



# Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee

**Hearing date:** 01/05/2026

**Questions taken on notice**

**Directed to:** Fire Rescue Victoria, Gavin Freeman

**Received date: [office use only]**

**1. P.19 Sarah Mansfield**

**Question:** You said that you provided all of the strike teams that were requested, but we have a joint submission from UFU, AVA and CFA Volunteers Group that said a request was made to FRV for additional strike teams but they were not able to be provided because there were not enough appropriate trucks in commission to be able to meet that request.

**Gavin FREEMAN:** I would have to take that on notice-

**Response:** At the Inquiry, my initial answer was no, however after taking this question on notice, I conducted some further investigations. On 9 January 2026, FRV had two Strike Teams deployed following requests for our assistance. On review of the relevant log books, it shows a request for a Strike Team to attend the Grampians, which was unable to be filled based on “operational activity and capacity within FRV” noting at that time we had deployed 10 Pumper Tankers outside the FRV District, still had 10 primary appliances committed to a third alarm factory fire in the Western Suburbs - in addition to our regular response call outs and business as usual. Essentially, FRV only had capacity on the day for two Strike Teams to be available without diminishing the primary response capability within the FRV Fire District.

**2. P.31 Sarah Mansfield**

**Question:** -Mr Freeman, we also heard from an FRV officer who was deployed as a ground observer to gather intelligence during the fire. How many firefighters have been trained in this role since FRV, as an entity, commenced?

**Gavin FREEMAN:** I would have to take that on notice. There are a number of them, but I can get that answer for you.

**Response:** There are 63 trained Impact Assessment operators. Impact Assessment crews are drawn from FRV’s Urban Search and Rescue

(USAR) capability. USAR trained Operators possess Impact Assessment skills.

Additionally, there are 215 Ground Observer (Ground Intelligence) trained Operators who are currently skilled to perform the role. FRV utilise CFA vehicles to perform the role of Ground Observer (Ground Intelligence). There are six vehicles throughout the State of Victoria that have been agreed to be used for this purpose between CFA and FRV. The arrangement requires CFA to exhaust local Ground Observer options prior to FRV being requested to provide crews on those vehicles.

### 3. P.33 Wendy Lovell

**Question:** -how many FRV commanders and ACFOs have received incident management team training that would increase CFA's and Victoria's incident management team capability whilst on secondment to CFA?

**Gavin FREEMAN:** There are a couple of programs: the secondment program and of course the AIIMS for incident control. I will have to take that on notice to

**Response:**

All FRV operational staff receive some form of incident management training at each stage of their career.

There are three incident management levels identified in the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP). The SEMP uses the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS) as its foundation.

**Level 1** incidents can be resolved through the use of local or initial response resources, using normal management procedures. Leading Firefighter/Station Officer ranks are endorsed by FRV to be:

Crew Leader

Incident Controller – Level 1

**Level 2** incidents may be more complex either in size, resources or risk and are characterised by the need for:

resources beyond initial response;

sectorisation of the incident;

establishment of incident management functions due to the levels of complexity; or

a combination of the above.

The Senior Station Officer rank is endorsed by FRV to be: Incident Controller - Level 2 and Operations Officer - Level 2. The Commander rank is endorsed by FRV to be: Incident Controller - Level 2 (unless accredited as a Level 3 Incident Controller via the EMV accreditation process), Operations Officer - Level 2 (unless accredited as a Level 3 Operations Officer via the EMV accreditation process), Planning Officer - Level 2 and Safety Officer - Level 2.

**Level 3** incidents are characterised by degrees of complexity that may require the coordination of numerous activities across a number of services and an extended duration of time. The emergency may require significant whole-of-government coordination of response and recovery to manage the consequences that may be faced by the broader community.

Level 3 Incident Management Team (IMT) lead roles are accredited via the EMV accreditation process and may be performed by Commander or Assistant Chief Fire Officer ranks for Incident Controller, Operations and Planning, with all other roles available to both operational and corporate FRV staff.

FRV supports all staff to acquire and maintain IMT skills through a variety of activities. These activities are offered to seconded and non-seconded staff and include:

IMT related skills acquisition courses;

IMT exercises (FRV personnel can participate in multi-agency and/or FRV agency lead exercises); and

IMT mentoring/shadowing opportunities.

There are currently 33 CFA seconded staff who are accredited in Level 3 IMT roles. Roles include:

Level 3 Incident Controller – 28;

Level 3 Operations Officer – 4; and

Level 3 Planning Officer – 1.

There are currently 16 CFA seconded staff who are on the Level 3 Incident Controller accreditation pathway. FRV have no visibility of

seconded CFA staff on other Level 3 pathways. This information is held by CFA.

All CFA seconded staff are offered opportunities to acquire and maintain Level 3 skills. FRV has limited records of Level 2 skills maintenance activities and has limited access to total CFA seconded staff with IMT endorsements. CFA have generally provided for FRV seconded staff to maintain IMT skills as part of normal activities with FRV support on occasions when opportunities arise.

#### **4. P.34 Wendy Lovell**

**Question:** -during any of the January fires were FRV staff that were seconded to CFA withdrawn from the fireground because of issues with radio communications?

**Gavin FREEMAN:** No, I am not aware. I think there was an issue in the north-east – and again, I could check that out and take that on notice – where there was confusion amongst some radio channels, but that was addressed pretty quickly, as I understand it. But I will take that on notice, if I could, please.

**Response:** There is no evidence that any FRV staff were withdrawn from the fire ground due to radio connectivity issues. The only related incident I am aware of is that one firefighter reported connectivity issues with his radio and not being able to access the correct channel while on the fire ground. As noted above in my answer to question 3, we are aware of issues with radio connectivity and are currently looking into this to address it.

#### **5. P.34 Wendy Lovell**

**Wendy LOVELL:** Why don't commanders and ACFOs seconded to CFA have the same communication equipment that the rest of the CFA brigades and volunteers have? And what action have you taken since January to rectify it?

**Gavin FREEMAN:** They should have the same equipment. When the seconded officer comes out of FRV into CFA, we are responsible for providing the tools of trade for them. So, again, for any specific examples I will have to take that on notice.

**Response:** Following receiving this question during the Inquiry, I instigated some investigations to occur, which confirmed the answer is

generally affirmative, but note issues with radios have been identified and require further work. Essentially, the allocation of radios to Secondees is established and occurs, however we have identified problems regarding the types available and training on the use of radios. For example, an issue that needs work is that multiple different radio types (Tait/Harris/Motorola) are all being used across our people and the capabilities, upgrades and channels are different in each radio type, which obviously causes issues. We are now considering how to best address this issue.

#### **6. P.37-38 Gaelle Broad**

**Question:** -Just with the FRV, I am keen to understand because you are talking about not being in bush areas. I know Bendigo is a city surrounded by forest. FRV has about – 40 per cent of the area is covered by bush. But with the Harcourt fire, my understanding is that the FRV in Bendigo, 25 minutes away, was not called, and it took 14 hours for FRV to provide back up. It took 17 hours for them to get on the ground, and then they were only there for a couple of hours. Can you talk to that response specific to the Harcourt fires?

**Gavin FREEMAN:** Yes, look, our responses – we respond wherever we are requested to go. We frequently, if CFA ask us to respond then we do – vice versa as well. And in response to your question on that bushfire area that sits within FRV’s area, each year that is a conversation that I do have with Chief Officer Heffernan to ensure that CFA are able to provide support to help us, and with Chris Hardman as well in our area, because we are not equipped with bushfire-specific trucks. So we do draw on the other agencies to assist us when we get fires that are our responsibility. In terms of that response you are talking about there, I would have to take that on notice and get the details around those timeframes, because I am not sure why that occurred.

**Response:** Queries around FRV taking 17 hours to get a Strike Team/response to the Harcourt fire and a truck only staying 44 minutes.

Following this line of questioning at the Inquiry, I caused these matters to be further investigated. From those investigations, I note the following:

FRV only respond to requests from CFA to fires in CFA area. On 9th January 2026, CFA did not request any FRV resources for the Harcourt

fire. A request for a Strike Team was received and CFA and FRV worked together to reallocate an already deployed Strike Team to an operational priority.

CFA indicated during the hearing that they include FRV area coverage in their decision making in relation to where to respond appliances from. In my view, this is a demonstrated example of a complementary Fire Service.

On 9 January 2026, having 2 FRV Pumper Trucks remain in Bendigo enabled CFA to respond as required in the broader Bendigo district with the knowledge that FRV would be able to respond to any local calls in support of CFA.

**Additional information provided to correct misinformation provided to the Committee:**

1. In response to Mr Peter Marshall's evidence on the vote of no confidence.
  - The vote conducted in June 2025 was run via SurveyMonkey. FRV had no oversight of the voting process and no visibility of how the results were verified or scrutinised. Based on figures published in UFU bulletins, I note the following:
  - According to FRV's 2023–24 Annual Report (the most recent at the time of the vote), FRV had 4,741 employees.
  - The UFU reported that 3,697 survey links were distributed to private email addresses, more than 1,000 fewer than the total number of FRV employees.
  - Of the links sent, the UFU reported that 78.3% of members who received a link voted, and the result of that vote was 90.3% no confidence in the leadership of Commissioner Freeman, Tony Matthews and Tom McPherson - who were grouped together under the one question. On the numbers provided by the UFU, it remains unclear how many links were actually received, and I understand there were reported issues with people not receiving links.
  - Based on these figures, the number of "no confidence" votes is approximately 2,615. This represents around 55% of the total FRV workforce, not 90.85% as has been claimed.
  - Additionally, it remains unclear what, if any, safeguards were in place to protect the confidentiality of the vote. Any real or

perceived risk that voting could be identified may have influenced participation or responses.

2. The data Peter Marshall provided about the secondment agreement and his assertions that the Committee had been misled by FRV and CFA;

The data that Mr Marshall referred to in his evidence was old information from 2020 to 2023. This data was supplied to the United Firefighters Union in order to support FRV's submission for additional Commander reliever positions. The data Mr Marshall stated in evidence was only part of the full data set.

It is worth making clear that there is no direct correlation between 'vacant positions' and 'fulfilment rates' or 'unrelieved positions.' Vacant position refers to a position where no staff member currently holds the position as their substantive appointment. Unrelieved positions refer to roles where no relief arrangements are in place for the specified week. Fulfilment rate is a measure of how many positions have someone filling the role at the time – either as a permanent appointment or covered by short term relief. The higher the rate, the better.

Therefore, while there may be a number of vacant positions, this does not automatically mean that there are gaps in service delivery. These gaps are better measured by the number of unrelieved positions or the fulfilment rate.

For accurate data on the secondment agreement, please refer to the documents I relied upon at the Inquiry, enclosed with this letter.

In response to the Committee's request for the briefing packs that were relied upon during the hearing, as communicated to Inquiry staff, I did not take any physical documents to the hearing and only had my iPad. However, I have enclosed with this letter copies of the electronic documents I referred to during the hearing to assist the Committee.