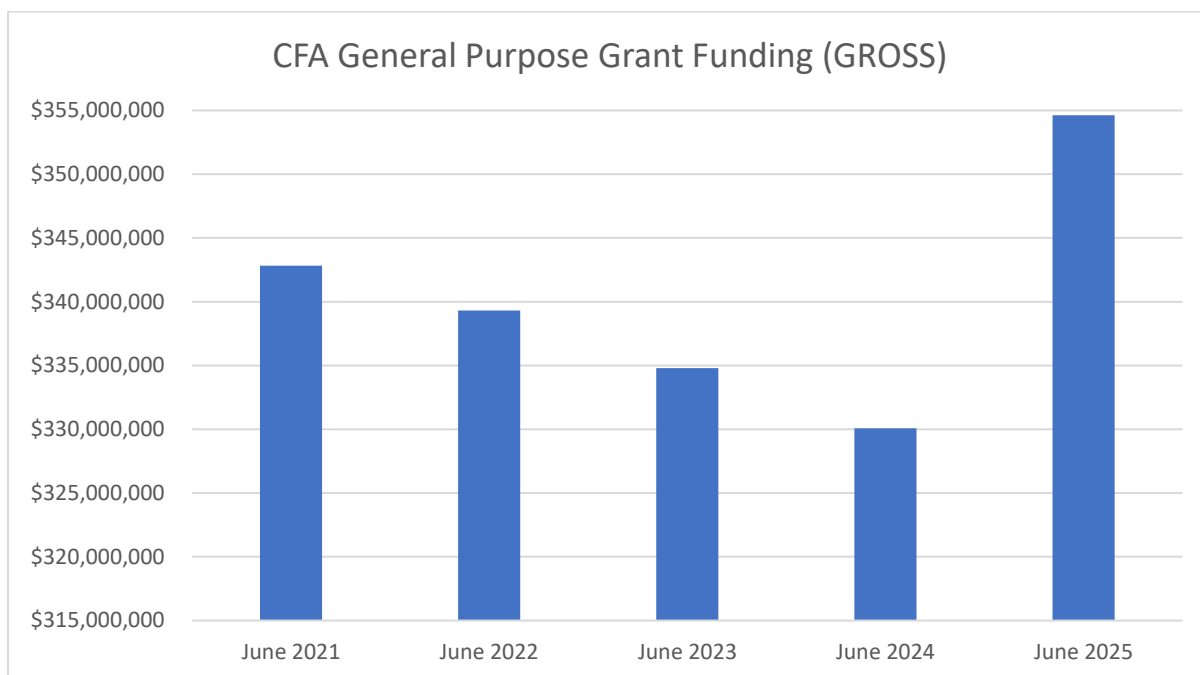


Figure 3.1: CFA General Purpose funding

Reported at line item 2.2.1 of CFA’s Annual Reports are the general-purpose grants provided by the Victorian Government to CFA. CFA describes this funding as mainly relating to operational funding as opposed to “Specific purpose” funding which is accounted for separately and mainly relates to joint agency program funding. However, this can be misleading, as grants withheld for the purposes of other agencies is actually deducted from CFA’s total funding, and therefore there is not a clean split.

In four of the past 5 years, CFA general purpose grant funding has decreased year on year.

It is interesting to note that in the most recent year, where a total increase of \$24M funding was reported, CFA’s annual report details a \$9.8M increase in employee benefits recognising increased workforce costs, and an extra \$16.2M increase in contractor and consultancy fees. This would help explain why the increase in general purpose funding was not noticeable to CFA volunteers, as they, nor their brigades were the direct beneficiaries of this increase.

However, despite the 2024/25 increase, VFBV analysis of annual reporting figures shows a clear trend of base budgets not keeping pace with demand.

3.2 NOMINAL VS REAL CFA GRANT FUNDING

Using CFA’s own Annual Report totals (General Purpose + Specific Purpose), while nominal funding appears relatively stable, these figures mask a real decline. While on paper, comparing the 2021 total of \$351.6M to the 2024/25 result of \$361.3M looks like a \$6.7M increase over the five years, it is misleading because it does not account for the 19.2% cumulative CPI inflation over the same period.

Funding and Resources

CFA GRANTS	2021 (\$m)	2022 (\$m)	2023 (\$m)	2024 (\$m)	2025 (\$m)
General Purpose	\$342.9	\$339.3	\$334.8	\$330.1	\$354.6
Specific Purpose	\$8.7	\$7.7	\$6.9	\$9.4	\$6.7
TOTAL	\$351.6	\$347.0	\$341.7	\$339.5	\$361.3

Source: CFA Annual Reports 2020/21 to 2024/25

When adjusted to 2020/21 dollars, the real value of CFA grants has declined every year except the final one, and even then, does not recover lost ground.

Real grant values (2020/21 dollars)

Year	Actual \$m From CFA Annual reports	Real (\$m) 2020–21 dollars	Real Change
2020–21	351.6	351.6	–
2021–22	347.0	327.1	–7.0%
2022–23	341.7	303.9	–13.6%
2023–24	339.5	290.8	–17.3%
2024–25	361.3	303.1	–13.8%

Source: ABS Australian CPI June quarter year-on-year

Real grants fell from \$351.6m to \$303.1m – a loss of \$48.5m in purchasing power. Even with the nominal increase in 2024/25, the real value remains well below the 2020/21 baseline.

The nominal totals show a downward trend in four consecutive years.

Think of nominal dollars as the actual dollar amount given each year – what appears in the budget. But because prices rise over time (inflation), those dollars don't buy as much as they used to.

To compare fairly, we convert each year's funding into real dollars, meaning "what that money would be worth in 2020–21 prices."

$$\text{Real Funding} = \frac{\text{Nominal Funding}}{\text{Price Index}/100}$$

The price index starts at 100 in 2020/21 and increases each year with inflation (for example, 106.1 in 2021/22 means prices are 6.1% higher than the base year).

So, if CFA received \$347 million in 2021–22 and prices were 6% higher, that money only buys what \$327 million would have bought in 2020–21

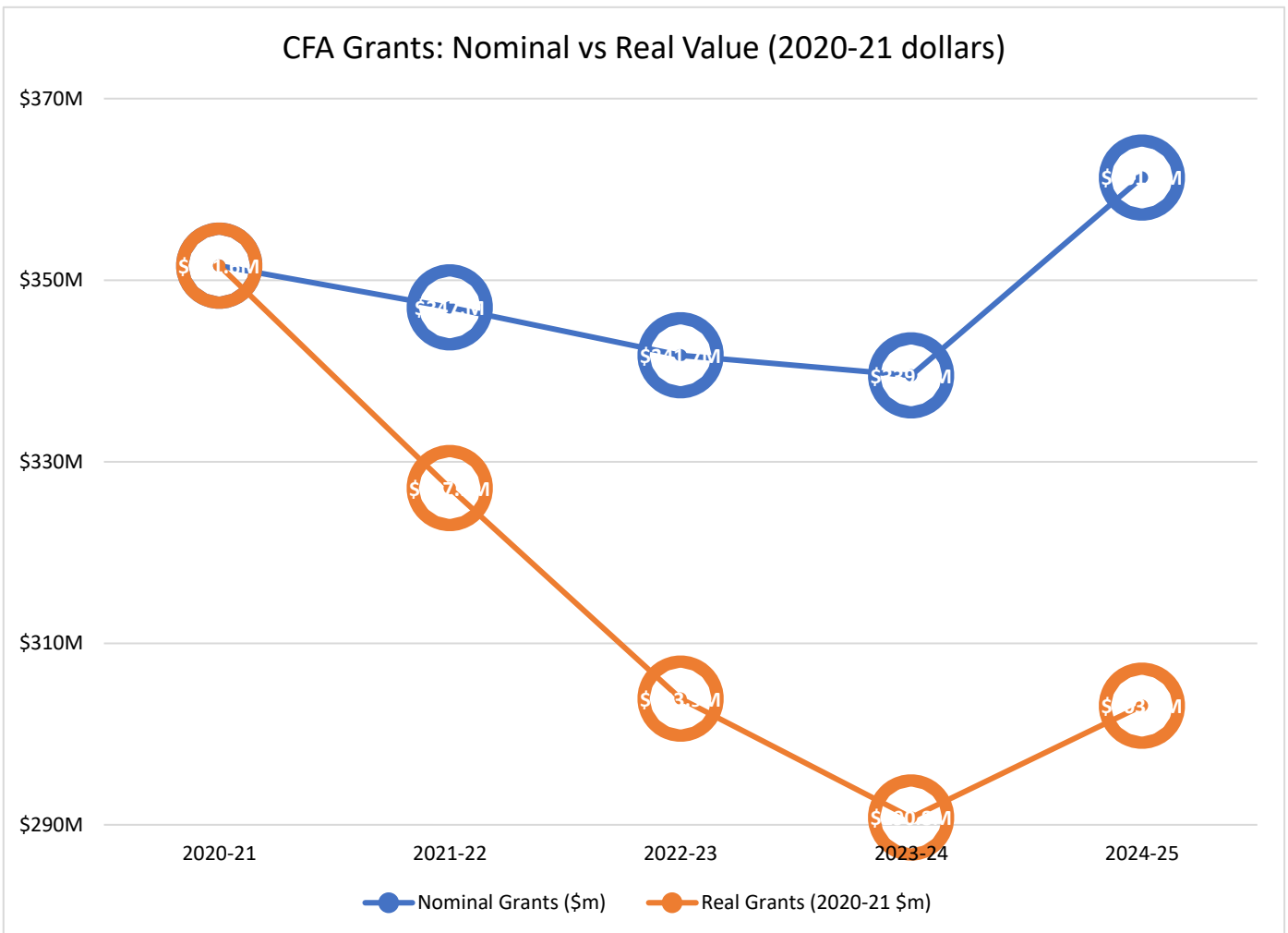
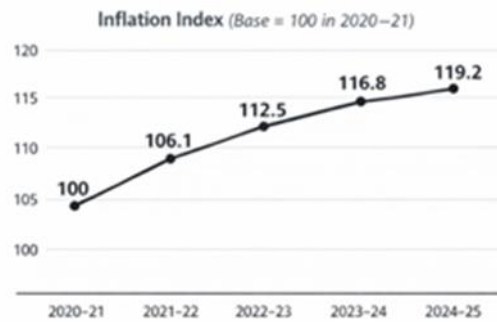
Once each year's funding is converted to real dollars, we compare it to the base year (2020–21).

To show the scale of the drop, we express that difference as a percentage of the base year.

Funding and Resources

Across 2021/22 to 2024/25:

- Real funding from grants dropped every year
- Even after a nominal increase in 2024/25, CFA grant funding still sits -13.8% below 2020/21 in real terms



Funding and Resources

The government’s arguments that CFA funding has risen over the past five years is misleading, as it fails to recognise that inflation has eroded CFA’s purchasing power.

Cumulative CPI inflation over the period was 19.2% driven by:

- Rising labour costs
- Fuel and fleet cost escalation
- Personal protective clothing and equipment inflation
- Construction and capital cost blowouts

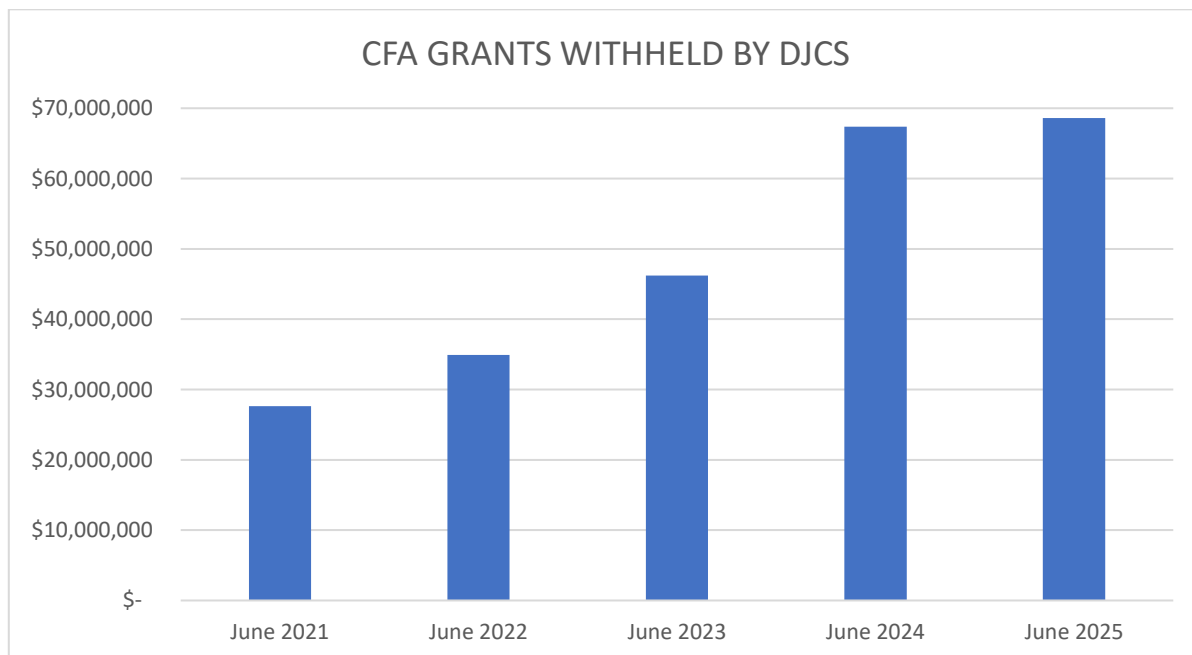
This means CFA would need \$419m in 2024/25 just to maintain the same purchasing power as \$351.6m in 2020/21. With actual grant funding amounting to \$361.3m, this leaves a real shortfall of ~\$58m

The 2024/25 increase does not repair the structural decline. Although 2024/25 saw a nominal increase of \$21.8m, the real value remains:

- \$48.5m below the 2020/21 baseline
- \$13.8% lower in real terms
- Equivalent to losing more than one year of grant funding over the period

This demonstrates that the recent uplift is not a funding boost, but merely a partial correction that still leaves CFA significantly behind.

3.3 GRANTS WITHHELD



At the same time that general purpose grants have been decreasing in four of the last 5 years, the amount of grants withheld from CFA by the Department of Justice and Community Safety has increased.

Funding and Resources

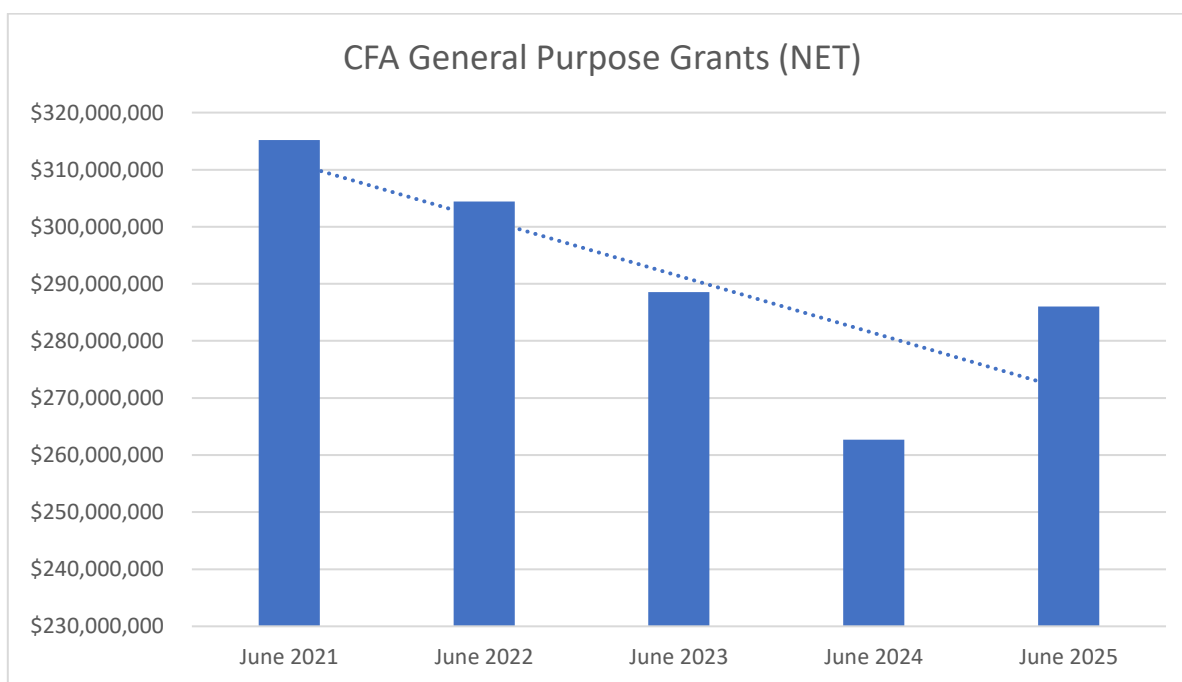
Grants withheld represent money reported against the total CFA grant money that is actually not paid to CFA, but rather, withheld by the Department to pass on to other government entities.

When volunteers originally requested transparency of what these funds were actually funding, they were told that every dollar was for and benefitted CFA volunteers, and then later told it was for new radios. Both of these assertions turned out to be false and misleading.

A FOI request by VFBV later revealed that far from every dollar, these funds are withheld through “pass through” funding via CFA that is used to fund broader emergency management programs such as EMV, Triple Zero Vic, the Inspector General of Emergency Management, Victoria’s RMR network and the State Control Center.

While this money is reported against CFA’s grants, CFA is not involved in how it is calculated or spent, and the money actually never even gets sent to CFA. DJCS simply informs CFA of how much it is withholding and deducts this amount from CFA’s grants.

Therefore, CFA’s net general purpose grant funding can be expressed in net (actual minus withheld) terms as follows:



This shows a clear trend of reduced general purpose grants after the grants withheld are deducted, and the trend line is displayed by the blue dotted line.

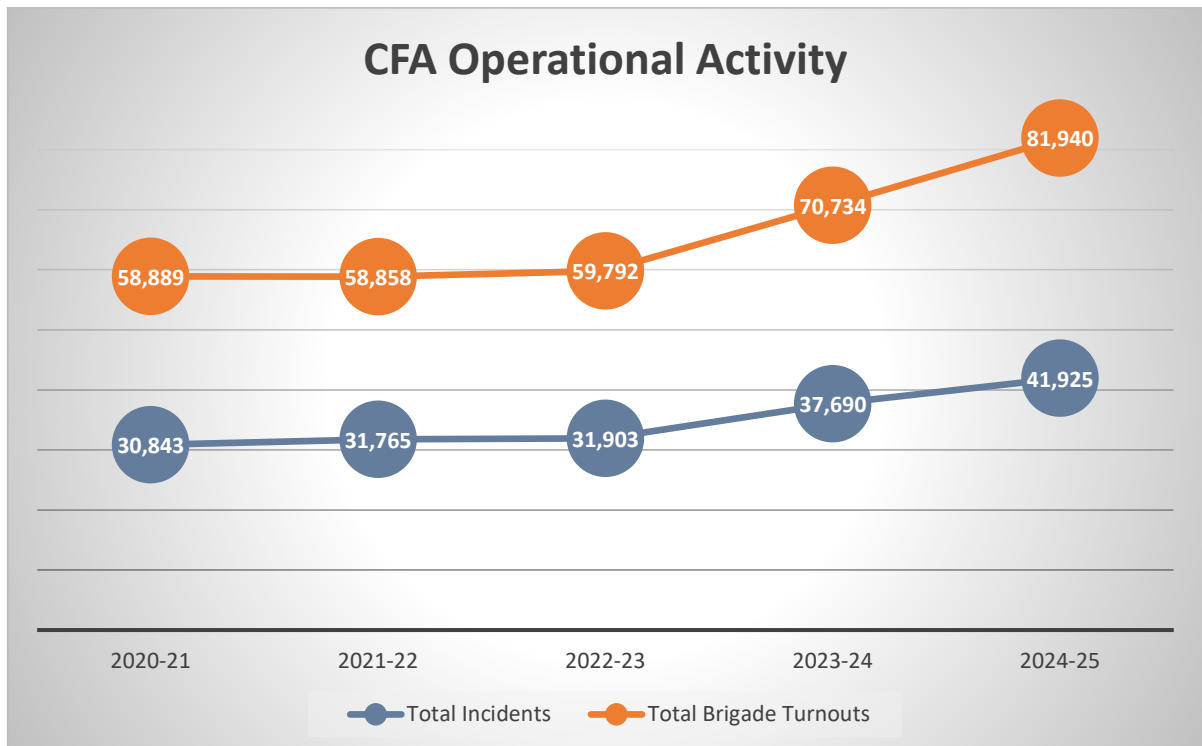
CFA’s Comprehensive result demonstrates the same dire situation, with the last two financial years recording a significant deficit of a \$50.3M loss for 2025, and a \$74.4M loss the year before. It is important to note that of the only two significant positive results recorded in CFA’s comprehensive result came off the back of significant asset revaluations in 2020/21 and 2022/23 which are non-cash

Funding and Resources

adjustments. The net results depict an even bleaker picture, with four of the past 5 years recording a deficit.

3.4 WORKLOAD INCREASING

And while general purpose grants continue to retract putting pressure on CFA's base budget, operation activity and the workload of volunteers is increasing.



CFA brigades responded to an 11% increase in incidents in 2024/25 financial year, and a 18% increase the year before that, with actual brigade turnouts increasing even more.

In other words, while the workload of brigades, volunteers and CFA increases, base funding for core programs and services has decreased. Put simply, with funding not keeping pace with inflation and increased activity - volunteers are being expected to do more (much more) with less.

In defence of these claims, government have insisted that CFA funding is complex and there are a range of other factors which increase CFA's total funding. Government deflect by trying to point to other income streams and other funding arrangements. These claims need to be treated with caution.

A common tactic has been to try and count seasonal funding that is predominately provided to agencies via Treasurer advances. These are the additional costs incurred during busy fire seasons and cover funding for major emergencies that cannot be predicted or estimated with any accuracy for budgeting purposes.

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During these large-scale events, the agencies incur additional costs in leasing heavy machinery (to urgently construct fire breaks around an active fire), aviation, additional costs incurred in setting up base camps, accommodation, catering and other associated costs as a result of a large-scale emergency.

By their very definition, to claim this reimbursement for additional costs incurred during an emergency as somehow forming part of CFA's regular budget is very misleading. The government is simply reimbursing the agencies for additional; costs incurred for one-off large-scale incidents that have not been budgeted for. To claim this as contributing to sustainable funding or CFA base funding is mischievous.

To further confuse, the government has repeatedly relied on multi-year funding announcements to try and assert significant increases to CFA budgets using very loose language. For example, at various times government have referred to a \$110M, \$70M and \$40M rolling fleet replacement program. Inexplicably, these three wildly different amounts all refer to the same set of programs across three different agencies, for funding spread out over four years.

The \$40M rolling fleet replacement program refers to the extra \$10M over four years to CFA's base capital fleet program. A welcome boost indeed, but miles away from what is required to bring CFA's ageing fleet back into policy.

The \$70M program refers to CFA's \$40M program plus the addition of \$7.5M for SES over 4 years (\$30M).

The \$110M program refers to CFA's \$40M program, the SES \$30M program, and with the addition of FRV's \$40M program to its fleet which as with CFA's is \$10M over the next four years.

These figures provide an insight into the spin that is being used to try and confuse the public about funding announcements and the sustainability of Victoria's fire services funding. Regardless of whether you use the \$110M, \$70M or \$40M funding announcement, CFA is only being provided an extra \$10M per year to its base capital fleet program. A far cry from the type of numbers bandied about in government media releases.

Complexity is also used to advantage when quoting agency "budget" figures. For example, CFA account for the \$72M in FRV secondees costs as income in their annual report as "fair value of services received free of charge." They show a corresponding expense of identical value under their expense items to zero this out.

Interestingly, FRV do not use the same treatment when accounting for FRV's receipt of services received free of charge from CFA to FRV instead choosing to classify the \$1M of free of charge services (payroll, administrative and mechanical services CFA provide to FRV free of charge) as not meeting the criteria for recognition as income as these resources would not have been purchased externally. So, you have a case of each agency using differing interpretations.

However, in using CFA's treatment of valuing the seconded workforce costs at fair value, when trying to use this figure to infer therefore that CFA's "budget" has been increased, fails to appreciate

Funding and Resources

that the cost of the FRV workforce is now counted twice – as it is accounted for in FRV’s comprehensive operating result in their annual report, and “budgeted” to form part of FRV’s general purpose grant – not CFA’s.

This is just one example of how standard accounting practices are being mismatched with plain English media releases to create an intricate web of confusion and misinformation and reinforces VFBV’s view that fire services budgets should be clear, transparent and available to the public.

VFBV in fact agrees with the government’s recent assessment that fire service budgets are complex and difficult to compare.

However, where our view differs, is that the government is making them overly complex to try and shield themselves from criticism about savings efficiencies that are being sought from its emergency services.

While volunteers welcome efficiencies that reduce the draw on the public purse and result in the same or better outcomes but more efficiently for the tax payer, this assessment cannot be made when there is no transparency as to where these savings are being made from (and where they are not), and volunteers have genuine reasons to fear that more often than not – it is their programs and services that usually bear the brunt of blunt government savings targets.

This is due to the very small proportion of fire service budgets that remain discretionary. The majority of funding is now tied to specific programs, and main expenses like employee expenses are tied up in enforceable workplace agreements removing any discretion for how this money is spent. Therefore, it tends to be volunteer funding and programs at risk.

At the same time as seeking cost efficiencies being extracted from CFA base budget, volunteers watch on in horror as other government projects and agencies experience cost blowouts and wastage at a horrific scale.

All CFA volunteers want is fair and equitable treatment.

They want transparency around fire service funding so they can compare apples with apples and determine if the value of their services is recognised in CFA’s funding. As the Victorian public now contribute 95% of CFA’s base funding under the Government’s new Emergency Services Tax, the Victorian public too deserve to know how their fire service is being funded and how this compares to other entities across the government and emergency services portfolio.

Regional Victorians in particular deserve to know that there is no postcode discrimination in funding between country and metropolitan services, given the increased risks they face in the natural environment which makes them more prone to impacts from bushfires.

Funding and Resources

CASE STUDY

The majority of CFA funding is directed to corporate activities, salaries and wages of its paid workforce and broader sector activities. The actual amount of money that directly benefits CFA volunteers and brigades is actually much smaller.

For example, CFA's base budget covers all the day-to-day expenses such as corporate offices, personal protective clothing; fire hoses, branches and equipment; fuel; fleet maintenance; fire station maintenance; training, insurance and CFA employee costs.

The only base budget money CFA brigades receive directly from CFA and Government is a small annual brigade/group allowance that is intended to cover incidental operating expenses. These range from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand dollars per brigade. Brigades report that it does not even cover the actual costs incurred by brigades, with many brigades required to supplement this funding with community donations and fundraising.

For example, from CFA's 2024/25 general purpose grant of \$354.6M, CFA provided approximately \$1M (0.003%) to volunteer brigades via a brigade allowance. Yet in the exact same year - volunteer brigades raised close to \$4.7M from volunteer time spent public fundraising to assist them with their brigade expenses, including brigade owned vehicles.

CFA FUNDING SQUEEZES DESPITE GOVERNMENT REVENUE INCREASES

While most Victorian's are familiar with Victoria's poor budget situation, many might be surprised that government revenue collection on behalf of fire services has actually increased year on year, and rather than being directed to CFA, the government has instead chosen to reduce emergency services draw on consolidated revenue. In other words, they have robbed Peter to pay Paul. However, in this case, it has been CFA and CFA volunteers who have borne the brunt of these savings.

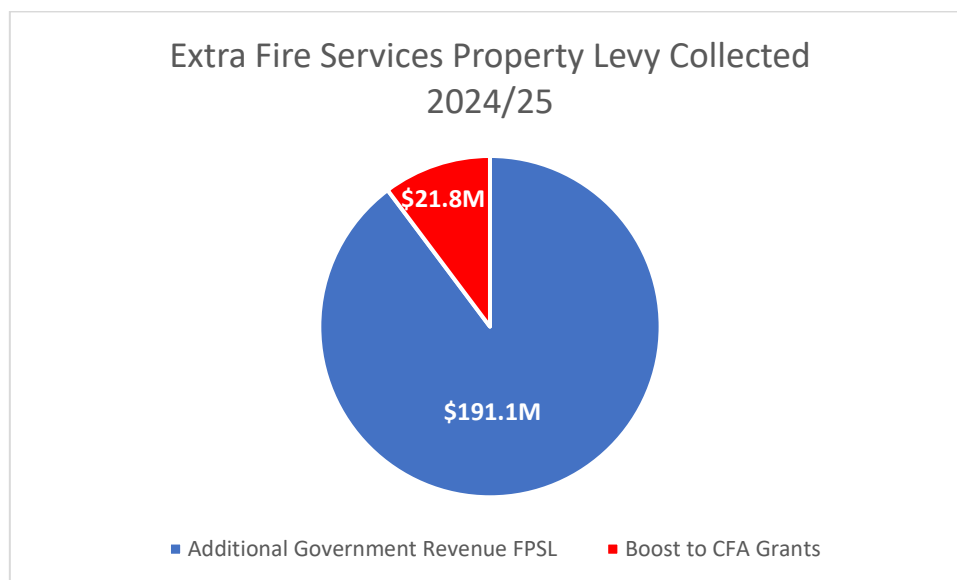
In the past five years that CFA's nominal income from grants has fallen, the State Government has collected increased taxes from its Fire Services Property Levy.

Year	FSPL revenue collected (\$ million)
2024-25	1,030.6
2023-24	839.5
2023-24	791.9
2022-23	791.9
2021-22	758.8

Source: State Revenue Office

Funding and Resources

In the same year they announced a meagre \$22M boost to CFA grants, according to State Revenue Office figures, the Victorian government collected an extra \$191.1M from taxpayers from the Fire Services Property Levy.



This indicates that rather than boost CFA funding to correct the previous years declines and account for inflation, the government has chosen to divert the extra tax revenue to reduce their contribution to the fire services from consolidated revenue.

3.5 CFA Fleet

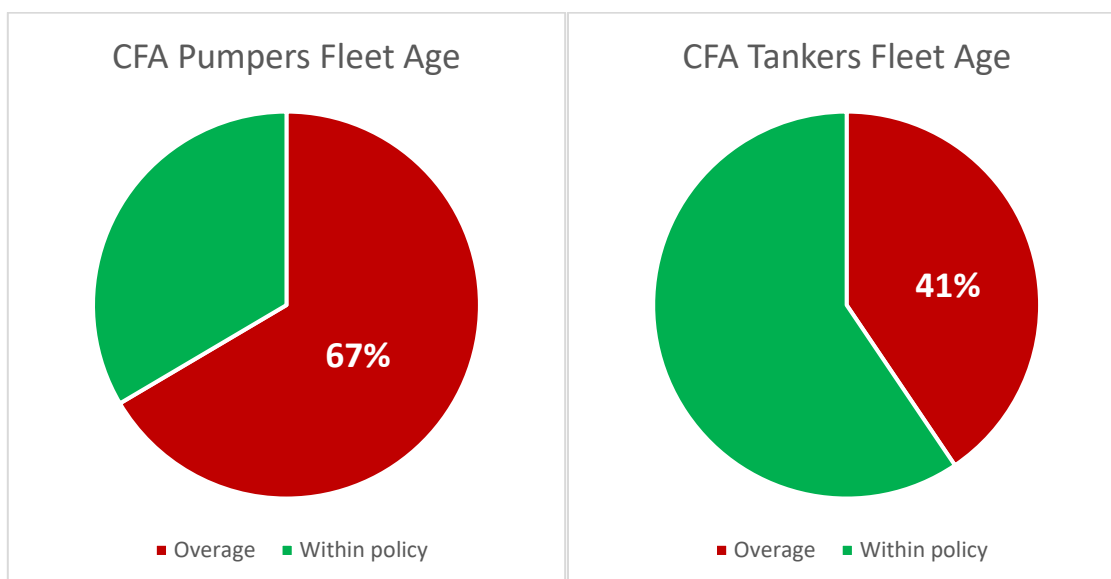
The age of the CFA fleet is the most visible, stark and public facing example of the mismanagement and unsustainability of current CFA funding. Based on VFBV and volunteer analysis as at January 2026:

- 145 CFA Pumpers (67%) are over their design age of 15 years, with the oldest 33 years old.
- 690 CFA Tankers (41%) are over their design age of 20 years, with the oldest 37 years old

The failure to properly fund CFA's fleet over the last 15 years has resulted in Volunteers operating one of Australia's oldest fleets of operational frontline fire trucks, depriving them of up-to-date technology which improves firefighting capability which improves the safety of the Victorian public, and improves the safety of firefighters.

This failure has resulted in a staggering 43% of CFA Pumpers and Tankers aged beyond their useful and design life putting firefighters at risk and reducing the capability in the field.

Funding and Resources



CFA's oldest trucks are now over 37 years old, almost double the industry convention and design life of 15-20 years. These trucks belong in a museum and not on our firegrounds. Industry practice has been to calculate a Pumpers life expectancy of up to 15 years, with Tankers classified useful life as 20 years.

In the U.S. the National Fire Protection Association recommends any trucks over 15 years be placed in reserve status, while in the United Kingdom and across Europe, Fire & Rescue Services cite a life expectancy for appliances of just 12 years.

Firefighters deserve equipment that is up-to-date, safe, complies with Occupational Health & Safety Standards and is the most effective that is reasonably available. All other fire services in Australia do this. Insufficient funding is leaving Victoria's volunteer firefighters using out-of-date fire trucks when no other comparable fire service would.

Basic Safety Features Not Provided

The citizens of Victoria would not go without the basic safety features within their own cars to protect themselves and their families from harm. The State is responsible for the safety of its volunteer firefighters with whom it sends into harm's way to protect lives and property across Victoria.

Firefighting is an inherently dangerous job. It is paramount that appliances responding under emergency conditions have modern safety features in order to operate safely in those conditions.

This does not just mean safety while travelling to a fire or incident but also when operating an appliance when it gets there. The type of equipment provided on an appliance, its stowage and its operability are all considerations as to the optimal age of an appliance.

New equipment & vehicle designs are introduced to meet changing requirements and to improve firefighter safety and ergonomics. Firefighters using older trucks & equipment deserve the same

Funding and Resources

safety improvements as those using newer equipment. Inadequate funding means CFA must choose which firefighters use safer equipment and those which will not.

And while old CFA trucks are proclaimed to be road worthy, no-one can claim these trucks provide volunteers with the safest and most reliable capability. No ABS, no airbags, no aircon, no traction control and all non-complaint with new emission standards, meaning diesel particulates from old dirty diesel engines are being pumped over the volunteers personal protecting clothing hanging on hooks around these old trucks in hundreds of tin shed brigades across the state.

Other Safety features that are not in CFA's older frontline operational firefighting trucks are; fire resistant brake lines, electrically operated priming pumps, live hose reels for quick attack and fire knockdown, rear deck crew lighting, ABS, airbags, electronic stability control, improved steering, up-to-date suspension, higher torque for increased acceleration (particularly expected of emergency service vehicles operating under operational load), larger pumps, foam systems and crew cabs that places all firefighters within the vehicle for crew protection and safety.

The Single Cab Tanker

As at January 2026, there are still 650 old single cab tankers in use across CFA that were manufactured between 1989 – 2010. All but 11 are beyond their design age of 20 years, with the oldest being 37 years old.

Although age is only one factor, age brings old technology, the scarcity of parts to keep the trucks operational and volunteer firefighter comfort and safety.

Single cab tankers have seating for 2 or 3 people enclosed within the front of the truck, (driver and up to 2 passengers) and seating for 3 additional people on the outside of the truck, facing backwards and in the open air, protected only by a roll over protection module designed to protect from being crushed if the vehicle were to rollover.

These tankers still require volunteers to ride on the outside of the truck in the open air – exposed to heat, cold and the toxic smoke and fumes. They are not protected from rain, the sun, wind or toxic fumes.

Funding and Resources



Victoria's paid fire services have banned employees from using these single cab vehicles due to concerns with health and safety. Employees have been able to do this using their ability under Victorian workplace laws to issue provisional improvement notices that trigger WorkSafe involvement. Victoria's volunteers have no such protection under Victorian law.

It is incomprehensible to VFBV that CFA volunteers would be afforded lesser protection under Victorian Health and Safety legislation, and that the Victorian government would not have a forward plan in place to remove these vehicles from service as a matter of urgency.

Case Study: 7 Feb 2009 (Black Saturday)

Burnover's are one of the dread fears of fire fighters – the situation that sees a truck caught in the midst of a blaze that overrun you and/or your equipment providing no route of escape.

On Black Saturday, 25 CFA Tankers were involved in a BurnOver. 8 of these were newer style “crew cab” Tankers which house all firefighters within the main cabin of the truck, whilst the remaining 17 were older style Tankers with single cab's that require part of the crew to be seated outside on the back rear deck.

No firefighters were injured on any of the crew cab tankers, yet 4 Firefighters sustained burn injuries from older style single cab trucks.

The modern twin cab tanker that replaced these old designs, contains all the safety features of a modern vehicle, which should be a mandatory requirement for firefighters who give their time freely. In addition, firefighter safety is enhanced by improving situational awareness of the fire enroute or at the fireground. Situational awareness is improved by effective communication which is facilitated by having all the crew together in a crew cab vehicle, not separated by a physical barrier

Funding and Resources

of a single cab tanker or exposed to the elements. Firefighters who travel together in one compartment allow planning, risk management and confidence building between firefighters on their way to an emergency while protecting them from toxic smoke, fumes and harmful elements like the sun, heat, rain and sleet.

How many families would choose to drive a 37-year-old vehicle, unless they were car enthusiasts looking for that retro experience. However, CFA volunteer firefighters, that are tax paying citizens of Victoria that provide an extraordinary service unfortunately do not have a choice. These aged fire trucks are the only vehicles provided to them as they hurtle towards danger and potentially compromise their own safety.

Old Fire Trucks Are Not Made for Diversity

CFA made a conscious effort in 2007 to produce ergonomically sound fire trucks. This meant that issues like noise reduction were mandated as per the Australian Standards. This ensured that there was no need for ear protection when operating the water pumps. In addition, there were decisions made to ensure the stowage of equipment was accessible to all firefighters no matter their height, strength or gender. The availability of the stowage and the unique systems at the time to allow anyone to locate and safely gain access to all the equipment was cutting edge. All CFA vehicles manufactured from 2007 onwards have these ergonomic advances, however the fire trucks manufactured prior to this date have not.

CFA has been targeting diversity in their firefighters for many years with a push for the involvement of more women into their ranks. The older fire trucks issued to community Fire Brigades are not ergonomically sound on modern standards, and therefore simple tasks such as getting access to equipment is difficult and may compromise safety. These fire trucks prior to 2007 were designed for male firefighters with extra strength and reach, not a diverse volunteer workforce that is required in 2026 and beyond.

VOLUNTEERS ARE NOT PROVIDED THE SAME LEGAL PROTECTIONS

Victorian volunteers have largely missed out on the significant improvements that would have come with the harmonisation of Australian OH&S rules and would have prevented governments and agencies increasingly ignore the emerging risks arising from an ageing fleet and infrastructure.

While the Victorian legislation creates a general duty of care for volunteers, it does not extend this general duty with other legislated protections that are in place and afforded to employees and career firefighters.

For example, the Victorian OH&S Act **does not** extend to volunteers the specific legally binding protections of a:

- Duty of employers to consult with volunteers in identifying, assessing and making decisions on hazards and determining the membership of any health and safety committee;
- The right to establish designated volunteer work groups;

Funding and Resources

- The right to designate volunteer health and safety representatives for each volunteer workgroup;
- Protection of volunteers against coercion in matters of health and safety;
- Right of inspection;
- Right to issue or serve a provisional improvement notice;
- An obligation for their agency to train volunteer health and safety representatives and attend courses;
- Protections for the establishment and regular holding of health and safety committees at least once every 3 months; and
- Prohibition on discrimination against a volunteer because of their involvement as a health and safety representative.

This is not an exhaustive list, and there are a complex interpretations of how various sections apply to volunteers.

However as can clearly be seen, the law does not provide the same clear and direct protections for CFA volunteers as it does for employees.

VFBV submits that given CFA volunteers make up the bulk of the emergency management workforce and operate in a very dangerous environment - this is a significant oversight and gap worthy of review and investigation.

Decades of ad hoc, hand to mouth & deficient funding

Following the Royal Commission into the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires, more than 600 operational vehicles were added to the fleet to address deficiencies. 26 years later, following the Royal Commission into the 2009 Black Saturday Fires, a smaller but similar focus and spike in production was again initiated. This sporadic funding leaves long-term legacies on Victoria that drive peaks & troughs 20 years down the track when many of these vehicles require replacement. This cycle of boom and bust must be broken if fleet strategies are to be sustainable.

Funding and Resources

There is no funded long-term forward fleet renewal plan in place that assures the timely replacement of ageing CFA vehicles. Current funding is still below the minimum replacement target, which means the CFA fleet age will continue getting older and older. As a result, each year, Volunteers rely on going cap in hand to request special one-off, non-recurrent top-up funding.

CFA’s fleet funding budget must not only cover replacement of its existing operational vehicles, it must also stretch to cater for the demands of a growing population. According to the governments population projections - Victoria’s population is expected to grow from 7 million people to 10.3 million people by 2051. Population growth increases a community’s risk profile & higher risks necessitate changes to the mix and capability of emergency vehicles.

Higher density living requires updates to the type of fire truck & equipment required. Tankers are built for area’s that do not have easy access to reticulated water supplies. Therefore, they must dedicate their load to carrying as much water as possible (4,000+ litres) and are built for off road access. As a result, they tend to be 4WD and use smaller pumps to conserve water and carry far less equipment.

Pumpers on the other hand are designed for built up areas with water mains, typically carry much less water (1,200+ litres) and more specialist equipment designed for structural & internal firefighting.

For example, a Tanker built in 1998 for \$130,000 may need to be replaced now with a Pumper, which today costs over \$1M. CFA’s Fleet budget does not reflect this changing risk environment that requires different equipment and different trucks to meet changing community needs, let alone increases to the fleet to account for population growth. With no changes to funding to account for these changing risks, the existing fleet funding is building less and less and resulting in trucks that would have been retired 17 years ago, requiring to stay in service, and depriving brigades and firefighters of the significant safety and technological improvements that come with newer and more modern equipment.

Volunteers are relying on ‘top-up’ funding, by way of annual bids to supplement the funds required to run CFA’s fleet programs. This funding crisis last came to a head in 2014, and resulted in CFA having to abandon its maximum age targets from all its Fleet Policies, replaced with a policy of “fit for purpose / fit for task”. This change in policy simply masks the reality that without sufficient funding, CFA has no means in which to meet any form of maximum age profile within its fleet, nor plan for future growth.

Inflation and cost rises

As the cost of living has hit the community hard, the Emergency Services are not immune. The cost of building a CFA Tanker, which is the work horse of the organization is now approximately \$560,000.



Funding and Resources

The provision of a Medium Pumper which is used for providing fire safety to regional towns and cities has soared from \$625,000 in 2020 to \$1,000,000 today.

The Firefighting Manufacturing Industry Requires Certainty

Manufacturing of firefighting vehicles is a specialist industry, with only a small number operating in Australia. Manufacturers need time to organise themselves to build firefighting vehicles. The start up for a new run of vehicles could be up to 2 years to gain trained staff and to set up for production. Complicating this timeline, the cab chassis that CFA purchase are imported from Japan, Germany, Denmark or Italy where potential delays in shipping from these countries can be delayed due to global forces out of the state governments control.

To overcome the gap in the age profile and serviceability of the CFA fleet, the state government needs to commit to a long-term plan to replace the ageing fleet at CFA. This gives manufacturers the certainty to plan for the future, source quality staff and prepare for longer production runs.

CFA Base Capital Budget

Between 2014 – 2025 CFA managed a Capital Budget from base funding of approximately \$28M per annum. Of this, \$12.5M was directed to emergency response vehicles (trucks), \$9.5M to land and buildings, and \$6M towards its transport and corporate fleet.

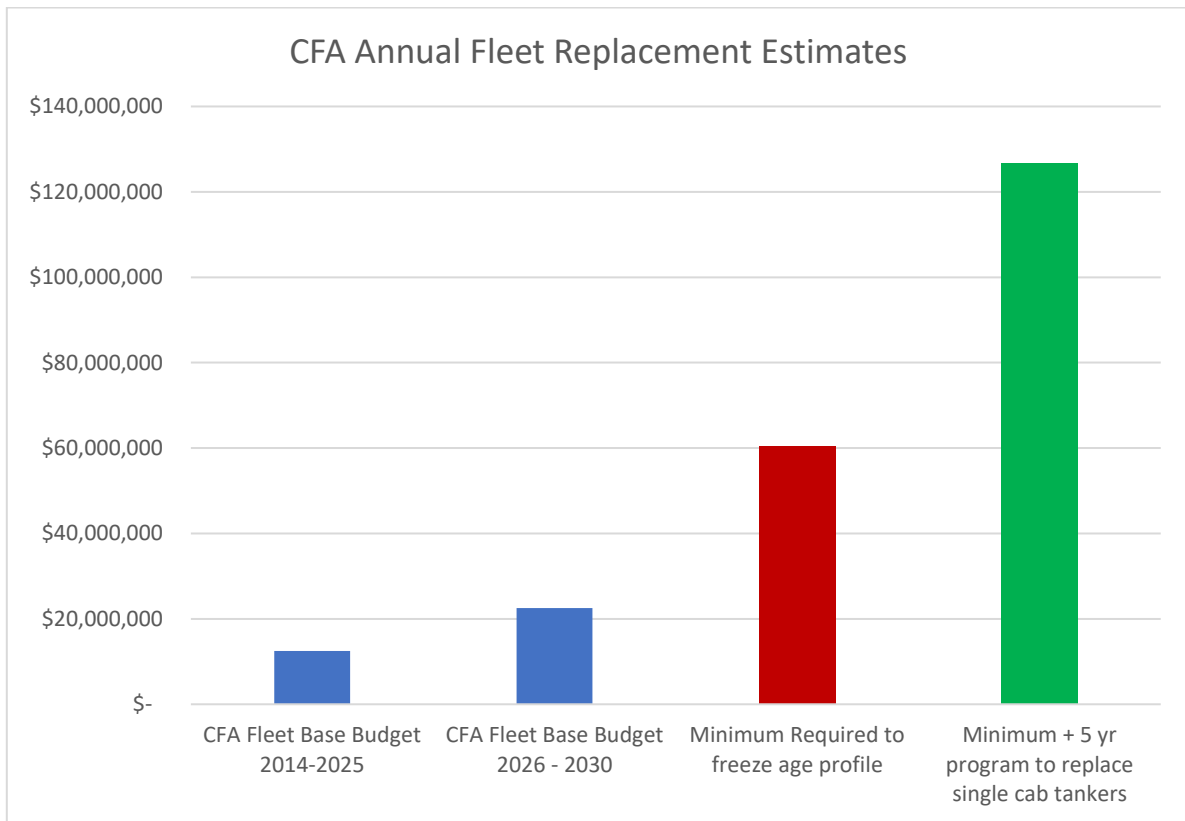
In 2024, VFBV analysis calculated that CFA must replace 100 trucks per year at a cost of \$55M to just to stop the age of the fleet getting any older. At the time, this was based on:

- 1,707 CFA Tankers with maximum age of 20 years requires 85 to be replaced per year
- 218 CFA Pumpers with maximum age of 15 years requires 15 to be replaced per year
- Tanker cost was estimated at approximately \$465k and Pumper cost was estimated at \$1M

Based on today's figures and cost estimates, VFBV now estimates CFA will require \$60.48M per annum just to stop the age of the fleet going backwards and replace the minimum 100 appliances per annum.

Last year, after announcing the governments new Emergency Services Tax that aimed to collect an additional \$500 million dollars per year, the government announced it intended to increase CFA's base fleet budget by just \$10M.

Funding and Resources



While welcome, even after accounting for the \$10M increase over the next four years, this still leaves the CFA almost \$38M short per year, just to freeze the current age profile.



The Committee enquire into the inadequacy of CFA's base budget fleet replacement funding.



That the Victorian government immediately prioritise the funding of CFA's emergency vehicle fleet capital program commensurate with CFA's fleet size, with a full 10-year plan to return the fleet to maximum age profiles to be budgeted and costed.



All Victorian fire service fleet profiles to be tabled annually to create transparency into the state and sustainability of Victoria's current funding to maintain its fleet of emergency vehicles.

Funding and Resources

3.6 INFRASTRUCTURE

At the time of submission, detailed analysis and volunteer consultation of CFA's building infrastructure could not be undertaken.

Given CFA manage a portfolio of 1,196 fire station buildings, volunteer lived experience is that the current capital allocation of \$9.5M for infrastructure is highly inadequate.

This contributes to the ageing fleet problem in that newer trucks no longer fit into ageing fire stations. This has a significant impact on how trucks are cascaded across the State, with ageing infrastructure creating a major impediment to the full replacement of CFA's old single cab trucks.

Analysis conducted by local volunteers in CFA District 4 (the most southwest district that borders Victoria and South Australia) argue that CFA has not funded a single Class 1 station from base budget for more than 30 years.

In recent years, volunteers had to apply for a volunteer grant (VESEP) just to fund the construction of 8 toilets for brigades across District 4 which did not even have this most basic of amenity. As they point out, government and CFA talking about inclusion and gender equality rings hollow for these brigades who with current funding cannot even begin to contemplate change room facilities and other amenities that might encourage a broader range of community members to volunteer.

Local volunteers from these stations talk about facilities that cannot be properly sealed, allowing vermin and insects in. Volunteers have reported snails having eaten all the toilet paper at night should a light be accidentally left on.

CASE STUDY

The Paschendale Fire Station was a kit form station built by its members and they also concreted the floor in the late 1960's. It's a single bay station with no concrete apron, the shed frame is made from steel and timber and measures just 9.2m (L) 4.03m. (W) and 2.87m (H). This station houses a 35 year old single cab tanker which was cascaded from South Warrandyte in 1996. The only amenity this brigade has ever had was the toilet that was installed last year at the rear of the station.



Funding and Resources

CASE STUDY

Lindsay Fire Station is a single bay shed, also with no concrete apron, the shed frame is made from steel and timber built around 1974. It currently houses a 32 yr old single cab Tanker. The only amenity ever funded for this station was the toilet that was installed at the rear of the station last year, using the grant.

When this station was built there was no mains power connected to the station. Years later the CFA installed a

12 volt system but it didn't have enough power to run the two fluorescent lights inside the station, with only just enough power to run a motion sensor with a very dim light outside so members could open the door in the dark.

For years this brigade has had to do without the necessities that other brigades take for granted, such as fridge, pressure cleaner to wash the truck, battery charger, pressure pump for running water, or even a simple hand basin. About 6 years ago the CFA installed solar panels on the roof connected to a battery bank, with at least the brigade now having 240v power to run some of these necessities if they actually had any place to put them. The CFA looked at connecting mains power to the shed from the power line that runs to the south of the station, but decided it was too expensive.



These are just two examples of the support and lack of respect or appreciation that Victoria's volunteer firefighters (and regional and rural communities across the State) are feeling from a government who just in recent months claimed that Victoria enjoyed the best funded fire services in Australia.

Under the governments Fire Service Reforms, the government transferred all infrastructure for new CFA stations to the Community Safety Building Authority. (CSBA) Since this time, volunteers have become increasingly concerned at the cost blowouts of new station builds under the CSBA model, with cost overruns attributed to their centralised Melbourne model which does not utilise local planners, surveyors or architects.

Following last year's release of the Silver Review which the Victorian government commissioned into Victoria's public service, it was announced that the CSBA would be merged into the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority, which has managed Victoria's big build.

Volunteers have expressed deep concerns about the size, frequency and quantum of cost blowouts under the government's management of its big build program, and are horrified that even more precious funding that volunteers are relying on to replace aging infrastructure will again simply be whittled down to nothing.

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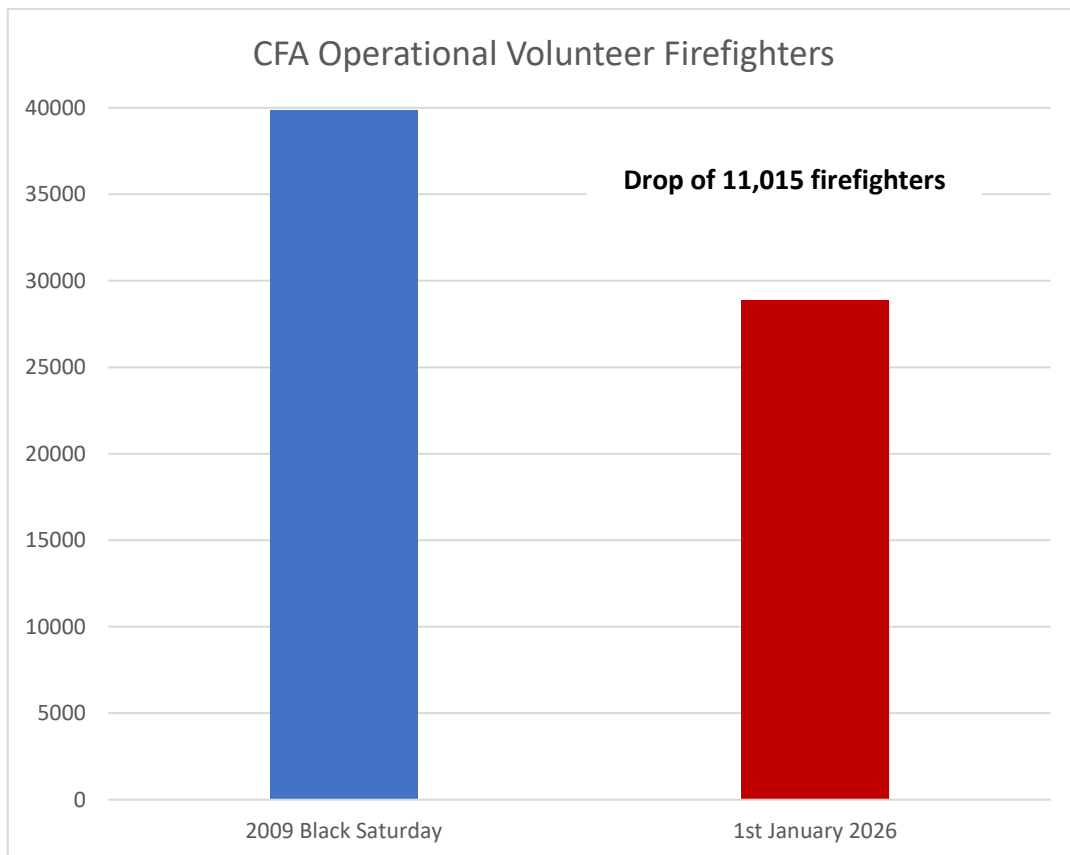
The Committee request a comparison of station build costs and the reasons for them since transitioning to the governments Community Safety Building Authority in 2019.



That CFA infrastructure works be returned to CFA to manage internally with full transparency and accountability to be publicly available on station build and budget progress.

3.7 RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF CFA VOLUNTEERS

Despite steady increases made to boost CFA volunteer numbers following the 2009 Black Saturday fires, CFA operational volunteer firefighter numbers are at the lowest levels in history. On Black Saturday in 2009, CFA recorded 39,870 operational firefighters. As at the 1st January 2026, that number is now 28,855.



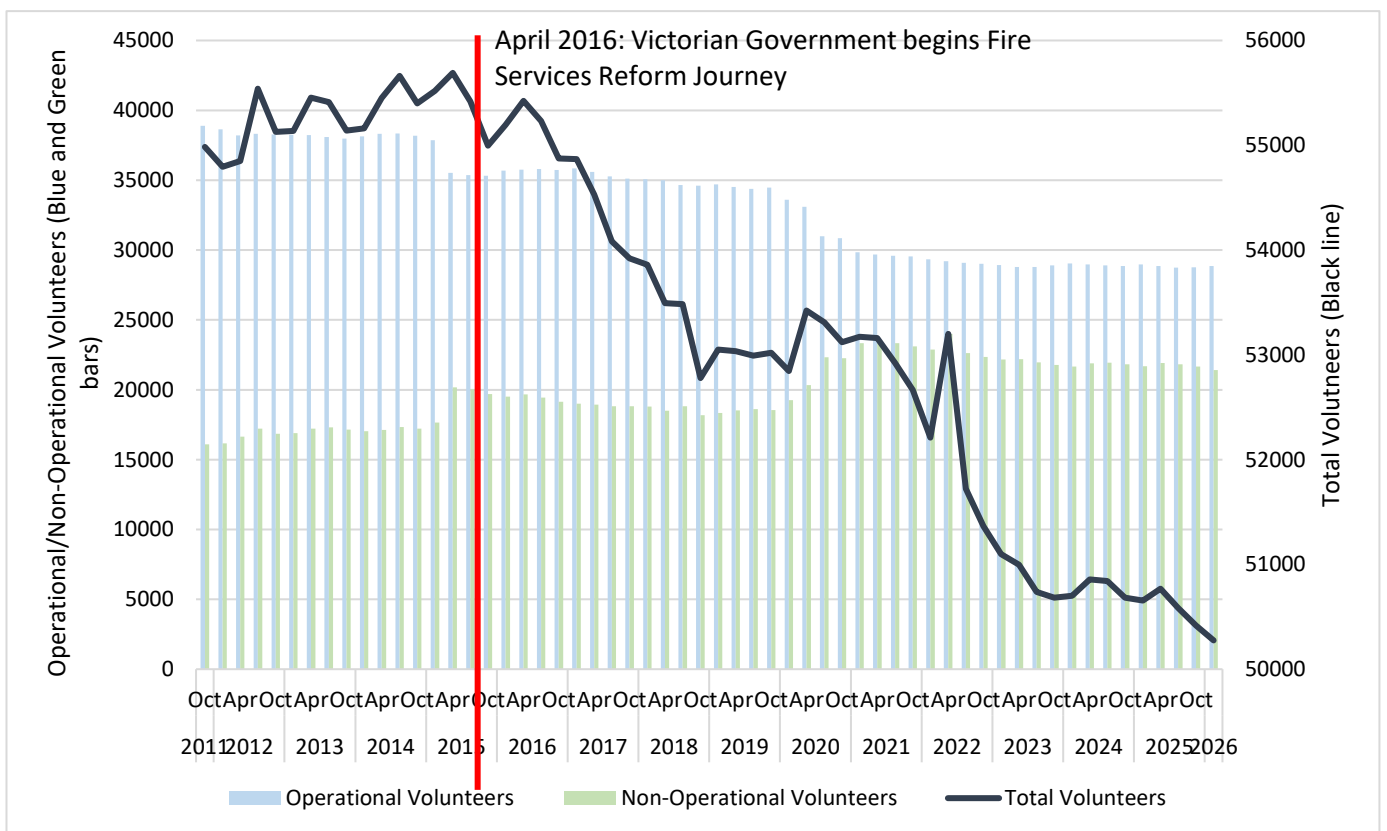
Funding and Resources

For a government that campaigned during the 2014 election and made one of its key election promises the funding and recruitment of an additional 450 paid firefighters over four years, the loss of more than 10,000 volunteer firefighters during their term of office and reducing the State’s firefighting capacity to a record low - is a damning indictment on current fire service policies.

DECLINE IN VOLUNTEER NUMBERS

The following graph shows the devastating impact on CFA volunteer numbers over recent years.

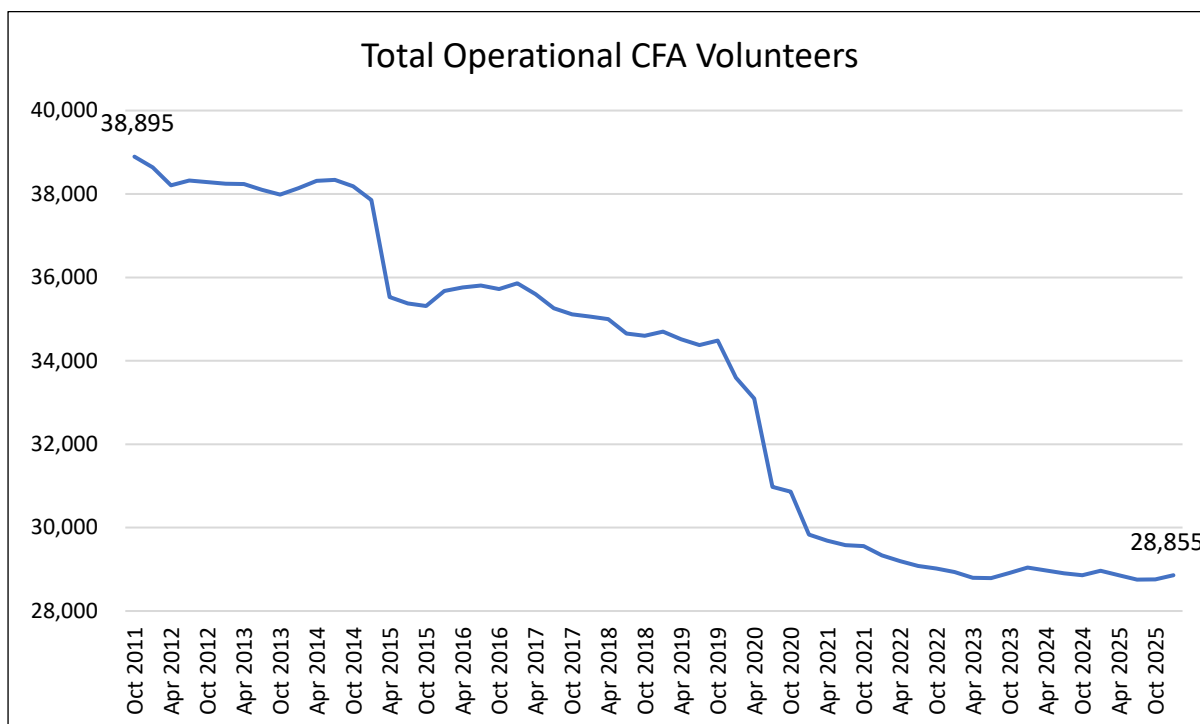
The red line indicates the time period where the Premier intervened and the Victorian Government’s position changed, resulting in the resignation of the popular Emergency Services Minister, the Hon. Jane Garrett MP.



Prior to the red line, you can see a healthy trend of consistent high levels of volunteers. This counters the usual deflection that volunteering rates in Victoria are simply dropping due to other factors such as lower volunteering rates across the broader community volunteering sector.

Funding and Resources

The following graph shows just the trend of operational volunteers back to when quarterly records were commenced back in October 2011.



And while some like to talk down volunteer numbers and believe it is an evitable trend, the expressions of interest that CFA receives each year from community members wanting to join CFA continue to rise, which debunks this often-quoted barrier.

It is VFBV’s position that CFA does not have a recruitment problem per se – but rather a retention problem.

Generally speaking, there continues to be high interest among Victorians to volunteer with CFA.

Young people in particular, want to volunteer “for purpose” – and emergency services provide an exciting and respected volunteer pathway. This is evidenced by the high number of expressions of interest that CFA receive each year following a busy fire season. For example, this year alone CFA has received more than 3,400 expressions of interest from community members wishing to join CFA as prospective members.

This is not to say that in some communities, especially those experiencing high levels of rural decline, recruitment can be more difficult. This is why it is so important for CFA to have a multimodal recruitment campaign and governments must respect the contribution of volunteers by providing sufficient funding, so that the next generation of volunteers can be recruited and that their volunteering experience matches their expectations.

Funding and Resources

Younger members joining CFA only to learn that their government issued fire truck is more than twice their age, and female members joining to learn that the government does not even provide change rooms to get dressed in are just two examples of where the model fails to meet contemporary community standards and is a huge disincentive for these cohorts to continue their volunteering experience.

Recent agency policies implemented against the advice of volunteers have also acted as a significant barrier, where these prospective members will struggle to get through CFA's increasingly complex recruitment processes that is 100% digital.

It is therefore little surprise that those that do eventually stick with it and join, eventually lose interest when they realise how little support they receive to undertake the work expected of them.

Reform Impacts

Large numbers of volunteers have traditionally been drawn from all over the State, with highly urban/populated communities responsible for contributing a very large number of additional volunteers for state-wide surge capacity. The impact of Victoria's recent reform legislation, budget changes and the associated changes will be felt most strongly in these highly urban densely populated communities.

Volunteers require respect, recognition and a purpose for them to continue to be engaged.

Training, volunteer support and operational utilisation are also critical factors in retaining them and maintaining operational readiness for deployment.

Since the introduction of Victoria's highly controversial and divisive fire services reform, the number of CFA volunteers has dropped markedly. VFBV remains very concerned that this frontline ready force may continue to be diminished with any further conversion of CFA areas into FRV areas in urban and regional areas.

It remains to be seen what moving volunteers to 'support' call only type roles and removing CFA primary areas from FRV districts will have on long term volunteer numbers at co-located stations. Historical evidence demonstrates that when volunteer roles are diminished or they feel their contribution is no longer valued or respected, they disengage.

For many volunteers, this means finding a different avenue with a different organisation where their contribution to their community is better spent.

Experienced volunteer firefighters take many, many years to grow, develop and train. Current volunteer statistics only report on the gross numbers of volunteers 'on the books', and therefore reflect 'new joins' the day they graduate. Volunteer resignations on the other hand only counts those volunteers who have formally resigned.

These factors mask the true impact of the significant years of service being lost from the organisation when veteran volunteer firefighters move on, or where they simply 'withdraw' or reduce their services without formally resigning.

Funding and Resources

The ratio of available firefighters to those in use at any one time is built into fire service long term planning.

For example, career firefighters are planned for by a 1:5 ratio which means for every paid firefighter on shift, you have to hire 5 to account for planned leave and off shift time. Additional firefighters are hired on top of this to cover unplanned leave like sick leave etc.

The same logic should not be dissimilar for volunteers. In other words, you need to have many more volunteers on the books than you will ever use at one time, so that CFA can sustain long campaign style incidents that run for several weeks or months.

A cradle to grave volunteer model ensures flexibility to account for changes in lifestyle and career/family changes, or life pressures such as starting a family, new job or new business. A flexible model that buffers this ebb and flow of availability is key to its long-term success and sustainability.

Brigades are more frequently reporting issues with volunteer overcommitment, where a number of volunteers continue to volunteer over and over again for deployment as they feel no one else will be able to do it. In some cases, this has hurt their livelihoods and provides early warning signs that current pools are becoming strained and therefore need to be grown and topped up.

VFBV and volunteers have been calling for bi-partisan support for initiatives that protect, encourage, support and strengthen Victoria's emergency management volunteer surge capacity to best prepare Victoria for future disasters.

Clearly, Victorians continue to be attracted to joining CFA as volunteers. This is continually demonstrated through healthy recruiting figures following busy fire seasons. VFBV maintains that declining satisfaction through lack of capital budgets and lack of resourced retention initiatives are among issues confronting CFA volunteers leading to declining morale.

Recruitment, retention and respect go hand in hand with ensuring Victoria has a volunteer pool strong and resilient enough to meet future peak load demands.

History shows us that volunteers must have meaningful roles to motivate and encourage them, and this is the biggest threat to boundary changes under the current model, because their ability to do meaningful roles is significantly diminished.

2009 BUSHFIRES ROYAL COMMISSION

The 2009 Royal Commission did consider the impacts of potential boundary change on the State's capability and capacity.

The Royal Commission recognised the link between arrangements aimed at improving or supporting local service capacity (the day-to-day small incidents that fire agencies respond to and report on via service delivery standards) and arrangements directed to improving or supporting the peak load capacity for major disasters.

In the 2026 context; FRV contributes mainly only to local service capacity, whereas CFA contributes the overwhelming majority of peak load capacity for major disasters across Victoria. However it

Funding and Resources

needs the local service capacity to ensure those volunteers are trained, experienced and utilised throughout the year to ensure they are still there when needed for larger scale emergencies.

VFBV strongly supports the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission contention that these two requirements of local service capacity vs peak load capacity should not be considered in isolation, and it is fundamentally dangerous to do so. Changes directed to one ultimately flow through and have impacts on the other.

BALANCING THE NEED TO MAINTAIN LOCAL SERVICE CAPACITY PLUS ENSURING PEAK LOAD CAPACITY FOR MAJOR DISASTERS

The term peak load capacity is used to describe the resources required to provide thousands of firefighters (sometimes for many days, weeks, or months) to a large fire or emergency while simultaneously ensuring local coverage of other at-risk communities is maintained.

Peak load scenarios involving multiple large scale and potentially catastrophic bushfires will and do occur with significant regularity every year. Volunteer surge capacity is the term used to describe the enormous capacity and provision of weight of attack and sustained long duration human resourcing provided by CFA volunteers to these events.

Large fires require hundreds if not thousands of trained and experienced volunteer firefighters. This has been eloquently described in many publications. They mobilize and fight the fire like an army.

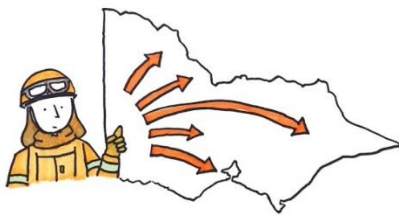
Just as emergency management volunteers are a critical 'resource' for Victoria, the way volunteers are engaged, encouraged, supported and empowered is an equally important consideration.

Community embedded volunteer fire brigades are fundamental to activating the community as a model to share responsibility for their own safety and is core to building community resilience.

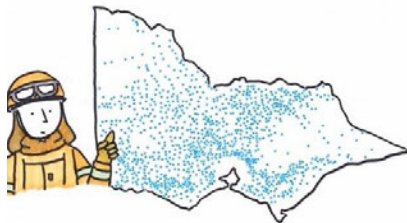
Funding and Resources

To assist the Committee better understand what is meant by peak load capacity and volunteer surge capacity, the following overview is provided.

CFA volunteer surge capacity is the ability to field thousands of trained, experienced volunteer firefighters at short notice while at the same time maintaining normal day to day service delivery and protection of local communities.



One of the fundamental benefits of the CFA volunteer-based model is the depth of capacity and capability it provides to maintain response across Victoria to widespread, large scale, multiple and concurrent emergencies whilst maintaining local fire cover for the rest of Victoria.



The blue dots on the map above show the location of CFA volunteer brigades across Victoria that provide a network of brigades all contributing to volunteer surge capacity

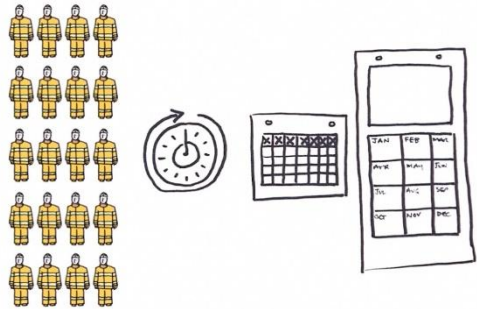


CFA volunteers attend local fires, day to day emergencies and major disasters anywhere in the state.



They are professionally trained and equipped for all fire risk situations - from houses, shops and factory fires to major hazards, bushfires and motor vehicle accidents.

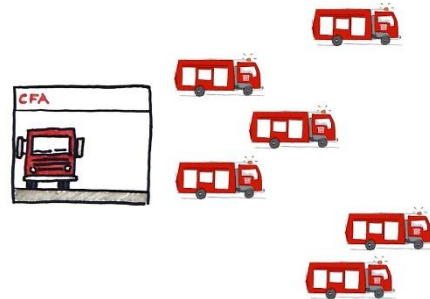
Funding and Resources



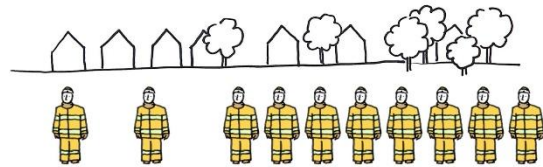
Your local CFA volunteer brigade is much more than just 3 or 4 firefighters on duty – it's dozens of volunteer firefighters on call and ready whenever needed 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Every day of the year.



This regular activation results in a well-motivated, exercised and prepared emergency force that maintains operational readiness across the whole year. This not only keeps communities safe but ensures the highest levels of firefighter safety due to frequent use of their skills.



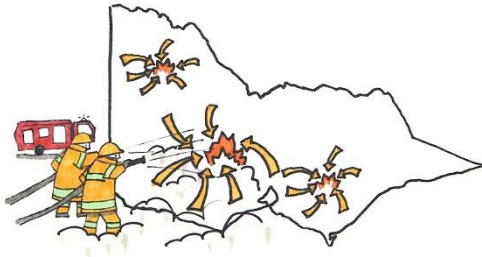
CFA's volunteer numbers mean Victoria has the ability to combat multiple fires at a time and keep supplying firefighters on the ground. Often for weeks, months or more as required.



A huge portion of our CFA volunteer surge capacity comes from the ever-growing outer metropolitan Melbourne and provincial cities.

So maintaining our volunteer numbers in these areas is vitally important for Victoria.

Funding and Resources

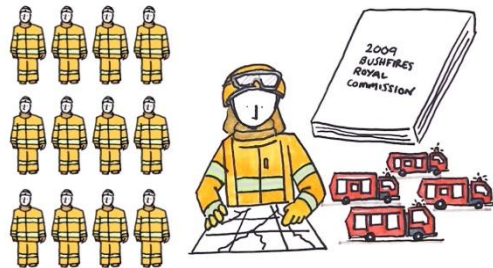


These volunteers from outer metro along with CFA volunteers right across the state means we have thousands of trained, experienced volunteer fire-fighters in the field ready to be deployed every hour of the day and we can keep supplying these firefighters for weeks at a time wherever they are needed.



This enormous surge capacity is recognized by fire experts as one of the most fundamental benefits of the CFA volunteer workforce.

They are embedded in cities, suburbs, regions and even the smallest rural communities.



The 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission said that the CFA volunteer surge capacity, together with the local knowledge and the ability of CFA volunteer fire brigades to mobilise a rapid response was a key strength during the 2009 Black Saturday Fires.



This capacity is not just demonstrated during summer, but across the entire year. The 2014 Hazelwood Mine Fire is just one example of a non-bushfire emergency that extended over 45 days and required thousands of well-trained volunteers. And this volunteer surge capacity is essential for Victoria's continuing ability to deal with large fires.

Funding and Resources

VOLUNTEER BASED MODELS ARE CRITICAL TO MEETING PEAK LOAD CAPACITY FOR MAJOR, CONCURRENT AND PROLONGED EMERGENCIES.

Recent decades show a regular annual occurrence of major events requiring deployment of massive numbers of trained volunteer firefighters and future climate/population assessments generally predict potential for more frequent and more consequential (life, property, livelihood loss) events.

Recent years also demonstrate that large scale non fire emergencies (flood, storm, threats to critical infrastructure supply such as gas or coal) can and do occur randomly at all times of the year impacting broad community areas and significant numbers of people.

Historically, CFA brigades have serviced all of country Victoria, more than half of metropolitan Melbourne, and all provincial centres and townships across Victoria.

Victoria's surge capacity is derived from this entire network of CFA brigades but importantly a large portion of the volunteer surge capacity is supplied from CFA brigades in the highly populated urbanised outer metropolitan areas.

Sustaining volunteer capacity across Victoria and particularly in outer metropolitan Melbourne and provincial towns where there are larger concentrations of CFA volunteers is vitally important for Victoria's state-wide peak load and surge capacity.

The peak load capacity is not just required for high profile disasters like the 2026 Fires. They have recently been used for the 2022 Flood Event, the 2019/20 Eastern Seaboard Fires and the 2009 Black Saturday fires. Each year there are numerous days when thousands of trained firefighters need to be deployed to major emergencies.

Population growth and urban expansion will see even more people living in high-risk environments and more communities on the urban development/fire risk interface.

THE IMPORTANCE OF METROPOLITAN/HIGHLY POPULATED AREAS TO VOLUNTEER CAPACITY

CFA volunteer capacity in outer metropolitan Melbourne areas and provincial centres makes up a substantial portion of Victoria's volunteer surge and peak load fire response capacity. CFA incident statistics show that for the big emergencies sometimes up to 40 - 50% of personnel deployed are volunteers supplied from volunteer and former integrated (vol/staff) CFA brigades in the greater metropolitan area of Melbourne (excluding the old MFB district where there are no volunteer fire brigades). Maintaining volunteer capacity in these highly populated areas is vitally important for Victoria's capacity to deal with large scale emergencies.

Over the years CFA volunteer brigades have generally been able to evolve their capacity to match changes in local community circumstances and service demand increases such as those caused by urban population growth. Sometimes growth does exceed the capacity of volunteers or community circumstances challenge a brigade's ability to sustain required levels of volunteer capacity and additional support needs to be provided to the brigade.

When the support solution requires additional paid firefighter support the previous CFA model deployed paid firefighters to supplement and support the existing volunteer capacity. This approach was known as the CFA integrated brigade resource model.

Funding and Resources

This resource model enabled CFA to grow volunteer brigade capacity to meet growing service demand in urban growth areas and at the same time maintain the volunteer 'surge' capacity to manage large scale, long duration and concurrent major emergencies.

Changes introduced over recent years to Victoria's fire services as a result of Fire Services Reform have seen the weakening and eroding of this vital agency/community partnership.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Developing community resilience is the foundation for effective disaster preparedness, response and recovery with the community's sharing responsibility for their own safety.

Emergency management volunteers, who live, integrate and operate within their communities on a daily basis are best placed to embed this philosophy, prepare their communities, build the capacity of their communities and know their local community vulnerabilities and strengths.

The work done by local volunteer fire brigades and other emergency management volunteers is critical to supporting communities:

- Recovering from disasters.
- Leading change and coordinating effort.
- Understanding risks.
- Communicating with and educating people about risks.
- Partnering with others who can help achieve change.
- Empowering individuals and communities to exercise choice and take responsibility.
- Risk reduction and
- Fostering relationships, networks and capabilities to improve resilience.

Improvements to community resilience are in large part due to local leadership, local drive and local ownership. This local ownership and empowerment is a significant enabler.

Any future changes that reduce this local involvement will be detrimental to ongoing community resilience.

Without the buy-in, input and ownership of local community-based volunteers who live within, operate within and execute resilient outcomes in times of need many programs are likely to fail.

The preferred approach must be to place the emphasis and resources at the closest possible level to the grassroots and local community.

The Hidden Value of Volunteers

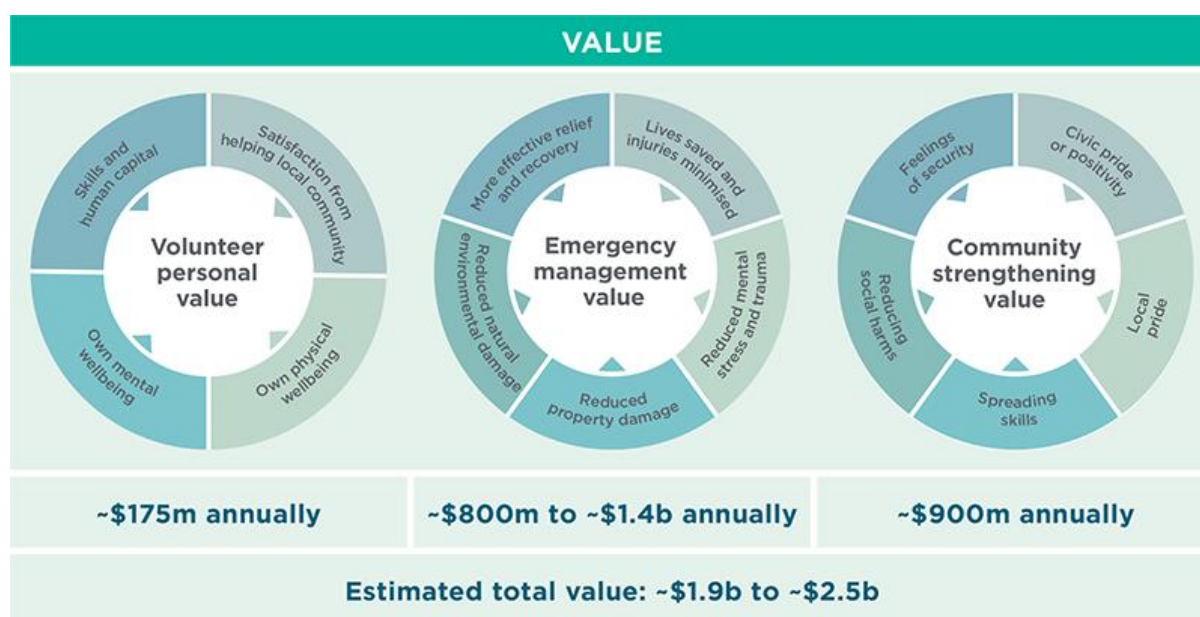
Victoria's Emergency Management Volunteers contribute a conservative indicative value of \$1.9 - \$2.5 billion dollars of value to Victoria every year.

VFBV worked alongside our partners at the Victoria State Emergency Service Volunteer Association (VicSESVA), Ambulance Victoria, St John Ambulance, the Victorian Council of Churches Emergency

Funding and Resources

Ministry and Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) to research and report on the value of Victoria's emergency management volunteers, volunteering and volunteerism. The project worked with Lateral Economics to model the value in economic terms.

In May 2020, the publication *The 3V's Final Report: Uncovering the hidden value* was published. The three V's represent: Volunteers - Volunteering and Volunteerism.



Overview of value creation from Victoria's emergency volunteers, volunteering and volunteerism.

The project involved exploring additional ways to analyse the value of Victoria's emergency management volunteers, volunteering and volunteerism. It has provided a framework and model that illustrates various layers of value, and explores the breadth of that value at the local community level. It was sponsored by the now disbanded Volunteer Consultative Forum (VCF) which VFBV was a founding member of, and worked with Lateral Economics to produce a fresh and original perspective to this unique task using fit for purpose logic, structure and evidence.

The full Final Report (2020) are attached as appendices to this submission.

The reports discuss the 'hidden value' that arises incidentally from the 3Vs that might not otherwise be known, captured and hence appreciated. It aims to bring this value to life through a new way of talking about volunteers, their activities and impact on society, while being accurate and credible.

The 3Vs Final Report presents a simple logic for how the 3Vs generate value to Victorians. Volunteers undertake activities which have positive outcomes or 'value', and value can be described in different ways. Describing value in its diversity allows the State to recognise and build on the value accrued by Victorian communities from the 3Vs. In this way, the 3Vs can be conceived not only as an emergency management workforce and a mechanism for building emergency related community resilience, but also as a way to strengthen communities.

Funding and Resources

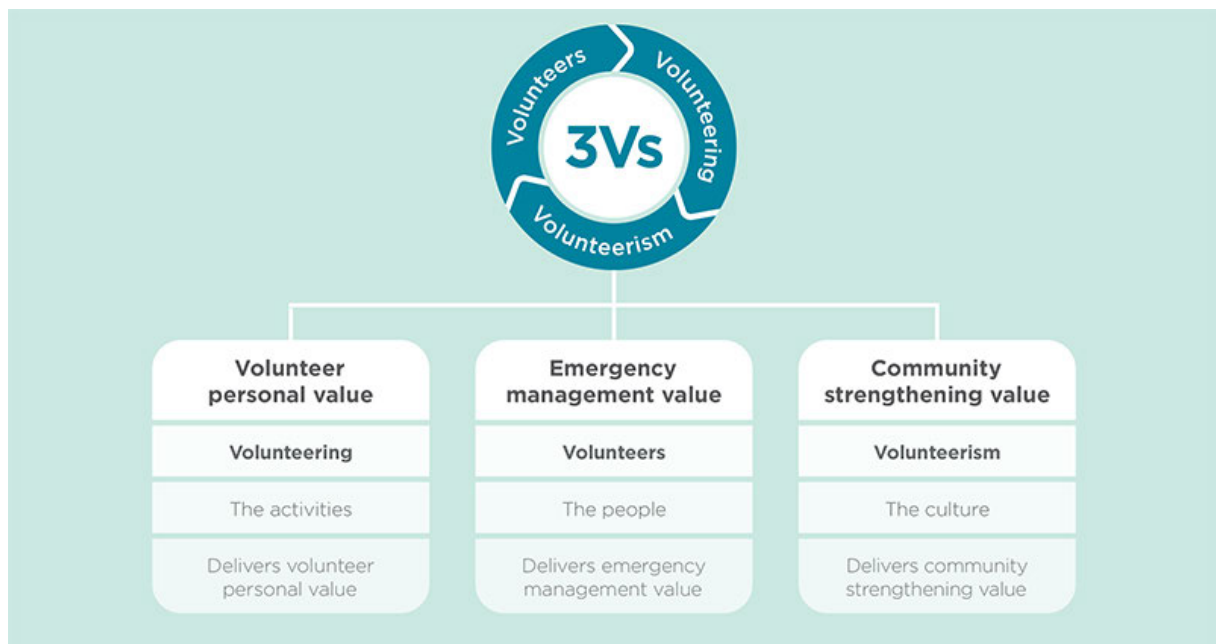
Even a preliminary analysis of this kind shows that the value of volunteers is large, and widely distributed across the community. Discussing the size of the 3Vs' value puts in stark contrast the flip-side of the issue: the possible losses and risk to Victoria from lower 3Vs activity.

Visible, active, positive emergency volunteerism in a community can make a difference to society as a whole. This difference has both tangible and intangible aspects. Emergency Management Volunteers are fundamental to emergency management in Victoria. It is therefore critical that their value and importance be recognised, and their collective interests and needs be protected, encouraged and supported to ensure they can deliver their services safely and effectively for the benefit of the Australian community.

It is estimated that approximately 100,000 Victorians contribute their time, skills and resources to ongoing volunteer work in local communities before, during and after emergencies. While it is helpful to know how many people volunteer, it provides no real insight, evidence or facts about the value that volunteers are providing to the state of Victoria.

The final report builds on the 3V's interim report released in August 2017 and provides further evidence of the value generated by Victoria's emergency management volunteers, volunteering and volunteerism and also a framework and model that identifies three layers of value: volunteer personal value; emergency management value; and community strengthening value.

The value created by Victoria's emergency volunteers, volunteering and volunteerism is estimated at between \$1.9 billion to \$2.5 billion annually.



Emergency Response

4.1 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The 2026 fire season was a significant fire season, and among one of the most serious with more than 436,000 hectares of land burned comparable with the amount of land impacted by the 2009 Black Saturday fires.

CFA volunteers rose to meet this challenge. They not only did the best with what they had, but their bravery and resilience in the face of catastrophe was exemplary. While much was lost, countless lives, properties and wildlife were saved.

Large fires require the mobilisation and deployment of thousands of volunteer firefighters to fight them while sufficient volunteers and equipment remain in place to protect local communities. Agency figures only count those who responded to an incident, and these figures must be seen as a very conservative estimate that do not come close to quantifying the tens of thousands of additional volunteers who were on standby in case local fires broke out and those who assisted in support roles – all of whom will never adorn a fire report.

CFA volunteers responded to 13,548 individual incidents <small>(1 Dec – 1 Mar)</small>	More than 28,500 total brigade turnouts <small>(1 Dec – 1 Mar)</small>	More than 111,000 individual turnouts <small>(1 Dec – 1 Mar)</small>	206,012+ volunteer hours on fireground <small>(1 Dec – 1 Mar)</small>
436,300 hectares of land burned	CFA volunteers attended almost 200 G&S Fires in a single day <small>(9 January, 2026)</small>	More than 80 CFA Strike Teams were mobilised in a single day <small>(9 January, 2026)</small>	27 TFB Days compared with only 12 for the entire 2024-25 season <small>(7 Jan – 15 Feb)</small>
7,000 individual vehicle responses using more than 1,800 unique appliances from more than 780 CFA brigades <small>(7 Jan – 27 Jan)</small>	400 Strike Teams using more than 2,000 appliance deployments from 650 brigades <small>(7 Jan – 27 Jan)</small>	1,590 damaged structures <small>(from 7 Jan)</small>	45,593 statewide livestock losses and 1 one fatality <small>(from 7 Jan)</small>

As a sector, we pride ourselves on continuous improvement, and there are as always, a myriad of issues that get raised with VFBV each year by volunteers seeking improvements. Sadly, in the experience of volunteers - many of these issues are re-occurring. Instead of embracing and committing to fixing them or engaging with volunteers to better understand the causes and impact - agencies frequently get defensive and are uncooperative.

The effectiveness of the deployment, utilisation and tasking of volunteers and all personnel will not only impact on the success of efforts before and during the fire season but will also impact on their future commitment and contribution.

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As at the date of submission VFBV has not yet received any information or analysis from the agency or sector's debriefing/after-action processes. As a result, this submission has been significantly affected.

However, in the spirit of continuous improvement – and based on volunteer reports thus far, there are a number of issues of concern that are frequently raised by volunteers and operational improvements that VFBV has been pursuing over a long period of time.

4.2 LACK OF FUEL REDUCTION ALONG ROADWAYS CONTRIBUTED TO THE FIRE SPREAD

Volunteers feel strongly that poorly managed roadways where high fuel loads have been allowed to grow contributed to fire spread during the 2026 fire season.

The lack of accountability under current emergency management planning legislation for relevant authorities to manage and be accountable for these roadways is seen as a contributing cause of fire intensity and spread.

Major roadways that at other times may have acted as fire breaks instead became corridors for fires to spread and travel acting like a chimney.



4.3 ROADSIDE BARRIERS IMPACTED ON EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Volunteers responding to the Longwood (Berry's Lane) Fire have reported being impeded by long stretches of roadside barriers, including wire rope barriers. First responders reported the barriers prevented crews from accessing the fire in a timely manner.

VFBV appreciates that roadside barriers play an important safety role for motorists. However, volunteers have long advocated for regular crossovers and breaks to the barrier installations to ensure emergency vehicles can cross, and access the vegetation contained on median strips.

Volunteers believe more frequent breaks in the barriers would maintain the inherent safety intent of the barriers, while allowing emergency crews to access and cross over where required.

4.4 LACK OF DIVISION/SECTOR/STRIKE TEAM LEADER TRAINING

While much progress was made during the Incident Management Team Training Project established in response to the 2009 Black Saturday fires, much of this work as far as field-based leadership roles such as Division, Sector and Strike Team Leader stalled, and has only in very recent times started to progress at all. This long delay has resulted in a heavy depletion of volunteers endorsed for these roles.

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Volunteers continue to raise concerns with the lack of training and accreditation pathways to these roles and the lack of professional development opportunities for those being mentored into the roles.

Following years of delays under EMV, CFA finally received permission to develop these courses independently. CFA Strike Team Leader training was only made available from mid-2025, following many years of delays. Current training Calendars show only a single Sector Commander course so far being offered in 2026, and no Division Commander courses are currently available.

This limits progression to Level 2 and level 3 Incident Controller pathways and represents a significant impediment to rebuilding the Level 3 IC capability that has been lost over recent years.

VFBV has also expressed disappointment to CFA for the lack of progress on strengthening the Role of Group, which was a project jointly pursued by VFBV and previous Chief Officer Euan Fergusson AFSM to strengthen the role of CFA Groups and develop their capability for local command and control for level 2 incidents. This would have the added benefit of being a strong feeding ground for members wishing to then pursue level 3 training.

4.5 INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TRAINING

The vast majority of IMT training courses continue to be scheduled Monday to Friday and during business hours. This creates a significant barrier to many volunteers who simply are not able to attend training during business hours due to their paid employment or other commitments.

Despite regularly being raised as a concern, there is very little evidence of improvements being made to facilitate volunteer engagement and involvement.

VFBV urges the Committee to audit the IMT training calendars for the past five years and assess the opportunities provided to volunteers outside business hours (such as weekends and evenings) across the full spectrum of roles.



The Fire Services Implementation Monitor be required to report on volunteer access to IMT training on a quarterly basis.

4.6 INCIDENT MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

VFBV continues to express concerns at the lack of resourcing and support for volunteers to be sought out, developed and mentored into senior incident management roles.

There are also corresponding concerns raised from those who have achieved accreditation with the observation that there are very few formal mentoring programs or opportunities for these senior volunteers to share their knowledge and experience with future leaders.

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Previously, targeted programs to encourage and develop volunteers were seen as highly successful and goes hand in hand with ensuring volunteers are then actually utilised in senior incident management roles.

Many volunteers believe there continues to be no substantial effort made to nurture and encourage the continuing development of existing volunteers who are already endorsed to perform senior incident management roles. VFBV believes these people have extended their commitment beyond reasonable expectations and should be recognised and supported accordingly.

VFBV continues to receive complaints from volunteers qualified and endorsed for these roles that report they are either not approached for use, or they are only approached at the last minute, or for roles no-one else wants (such as night shifts) or when no-one else is available. This has a significant impact on their morale and enthusiasm to maintain their skills.

VFBV has strongly advocated over many years for CFA to adopt a robust, comprehensive and dynamic human resource and workforce management system that would facilitate utilisation analysis.

4.7 FIREGROUND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Volunteers continue to raise concerns with poor resource management systems for equipment and personnel. Incompatibility between CFA and FFMVic processes continue to frustrate, as too does the continued use of manual and paper-based systems that prevents end of season analysis.

VFBV continues to urge the need for more strategic resource management, including better systems to monitor volunteer deployment and ensure every resource deployed to the fireground (including people) are known and accounted for.

VFBV appreciates that strategic planning decisions to not draw resources from specific geographic areas in order to plan for contingent events is both necessary and required, but would urge improved communication strategies to ensure volunteers are aware of these decisions so they can understand it is a deliberate strategy and not just a case of being forgotten or overlooked.

4.8 TASKING

Tasking is frequently raised by volunteers who are seeking improved and more timely methods for the tasking of personnel.

Once resources have been requested and activated it is equally important to ensure rapid, and productively focussed deployment of those resources at the incident and on the fire ground.

Volunteers volunteer to help people – not stand around waiting to be tasked.

It is important to maintain adequate focus on effective use of the time available during each deployment cycle. When deployed firefighters are ‘mucked around’ it is damaging to morale, a disincentive for them returning to another shift cycle, negatively impacts employers willingness to

Emergency Response

release volunteers and possibly a lost opportunity to get maximum effect from the firefighting effort.

4.9 COMMUNICATIONS

There is no aspect of modern emergency management and operations that is not reliant on a capable and reliable telecommunications system.

The ability of members of the public to report emergencies and provide emergency intelligence to the emergency services, the mobilisation and dispatch of responders, the two-way transmission of operational intelligence, general command and control of assets during operations and providing the capacity for incident controllers to alert and inform the public response and for local command and control of assets is dependent on a capable, redundant and reliable telecommunications system.

The loss of power is a predictable and frequent occurrence during bushfires, and stronger redundancy systems are urgently required to protect and maintain telecommunications during emergencies.

Public telecommunications failures (such as local towers losing power) have a cascade effect on emergency service communications, as it pushes all communications on the fireground - onto an already stretched emergency network that compounds local telecommunication failures.

VFBV continues to receive a high level of anecdotal complaints from volunteers regarding communication problems experienced during the 2026 fire season. Analysis of these concerns and their frequency will be dependent on information gleaned from this year's AAR's.

Volunteers frequently report radio congestion as a key frustration. VFBV believes more preplanning is required that would potentially automatically de-couple and segment command channels as the number of appliances dispatched increases. This would require coordination with 000Vic to ensure Firecom operators are available across those channels that are monitored.

SHORT STATUS MESSAGING

During the initial scoping of CFA's radio replacement, CFA prioritised the availability of short status messaging functionality as part of its mobility solution that would allow brigades to communicate pre-defined codes over data networks instead of consuming radio traffic bandwidth to FireCom.

The four most common status that was identified as being appropriate for short-status-messaging was "Turnout", "On-Scene", "Returning" and "in-Station". This functionality would allow brigades to replace current voice communications with a quick press of a button on a CFA radio.

This functionality was deemed critical to address the serious radio congestion often experienced by brigades during peak periods, and have historically impacted on CFA's response times, field intelligence and prevented brigades from being able to communicate their status due to radio congestion.

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And while CFA built this capability into its preferred radio equipment, and despite other emergency services indicating the same requirements, we were shocked when 000Vic (ESTA at the time) advised that it did not support this capability for its next-gen CAD and that it had determined it was out of scope for the upgrade currently underway.



Given the constant reports of radio congestion hampering communications, we urge the Committee to recommend that short status messaging and mobile data capability be prioritised for integration into Victoria's CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) upgrades.

BLACKSPOTS

We urge caution in relying on telecommunication provider coverage maps. VFBV is requesting CFA to independently assess black spots reported by brigades and volunteers to provide a better understanding of network coverage.

All CFA appliances now have the ability for automated vehicle tracking due to the capability of new mobile radios installed in these vehicles. This same technology may also be capable of alerting incident control teams when resources have moved into a black spot area due to the AVL losing connection with the network. This would allow more proactive monitoring of the communications status of vehicles involved in fireground operations.

VFBV would also support the investigation of an emergency band or segment of - to be reserved on the public mobile phone network for use by emergency services during emergencies, when congestion is frequently reported either due to towers being taken offline due to power cuts or increased public use during emergencies.

4.10 CFA/DEECA CULTURE

There continues to be a healthy respect between agencies and agency personnel and many examples of positive and good working relationships.

There will however always be an underlying tension and perception of conflict between suppression agency tactics and land management agencies in how fires are approached and managed and how aggressively or defensively the tactics employed are.

CFA volunteers continue to make observations on these cultural differences and the effectiveness of differing strategies between direct and indirect attack.

VFBV urges CFA to be required to take a more proactive and stronger advocacy role when other agencies are responsible for fires which threaten private land and property or fires which are heavily resourced by CFA and CFA volunteers. This would ensure incident managers benefit from the perspectives, knowledge and experience that are essential for managing fires in the urban/rural

Emergency Response

interface as well as providing critical knowledge required to motivate and manage a predominantly volunteer workforce.

Differing radio communications practices continue to frustrate and be reported on main command channels and should continue to be a focus of continuous improvement between the agencies.

4.11 STAGING & RESOURCING

Volunteers continue to express concerns and frustrations about poor time and resource management of incoming and outgoing crews.

Continued observations of staging and base camps not being aware of incoming crews or requests for resources are frequently raised.

Poor or late tasking of crews continues to be a key frustration, with incident management plans not being available to incoming crews at the start of shifts and crews having to wait long periods of time at the start of each shift for briefing and planning handover.

Unnecessary delays in processing, briefing and deployment have a significant impact on morale and VFBV urges priority action to address and improve this key concern.

Better use of cascading briefings down field command levels should be considered, as well as consideration of obviating the need for centralised briefings providing quality assurance is in place to ensure briefings are accurate and appropriate.

Improved auditing and accountability for key deliverables of IMT's and ICC's should be considered to ensure tasks that have flow on impacts (such as the preparation of incident plans and briefings) are addressed and delivered on time and are available for propagation.

4.12 SITUATION REPORTS AND FIELD COMMAND

Intelligence from the field remains critical for incident managers to plan and adapt to changing fire conditions.

Volunteers continue to express perceptions that IMT's and ICC's continue to be too top heavy and paperwork focussed, and critical information from the field does not appear to be actioned or addressed in a timely manner.

Better encouragement and support for situation reports from Strike Team Leaders, Divisional and Sector commanders would improve the regularity and relevance of key information from the field.

Stronger accountability and systems to ensure field requests and information are acted upon in a timely manner would likely significantly improve safety and morale.

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4.13 LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

The importance of embedding local knowledge not only in IMT's but in the field continues to be raised as a priority by volunteers.

Local brigades frequently report a lack of formal engagement for incidents being managed in their areas. This frequently results in increased workload for the local brigade who then continues to work and respond to their area often unaware of what other resources have been deployed or are in transit.

Improved methods of ensuring local brigades are provided regular information that would enable them to keep a watching brief across their area, as would formal opportunities to provide local knowledge and experiencing to incoming crews and IMT's would provide significant assurance and be of incredible benefit.

Ensuring local Group members and Group Officers are embedded in the command structure and engaged in the resource planning discussions is essential.

Local Group Officers are best placed to advise on relief arrangements as well as emerging morale issues from locals and should be more effectively used than they are now.

4.14 DUTY CYCLES AND FATIGUE MANAGEMENT

Volunteers continue to raise concerns with the lack or immaturity of volunteer fatigue management and tracking systems. Concerns are amplified when witnessing what appears to be the far superior planning, tracking and management of paid staff, who always seem to have food, rest breaks and shift changes well managed, yet volunteer crews are simply ignored or forgotten about.

With volunteer time being so precious, and of such significant impact on a volunteers family, work and livelihood, volunteers continue to express strong concerns when it appears their time is taken for granted, or priority is given to changing over or relieving paid crews only.

VFBV urges the sector to develop a pay-status blind system that treats all responders equally and supports safe and equitable arrangements for everyone.

4.15 DIFFERING ARRANGEMENTS FOR PAID STAFF

Volunteers have raised strong objections around what they perceive to be differing standards provided to paid staff versus volunteers that continues to emerge over recent years with greater frequency.

Any arrangements that provide for different accommodation, catering, tasking, on/off boarding or equipment issued to paid staff that is different to that provided to volunteers will continue to create division and resentment and have a significant impact on morale and culture.

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4.16 DEBRIEF AND AFTER-ACTION REVIEW'S

Relatively recent changes made to agency debriefs and after-action review processes over the years has been a topic of frequent volunteer discussion.

Over recent years, the role of Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) in leading sector wide debriefs has resulted in CFA stepping back and taking a much smaller role.

Volunteers have expressed concern that while they support interagency and sector wide debriefs – it is critical that agencies continue to support and provide widespread agency specific forums open to all members.

Reports of only senior leaders being invited to debriefs or debriefs occurring on weekdays and during business hours has only reinforced this negative perception.

VFBV commends CFA's recent action to lead its own internal AAR's and VFBV will continue to monitor to ensure focus is given on ensuring local and district debriefs are held at times suitable for volunteers to attend and to ensure volunteers continue to feel engaged and part of the after-action review process.

4.17 NEAR MISS REPORTING

While acknowledging recent years improvements, volunteers continue to express concerns at the slow and ad hoc processes for agencies to share important lessons learned from near misses and injuries.

VFBV has advocated for further investment in the development of case studies and scenario problem solving based on key messages from near miss and other investigations.

An open and transparent process of reporting, communicating and analysing is in the interests of all firefighters.

Volunteers have observed that many near miss investigations are often confined to the technical aspects of the environment such as weather, fuels, topography and fire behaviour. Thereby providing little expert analysis of elements of decision making and human behaviour that may have either contributed to the incident or alternatively prevented a worse outcome.

Outcomes and lessons learned need to also be extended far wider than just case studies and analysis and need to be appropriately joined up with pre-season briefings, training materials and operational exercises so that it can be usefully incorporated by firefighters into improved safety and decision making.

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4.18 PERSONAL PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

VFBV continues to pursue the more equitable distribution of next generation bushfire PPC.

Given longer duration fire seasons, higher incidences of activity and the need to ensure PPC is regularly laundered to ensure firefighter safety – VFBV is strongly advocating that volunteers be provided with multiple sets of PPC.

Governments funding of next generation bushfire PPC was limited to just one set for each operational volunteer, with no additional funding provided to CFA base budget to account for the increased costs or additional sets.

Back in 2020 when VFBV raised the issue about volunteers being expected to wear the same dirty PPC for days or weeks on end during large scale deployments, CFA advised that volunteers would be permitted to retain their older generation bushfire set to count as a second set.

That was five years ago.

VFBV believes it is unacceptable that volunteers do not have an entitlement to multiple contemporary sets of PPC that are fully funded by government, just as career staff do.

4.19 PRIVATE ASSETS

Volunteers remain incredibly supportive of private equipment and appliances and their importance to suppression and patrol activities.

This includes private community held assets (such as brigade owned appliances) as well as private equipment held by residents, farmers and private industry.

The importance of this equipment comes to the fore every season and should not be underestimated.

Volunteers have recently raised concerns about the widening gap of inadequate insurance cover, and the agencies enthusiasm (or not) to sometimes embrace private equipment and the important role it plays.

VFBV urges arrangements be reviewed with the intent of strengthening the support and protections for private equipment to ensure this valuable resource continues to be available during future seasons.

4.20 AUTOMATIC VEHICLE LOCATION AND RESOURCE TRACKING

VFBV supports greater use of Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) and resource tracking to maintain the safety of firefighters and assist in MAYDAY procedures. And while the technology and systems

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are now capable of this functionality, this intelligence is not readily available in the field or to volunteers.

VFBV has had reports of inadequate response to MAYDAY events. While one is under investigation, other reports remain anecdotal. VFBV will be monitoring the AAR's closely for any further reports.

4.21 CATERING AND ACCOMMODATION

Volunteers continue to report inadequate planning for basic functions such as catering and accommodation that significantly impacts upon volunteer morale and safety.

It should not be necessary to emphasise the importance of ensuring crews who are working in hot and difficult conditions, often doing high levels of physical activity require regular replenishment.

Reports of ration packs being exhausted and not replaced highlight ration packs being used to cover catering gaps, instead of the supplementary role they should be playing.

Volunteers wish to see stronger accountability on those responsible for ensuring timely and adequate food is provided to crews.

Reports continue to be received from volunteers about poor staging areas, secure parking and accommodation for volunteers contributing to the 2026 fires. In some instances, volunteers are bunking in school camp type facilities with more than 8 to a room.

This has a significant impact on restful sleep during down periods, contributing to serious fatigue issues for those members trying to recover from long and exhausting shifts. Inadequate separation or planning for day shift personnel and night shift personnel also results in noise pollution significantly impacting on crews rest.

While VFBV appreciates the complex logistics involved in large scale emergencies, VFBV maintains that not enough attention or priority is given to these issues which appear to disproportionately occur to volunteer crews.

Morale of crews working in extremely difficult and unpleasant conditions plays a significant role in operational effectiveness. VFBV submits that volunteer morale continues to be significantly impacted by these recurring issues.

While every effort is made by VFBV and volunteers to have volunteer specific concerns listened to and addressed, far too often these issues are dismissed.

To ensure operational response and effectiveness is maintained, it is critical urgent action is taken to address these issues.

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4.22 INTERNATIONAL AND INTERSTATE SUPPORT

Volunteers support the continued use of international and interstate personnel but seek more transparent communications around the roles being filled and assurances that local resources have been used and depleted first.

While VFBV appreciates the need to bring personnel earlier than sometimes required in order to climatise and brief personnel, volunteers want to ensure these deployments are not masking internal gaps that need to be prioritised for future years.

CFA volunteers have also faced increased hurdles in being deployed overseas themselves, with some jurisdictions refusing to allow volunteers to be deployed as volunteers and instead being required to be deployed as casual (paid) firefighters.

While we do not object to volunteers being reimbursed for international deployments, VFBV's position is that volunteers should be free to decline payment should they wish, and able to be deployed as volunteers. Jurisdictions that do not allow this to occur, should consequently be deprioritised for future deployments to Victoria, that relies on its volunteer model.

In CFA's case, the governments fire services reforms specifically preclude CFA volunteers being able to receive any form of payment, and they are therefore not able to be deployed to those international locations (such as Canada) that insist. Unlike other Australian States that will allow their volunteers to be temporarily reclassified as employees for the duration of the international deployment in order to satisfy visa and insurance issues, CFA volunteers have not been able to do so under the governments fire service reforms, robbing CFA volunteers of a valuable experience and use of their knowledge and expertise in some international jurisdictions.

4.23 EARLY DETECTION

Volunteers support the greater use of technology to assist with the early detection of fires in the landscape. These technologies are particularly useful for lightning strikes.

This in no way detracts from the important and critical role that fire spotters play, and volunteers encourage the continued use of fire spotters who not only provide early detection but contribute significantly to local intelligence.

Greater use of camera's, AI and satellite technology are required to provide much greater early detection of fire starts in remote and uninhibited areas. Getting to fires early in their cycle is the most effective way to extinguish the fire and prevent spread.

Resilience and Recovery

5.1 RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY – HARDENING OF CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Volunteers feel strongly that much more can be done to harden and prepare critical infrastructure for the fire season.

Given the vital role critical infrastructure plays, all critical infrastructure should be identified through municipal emergency management planning, and councils should be adequately funded to maintain these registers which should include prevention works conducted throughout the year to ensure these assets are prepared for peak danger periods during the fire season.

Appropriate backup power, and priority treatment when power fails in order to facilitate the reconnection of powers to these facilities when operating on emergency power.

Volunteers believe there should be more resilience of not only telecommunication infrastructure, but water and power that are critical during times of emergency.

5.2 KEY TELECOMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Volunteers have made strong representations about the lack of emergency power and generators for key telecommunications infrastructure. Many critical towers only have small reserves of emergency power that once depleted result in these critical telecommunications infrastructure powering down.

Given the importance of emergency messaging, communication with the public relies on mobile phone and radio infrastructure. Without it, communities simply cannot be informed of critical warnings.

Emergency Services and first responders also rely on telecommunications, which are often a key redundancy when emergency radios and networks are overloaded or impacted by fire. The inability of crews to access data that rely on the 4G/5G networks and NBN infrastructure during emergencies can significantly impact crew safety and operational effectiveness.

All critical infrastructure such as telecommunication towers should be clearly identified in emergency management plans, with priority access provided through ICC's to operators who need to access this infrastructure during active emergencies.

Reports of private operators not being able to access equipment to restore power indicates a lack of planning, and should be prioritised to ensure crews are available to escort urgent repairs and power restoration of these facilities during active emergencies given the essential role they play.

Resilience and Recovery

5.3 TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT POINTS (TMP)

Traffic management points tend to be one of the most controversial aspects during bushfires and they have a direct correlation on community recovery and a link to the community's willingness to evacuate.

It is our view that improved arrangements for residents who decide to remain on their properties still have merit. We do however wish to acknowledge how difficult TMP's are and the role of police.

In our experience the vast majority of police officers involved in TMP's are compassionate and do their best to enforce the rules with as little impact on the community as possible. None of these criticisms are directed at them or how they have undertaken their role.

Residents in fire impacted communities continue to raise frustrations with volunteers that their ability to leave their home to restock supplies (such as essential food and fuel for their generators) is hampered by traffic management points and road closures established in the aftermath of large-scale bushfires.

While TMP's are critical to ensure community safety, additional flexibility and systems to identify and triage residents during different phases of the fire should be improved. There should be a balance between warning people about the risks, and personal responsibility.

Some residents have expressed a reluctance to evacuate or leave well in advance of predicted fire danger days as they worry they will not be able to return to their properties.

Flexibility to assist with the reuniting of families, especially when communications have been knocked out would alleviate a considerable amount of community anxiety.

Wristband systems and the like can make it easier for police to identify and log residents and have been very well received in the past.

The long delay in opening roads to allow for the safe passage of community members returning home is an issue frequently raised with volunteers. Volunteers fear members will be less likely to evacuate in the future if they continue to experience such difficulty in returning.

A prioritisation system to support community members who must return to take care of livestock is critical.

VFBV fully appreciates that roads were not able to be opened due to unassessed or uncleared dangerous trees. We do not undermine the importance of safety. However what volunteers are seeking is better communications with the community on timelines, more resources to speed up clearing of dangerous trees and a more targeted plan on prioritising priority roads that would allow communities to return faster.

Volunteers also want to see greater utilisation and upskilling of tree hazard assessors, and prioritisation of heavy plant and equipment required to clear roadways in the aftermath of large scale emergencies.

Lessons Learned

6.1 PREVIOUS REVIEWS, MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND LESSONS LEARNED

For the benefit of the Committee, we have provided a brief summary of significant previous review and enquiries to affect the fire services over the past decade.

VFBV shares the frustration of many volunteers who have participated in a plethora of reviews, often with perceptions of little ultimate improvement to the support of volunteers and their communities with local service planning, preparation, delivery and recovery.

6.2 KEY FINDINGS AND THEMES

VFBV wishes to draw attention to the following common and important themes identified frequently during Victorian reviews over the past decade.

- That a priority for fire services is to ensure planning and resource allocation addresses preparedness and capability for the high consequence major events and avoid potential for local level planning and resource allocation to monopolise scarce resources or divert attention from major disaster readiness;
- That the frequency and severity of major fire and other disasters is predicted to increase and growing population in risk interface areas will mean increase potential life, social and economic impact will increase;
- The importance of the CFA volunteer-based model for the provision of rapid response, local knowledge and surge capacity required to manage peak load situations where huge resources are required to respond to major, concurrent and long duration emergencies at the same time as maintaining day to day service coverage in urban areas, townships and communities across Victoria;
- The need to improve genuine consultation with volunteers;
- The need to improve planning, resourcing, delivery and access to training for volunteers;
- The need for proactive, deliberate and accountable design and implementation of policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers and the community;
- The need for increased focus on prevention, education, and community sharing responsibility for their own safety;

Lessons Learned

- An assessment that Victoria currently has one of the highest cost per capita fire services; that simply adding more paid firefighter resources to fire services and fire suppression will not always be the most effective or cost-efficient way to improve community safety outcomes; and question whether Victoria's fire response standards are causing resources to be directed to the wrong solutions;
- That CFA volunteers are vital to Victoria's emergency management capability and despite there being ongoing social, demographic and other challenges to volunteering there are also many opportunities to improve the attraction, retention and support to volunteers.
- Considering the vital importance of volunteers to Victoria's emergency management capability there needs to be more focussed effort and investment in maintaining and strengthening volunteer capacity; and
- Instead of making changes to the structure and/or management arrangements of the fire services there is better opportunity and precursor work required to improve shared effort; establish common operating systems; align work practices and culture; achieve commonality in operational doctrine and procedures; use compatible equipment; pursue integrated preparedness/response/prevention/recovery effort etc.

There is a consistent recognition throughout all of the reviews, reforms, reports or inquiries over the past decade, of the importance of community-based CFA and other emergency service volunteers to Victoria's capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

6.3 SIGNIFICANT REPORT SUMMARIES

The following summary lists key volunteer aspects of the major reviews/reforms.

Inspector-General for Emergency Management Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season (2020)

The Phase 1 of this review was handed down on the 14th October 2020.

This report found that having the right balance in maintaining a level of readiness to respond to bushfire in Victoria is a complex calculation. The required resources in terms of personnel, vehicles, equipment and aircraft need to be scalable according to seasonal requirements and cannot readily be switched on and off if conditions alter rapidly.

The Inspector-General found the extent to which the organisational changes attached to the Governments 2020 reforms and how they will affect the delivery of bushfire preparedness and response in Victoria remains to be seen.

Lessons Learned

The 2019–20 fires highlighted the ongoing need to arrive at realistic community understanding about shared responsibility; and specifically, the role of the individual in addressing the risk of bushfire, its eventuality and consequences, versus the role of the State and its agencies. The recent past has already brought larger and more frequent bushfires. Adapting to a future in which that is the norm means shifting beliefs, approaches and actions on the part of both the emergency management sector and the wider community.

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020)

The Royal Commission presented its report on the 28th October 2020.

The Commission found that every state and territory suffered fire to some extent during the 2019/20 Fire Season. The fires did not respect state borders or local government boundaries. On some days, extreme conditions drove a fire behaviour that was impossible to control.

Thousands of Australians – locals and holidaymakers – became trapped. Communities were isolated, experiencing extended periods without power, communications, and ready access to essential goods and services, or access to cash or EFTPOS to pay for their most basic needs.

It found that achieving an effective national approach to natural disasters requires a clear, robust and accountable system capable of both providing a comprehensive understanding of, and responding to, the aggregated risks associated with mitigation, preparation for, response to and recovery from natural disasters.

The Commission found that natural disasters are expected to become more complex, more unpredictable, and more difficult to manage. We are likely to see more compounding disasters on a national scale with far-reaching consequences. Compounding disasters may be caused by multiple disasters happening simultaneously, or one after another. Some may involve multiple hazards – fires, floods and storms.

The Commission stated that to make Australia more resilient to natural disasters demands action on multiple fronts. A resilient nation will seek to mitigate the risk of disasters through a wide range of measures, and it will attend to all of the complex and sometimes long-term consequences.

Importantly, it found efforts to make Australia more resilient to natural disasters are likely to become increasingly costly, and therefore will call for more resources and a more effective and efficient use of resources.

The Commission also highlighted the importance of local government and councils in emergency planning. It raised concerns with the capability and capacity of local governments to fulfil the responsibilities delegated to them and that their capability appeared to depend on factors including their relative size, natural disaster risk profile, demographics and the resources available to them.

Lessons Learned

Inspector-General for Emergency Management Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector (2019)

This review is instructive reading for anyone who states that Victoria's fire services arrangements had remained 'largely unchanged until July 2020'.

The Inspector-General found that the Victorian emergency management sector has undergone significant reform in the 10 years since the 2009 Victorian bushfires. Much of this reform has been guided by major reviews including the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, the Review of 2010–11 Flood Warnings and Response, and the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry.

IGEM considered that the 10-year anniversary of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires presented an opportunity to consider whether the significant program of reforms introduced since 2009 are effective in supporting Victorians to become safer and more resilient.

Through the review, IGEM found that many aspects of the sector have significantly improved since 2009. The creation of new enabling legislation, bringing with it the establishment of Emergency Management Victoria, the Emergency Management Commissioner, and the Inspector-General for Emergency Management have been pivotal.

In its report, IGEM makes eight observations, 33 findings, and five recommendations identifying good practice and opportunities for continuous improvement. The recommendations relate to the critical areas of risk management, community information, recovery, outcomes frameworks, and capability and capacity.

The review found that shared responsibility became a prominent theme in emergency management following the 2009 Victorian bushfires and 2010–11 Victorian floods. The sector acknowledged that it did not have the capacity to ensure the safety of all Victorians and community members should be supported to take responsibility for their safety and wellbeing.

Shared responsibility is also a positive mechanism to facilitate greater engagement between the sector and community, improve levels of emergency preparedness and build community resilience.

Despite significant reform in the sector, the review outlines concerns that community resilience is decreasing and reliance on the sector and government is growing. IGEM noted that the sector does not clearly articulate its expectations of communities in emergency management and often tries to 'fix' problems for communities. While these actions are well-intentioned, it can disempower individuals and communities and create confusion about the meaning of shared responsibility in emergency management.

Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

This inquiry was conducted by a Victorian Parliament Select Committee formed by the upper house and found that the restructure of the Country Fire Authority and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade as

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proposed in the Bill was not included among the recommendations of the fire services reviews undertaken over the last decade.

The Committee also found that the Government had developed its restructure proposal secretly, hastily and without involving representatives from Emergency Management Victoria, the Country Fire Authority or the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

It found that the Government did not meet its statutory obligations to consult with volunteers and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria as required by the Volunteer Charter and the Country Fire Authority Act 1958.

The Committee said this reinforced the perception of a bias towards the United Firefighters Union, and undermined confidence in the restructure proposal.

The Committee was concerned that the Government's claimed level of consultation was found to be false and observed that the Government's failure to acknowledge and correct those errors until prompted by the Committee undermined confidence in the claimed consultation process.

The Committee expressed concern about the Government's failure to undertake implementation planning in parallel with developing the restructure proposal, reinforcing the importance of ensuring Victorian firefighting surge capacity was not diminished and highlighting its concern that the impact of the restructure on this vital surge capacity was unclear.

Key recommendations were:

- Not to proceed with the proposed Bill due to the lack of implementation, operational and funding certainty; failure to undertake consultation; and consequential polarisation of fire services volunteers and staff;
- Separate 'Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation' legislative changes from legislation to restructure the fire services;
- The Government ensure compliance with its consultation obligations under the Volunteer Charter and the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 prior to proceeding with any further reform of the fire services;
- The Government undertake meaningful and balanced consultation with Emergency Management Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, staff and volunteer representatives prior to proposing any further reform of the fire services;
- The Government develop and publish a detailed implementation plan in parallel with any further fire services reform proposal;

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- Country Fire Authority staff should continue to be employed directly by the Country Fire Authority, and solely within the Country Fire Authority chain of command. Secondment should only be used for staff exchange/development opportunities, not as a default employment mechanism;
- The Government and its agencies not endorse any EBA, instrument or accord, which has the effect of limiting the exercise of statutory powers of the chief officer(s) of the fire service(s);
- The Government ensure adequate infrastructure funding for the fire services independently of the restructure;
- The Government develop and publish a detailed funding plan in parallel with any further fire services structural reform proposal. The funding plan should identify and address the impact of:
 - resource and asset transfers between the Country Fire Authority and Fire Rescue Victoria;
 - the creation of the Fire Rescue Victoria fire district on the Fire Services Property Levy revenue base beyond the two-year freeze period; and
 - any changes to the differential charging rates for the Fire Services Property Levy beyond the two-year freeze period; and
- The Legislative Council refer the Department of Premier and Cabinet to the Legislative Council Privileges Committee for investigation of its interference with the Committee's inquiry.

The minority report associated with this Committee agreed or agreed in principle with all but two of the overall recommendations.

Both the full report and the minority report agreed that a detailed implementation plan needed to be published in parallel with any future consideration of the reform.

Victorian Fire Service Review – Drawing a line, building stronger services (2015)

Both the Victorian Fire Services Review (2015) report and the State Government response recognised the importance of CFA volunteers and CFA as a volunteer based and fully integrated organisation to Victoria's emergency management system.

The report calls to improve leadership and to address a concerning culture that has tolerated treating people differently based on pay status; bullying and harassment; poor front-line worker and management relationships; and a them and us approach.

Lessons Learned

There is a strong call for everyone in the sector to focus more energy on working as one. There is strong recognition of the need for CFA to have more flexibility in the way it deploys resources to support local brigades and community circumstances, and there is an identified need to improve leadership from agency executive level through to Brigade level and across the sector's collective leadership.

The review recognised the strengths of the existing fire services and said that effort should be focussed on ensuring the separate fire services share common effort, reduce duplication and work as one. The report explicitly advises against any contemplation of amalgamating the MFB and CFA, reporting that this would have a negative rather than constructive impact.

The report acknowledged the extensive and essential capacity of CFA's volunteer Brigades and the fundamental value of sustaining and building strong integration in those communities where paid staff are required to supplement volunteer capacity. The report identified the essential nature of CFA's volunteer Brigade surge capacity for major and concurrent events.

There are 20 recommendations, and the Government identified an action to address 18 of these. Several recommendations were earmarked for further discussion/work and the Government committed to work with VFBV and others on the detail of these. All work on this report ceased after the resignation of the Emergency Services Minister responsible.

Emergency Services Response Times (2015)

Victorian Auditor-General's Report undertaken to assess how accountable emergency service organisations (and others) are for their response time performance.

Key findings included:

- Targets which relate to the number of minutes for emergency services to arrive at a structure fire are based on outdated scientific research from 1987;
- Current response times set for performance standards do not necessarily reflect better outcomes or service efficiency;
- Response times do not represent the extent of emergency response activity or adequately describe emergency service performance; and
- The work of fire services extends well beyond responding to fires and this must be considered in relation to assessing resource requirements and protecting Victorian communities, this issue is complex and requires significant consideration of all aspects of the work undertaken

Lessons Learned

Managing Emergency Service Volunteers (2014)

Audit undertaken by the Victorian Auditor General to assess the CFA and Victorian SES on their effectiveness and efficiency at managing emergency services volunteers.

Key findings include:

- CFA does not have a sound understanding of the total number of volunteers needed to fulfil its operational requirements;
- CFA does not know how many volunteers it needs;
- An evidence-based assessment of the current workforce capacity and capability is needed for CFA to understand what is needed to meet service delivery;
- Weakness in the processes to identify volunteer training needs limit the effectiveness of CFA training. Training is inconsistent and not always available when needed with career firefighter training prioritised; and
- The management of recruitment and lack of focus on retention, particularly through gaining and understanding why volunteers leave needs to be addressed

Senate Inquiry ‘Recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events’ (2013)

Undertaken by the Environment and Communications Reference Committee to review recent trends on the frequency of extreme weather events and an assessment of the preparedness for key weather events from infrastructure, planning, and insurance to prevention and response.

Key findings include:

- There is an anticipated increase in frequency, severity, duration and consequence of extreme weather events, which will likely result in great pressure on emergency services;
- This potential increase in extreme weather events will result in the need to have a standing capacity of agencies both to prepare for, and to respond to, emergencies; and
- It is uneconomic to maintain full-time paid fire and emergency services that are capable of combatting all conceivable events.

Lessons Learned

Any future consideration of resource requirements for the State needs to consider the potential future impact of extreme weather events, and the critical support needed to sustain volunteers to ensure the State's capacity and capability to respond to these events.

Independent Inquiry – His Honour David Jones AM (2011)

Commissioned by Deputy Premier Peter Ryan to examine the effect of arrangements made by CFA on the recruitment, training, deployment, and support to CFA volunteers.

His honour Mr Jones was appointed to conduct the inquiry with terms of reference relating to the examination of the effect arrangements made by CFA were having on CFA volunteers and make recommendations to address any shortcomings of difficulties it identified.

The report was a landmark in bringing together an independent examination of issues negatively affecting CFA volunteers, spanning key issues including recruitment, retention, training, engagement & effective consultation, institutional discrimination and deployment.

The report itself is an important document to gain an insight to agency arrangements and their effects on volunteer satisfaction and retention.

Key findings relevant to this review:

- The process for addressing service needs and allocating resources must be clear and transparent. Decisions about allocation of additional career firefighters may affect the involvement of volunteers. Consequently, in accordance with the Volunteer Charter volunteers can reasonably expect to be consulted. 'Decisions such as allocation of resources and possible consequences on volunteer involvement should be made by the CFA Board and CFA Chief Officer not by a Dispute Panel or Board or Reference formed by an industrial agreement';
- Communication and information technology investment is vital to the sustainability of the CFA model and to facilitate effective involvement of volunteers;
- The CFA model of one integrated force (volunteer and paid members) can serve the community very well;
- CFA encouraged to develop service models, standards and resource planning processes that are evidence based;
- Developing a better skills database to capture the skills and qualifications of volunteers to holistically drive volunteer development and utilisation; develop a cadet scheme that taps young members of the community and promotes volunteerism to retiring and resigning employees; explore legislative options for protecting volunteers in relation to their

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employment;

- That the CFA's volunteer-based, and community embedded service model is fundamental to achieving community-based responsibility for their own safety and engagement with local communities;
- CFA culture, leadership and human resource management are keys to maintaining and strengthening the community's understanding of, confidence in, support for and active participation in the volunteer-based emergency service model for Victoria, which is consequently, fundamental to the future success of the CFA;
- Achieving an appropriate CFA organisational culture and providing sound organisational leadership driven by a commitment to principles and policy designed to achieve a successful volunteer-based organisation are critical;
- Improving leadership in CFA from top to bottom is key to the success of the CFA integrated model – this cannot be over emphasised and is one of CFA's biggest challenges. Entry to leadership positions (including operational paid staff) needs to be opened up to ensure the right people hold relevant positions;
- Changes need to occur to single tier entry for paid firefighters;
- All position descriptions and key selection criteria for roles in CFA require knowledge of and commitment to a statement of CFA vision, mission and values which need to include principles that support and complement the principles in the Volunteer Charter and recognise the volunteer-based nature of CFA;
- The changing circumstance of Victoria further emphasises the need for CFA to ensure it remains attractive to future potential volunteers, and more critically, that the CFA volunteer-based model that provides such valuable services is sustainable into the future;
- Women are currently an untapped resource for CFA volunteer recruitment and specific action is required that facilitates the involvement of women as volunteers in the CFA at all levels;
- CFA should further develop its community education programs to specifically engage culturally and linguistically diverse communities to address the importance of ethnic diversity; and more needs to be done to engage young people in CFA – there may be scope to do more

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work with schools;

- Developing initiatives and strategies to maximise involvement of young people as volunteers and their retention as volunteers is of vital importance to the sustainability of the CFA model;
- Industrial arrangements should not limit or restrict utilisation of volunteers; appointments to positions in CFA should be based on merit, appropriate competency and experience that do not discriminate against volunteers. CFA employment arrangements should be flexible and matched to support/service need;
- Barriers to lateral entry and secondments are contrary to the best interests of CFA in that it inhibits the ability of CFA to appoint the most suitable person to the position. Where it prevents vacancies from being filled it is an unacceptable situation. CFA needs to revisit this arrangement with the United Firefighters Union (UFU). Restrictions to lateral entry is causing delays in CFA's ability to fill key operational and management vacancies – sometimes for more than 12 months;
- High turnover of Operations Officers and industrial arrangements which inhibit the appointment of suitably qualified volunteers to Operations Officers and Operations Managers who have a very important role in the management, leadership and support for volunteers and their brigades, significantly affects CFA brigades;
- The industrial barrier to CFA employing part-time or casual employees is too restrictive and inhibits the CFA in being able to best resource the needs of the organisation. This restriction should be revisited by the CFA with the UFU;
- First Aid training and maintenance of currency qualifications – improvement is necessary with the delivery of First Aid training for volunteers;
- There has been a lack of organisational and strategic planning for training. Forward strategic planning, in what is a dynamic area, is essential. It needs to be short term (next 12 months), mid-term (next two or three years) and long term (next five to 10 years). Such planning needs to include the allocation of resources and training resource levels need to be driven by training need. A solution needs to be found so that capacity can meet demand;
- The need for volunteer training is increasing but the availability is reducing. Availability and accessibility to FTGs (Fire Training Grounds) is another consistent concern and issue. CFA must take initiatives to improve FTG accessibility to volunteers for training;

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- The availability of career training instructors at times that are likely to be convenient to volunteers as governed by industrial agreements is too restrictive;
- The use of sessional instructors has a role to play in the effective, efficient and cost-effective delivery of training. However, again this is being inhibited by industrial arrangements, although, hopefully, some satisfactory outcome can be negotiated; and
- Existing qualified volunteers are underutilised in Incident Management Teams. There certainly is a perception amongst volunteers that they are a last resort resource. That should not be the case as their better utilisation is beneficial to volunteer morale and the CFA.

There is a range of other findings and recommendations on such matters as consultation and communications processes, internal dispute resolution, disciplinary arrangements and the creation of a Volunteer Ombudsman.

Victorian Government Review of the 2010/11 Flood Warnings and Response (2011)

Examined the emergency management arrangements in response to significant and widespread floods of late 2010 and early 2011, which were severely tested.

Key findings include:

- The need for CFA volunteers to be sustained, supported and equipped to enable the additional capacity required, and expected of them, to support and respond to other emergencies such as floods;
- The need for Victoria's emergency management arrangements to have scalability for both small- and large-scale events; and
- Victoria's volunteers must not be disenfranchised as the state relies so heavily on them for emergency management capability.

Whilst the report focusses on the Victorian SES as primary responders to flood, its relevance is in highlighting that it is appropriate for Victoria to maintain an 'all hazards, all agencies' philosophy for emergency management and therefore resourcing considerations are not to be limited to local fire response.

2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC)

This was an extensive inquiry with its final report stretching over five volumes. Hearings were conducted from May 2009 through to July 2010. Final report published in July 2010 included extensive observations plus 67 formal recommendations.

Lessons Learned

The VBRC gave particular recognition and acknowledgement to the strength of the CFA volunteer base and specifically the value of 'the surge capacity, the local knowledge and rapid response of volunteers.

Council Assisting the VBRC advised that any changes to emergency management arrangements in Victoria should be treated against two key and interdependent aspects, these being how the changes improve Victoria's ability to (a) manage bushfire prone areas (including preparing for and responding to major fires); and (b) service Victoria's expanding urban fringe and growing regional towns.

These two aspects are highly interdependent, and volunteers emphasise strongly that the soon to be replaced CFA service model in Melbourne's growing urban fringe was absolutely fundamental to Victoria also having capacity to mobilise the large numbers of highly trained volunteer firefighters required for peak load and surge capacity associated with major state level emergencies, including bushfires.

The VBRC recommendations are extensive and formal implementation monitoring processes and reviews also exist, so a full analysis has not been included here. Several matters of particular interest in the context of reform and resourcing are:

- Importance of CFA volunteers for surge capacity, local knowledge and rapid response;
- Need for reliable technology for resource identification and tracking when preparing for and responding to incidents;
- Need for reliable and effective communications equipment and need to overcome black spots and other communications problems between vehicles, fire crews and command and control personnel including incident management teams;
- Need for appropriate numbers of command and control vehicles, strategically located around the state for rapid deployment; and
- Need for increased numbers of trained, qualified and endorsed personnel for level 3 incident control and specialist incident management roles – including importance of harnessing and effectively utilising the volunteer resource and experience.

CFA “Training Delivery” Review by David Garnock (2009)

This review was undertaken following concern over the need for CFA to improve its ability to meet a number of the training delivery needs of firefighters.

The report identified that the rectification of the training issues will be largely dependent on additional allocation of resources. The provision of effective and accessible training based on

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brigade needs to ensure they have the correct profile of active qualified volunteers for the brigade risk and role is fundamental to fire and emergency service delivery.

Issues raised in this review and also in previous/subsequent reviews suggest the problems identified are still pertinent today. VFBV suggests issues requiring close attention is improved funding of training in CFA and the removal of industrial agreement provisions or work practices that inhibit training and better utilisation and empowerment of brigades and volunteers to support their own training and assessment needs.

Successive annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency surveys highlight issues relating to flexibility of, access to, formats and resourcing of training remain the areas of most concern and dissatisfaction amongst volunteers. Not all of these concerns are issues that CFA can address alone and issues of funding, work practices and industrial arrangements have been raised by VFBV with successive Governments.

The review focussed on organisational arrangements and cultural issues and identified the need to address issues or face continued impediment to CFA's capacity to rectify some longstanding training delivery issues.

Relevant to this review, a summary of key findings includes:

- CFA needs to improve flexible scheduling, delivery and availability of training to volunteers;
- There are industrial agreement provisions impeding training of CFA volunteers and these need to be addressed;
- CFA needs to develop options to increase delivery of training in locations and at times more accessible and suitable to volunteers;
- CFA needs to improve duration and review any unnecessary mandatory requirements of training to improve flexibility and ensure training is aligned to actual need; and
- Consistency of training approaches to skills maintenance training and recording and RPL/RCC processes need to be improved.

Independent Government Review – Judge Gordon Lewis (2008)

Instigated by Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Bob Cameron to determine the key obstacles in decision making processes for procuring firefighter equipment.

Key findings:

- CFA and MFB EBA agreements with paid firefighters effectively give power of veto to UFU, preventing management decisions being made and seriously delaying procurement of

Lessons Learned

firefighter protective equipment;

- CFA and Government failed to meet their commitment and obligations to consult with volunteers;
- Firefighters and the public of Victoria poorly served by the inability of the UFU, CFA and MFB to work cooperatively; and
- Future stakeholder relations effort and consultation arrangements must involve consultation with volunteer firefighters in Victoria and volunteers must be entitled to participate in any discussions directed at matters that affect them

VFBV participated and/or submitted extensive submissions to each of these reviews, all of which are publicly available. Should you require any assistance locating a submission, or wish to explore any in further detail, please don't hesitate to make contact and we will facilitate your request.

Similarly, we are committed to assisting in any other capacity as required to help better understand the concerns and/or themes frequently raised by volunteers



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

”

Volunteers play a critical role in the delivery of emergency management across Victoria.

APPENDICES

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEER STATEMENT

VICTORIA
State Government

Volunteers play a critical role in the delivery of emergency management across Victoria.

There are over 100,000 emergency management volunteers throughout the State across a wide range of agencies. A community focussed service delivery approach, with volunteers working together with agencies and paid staff, provides the best outcome for Victorian communities.

Through reference to the key principles set down in this Emergency Management Volunteer Statement, the parties commit to use and apply the Statement to strengthen the culture of volunteering in Victoria and build a shared understanding of, and respect for, the critical role that volunteers play in the emergency management sector and community.

This Statement is dated the 4th of May 2016.

Daniel Andrews MP
Premier, State of Victoria

Jane Garrett MP
Minister for Emergency Services

Craig Lapsley PSM
Emergency Management Commissioner

Emergency Management Agencies Signatories:

Ken Lay APM
Ambulance Victoria
Chair

Penny Harrison
Australian Red Cross – Victoria
Executive Director

Raymond A Campbell ESM
Australian Volunteer Coast Guard
National Commodore

John Peberdy
Country Fire Authority
Acting Chair

Tom Mollenkopf
Life Saving Victoria
Chair

Major Eddy Holman
Salvation Army – State Liaison Emergency Services Officer,
Victorian State Council

Cameron Oxley
St John Ambulance
Victorian Chair

Peter Akers
Victoria State Emergency Service
Chair

Stuart Stuart
Victorian Council of Churches
Chief Executive Officer

Dr Faye Bendrups
Volunteer Emergency Service Association
Independent Chair

Nev Jones AFSM
Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria
State President

The Emergency Management Volunteer Statement:

- Is an agreed commitment between the State of Victoria and emergency management volunteers, from agencies listed in the Emergency Management Manual Victoria;
- Ensures the State of Victoria and the emergency management volunteer agencies will commit to consult with volunteers on matters which affect them, through volunteer engagement arrangements within the emergency management sector, including the Volunteer Consultative Forum, and in line with their agencies' obligations;
- Is the framework for an enduring commitment between the parties. The Statement will be reviewed as required by the parties or at the end of four years from its date of commencement;
- The parties commit to maintaining and further building emergency management volunteer capacity as required, to plan, prepare, respond and recover from emergencies and build community safety and resilience; and
- Coexists and complements the enduring effect of the CFA Volunteer Charter.

Emergency Management Volunteers:

- Selflessly give their time to protect and help others;
- Are essential to the State's response before, during and after both routine and major emergencies;
- Are part of their communities and, as such, are fundamental to community safety and resilience;
- Give of their time without expectation of financial reward, but to gain satisfaction from service, achievement, personal development and camaraderie;
- Depend on the goodwill and practical support of their families, friends and employers to enable them to serve;
- Provide their services for the protection of life and property, to create a safer community;
- Work with all emergency management volunteers and paid staff in a mutually respectful and active partnership, having regard to the principles of their agencies, other organisations, government and the community;
- Operate safely and undertake appropriate training and planning to ensure their personal safety and enhance the delivery of services in creating a safer community;
- Are committed to maintaining positive and collaborative relationships with emergency management agencies, government and each other; and
- Bring an extensive and unique range of community and industry skills to Victoria's emergency management capability.

Emergency Management Volunteer Agencies:

- Recognise, value, respect, promote and support emergency management volunteers who come from widely diverse communities with differing needs and characteristics;
- Recognise and acknowledge that a primary responsibility of agencies' paid staff is to nurture and encourage volunteers and to facilitate and develop their skills and competencies, and maintain and build volunteer capacity at all levels of emergency management;
- Recognise and acknowledge the value of the time that volunteers provide and ensure that their time is optimally utilised;
- Work with and support a positive integration of paid and volunteer emergency management workers;
- Develop and maintain an organisational culture and organisational relationships that support volunteer engagement in all emergency management functions;
- Ensure that volunteer views, opinions and concerns are considered before adopting any new or changed policies, procedures or approaches that impact on them as volunteers;
- Provide administrative, operational and infrastructure support in a timely manner to enable volunteers to perform their roles safely and effectively with appropriate resources;
- Commit to maintaining and building individual and overall emergency management volunteer capacity to carry out emergency management roles;
- Recognise and value the unique range of community and industry skills that volunteers provide to emergency management;
- Endeavour to utilise suitably qualified and experienced volunteers in key leadership positions; and
- Recognise the value of volunteers and their local knowledge during emergencies.

The State of Victoria:

- Recognises, values, respects and promotes emergency management volunteers, their families and employers for their contributions to the well-being and safety of Victorian communities;
- Commits to engage and consult with emergency management volunteers and their representative bodies on emergency management issues and matters that affect them, through the Volunteer Consultative Forum and other volunteer engagement arrangements within the emergency management sector taking into account the recognition of the importance of volunteers in Victoria's emergency management arrangements under the Emergency Management Act 2013; and
- Will ensure that the commitments and principles in this statement are supported across government and by emergency management volunteer agencies.

The Emergency Management Commissioner:

- Commits to perform the functions having regard to the fundamental importance of the role that volunteers play in the performance of emergency management functions in Victoria.

These commitments are made within a legislative and policy framework that includes the obligations of the Emergency Management Commissioner and Emergency Management Victoria to have regard to the fundamental importance of the role that volunteers play in the performance of emergency management functions in Victoria, under the **Emergency Management Act 2013**; the roles of emergency management volunteer agencies under the State Emergency Response Plan and the State Emergency Recovery Plan; and the principles and obligations agreed between the Victorian Government, CFA and its Volunteers set out in the CFA Volunteer Charter 2011 and the **Country Fire Authority Act 1958**.



TOGETHER, WE WORK AS ONE



VOLUNTEER CHARTER

PREAMBLE

Volunteers of the Country Fire Authority of Victoria (CFA) are fundamental to emergency management in Victoria and their value and importance is recognised. Volunteers and the commitment they bring to the protection of the Victorian community remain the core strength of CFA. The individual and collective interests and needs of Volunteers must be protected if they are to deliver their services safely and effectively. They must always be consulted about issues that affect them as Volunteers. This Charter recognises that the members of CFA and their Association, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV), operate under the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958*. The Charter is a statement of principle that will apply to the relationship between CFA, the State of Victoria, and CFA's Volunteers.

THIS VOLUNTEER CHARTER...

- ☞ Is an agreed commitment by the State of Victoria, CFA and VFBV on behalf of CFA Volunteers to each other;
- ☞ Ensures the State of Victoria and CFA will commit to consultation with Volunteers about all matters which might reasonably be expected to affect Volunteers;
- ☞ Provides the framework for the three-way relationship between the parties, requiring the success of the relationship and the outcomes from the Charter to be judged against the following principles:
 - Is it fair?
 - Is it just?
 - Is it reasonable?
 - Does it discriminate against Volunteers?
 - Is the outcome practicable and sustainable?
 - Is it in the best interest of the safety of the Victorian community?
- ☞ Is the framework for an enduring commitment between the parties. The Charter shall be reviewed as required by the parties or at the end of four years from its date of commencement.

VOLUNTEERS IN CFA...

- ☞ Selflessly bring time and life skills to protect life and property, prevent and suppress fires and thus create a safer community. They actively promote fire prevention works and provide fire, emergency and community services across Victoria. Many Volunteers provide their own equipment to do so;
- ☞ Are drawn from communities throughout Victoria in order to participate in an integrated fire service through a practical partnership based on mutual respect for CFA, people employed by CFA, and personnel of other organisations, to ensure that community safety needs are met to the best of their collective abilities;
- ☞ Depend on the goodwill and practical support of their families, friends and employers to enable them to serve. The time available to them is limited by the needs and demands of their employment, families and other obligations; and

- ☞ Do not contribute their time for financial reward but do expect to gain satisfaction from service, achievement, personal development and camaraderie.

THE VOLUNTEERS WILL PROVIDE THEIR SERVICES TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITIES SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES...

To:

- ☞ Provide their services for the protection of life and property, prevention and suppression of fires and undertake other relevant duties to create a safer community in a mutual, respectful and active partnership with people employed by CFA, other organisations and the community;
- ☞ Operate safely and undertake appropriate training and planning to ensure their personal safety and enhance the delivery of services in creating a safer community;
- ☞ Exercise the powers vested in them by the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* and Regulations in the best interests of the community;
- ☞ Recognise and support the elected VFBV representatives and the consultative mechanisms as agreed with CFA; and
- ☞ Be committed to working in harmony and consultation with CFA and seek to resolve differences of opinion internally in the first instance.

THE CFA RECOGNISES THE COMMITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS. THE CFA SHALL PROVIDE ITS SERVICES AND SUPPORT TO VOLUNTEERS SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES...

To:

- ☞ Recognise, value, respect and promote CFA Volunteers who come from widely divergent communities with differing needs and characteristics, as core partners with people employed by CFA;
- ☞ Recognise and acknowledge that a primary responsibility of CFA and people employed by CFA is to nurture and encourage Volunteers and to facilitate and develop their skills and competencies;

- ☞ Recognise and acknowledge the value of the time that Volunteers provide to CFA and ensure that Volunteer time is used to maximum advantage;
- ☞ Acknowledge that policy development and change should always be considered in terms of its potential to support and facilitate the Volunteer contribution and the particular situation of local brigades;
- ☞ Recognise that VFBV represents Volunteers in general and ensure there is meaningful consultation, allowing enough time for real involvement, with the elected representatives of Volunteers on all matters which may impact upon Volunteers before the adoption or implementation of any new or changed policies, procedures or approaches;
- ☞ Ensure that Volunteer views, opinions and concerns are fully considered before adopting any new or changed policies, procedures or approaches which impact on them as CFA Volunteers;
- ☞ Provide the resources necessary to enable new or changed policies, procedures or approaches which impact on them as CFA Volunteers to be implemented efficiently and effectively;
- ☞ Provide adequate resources to enable Volunteers in CFA to deliver agreed services;
- ☞ Provide administrative, operational and infrastructure support to enable Volunteers to perform their roles safely and effectively within available resources;
- ☞ Recognise and respect the needs of Volunteers that are derived from their volunteer service and provide effective and comprehensive support services within available resources including but not limited to:

- Procedures to address issues of discrimination in a fair, just and timely manner;
- Counselling and welfare support;
- Training;
- Support and assistance for Volunteers in applying for employment as CFA employees; and
- Compensation for accidents, injuries and losses.

THE GOVERNMENT OF VICTORIA RECOGNISES AND ACKNOWLEDGES THE VOLUNTEERS' COMMITMENT. THE STATE OF VICTORIA WILL PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THE VOLUNTEERS SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES...

To:

- ☞ Recognise, value, respect and promote CFA Volunteers, their families and employers for their contributions to the well-being and safety of the people of Victoria;
- ☞ Ensure that CFA legislation appropriately recognises the needs and interests of Volunteers in the delivery of services and protects Volunteers who provide their services in good faith and their dependants from financial losses and other liabilities; and
- ☞ Consult with the elected representatives of Volunteers on all matters which may impact upon Volunteers including proposed legislation and the adequacy of resources to enable Volunteers in CFA to deliver the agreed services.

THE COMMITMENT...

The parties commit themselves to use and apply the Charter in the spirit of mutual respect and goodwill and to work together in that spirit to resolve any disputes which may arise between CFA, the State of Victoria and the Volunteers by reference to the key principles set down in this Volunteer Charter.



This Charter is dated the 27th day of February 2011 and re-affirms the enduring commitment between the parties to each other evidenced by the Volunteer Charter made on 22nd December 2001.

Ted Baillieu MP

Premier on behalf of the State of Victoria



Peter Ryan MP

Minister for Police and Emergency Services on behalf of the State of Victoria



Hans van Hamond AFSM

President, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria



Kerry Murphy PSM, AFSM

Chairman, Country Fire Authority



Strategic Priorities for Emergency Management Volunteering in Victoria

Developed by the
Volunteer Consultative
Forum (VCF)

October 2015



From the Emergency Management Commissioner and Chair, Volunteer Consultative Forum



Victoria's emergency management arrangements rely heavily on an integrated, highly trained, effectively deployed and optimally utilised volunteer workforce.

Volunteers can and want to undertake the full breadth of roles in emergency management, from frontline to senior leadership. We, as leaders, must remove the

barriers that are stopping optimal volunteer utilisation. The recognition of the qualifications, the professionalism and the broad experience that exist amongst our volunteers improves our overall public value to Victorian communities.

In recognition of the fundamental importance of volunteers, the Volunteer Consultative Forum (VCF) was established in 2013 to facilitate the Victorian Government's commitment to consult and engage with emergency management volunteers and their representative bodies on matters that affect them, and reform as outlined in the Victorian Emergency Management Reform White Paper.

The VCF is chaired by the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC), with Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) providing support.

The key objective of the VCF is to give emergency management volunteers a voice to the Minister for Emergency Services and government, and to provide advice on volunteer-related issues and the broader emergency management reform agenda. The VCF complements, rather than replaces, existing arrangements within the emergency management sector.

The VCF membership comprises representatives from Ambulance Victoria, Australian Volunteer Coast Guard, Country Fire Authority, Life Saving Victoria, Red Cross, Salvation Army, St John Ambulance, Victoria State Emergency Service, Victorian Council of Churches, the Victoria Emergency Service Association, and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

In early 2014, the VCF, with support from EMV, completed two key pieces of foundational work as part of its establishment phase and to inform initial direction.

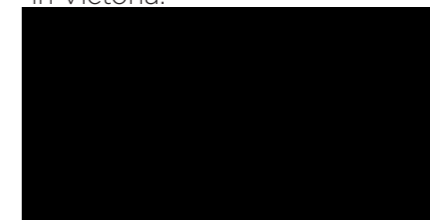
Two key documents were developed; the first identified the common barriers and enablers to volunteering across the sector from a volunteer's perspective, and the second detailed a range of successful volunteer initiatives that may be applied or used in other agencies.

The information and insights from this work were then used to create the Strategic Priorities for Volunteering in Emergency Management. The Strategic Priorities identify thirteen common volunteer needs, and their value to volunteers.

These priorities are a strategic and business planning instrument for emergency management agencies across the sector, and to assist government. The priorities are informed directly by volunteers and identify needs that require additional focus across the sector, some things that need to be done better and some things that require a new approach if we are to realise the shared goal of a sustainable emergency management system.

This instrument demonstrates the need for a more strategic focus toward sustainability and the fundamental importance of volunteers to the delivery of emergency management. This has become the unifying purpose that has driven the VCF to focus on the strategic needs and issues that are important to a sustainable emergency management system and developing a motivated, valued and engaged volunteer capability.

For the community to realise the full benefits of our integrated workforce, we have the responsibility to address these priority needs that will improve volunteer satisfaction and in turn, public safety in Victoria.



Craig Lapsley PSM

Emergency Management Commissioner
Chair, Volunteer Consultative Forum

	Need	Value to volunteers
Training, skills development, acquisition and maintenance	Better access to training, induction and information including the use of online systems/tools.	It will be easier for volunteers to undertake training at a time convenient to them, and will remove the need for travel to a location. This will reduce the time commitment for volunteers, and will increase opportunities to enhance effective delivery by agencies and organisations to share systems or design resources.
	Broader and structured development pathways and plans for volunteers.	Volunteers are enabled to expand their knowledge and experience within their agency, within the community or across the sector leading to greater personal challenge, motivation and satisfaction.
	Transportability of skills and accreditations between emergency management organisations.	Streamlining and simplifying will reduce the burden on volunteers needing to re-train while enabling transfer to another agency more suitable to lifestyle, choice, location or available time. The significant initial investment in training volunteers in one agency can then be applied to another agency without losing skills, knowledge and experience.
Recognition, respect and valuing of volunteering	A modern and robust strategy to enhance community, government and business knowledge, understanding and respect for EM Volunteers while strengthening Victoria's culture of emergency volunteering and community service.	The community will have a better understanding and appreciation of the fundamental importance and essential nature of volunteering before, during and after emergencies in Victoria, and will increase their support, recognition and investment in volunteering. The community will have increased confidence in the service provided by volunteers.
Systems, policy and process	Modern and effective recruitment systems, services and processes that are timely, two way, cost effective and efficient for potential volunteers.	Efficient ways for people to express interest and seek information about EM volunteering, with more people receiving the information they need to make a decision to progress or opt out, and data captured to inform continuous improvement.
	Systems, processes and leadership tools and arrangements to enable better use of the volunteer's time and capability, through flexible service delivery and modern two-way engagement channels.	Volunteer's time is used more effectively by designing more flexible ways for the volunteers, based on their needs, to be tasked, trained, supported, rostered, activated, surveyed and communicated with.
	Policy, systems and processes to reduce out-of-pocket expenses on volunteers.	The tools, resources and support for emergency management volunteers should not come at a financial cost to an individual volunteer.

	Need	Value to volunteers
Youth engagement	Strategic and future focused plans for the recruitment and retention of youth.	An increase in youth engagement and involvement through propositions to youth, that reflect their specific needs and how they will gain value from volunteering.
Workforce design	Flexible volunteering models that offer different roles to suit an individual's changing needs and lifestyle, and emerging categories of potential volunteers.	People are increasingly looking for organisations with flexible opportunities where volunteering can be integrated with work, study, family and recreation. Access and use of digital and mobile products offer enormous benefit in enabling volunteers to integrate volunteering into their lifestyle and for agencies and organisations to design smart products and services to support them and use their time wisely.
	Casual volunteers trained to provide additional support for significant or extended emergencies, in roles appropriate to their skills and experience level.	Designing new roles to integrate into the service delivery arrangements adds overall capability and capacity and supports the workload drain on first responders.
	Modern workforce management arrangements consistent with the needs of volunteers.	Aligning the role definition, capability frameworks, role statements, organisational design principles, performance management systems and training of paid staff with the need to support, empower and effectively utilise volunteers, ensuring their skill and training is fully recognised.
Employers	Effective arrangements to reduce the impact on employers when their people are engaged in emergency volunteering.	A better understanding and appreciation of what employers of volunteers contribute to emergency management is critical to recognising, valuing and supporting employers to continue to release volunteers.
Funding	Sustainable funding and investment toward the community-based service delivery model that operates before, during and after emergencies.	Investment will be required to support agencies, communities and volunteers to plan for and execute strategic and organisational change, and prepare for the needs of new groups of people that want to volunteer. Taking advantage of emerging types/groups of volunteers and trends in volunteering will assist to successfully navigate challenges and build a sustainable foundation for service delivery in communities.



Implementation

The Strategic Priorities express common needs across emergency management volunteering and describe the direct value to volunteers.

The priorities are designed to drive, guide and inform strategy, investment planning, decision-making and focus across the sector, in agencies, organisations, government and EMV.

The Strategic Priorities contain themes that address common needs in:

- › Training, skills development, acquisition and maintenance
- › Recognition, respect and valuing of volunteering
- › Systems, policy and process
- › Youth engagement
- › Workforce design
- › Employers
- › Funding.

Implementation will vary across agencies and the sector depending on strategic direction, capability and current work being undertaken, with the VCF being the body to provide advice and direct input on implementation, application and impact.

It is anticipated that as the planning processes mature these Strategic Priorities will be revisited and improved by the VCF, using available information, insights and evidence from volunteer surveys, program reporting, research, plans and strategy.

Accountability

The VCF is a forum that provides advice to the Minister for Emergency Services and input on issues related to volunteering, volunteers and volunteerism in Victoria's emergency management sector.

The Minister is supported by the EMC (also the Chair of the VCF) and EMV in fulfilling government's commitment to the VCF. The Emergency Management Act 2013 sets out the expectations of the EMC and EMV 'to have regard to the fundamental importance of the role that volunteers play in the performance of emergency management functions in Victoria'.

For the Strategic Priorities to realise the full benefits of the volunteer input that informed them, it requires executive leadership, stewardship and investment within agencies across the sector, within governance arrangements and at all levels of strategic and business planning.

Relationship to the Strategic Action Plan

There is a clear and important relationship between the VCF Strategic Priorities and the Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2015-2018 (SAP). The SAP steers the overall vision, strategic priorities, investment and principles for government and the emergency management sector.

The VCF Strategic Priorities complement the SAP by adding additional depth and clarity about the specific needs and value of reform to volunteers, sustainable volunteering and how the community understands and values emergency management volunteerism in Victoria.

Monitoring and continuous improvement

Monitoring the application and utilisation of the VCF Strategic Priorities will be embedded in SAP processes, as opposed to creating separate processes and systems. Overall responsibility for monitoring of progress and the linking of SAP Actions to the VCF Strategic Priorities is to be coordinated by EMV.

EMV will coordinate the monitoring of implementation and application of these priorities within SAP actions and outcomes. Regular feedback and advice on the application and impact of these priorities will be provided to the VCF and sought from the VCF.

EMV will coordinate the information required for the sector to undertake their responsibilities in reporting on and monitoring the delivery of the actions within the SAP. Reports on progress will be provided to the Minister for Emergency Services, SCRC, IGEM and the community through the EMV website. IGEM will monitor and report to the Minister for Emergency Services on the implementation of the SAP.

EMV acknowledges the leadership and input from the Volunteer Consultative Forum during the development of this publication.

This publication was produced and distributed by Emergency Management Victoria (EMV),

Working in conjunction with Communities,
Government, Agencies and Business

www.emv.vic.gov.au



RESPONSE TEMPLATE

Due: 24 January 2022 to [REDACTED]

Organisation name: Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria

Authorised by: Adam Barnett, CEO

Contact details: [REDACTED]

The Operating Model Review **consultation report**



That EMV, on behalf of the emergency management sector, develop the business case for a more secure and reliable resourcing model for filling IMT leadership roles based on a full time team of around 40 people in six IMTs.

What is your level of support for this proposal?

Low level of support for this proposal and low confidence that the Draft Report has appropriately:

- considered the significant risks of moving to a full-time team model.
- addressed existing barriers evident in the current model that is not allowing it to reach its full potential.
- worked collaboratively across the sector to investigate other options.

It is VFBV's view that should proposal 1 be implemented in its current form it will actually result in additional barriers to EM volunteers and will ultimately diminish overall IMT capability across the sector over the long-term.

What else needs to be considered?

- The Draft Report asserts that only 11% of Level 3 accredited personnel are emergency management volunteers. Given there are more than 100,000 EMV volunteers across the Victorian EM sector, this demonstrates a significant underutilisation of existing potential capacity and capability that is available.
- Victorian EM volunteers are amongst the countries most professionally trained and highly skilled EM volunteers. It is VFBV's view that the current model is not being allowed to operate at optimum levels. Not enough effort or focus has been

placed on maximising the currently available resources and removing well known and well ventilated barriers facing EM volunteers such as difficulty accessing training, mentoring and development pathway progression support.

- Since centralising IMT training under the leadership of EMV, the majority of training and exercising opportunities has typically only been scheduled on weekdays, during regular business hours, and in week-long blocks. While this may suit agency staff and employees, EM volunteers require a more flexible approach and more diverse opportunities that better supports them and their employers.
 - The Draft report lacks a workforce planning assessment that appropriately identifies the suspected gap of capacity in the current model and future capacity requirements sought to be resourced. A lack of EM volunteer engagement in building these assessments is a lost opportunity and lacks any credibility.
 - The Draft report lacks an Emergency Management volunteer impact assessment and neither identifies, quantifies or articulates the available resource potential and its advantages.
 - This lack of evidence base should preclude the Draft Report from asserting the “far more commonly held view that there are simply not enough people available.” An alternate view may be that due to the lack of appropriate volunteer engagement and consultation throughout this review, the review has failed to appreciate the depth and quality of capacity that exists and is currently being underutilised across the whole EM sector.
 - The use of unsubstantiated commentary such as the example above fails to acknowledge the observations and finding of the Inspector General for Emergency Management in his ‘Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria’s emergency management sector’ report that found “that agency-based volunteers are not provided with the same level of training and development afforded to paid personnel and volunteers hold concerns that they are under-utilised and undervalued by the sector.” (Finding 26)
 - By including the unsubstantiated commentary in the Draft Report, the authors are guilty of the very disrespect that leads
-

EM volunteers to feel undervalued and overlooked by the sector.

- VFBV holds significant concern that the model proposed will act as a further barrier to increasing the EM volunteer capacity across not only the level 3 incident level but may also have a flow on impact by discouraging a viable volunteer progression pathway from level 1 and 2 incident management layers that are crucial to building appropriately skilled and experienced level 3 operators.
 - VFBV is concerned that this proposal is not supported by findings from appropriate enquiries and commissions and may in fact contradict previous reports. VFBV cautions on relying on the Victorian Hotel Quarantine Inquiry in isolation, acknowledging its limitations of not having the same powers as a Royal Commission in respect of evidence and witnesses, and the fact that it was primarily investigating a Class 2 emergency in the context of a health pandemic.
 - The challenges of filling leadership roles outside the control agencies during recent floods and storms quoted by the report could alternatively highlight the poor approach to identifying and building relevant and appropriate capacity in accredited hazard specific endorsements under the new all hazards frameworks.
 - The permanent model suggested risks these full-time IMT's being generalists in nature across all hazards and may lead to inexperienced teams not carrying the appropriate knowledge and experience of the specific hazard relevant to the emergency.
 - Despite the Draft Report's assertions - the far more commonly held view amongst EM volunteers is that the fulltime model suggested may in fact erode the State's IMT capacity and create a less resilient and less scalable model capable of dealing with Victoria's diverse range of emergencies. VFBV believe proposal 1 represents a significant risk that has not been adequately addressed within the proposal.
 - The Draft Report's assertion that there are challenges of sustaining IMT's over time and for long duration events reinforces the commonly held view amongst EM volunteers that a lack of preplanning and robust availability and rostering
-

systems is contributing to the systemic underutilisation of the valuable EM volunteer capability available across the sector.

- The fulltime model proposed fails to address how these teams would equal the local knowledge, experience and resilience of place-based teams with local networks and experience with the local operating environment appropriate to the hazard.
 - The fulltime model proposed runs the risk of excluding local knowledge and personnel even further, and is contrary to recommendations suggesting local knowledge should be better integrated across IMT functional teams.
 - The Draft Report's assertion that its fulltime team model of just 40 personnel would be available when required fails to account for the limitations of 'fly-in' models and in our view over states its availability potential. We believe there has been a significant under estimation of the fulltime resources required when moving to a model purported to provide high availability to support a 365 day / 24 hour a day model.
 - The Draft Report identifies that the *all hazards all agencies* model in Victoria "is still maturing and does not have universal support across all parts of the emergency management sector". This presents a significant cultural and systemic risk given the fulltime model proposed is entirely based on the all hazard all agency model, without any of the precursors to modify the culture.
 - In stating that the concern that the accreditation process is too onerous is "ill-founded" displays an ignorance of the multiagency accreditation framework and process. It ignores the significant feedback provided by the sectors EM volunteers that have consistently raised concerns over many years and has been documented in official enquiries and reports. The "ill-founded" comment in the draft report may rather be a consequence of a poor understanding of the accreditation process itself or a result of the poor consultation and engagement across the sector, or both.
 - While VFBV believes there are significant barriers that discourage and prevent EM volunteers from participating equally with their paid counterparts within the level 3 IMT systems, it
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does not necessarily follow that the overall robustness and standards of the accreditation system are not supported. Rather, our point is that volunteers do not receive the same level of support or assistance in accessing the required training, exercising, mentoring and other support options available to employees. The accreditation system must provide a quality assurance layer that is much more holistic than simply assessing an operator's education/qualification level as suggested by the Draft Report. The accreditation system must satisfy itself of a person's competence, experience, capability and proven ability.

- The 2020/21 Department of Justice and Community Safety annual report describes the poor performance of Level 3 incident controller trained staff and volunteer targets not being met as being partly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting training and accreditation rates. This does not appear to have been considered by the Draft Report.
 - The Draft report assumes that a fulltime model would provide IMT's that are "expert in AIIMS". VFBV would caution against such an assumption, and the risk would be that would only be the case where the members selected for the fulltime IMT were already practitioners, supporters of AIIMS and agency cultures were supportive. The fact that class 2 emergencies have recently been permitted to operate without this discipline is cause for significant concern. The assumption that a fulltime model will somehow ensure AIIMS is applied across emergencies fails to address the required discipline, doctrine, training and culture change that is required to ensure the principles of AIIMS are embedded across the whole EM sector.
 - Should a full-time model be further contemplated, VFBV supports the ability for EM volunteers to apply for positions within the team. However, additional measures must also be taken to ensure appropriate support and encouragement (including by the respective agencies) that ensures a volunteer has the same level of support, delegation and equipment provided to a prospective employee. This includes identifying and removing any industrial barriers that may frustrate this. And whilst the volunteer will cease to be classified as a volunteer while they are being paid in the fulltime role, VFBV would argue that a volunteer applicant would not only contribute their
-

knowledge and experience to the role, but also the culture and deep understanding of how a volunteer workforce operates. VFBV would therefore support a lateral entry type arrangement to support an EM volunteer being supported through the application process, and assistance against any industrial driven barriers that may exist. This would meet the requirement and spirit of the CFA Volunteer Charter that expressly articulates an obligation on CFA and the State of Victoria to support and assist volunteers in applying for employment.



That EMV work with the emergency management sector to deliver efficiencies in the incident management structures by undertaking further work to:

1. Clarify and simplify the functions each tier to ensure there is not duplication across tiers
2. Rationalise and modernise control centres to reflect a flexible all hazards approach
3. Bring to bear more sophisticated risk assessment to reduce the demands caused by:
 - Resourcing requirements to meet readiness standards
 - The classification of incidents as Level 3 incidents which could be managed as Level 2 incidents
 - Resourcing requirements for night shift.

What is your level of support for this proposal?

While VFBV has partial support for some of these sub-proposals (and not others), we have low confidence that the Draft Report provides a reasonable basis to inform or guide this work. We hold significant concern that the use of the Draft Report to inform future work runs the risk of embedding some of the bias and lack of objective/unsubstantiated commentary that has caused such mistrust and concern over the report's draft findings.

Proposal 2.1 – **Partial Support**

Proposal 2.2 – **Low support** for *rationalisation*
Support for *modernisation*

Proposal 2.3 - **Partial Support** for a more sophisticated risk assessment but this must be done very differently to how this review was conducted and have a much higher degree of engagement and involvement of response agencies and the EM volunteer workforce.

What else needs to be considered?

Proposal 2.1

- While VFBV would support in principle the clarification of each tier (Incident/Region/State) the basis for assuming duplication in proposal 2.1 would appear to be the Draft Report's assertion that Class 2 emergencies don't typically use the regional tier. On face value this would appear to be a poor basis to "simplify" arrangements without assessing whether the lack of this regional tier during the management of recent Class 2 emergencies has led to sub-optimal outcomes.
- There is a risk the Draft Report has not adequately understood the differences between how Class 1, 2 and 3 emergencies are managed and their corresponding different characteristics. The

acknowledgment that it would appear Class 2 emergencies have not been managed consistently with the principles of AIIMS during recent events would also add to the concern that these differences are not fully appreciated or understood. There are different levels of command employed for each class of emergency, and sometimes dependant on the hazard with Class 1 in particular using each of the tiers to facilitate and clarify delegation of authority, manage span of control and ensure accountability and unity of command.

- The incident and regional tiers are critically important in moving decision making closer to the communities impacted and where local knowledge can better inform and guide difficult options.

Proposal 2.2

- VFBV has particular difficulty with assuming the modernisation of control centres to reflect an all hazards approach is contingent on reducing or rationalising their number.
 - The number of control centres needs to be assessed on an objective need's basis and not by an artificial fiscal constraint. Due to the sensitivity, this assessment must be done in a consultative manner and be transparent and open to scrutiny to build confidence in the recommended outcomes.
 - Local control centres suited for Level 2 incidents are critical to supporting the training and exercising required to build a sufficiently large pool of level 2 practitioners that will feed into the level 3 space and ease resourcing challenges.
 - A lack of focus and support for building the Level 2 cohort can be directly linked to the lack of qualified and accredited Level 3 practitioners and vice versa. Both of these cohorts are intrinsically linked and what is done to one, has flow-on impacts on the other.
 - VFBV contends that incident and regional control centres are equally critical to managing incidents and if done well, can avoid many incidents progressing to a level 3 and requiring State support. Therefore, investing in control centres across the three tiers should be seen as an investment in building local capability and a more resilient/fault tolerant network of control centres that
-

can flex up and down contingent on the requirements of the emergency.

- While the geographic location of RCC's and ICC's by way of dots on a map seems to have formed the basis of the Draft Report's assumption that there may be duplication at the regional and incident tiers, there is no analysis presented which attempts to look at their area of operations, proximity to risk, historical activity, incidence of concurrent activity and activation and dual purpose to objectively assess their suitability or otherwise.
- Class 1 emergencies in particular require ICC's to be reasonably proximate to the incident, acknowledging that critical field intelligence and briefings and access to local networks and arrangements are often critical to successful operations and support situational awareness.
- VFBV notes that while fire agencies on the whole have centralised their State operations into the State Control Centre, other EM partners continue to host their own State Centre's. Should rationalisation be a key objective of EMV, it is suggested that perhaps those facilities in the State tier be looked at first.

Proposal 2.3

- VFBV supports a more sophisticated risk assessment of resourcing requirements and classification of incidents and advocates for targeted action to rebuild the level 2 incident management layer, which in our view has been underutilised and under supported for too long. CFA Groups are well placed to support this work.
 - Resourcing standards for prepositioned teams need to continue to be guided and influenced by the expected hazard class.
 - The underutilisation and access to effective level 3 exercising likely contributes to the desire for some prepositioned level 3 teams to prematurely take over level 2 incidents.
 - However, a risk assessment must include local engagement and consultation with the sectors volunteer workforce and must look wider to address any systemic barriers that are contributing to
-

the resourcing challenges.

- Need to ensure the general 'dislike' of night shifts does not permeate an objective analysis of need.
 - While any risk assessment must be objective and done in full consultation across the EM sector, VFBV would caution on the assumption that night shifts are always lower intensity. While this may be true for some hazards and some incidents (depending on the duration of the incident), it should be noted that where significant response activities are still required to be underway during night-time hours, these operations still require the full support of night shift incident control centres, acknowledging that night time response activities also carry increased dangers and risks for responding crews.
 - Use of a Deputy Incident Controller for night shift is already contained within doctrine but may require some additional education.
-



That EMV, on behalf of the emergency management sector, build on the Emergency Risks in Victoria process and the Victorian Preparedness framework by establishing a workforce planning function to produce detailed assessments of the future emergency profile of Victoria across all hazards and the corresponding level of coverage required (for different levels of acceptable risk) and that departments and agencies provide relevant data to support this work.

What is your level of support for this proposal?

Low support and low confidence that EMV can lead work on behalf of the EM sector in an appropriately consultative way that builds cooperation and shared understanding.

What else needs to be considered?

- Detail on this proposal is somewhat vague and broad which does not assist with gaining a full appreciation for what is being suggested.
- While the workforce planning function is critical across the EM sector, the wording of this proposal and the narrative throughout the Draft Report seems to suggest building up EMV functions to the exclusion of the agencies. This would appear to be a significant departure from EMV's legislative role and stated vision.
- Each agency is responsible for its respective workforce planning functions. Rather than duplicate these efforts, EMV is better placed to support the agencies do this work and coordinate improvements that would support more homogenous data capture that would support and improve sector assessments.
- VFBV would suggest a more detailed assessment of all historical reports/enquiries and royal commission findings, observations and recommendations with clear and regular assessment of whether they have been addressed or are still relevant would likely be more instructive to future workforce planning.
- While the Draft Report acknowledges previous findings of the importance and substantial role of EM volunteers in the emergency management workforce when trying to understand future workforce demand, it speaks volumes that the Draft Report fails to substantially advocate or recommend substantive

proposals that address this 'substantial' section of the workforce.

- VFBV suggest a detailed assessment of the changed all hazard arrangements and auditing of the effectiveness of the new Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee processes since EMV annexed this function from the Country Fire Authority Act to replace municipal fire management planning committees. This assessment should evaluate whether these processes have matured and remain fit for purpose and whether they are providing meaningful contributions to the Victorian Preparedness Framework.
-



That SCRC, with support from EMV, take a leadership role in promoting a flexible, mobile workforce for emergency management across the VPS with an initial focus on building a culture that supports emergency management and basic capability in emergency management.

What is your level of support for this proposal?

Partial Support

What else needs to be considered?

- Given that we would have thought that was the role of the SCRC to begin in, we are generally comfortable with this proposal subject to a few caveats.
- The Draft Report is clearly observing gaps and challenges within the VPS for Class 2 emergencies. If the aim of this proposal is to focus on building strong EM arrangements across the VPS for Class 2 emergencies in particular, then that should be more clearly articulated and investigated.
- Such arrangements should be consistent and ensure all practitioners go through a robust accreditation process equal to other hazards training and exercising requirements recognising that “we work as one.”
- The Draft Report clearly observes and notes scepticism and concern from many operational leaders re the suitability and culture of the VPS to drive the necessary change and reforms required. Therefore, this body of work needs to adequately guide the general upskilling and discipline across the VPS to better contribute to emergency management. The risk of not doing this work would be to further entrench existing poor habits and culture that are preventing best practice contributions.
- Some volunteers have expressed concern that elements of the VPS may not be resilient enough to deal with some of the effects and impacts arising from emergency management. Proper screening and support services will need to be closely monitored.
- Recent reviews of the Class 2 pandemic arrangements across the VPS does contribute significant concern that the VPS lacks the required accountability and appropriate independence

required to effectively participate in emergency management arrangements. This will require more forensic analysis.

- The adoption of AIMS and provision of AIMS training would be considered an essential pre-requisite to this work occurring.
 - It is VFBV's observation that in broad terms the respect and appreciation for the professionalism and high skillsets of EM volunteers across the VPS is patchy. This often exhibits itself as tokenistic and fails to fully appreciate the depth and high standard of expertise available. This proposal may be an opportunity for the SCRC to consider how it could better lead, educate and support a better understanding across the VPS on the critical importance that EM volunteers play across the whole Victorian EM sector and their professionalism and skills.
-



That SCRC, with support from EMV, tackle the key barriers to VPS participation in emergency management:

Funding arrangements that require resources to be used for predetermined government outcomes creating competing priorities

Industrial relations arrangements that provide generous arrangements for some department staff during an emergency but are inadequate for others

Inadequate systems for tracking skills and availability of staff across the VPS.

What is your level of support for this proposal?

Low support due to this proposal being far too narrow and inappropriately focussed on just one segment of the sector while ignoring the same issues raised by others. EM volunteers in particular often raise these same key barriers to EM volunteers' participating in higher levels of emergency management. If this proposal sought to target these issues more broadly, more inclusively and across the whole sector, it would enjoy much greater support.

What else needs to be considered?

- The issues of funding for the VPS, industrial relations, and rostering are all internal issues to the VPS that VFBV does not have a particular view on.
- As internal issues, these issues should be resolved within the VPS and through existing funding arrangements to ensure this work does not divert previous and scarce funding from the existing EM sector towards the VPS.
- Volunteers are disappointed that this proposal seeks to address an issue for a relatively tiny portion of the current EM workforce, yet ignores these same issues that are repeatedly reported by EM volunteers as key barriers.
- CFA Volunteers in particular have highlighted unfair and inequitable industrial relation outcomes that serve as key barriers to CFA volunteers participating across the sector. Many of these observations and findings are documented in previous reviews and enquiries. We would welcome similar support from the SCRC and EMV to resolve those.
- CFA Volunteers frequently report inadequate systems for tracking skills, skills maintenance and robust availability systems for incident management roles that is resulting in the

underutilisation of CFA volunteers.

- VFBV has similarly expressed concerns with rigid funding requirements, and the shift to initiative-based funding as detailed in the Draft Report but only attributed in the report as a challenge for the VPS.
 - While the Draft Report recognises the “valuable incentive” introduced in the 2020 VPS enterprise agreement for VPS staff to earn annual payments between \$2,500 - \$4,000 per annum to participate in IMT roles, - sadly this same level of support or incentives to reward or recognise employers and small businesses that routinely release and support EM volunteers is still lacking.
 - The difficulties experienced by the VPS and exacerbated by long shift rotations/tours of duty that make an individual absent for long periods of time from their usual place of employment and which can have a significant impact on an individuals BAU are the same challenges regularly confronted by EM volunteers, especially the self-employed and those that are supported by small businesses. Consideration of shorter shifts, shorter tours of duty and more advance notice and planning for deployments are all considerations that can ease these barriers.
 - The myth that EM volunteers are an unreliable resource ignores the same issues present across the paid workforce that contributes barriers to personnel not being able to plan and prepare for deployment.
-



That EMV, on behalf of the emergency management sector, develop a business case for a new Emergency Management Corps. The Emergency Management Corps would initially comprise around 400-500 people from across the public sector who would contribute around 40 days per year to training, exercising and deployment in emergency management.

What is your level of support for this proposal?

Low Support

What else needs to be considered?

- This proposal risks unnecessary duplication and forming silo's across the EM sector that risks entrenching the existing poor culture across the broader sector.
- By being separate and contained to the VPS this proposal risks further disenfranchising EM volunteers.
- While VFBV strongly agrees that the Australian Army Reserve model can provide some inspiration (a point we have made to previous government enquiries) it is disappointing that this inspiration seems only directed towards the VPS.
- If public sector staff have a desire to contribute to “meaningful work, build networks across the public sector, and learn new skills and apply their skills in new ways” they should be encouraged to join an Emergency Management Volunteer agency and contribute to Victoria’s volunteer surge capacity.
- EM volunteer agencies are already designed and positioned to train and deploy them, and ensure they are integrated into the EM sector and arrangements. The VPS could make a valuable contribution across the volunteer EM sector.
- The VPS could consider more formal arrangements that support VPS staff to volunteer and be released through their local EM volunteer agency of choice. This may include additional emergency service leave for those who wish to volunteer their services and skills to their organisation of choice.
- The VPS could draw inspiration from models such as that used by the private and corporate sector that encourages their employees to formally volunteer, and provides additional leave. Programs such as that run by the National Australia Bank (NAB

Volunteering Program) partner with their employees to encourage and support their employees give back to community organisations and could serve as further inspiration for a similar VPS model.

- It would be recommended that EMV focus on its coordination role, rather than seek to duplicate the capacity and capability of the agencies.
 - It was disappointing that a target of 400-500 VPS personnel could so easily be proposed while the only proposal aimed at EM volunteers (Proposal 7) lacks any likeminded tangible targets. A commitment to train and develop an additional 500 volunteer incident management personnel would have gone a long way to addressing the capability gaps presumed.
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That EMV, on behalf of the sector, continue to target the key barriers to emergency management volunteer participation by:

Championing and promoting more innovative, flexible, and inclusive approaches to participation including reforms to recruitment, training, development and rostering, including through facilitating information sharing across volunteer organisations

Reducing financial barriers through greater employment protection, employer incentives, compensation for out-of-pocket expenses, including through legislative change where required

Reviewing well-being supports for responders across the sector to ensure adequacy, and setting guidelines for a broadened understanding of safety.

What is your level of support for this proposal?

In-Principle Support but low confidence that EMV are positioned to effectively influence or lead this work.

What else needs to be considered?

- VFBV supports the intent to target and address the key barriers articulated in proposal 7 but suggest they do not go far enough or have sufficient weight or priority in context to the previous proposals suggested by the Draft Report.
- VFBV does not support the statement in the Draft Report that suggests the formation of permanent IMT's (proposal 1) "should" provide increased opportunities for training, exercising and mentoring for volunteers. This has not been our experience.
- There was early work done in 2014 that sought to address recommendations from the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission that sought to develop a pool of fulltime multiagency "capability" personnel at the regional level to build a workforce capability model and program. It aspired to many of the same goals as that articulated within the narrative of the permanent IMT proposal. This "Regional Multi-Agency Incident Management Capability Team" was established to facilitate and develop oversight for multi-agency management capacity and capability building. However, its actual application was short lived, its early successes were quickly overshadowed by a decline in trained and accredited personnel, and funding and support was removed before many of the project's stated goals could be realised. Volunteers experience of this process was mixed, but many reported that this team overly focussed on paid personnel, maximising career progression for their peers and largely ignored the need to support volunteers through Level 1 and 2

incident management to create a future pipeline of level 3 trained and accredited personnel. Without a proper analysis of how this program worked and why it failed, there is a risk history will simply repeat itself.

- Proposal 7.3 is not explored or covered in the Draft Report's narrative which makes assessing it difficult. But based on the limited information articulated through the proposal, VFBV would be supportive of this work.
 - VFBV objects to the status-quo language inferred by this proposal that suggests "EMV *continue* to target the key barriers to emergency management volunteer participation." EM volunteer representatives, including through the Volunteer Consultative Forum, and including VFBV regularly express disappointment at the lack of progress or tangible initiatives that actually seek to address or target the key barriers. Proposals aimed at improving the accountability and monitoring of such work led by EMV would be a welcome development.
 - While the Draft Report observes that the Volunteer Consultative Forum developed a set of strategic priorities for volunteering in 2015, it fails to recognise the disappointment of the VCF in the apparent lack of progress on those strategic priorities and the lack of funding directed to strategically and individually pursue them across the whole EM sector.
 - While the Draft Report focusses on many of the perceived challenges to EM volunteers, it fails to propose, advocate or advance solutions with the same generosity of spirit used when exploring perceived challenges across the VPS in earlier proposals. Whereas in previous proposals VPS deficiencies have been met with a view that these deficiencies can be solved by focus, investment and leadership, perceived deficiencies within the volunteer sector appear to be presumed as absolute and beyond improvement. (eg. Declining volunteer numbers.)
 - The lack of tangible targets and actions reinforces a very tokenistic view of EM volunteers and fuels a perception that this aspect of the sector is simply 'assumed in' or 'assumed out' in some cases as an afterthought. It risks reinforcing genuine volunteer perceptions that they are not valued, respected or appreciated by the Victorian Government or the broader public
-

sector more generally.

- An over emphasis on declining volunteer numbers (particularly within the CFA) fails to attribute the reasons attributed to the decline over recent years including reform, additional red tape and bureaucracy. Focussing on overall vol numbers fails to appreciate that while volunteer numbers have declined overall, CFA and other EM Volunteer agencies continue to report strong recruitment numbers following major emergencies. As VFBV has frequently advocated – this points to a *retention* issue – not a *recruitment* one.
 - Given the focus of the Draft Report has been around building incident management capability, VFBV is disappointed that this proposal falls short of addressing specific and key barriers to EM volunteers participating in incident management in particular.
 - One of the key risks to the Draft Report is that many of the earlier proposals have the potential to increase barriers for EM volunteers to participate, which will lead to a further deterioration of capacity.
 - Robust development pathways must be created to support and assist EM volunteers progress through training, exercising and accreditation. There must be tangible and transparent targets and monitoring of any blockages or key barriers preventing EM volunteers from progressing through the system.
 - Access to legal and personal support services must also be improved to compensate for a more litigious and adversarial approach permeating the EM sector.
 - The development of utilisation and feedback reports that seeks to assess and report why certain individuals get ‘overused’ while others are simply ignored would benefit workforce planning analysis.
 - There is no more demoralising occurrence than a volunteer finally gaining access to the required training and accreditation, to only then never be used or deployed. Robust utilisation reporting must form part of the sectors health monitoring of how
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incident management personnel are being supported.

- While the Draft Report advocates for many new initiatives, it is VFBV's observation that many of the challenges experienced by the sector have been contributed to by not allowing the current model to reach its full potential. This represents a lost opportunity to fix and address key barriers that have been systemic and previously raised in historical reviews and enquiries.
 - VFBV's formal submission to the 2020 *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements*, and our submission to the 2020 IGEM Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season provides a significant collection of observations of matters that would address CFA volunteer concerns. These include consideration of greater employment protections, legal protections and greater support for reimbursement of out of pocket expenses and greater employer recognition. In particular the sections dealing with 'Other Matters' may benefit future reviews. (pg 45 of the Royal Commission Submission, and pg 61 of the IGEM submission deals with Other matters.)
 - Following the 2006/07 bushfires, VFBV provided a detailed submission to CFA addressing key barriers and improvements sought following extensive volunteer observations over the 2006/07 fire season. This report was followed up in 2012/2013 with EMV that sought to identify which of those issues still remained as matters of significant concern. Issues such as utilisation of volunteer personnel in human resource management systems, volunteer access to IMT training, and utilisation of volunteers in IMT roles were amongst the issues raised with the EMC.
 - The annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey that has been conducted each year for the past 10 years would be an important resource to understand many of the factors that contribute to how CFA volunteers in particular feel about their volunteer experience. The survey was rolled out across the whole Victorian EM sector with the support of EMV, the EMC and the VCF in 2016 and 2017. Funding was discontinued.
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That EMV support the emergency management sector to unlock the potential of spontaneous and non-affiliated volunteers by:

Developing a comprehensive strategy for coordinating spontaneous volunteers, including engagement objectives and risk mitigation strategies. *Note: IGEM has recommended that EMV develop a strategy to coordinate spontaneous volunteers together with the new recovery entity proposed under Recommendation 13 of the Phase 2 2019/20 Bushfires Inquiry*

Working with volunteer partners with strong connections in the sector to manage and promote a centralised platform for spontaneous volunteer registration, induction and training, including to minimise risk through vetting

Using this platform to promote connection between grassroots groups and the emergency management sector.

What is your level of support for this proposal?

Partial Support

What else needs to be considered?

- Need to be careful this does not distract from the focus and attention required to manage and support formal volunteering across the EM sector.
- Role clarity is essential.
- Need to manage the sensitivities across the EM sector. There is very low support for “spontaneous and non-affiliated volunteers” across Class 1 response agencies (particularly CFA and SES) due to the safety and training implications. However, there may be appropriate roles within the recovery and relief agencies.
- Some form of coordinated strategy may ease the pressure off individual agencies having to manage spontaneous volunteer enquiries during peak and high tempo activities.
- There is an opportunity to develop upskilling campaigns and education that could encourage spontaneous volunteers to continue their development by joining a more formal EM volunteer organisation. This could act as a feeder program to existing EM agencies.
- Caution needs to be advised that spontaneous volunteers will likely share some common needs and expectations with others across the sector, and that is the need to feel valued and

respected. Given how difficult this has been for EM volunteers to feel, there may be high levels of dissatisfaction amongst spontaneous volunteers if they are not well managed or feel they have not been able to meaningfully contribute.

- Need to ensure the professionalism and high skills of formal EM Volunteers is preserved and recognised by the sector/public and differentiated from spontaneous volunteers.
 - The notion of looking after the ones you already have before seeking others was a common theme raised by CFA volunteers during VFBV consultation on this proposal.
-



That EMV, on behalf of the emergency management sector, establish a team charged with championing the much larger involvement of NGOs and the private sector in emergency management by:

Promoting opportunities for building strategic partnerships between agencies and other players, for example through roundtables, hackathons, and collaborative leadership programs

Opening up the sector to new participants through engagement in training, joint exercises and planning structures (for example REMPCs)

Reforming procurement arrangements to increase private and NGO sector participation.

What is your level of support for this proposal?

Partial Support

What else needs to be considered?

- Concerned that rather than champion initiatives through the agencies, that EMV is seeking to establish and form its own teams that risk unnecessary duplication.
- Need to ensure broadening does not dilute focus, attention or accountability. CFA volunteers have reported in some cases REMPC's have been a step backwards from IFMP (Integrated Fire Management Planning) that had specific focus.
- There are opportunities for greater strategic partnerships across the NGO sector but this needs to be fostered through the agencies. CFA industry brigades are a good example of public/private partnerships.
- However, there are also opportunities to re-establish and improve the linkages and relationships with local government and councils.
- Predetermined procurement arrangements should be carefully structured and audited to minimise the risk of fraud.

Additional feedback

Is there anything else that needs to be considered to build the emergency management workforce we need?

We have provided suggestions throughout each proposals feedback.

Volunteer engagement takes time, and this time and focus should form part of the planning process to ensure future project timelines appropriately plan and account for the long lead times required to undertake volunteer engagement and consultation.

2024-25 VFBV Volunteer Survey Summary Results



ABOUT VFBV

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) is the CFA Volunteer peak body and volunteer association established under the Country Fire Authority Act to represent CFA volunteers on all matters that affect their welfare and efficiency.

VFBV is an independent association, operating autonomously from CFA but at the same time working closely with CFA and other key stakeholders to engage volunteers in CFA and other deliberations and provide advice on all matters affecting them. VFBV works tirelessly to represent, advocate and support CFA volunteers to the CFA Board and management, governments, ministers, members of parliament, councils, instrumentalities, business and the public.

OUR VISION

Strong Volunteerism, Embraced to Build Community Resilience for a Safer Victoria.

WHO RESPONDED?

This year 2,115 volunteers responded. This continues to be the highest response rate of any similar survey of volunteer firefighters across Australia, and makes the results highly credible and statistically significant. Based on the total CFA volunteer workforce and the total number of respondents – the survey provides a 95% level of confidence, with a confidence interval of +/- 2.09%

The demographic data of respondents also closely aligns with the demographic data of the overall CFA volunteer membership. For example, the gender split of this year's respondents was 18.7% female, and 79.5% male. This corresponds very closely to CFA's gender breakdown of 16% female, and 84% male of total operational volunteers. The age and length of service metrics are also similar to CFA's overall demographic data.

THE VOLUNTEER WELFARE AND EFFICIENCY SURVEY

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is an initiative by VFBV, designed by and for volunteers to help capture and communicate fundamental issues as volunteers see them.

It is conducted annually, with the first survey conducted in 2012. The Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is a critical and important tool that gives CFA and other decision makers clear feedback, directly from volunteers about the issues that are affecting their welfare and efficiency.

The survey measures CFA volunteer attitudes of the importance of each particular factor and their corresponding view of performance. The gap between how closely performance meets the expectation of importance is referred to as the Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Level (VolWEL) outcome.

A high VolWEL outcome is a sign that things are not working well, while a low VolWEL is a sign that things are working well. Any VolWEL over 2.0 indicates a large to critical gap is emerging and volunteers are highly dissatisfied with arrangements requiring priority attention. Movements of 0.05 are considered an indicator of true movement.

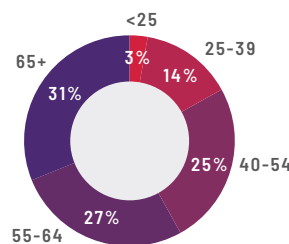


WE LISTENED TO
2,115
CFA VOLUNTEERS

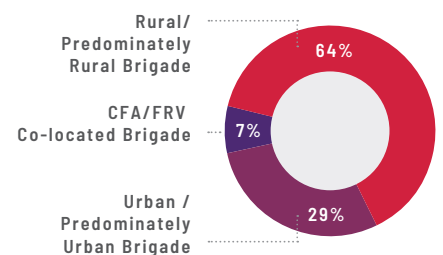
GENDER



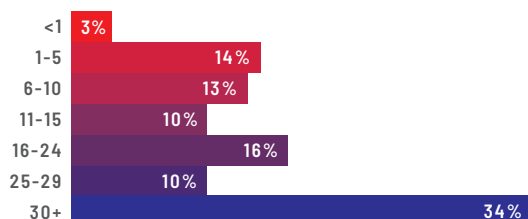
AGE (YEARS)



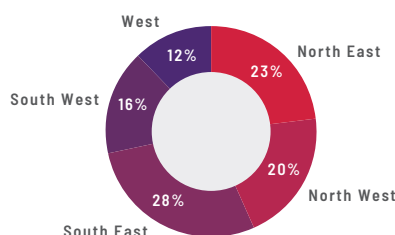
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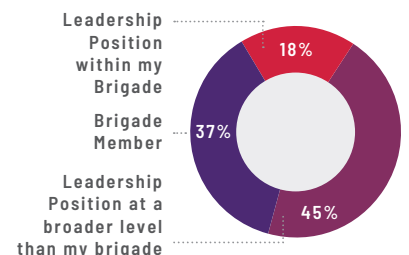
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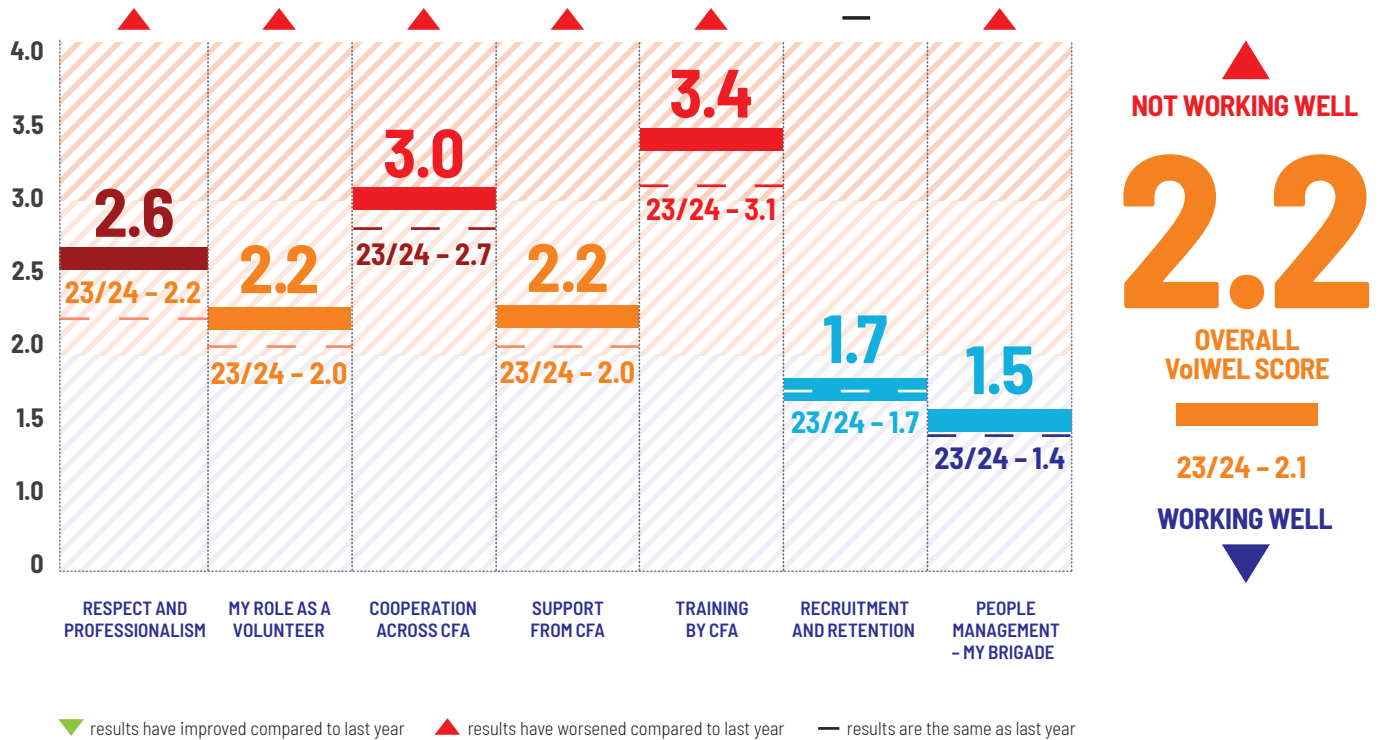
REGION RESPONSE



VOLUNTEER ROLE



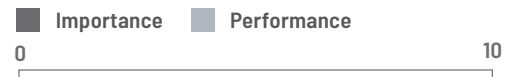
VOLUNTEER WELFARE AND EFFICIENCY LEVEL (VoIWEL) - OVERALL



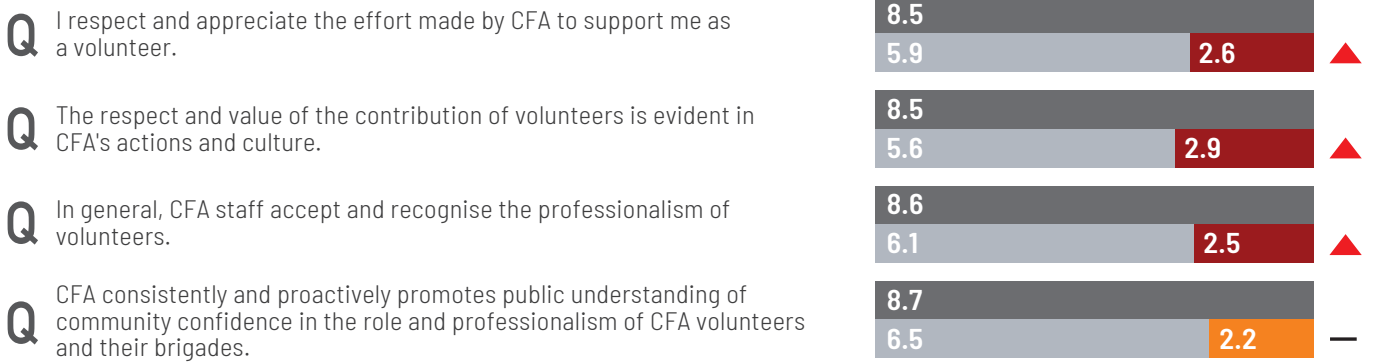
VOLUNTEER WELFARE & EFFICIENCY LEVEL (VoIWEL) DESCRIPTIONS

>3.0	Critical need for priority attention	A Gap of 3.0 or more indicates that there is a critical gap between volunteer expectations and performance and volunteers are highly dissatisfied. Priority attention is needed.
2.5 - 2.9	Significant Gap - immediate attention required	A Gap between 2.5 and 2.9 indicates there are significant issues that need to be addressed. Immediate action should be put in place to rectify areas of concern.
2.0 - 2.4	Large Gap - remedial action to be taken	A Gap between 2.0 and 2.4 indicates these issues are impacting volunteer welfare and efficiency and will be causing dissatisfaction with the volunteering experience. Action to address volunteer concerns should be implemented.
1.5 - 1.9	Mid-range Gap - need for improvement	A Gap between 1.5 and 1.9 indicates that volunteer expectations are not being met and should be addressed in both action and strategic plans, in the shorter term. Volunteers are indicating lower levels of satisfaction.
1.0 - 1.4	Small Gap - potential for improvement	A Gap between 1.0 and 1.4 indicates longer term planning should include addressing volunteer concerns. Volunteers are reasonably satisfied.
0 - 0.9	Meeting Expectations	A Gap of less than 1.0 indicates that on the whole, volunteer expectations are being met. These results would be evidence of high levels of satisfaction.

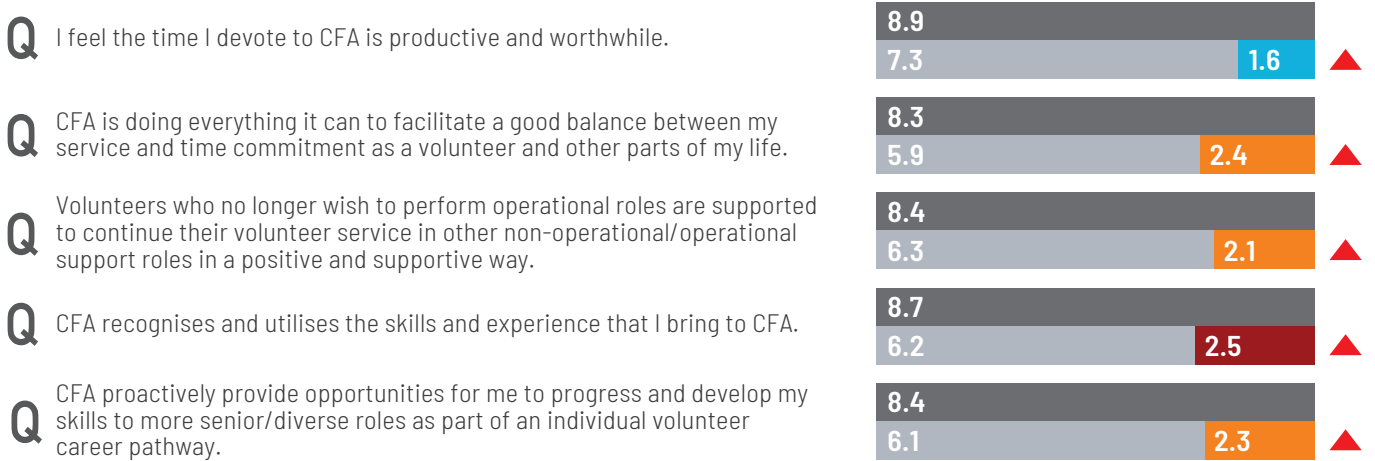
SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS



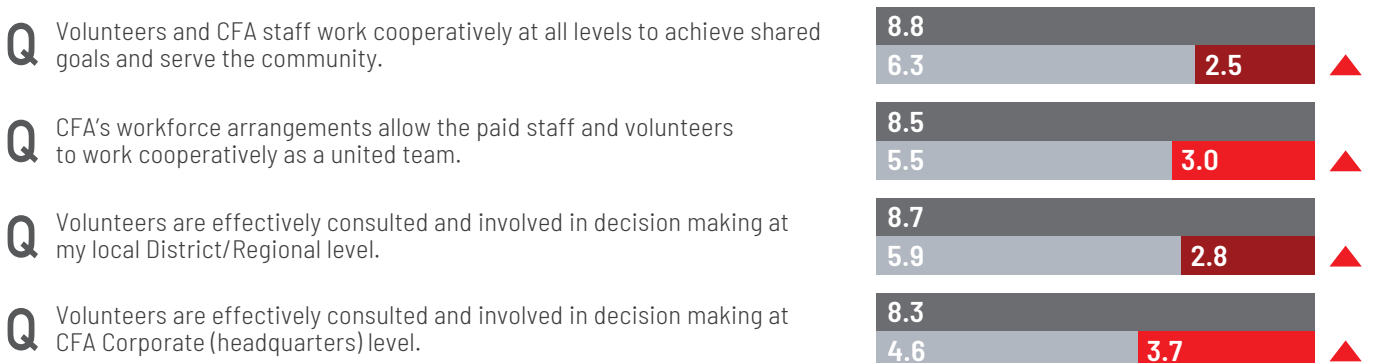
RESPECT & PROFESSIONALISM



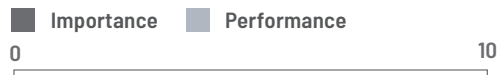
MY ROLE AS A VOLUNTEER



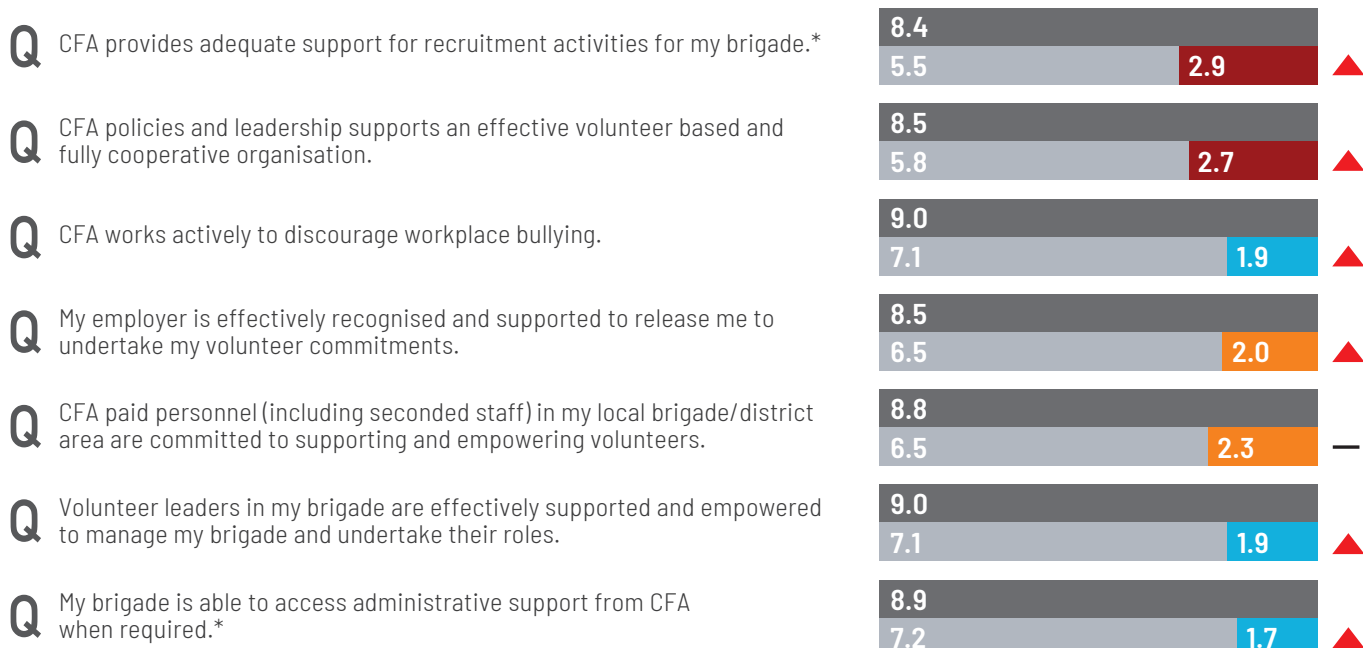
COOPERATION ACROSS CFA



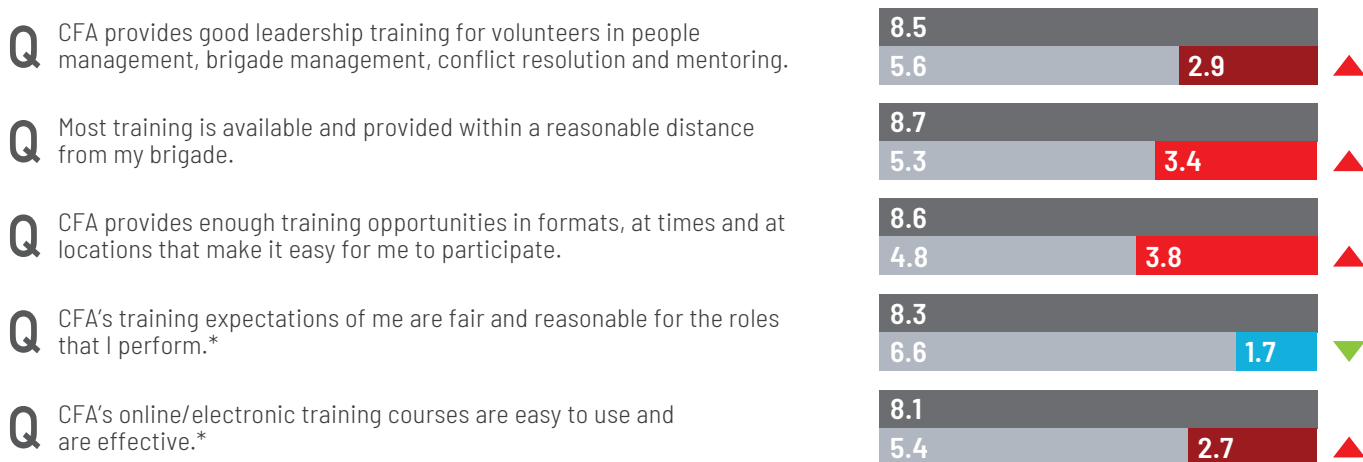
SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS



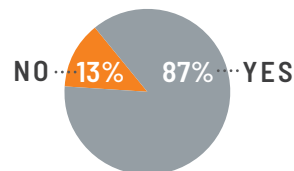
SUPPORT FROM CFA



TRAINING BY CFA

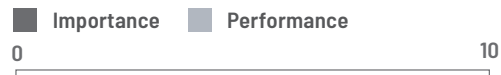


Q Do you have access to adequate internet in order to participate in online/electronic training?*



* New question inserted from 2022 survey onwards, has been excluded from the VolWEL calculation for this theme until trendline data can be established.

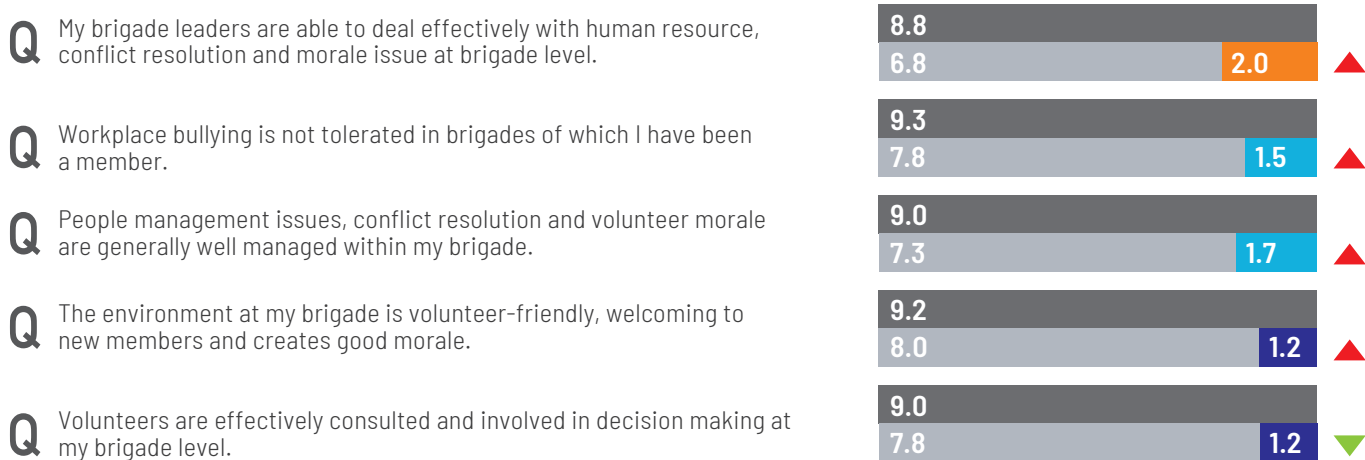
SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS



RECRUITMENT & RETENTION



PEOPLE MANAGEMENT: MY BRIGADE



2024-25 SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

