



4th June 2026

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

Dear Committee,

Thank-you for your correspondence of 1st May 2025 containing thirteen additional questions taken on notice. Please find enclosed our responses to your questions.

Breach of Statutory Consultation Obligations

- 1. VFBV documents repeated failures by government to consult volunteers on major reforms, including the fire services reform legislation and Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund—despite obligations under Section 6 of the CFA Act and the Volunteer Charter.***

Does VFBV consider the government has routinely failed to meet its statutory duty to consult CFA volunteers, and what consequences has that had for trust, morale, and policy outcomes?

VFBV Response

VFBV considers the State government has routinely failed to meet its statutory obligations under Section 6 of the Country Fire Authority Act. These breaches have a devastating impact on volunteer morale, and lead to a diminution in trust between the State government and CFA volunteers.

Section 6G of the Act states:

<p>6G Recognition of the Volunteer Charter</p> <p>The Parliament recognises that the Volunteer Charter—</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">is a statement of the commitment and principles that apply to the relationship between the Government of Victoria, the Authority and volunteer officers and members; andrequires that the Authority recognise, value, respect and promote the contribution of volunteer officers and members to the well-being and safety of the community; andrequires that the Government of Victoria and the Authority commit to consulting with Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria Incorporated on behalf of volunteer officers and members on any matter that might reasonably be expected to affect them.
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The requirement to consult is contained within Section 6G(c).

The Volunteer Charter is a tri-part agreement made in good faith between the Government of Victoria, the CFA and VFBV on behalf of all CFA volunteer officers and members. While originally signed and agreed on 22 December 2001, the Volunteer Charter was elevated to statutory recognition by an Act of Parliament [Country Fire Authority Amendment (Volunteer Charter) Act 2011], that was assented to on 10 May 2011.

This amendment Bill received overwhelming bi-partisan support across both houses of Parliament.

Ironically, the reason the Volunteer Charter was elevated to statutory effect in 2011 was due to concerns raised by volunteers that both government and CFA were failing to adhere to the Volunteer Charter prior to its statutory recognition.

The amendments were intended to put the obligations to volunteers beyond all doubt.

VFBV has had the need to advise government of its breaches several times in recent years with formal notifications provided during Fire Services Reform, the disbandment of the Volunteer Consultative Forum and the introduction of the governments new Emergency Services Tax.

These notifications resulted in no material processes or actions by Government to attempt to resolve the breach, nor respond to VFBV's concerns. While employees may rely on Fair Work Australia to arbitrate on consultation terms between parties, volunteers and their representative bodies have no such independent umpire upon which to raise their concerns.

Consequently, it has become clear to VFBV that while the Volunteer Charter was made in good faith, there are no consequences when the government walks away from these principles and breaches its statutory duties under the Act.

As a result, VFBV has long advocated for bipartisan support for the creation of an independent statutory officer designated as a Volunteer Ombudsman that can monitor Charter commitments and obligations, report to Parliament on any breaches and assist with remedying and arbitrating occasions where these obligations to volunteers are not met. While we have received notification of support from the Liberal/National opposition, Labor has yet to commit to supporting this new statutory role.

Real Funding Decline Despite Rising Demand

- 2. CFA grant funding has fallen 13.8% in real terms (\$48.5M loss) since 2020 21, while incident demand rose 11% in 2024/25 and 18% the year before, and Fire Services Property Levy revenue increased by \$191M in a single year.***

How can volunteers interpret these figures as anything other than a strategic under investment in the very workforce the State relies on most during disasters?

VFBV Response

There is no other way CFA volunteers can interpret these results. The massive drops in volunteer numbers are clear evidence of the loss of morale among CFA volunteers caused in large part by insufficient funding and poor government policy.

With CFA grant fund falling in real terms and not even keeping pace with inflation, and the workload of volunteers increasing to deal with increased community demand for fire services, CFA volunteers interpret the governments under investments in their fire service as not only a direct attack on the community/volunteer model that the CFA represents, but also as an inherent lack of respect for volunteers and those communities who collectively save the State of Victoria billions of dollars a year by choosing to share responsibility for their fire safety.

Under investing in CFA not only insults volunteers but endangers the communities relying on sufficient government investments to fund the very emergency services with which these communities rely for their safety.

Leadership Failure – Incident Management Collapse

- 3. Victoria now has just 57 Level 3 Incident Controllers, down from 152 in 2014. Rather than rebuilding capability, EMV repeatedly lowered targets. Only 11% of Level 3 accredited personnel are volunteers.**

Is the collapse in senior incident management capability a consequence of legislation implications or deliberate leadership failure or poor workforce planning by government agencies or a combination of all three?

VFBV Response

A combination of all three has contributed to the current malaise and lack of urgency in building Victoria's Level 3 Incident Management capability.

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommended that the State enact legislation to appoint a Fire Commissioner as an independent statutory officer responsible to the Minister for Emergency Services and as the senior operational firefighter in Victoria. [Recommendation 63].

In its Final Report, the Commission provided detailed responsibilities that the newly created Fire Commissioner would be responsible for the development and building of operational capacity to prepare for days of highest risk. (Page 376 of Final Report - Volume II: Fire Preparation, Response and Recovery.)

The Commission recommended the Fire Commissioner be provided a small secretariat and sufficient budget to support their work and be required to provide rolling three-year action plans. To avoid duplication and administrative bureaucracy diverting attention from operational outcomes, the Royal Commission wisely placed emphasis on the requirement for the Fire Commissioner to have to work through and in cooperation with the agency Chief Officer's to achieve the outcomes.

This recommendation was implemented on the 1 December 2010 with the inaugural appointment of the first (and only) Fire Services Commissioner. As is evidenced by the historical level 3 incident controller numbers detailed in VFBV Submission (pg 23) strong growth and capability was achieved during the intervening years under this model.

The Fire Commissioner model and small secretariat was changed in 2014 and slowly morphed and folded into a departmental all hazards all agencies model (Emergency Management Victoria) within the Department Justice and Community Safety growing to a large inter-departmental bureaucracy of approximately 300 public servants, multiple management structures and dual reporting.

It is instructive to note that as time went on and EMV grew (and grew) and since the inaugural Commissioner's resignation on 7th August 2018, no other Emergency Management Commissioner has held fire background. With the controversial Fire Services Reforms commencing discussions in 2016, it is again instructive to note this coincides with the large drop in Level 3 Incident Controllers.

Far from being responsible or accountable, VFBV argues that the current Emergency Management Commissioner model has been a significant contributor to the lack of focus, energy or efforts to rebuild Victoria's level 3 incident management capability. Further, by being subsumed into a government Department, the Commissioner lacks the independence originally sought. With the Emergency Management Commissioner no longer being the State's most senior fire officer and seen as a political appointment - this has significantly contributed to the perception that EMV has lacked the focus, expertise or credibility to pursue this work with rigour.

VFBV argues that the lack of accountability on the EM Commissioner for preparedness is a significant contributor of poor performance in Victoria's capability.

EMV's poor consultation record with volunteers has been as problematic as the State government's under this term of government, and VFBV believes this lack of genuine consultation and engagement with volunteers and their peak bodies as being ultimately responsible for the poor performance and lack of sufficient workforce planning and the necessary requirements to build the pipeline of volunteer capability required.

Secondment Model and Command Vacancies

- 4. The CFA/FRV secondment model prevents CFA from employing its own command staff, resulting in vacancy and non relief rates exceeding 20%, chronic fatigue risks, loss of local knowledge, and zero accountability for FRV withholding seconded staff it is funded for.***

From VFBV's perspective, has the secondment model fundamentally undermined CFA command capability and volunteer confidence, and does it now represent an operational safety risk?

VFBV Response

Based on extensive and widespread CFA volunteer feedback, VFBV asserts that the secondment model fundamentally undermines CFA Command capability, volunteer confidence, and represents an inherent operational safety risk.

The safety risk is not only to CFA volunteers who are operating under insufficient levels of command resources but also poses a safety risk to those employees operating under these insufficient arrangements and the communities who rely on them.

The data and narrative contained within VFBV's submission to the Inquiry on the effects of the secondment arrangements on CFA's Command capability was variously affirmed through your inquiry's hearings by the independent Fire Services Implementation Monitor, the Fire Rescue Victoria Commissioner, the CFA Chief Executive, and the CFA Chief Officer.

It is VFBV's contention that the evidence speaks for itself.

It should be instructive to the Committee, that the only criticism of VFBV's position on the secondment arrangements came in the form of a puerile attack by the stakeholder and organisation that all statutory parties identify as being one of the major contributors to the reason why the secondment arrangements are not working. VFBV similarly takes no comfort in the UFU's assertion that these capability gaps have long existed prior to Fire Services Reform. The fact that CFA has been under resourced in these key volunteer support roles for so long simply affirms VFBV's contention that CFA volunteers and CFA itself are being set-up to fail.

One only needs to review the key evidence provided to the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission on lateral entry and restrictions to career instructors to understand the strong nexus and similarities between the current impediments under the secondment model and those of the past. There is a common denominator.

Despite the UFU's attempt to try and assert that criticism of the secondment arrangements is simply a misinterpretation of the evidence, VFBV repeats its call for the Committee to simply seek out the information and evidence for itself.

It is again instructive to note that the UFU monitors and enforces its minimum crewing charts contained within its Enterprise Bargaining Agreement with militant force. Vacancies in FRV's minimum crewing rosters across FRV's 85 fire stations is monitored and enforced by the UFU with such ferocity that even single unfilled positions can lead to temporary station closures and costly overtime arrangements to ensure each shift is operating at 100% strength. It is telling that the UFU's reaction to VFBV simply requesting the same vigour be applied to ensuring CFA's Command vacancies are managed with the same precision and enthusiasm is deflected with the usual tired rhetoric that there is nothing to see here and it's all just a big misunderstanding.

The secondment arrangements fall squarely within the Committees Terms of Reference as they were a lead contributor of the agency's ability, or inability to sufficiently prepare, plan and respond to the 2026 fire season, the emergency response to control and contain the fires including the adequacy of resources, volunteer morale and the retention of CFA volunteers which builds Victoria's surge capacity for large emergencies. To suggest otherwise is simply absurd.

The fact that each of the agency witnesses attested to the issues speaks fundamentally to why the whole of government submission led by EMV and the Department contains key gaps in evidence and a distinct lack of information on what was one of the key issues arising from the 2026 fires. This points to political interference in what evidence the agencies have been permitted to supply and should concern the Committee greatly.

Witness after witness, submission after submission, including through your open-mic sessions described the effect of these arrangements to your inquiry, including many front-line volunteers who responded during the 2026 fires.

CFA maintains detailed records on exactly the number of vacancies and non-relieved positions across the State. It further breaks this down by date, by position and by District and regularly raises these issues with FRV through the Head of Agencies committee and with the Fire Services Implementation Monitor.

VFBV believes the Committee would be well served by requesting this information directly, rather than relying solely on the views of stakeholders.

Infrastructure Neglect in Regional Victoria

- 5. CFA manages 1,196 stations with only \$9.5M per year for infrastructure. Many stations lack basic amenities such as toilets, power, water, or gender appropriate facilities—often funded by volunteers themselves.***

What does this level of neglect signal to volunteers in regional and rural Victoria, and how does it affect recruitment, retention and safety?

VFBV Response

Insufficient capital investment has led to many CFA stations that have inadequate amenities forcing CFA volunteers to have to fundraise and spend countless hours undertaking fundraising activities to simply fund what any other emergency service would classify as minimum requirements.

This level of neglect in CFA infrastructure and funding signals to CFA volunteers that government does not respect the role they play, nor the service they provide to their communities often at great risk to themselves and their families livelihood.

This has a devastating impact on CFA volunteer recruitment and retention.

In many regional and rural areas suffering from other challenges such as rural decline, it is more important than ever for CFA to be able to attract a younger generation. When prospective volunteers walk into many of the regional stations and see an old fire truck that is often older than they are, and an ageing building with little amenity and poor maintenance, they are left completely disillusioned.

While an employee can legally raise an issue impacting upon their safety and are entitled to an OH&S representative who can issue an improvement notice to the employer, volunteers are not recognised under Victoria's Health and Safety regulations and are not provided the same rights to form safety committees or demand safety improvements.

The reality is – an administrative employee who hypothetically trips over a door mat situated in a CFA HQ lunch room is entitled to greater safety measures and protections than a volunteer firefighter who is forced

to respond to their volunteer fire station in the middle of the night, under the time pressure of a service delivery standard, in the dark, with inadequate lighting and poorly maintained cement and pathways, and required to change in cramped and dark conditions within cm's of the truck that is spewing out diesel particulates and will shortly egress that station under emergency conditions.

This two-tiered safety system operating across Victoria that shuts volunteers out and ignores their safety as they undertake some of the most dangerous work as part of an emergency service - makes volunteers third class citizens and exposes volunteers to risks and safety issues that have been deemed unacceptable for employees. How any government can preside over a system that treats volunteers with such contempt is beyond our understanding.

Training Access and Volunteer Progression

- 6. IMT and leadership training remains largely weekday, business hours based, with limited mentoring and exercise opportunities—systematically excluding volunteers and constraining progression pathways.***

Is it fair to say that government-controlled training systems are actively preventing volunteers from stepping into leadership roles the State urgently needs?

VFBV Response

Yes, it is fair to say that EMV and government-controlled training systems are actively discouraging and preventing volunteers from stepping into Level 2 and Level 3 leadership roles the State urgently needs.

The State must provide sufficient opportunities for volunteers to pursue training, exercising and professional development that will allow them to undertake and progress training and accreditation for Level 2 and level 3 incident management roles.

Training must be scheduled at times and locations that encourage volunteers, and there needs to be sufficient support that provides volunteers with flexible arrangements to pursue this higher-level training and professional development around their existing life/work pressures. Support for employers, the self-employed and other appropriate considerations is key to creating an environment that supports volunteers to undertake these roles. VFBV has often pointed to the Army Reserve model as a good example.

While EMV's Operating Model review suggested a myriad of supports that could be implemented to encourage and support public servants to undertake this training, it is again extremely disappointing that similar supports were not even considered for volunteers who make up the overwhelming majority of Victoria's EM workforce. This bias against EM volunteers simply amplifies the disrespect that volunteers report has a significant impact on their morale and retention.

Volunteer Numbers and Surge Capacity Risk

- 7. Operational volunteer firefighters have fallen from ~39,870 in 2009 to ~28,855 in 2026—a loss of more than 11,000, despite rising expressions of interest. This threatens Victoria's surge and peak load capacity.***

Does VFBV believe government policy choices not community willingness, are now the primary threat to Victoria's emergency surge capacity?

VFBV Response

It is fair to say that current government policy and lack of investment is the primary threat to Victoria's emergency volunteer surge capacity.

While external and environmental factors impact on CFA's ability to recruit volunteers in some areas, volunteer expressions of interest have remained strong. Following each major fire season, thousands of community members express an interest in becoming a CFA volunteer.

In those communities with acute external factors such as an ageing population and rural decline, rather than an excuse of why it is difficult, investment in appropriate facilities, flexible recruitment, induction and training programs, and respecting volunteers time would significantly support a brigade in a small rural township. If volunteer time was only required for emergency response, and not government paperwork, administration and fundraising, emergency service volunteering would be a lot more attractive to the next generation of volunteers.

Modern, safe and contemporary stations, trucks, equipment and personal protective clothing would signal to prospective volunteers that the government truly respects and appreciates their service and backs them no differently to any other emergency service worker. Instead, volunteers are left to feel they only receive the leftovers and scraps from the paid metropolitan model this government's fire service policies seems to preference.

At the same time, the townships that offer the most fertile ground for future recruitment across metropolitan areas has been effectively removed from CFA's operating model, with co-located stations across the metropolitan fire district simply designated as standby and support resources, with reduced roles and reduced recognition. As warned during the progress of the governments fire service reforms through Parliament – the State has moved to a model that displaces volunteers and reduces their contribution in growing suburbs that have previously been the major source of volunteer surge capacity and contains the highest populations of potential volunteers.

Urgency and Accountability

- 8. *More than a decade of reviews, royal commissions and audits have repeatedly identified the same failings in consultation, funding, fleet, training and leadership—yet little has changed.***

From the volunteer viewpoint, is Victoria now at the point where incremental fixes are no longer sufficient and structural legislative and funding reform is urgently required to avoid catastrophic failure?

VFBV Response

Depending on the context, there remains good reasons to continue pursuing incremental fixes, while in other areas where incremental progress has been genuinely pursued and not delivered results, that more significant and structural reform is urgently required and called for.

For example, the efforts made to make the CFA/FRV Secondment model work has been exhausted. How many more years of failure do volunteers need to suffer before significant changes are made to CFA's Command resourcing model?

VFBV argues that if previous inquiry and royal commission recommendations had actually been delivered and pursued with rigour, the need for larger reforms would largely not be required. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission documented the dangers of large change management and how it can divert energy and efforts from operational outcomes. VFBV asserts that reforms must be evidence based with clear outcomes and robust change management and workforce engagement to be truly successful.

Protecting CFA's Statutory Authority's independence from political interference is just as acute today, as it was during the 1939 Stretton Royal Commission.

IGEM and internal government monitor's progress reports continually point to a culture of reporting on "activity" rather than action or results that actually deliver outcomes that recommendations have sought.

For example, volunteers concern around insufficient gaps in roadside barriers was raised by VFBV in 2014, leading to a CFA Position Paper on Roadside Barriers arguing for a barrier length ideally of no longer than 500 meters. AusRoads Guide to Road Design Part 6.15 (2024) also recommends emergency service access at 500m.

In 2018 following further advocacy by VFBV - CFA and VicRoads put out a Joint Statement stating that a forward plan had been reached that would see VicRoads conduct detailed mapping of barriers which would clearly identify the location of access breaks, emergency cross over points and interchanges.

In 2020, the Victorian Auditor General released a report on Regional Road Barriers, noting that VicRoads asset register does not separately record where it has installed different types of barriers or where it provides emergency services with the exact locations of gaps between sections of barrier for emergency vehicle access.

Brigades are still waiting for this information, twelve years after it was first raised.

From a legislative perspective, one need look no further than the 58th Parliament's Inquiry that was completed in 2017 and enquired into the basis of the governments fire services reforms, dealing with concerns that are eerily similar and the subject and cause of many of the issues before the committee today. A review of that inquiry's 10 recommendations that if implemented would have significantly addressed many of the same issues arising in the 2026 fire season including issues with consultation, surge capacity, secondment, resourcing and infrastructure funding.

Volunteers continue to assert that the lessons learned from Victoria's fire seasons come at a significant cost of life and livelihoods. We owe it to all persons impacted by these extreme events to properly learn and embed these learnings into how Victoria's emergency management organisations operate.

Reforming how previous inquiry recommendations are captured, actioned, and monitored for outcomes would be a worthy pursuit of legislative reform.

Similarly, the need to unambiguously support and protect volunteer emergency services, holding governments, and statutory office holders to account remains critical to the Victorian public's safety in one of the most fire prone places in the world.

Recommendations

9. Your submission provides many recommendations – can you identify your key recommendations for this committee to take to the Victorian?

VFBV Response

VFBV has made many recommendations and believes all have merit and go to the heart of issues that contributed to the 2026 fire season, noting that we have not included operational improvements that are better pursued following CFA's 2026 After Action Review processes.

To assist the Committee, the following table summarises our recommendations and highlights those recommendations that are likely to have more of a significant impact than others. The page reference refers to VFBV's submission, where further detail and context can be gleaned.

High Priority

Page	Section	Recommendation
Preparation and Planning		
16	1.2 Municipal Fire Planning and Mitigation	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.
16	1.2 Municipal Fire Planning and Mitigation	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.
20	1.2 Municipal Fire Planning and Mitigation	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.
20	1.2 Municipal Fire Planning and Mitigation	We recommend that the auditing function of fire prevention plans and committees be returned to CFA, and for s 43 of the CFA Act be amended to authorise and strengthen the CFA Chief Officer's powers to audit and enforce s 43 for untreated risks that represent an unacceptable fire risk.
20	1.2 Municipal Fire Planning and Mitigation	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.
21	1.3 State Crisis and Resilience Council	VFBV advocates that each of the Class 1 agency Chief Officers should be represented on the SCRC.
22	1.4 Training	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.
22	1.4 Training	Victorian government fund the replacement of CFA's Learning Management System to better support CFA training.
23	1.5 Incident Management Teams (IMT)	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.
25	1.6 Underutilisation of Volunteers in IMT's	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.
26	1.7 Interoperability and Agency Attestations	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.
31	1.8 CFA/FRV Secondment Model	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.
32	1.8 CFA/FRV Secondment Model	The Committee review and report on the full range of vacancy and non-relief that was experienced each week during the 2026 Fire Season
33	1.8 CFA/FRV Secondment Model	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.
35	1.8 CFA/FRV Secondment Model	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.
41	1.10 Volunteer Morale – Strategic Priorities for Emergency Management Volunteering in Victoria	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.
Contributing Factors and Warnings		
47	2.4 Accuracy	That the Victorian VicEmergency app undergo public review so structured community feedback can be reviewed to scope future improvements and development
47	2.4 Accuracy	That warning include information on fire activity, speed and direction and expected changes to inform public actions to the warnings.

Page	Section	Recommendation
Funding and resources		
48	3.1 Funding	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, opex, capex and clearly differentiates between project or time limited funding
66	3.5 CFA Fleet	The Committee enquire into the inadequacy of CFA's base budget fleet replacement funding
66	3.5 CFA Fleet	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.
66	3.5 CFA Fleet	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.
69	3.6 CFA Infrastructure	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.
69	3.6 CFA Infrastructure	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.
Emergency Response		
84	4.5 Incident Management Training	The Fire Services Implementation Monitor be required to report on volunteer access to IMT training on a quarterly basis.
87	4.9 Communications	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.

10. We heard this morning from FRV that only 72 per cent of CFA vacancies had been filled leading up to summer under the secondment model – does that concern you? How much are these vacancies impacting on volunteers?

VFBV Response

CFA Command positions covered by the secondment arrangements are critical positions. The roles these individuals perform both individually and collectively are crucial to CFA's operating model and brigade/volunteer support. Any vacancies in this pool are of significant concern to VFBV and volunteers and have a significant impact on volunteers.

As detailed on Page 28 of VFBV's submission, these positions form the entire link between brigades and the CFA Chief Officer through his chain of command.

In their rush to try and minimise the number of vacancies that are reported, numbers provided by employees of FRV actually obfuscate the number of personnel who are not currently qualified or appointed to the rank they are performing, with many vacancies now being filled by individuals who are acting up in the roles on short-term appointments, above their actual rank. (eg: Commanders who are acting as ACFO's even though they do not currently hold the rank of ACFO.)

VFBV therefore urges caution in relying on only one source of truth for the true level of vacancy and non-relief and urges the Committee to call for the official CFA records and those reported to the Fire Services Implementation Monitor.

11. The CFA Chief Officer said he had given "qualified attestation" about CFA's readiness for the fire season due to the lack of resourcing under the secondment agreement. Is there a precedent for such a statement?

VFBV Response

The CFA Chief Officer's attestations are hidden from public view. Given the seriousness of the CFA Command vacancies experienced in the lead up to the 2026 Fire Season, we are not surprised that a qualified attestation needed to be given. This speaks to the seriousness of the issue and its impact on Victoria's preparedness for catastrophic fire conditions that were accurately predicted in the lead up to the 2026 fire season.

The real question is what was done about the concerns raised by the CFA Chief Officer, and why that was kept hidden from the public.

Similarly concerning is the complete lack of transparency in fire service budgets, command vacancies, incident management numbers across the whole pool of level 3 roles, volunteer surge capacity and infrastructure projects that tries to hide these issues from public scrutiny and accountability.

This lack of transparency lays the foundation for the promulgation of misinformation that can significantly impact the public's confidence in their fire services. While the government is quick to deflect any criticisms about misinformation, it is inescapable that the only reason why there are different accounts for fire services budgets, capability and resourcing - this is due entirely to the government's refusal to table this information in the first place creating a situation where there can be conflicting information in the public domain.

12. The CFA CEO said that VFBV's estimate that \$65 million per annum is required to maintain the current age of the fleet is "correct". What then is your assessment of the Government's recent announcement of just \$100 million over 10 years?

VFBV Response

Detailed VFBV analysis of the CFA Fleet shows that CFA must be funded to replace a minimum of 100 primary appliances per year to just maintain the current CFA age profile.

This is based on 85 primary Tankers and 15 primary Pumpers requiring to be replaced each year. VFBV's estimates of \$60.48M required per year only accounts for current truck pricing of \$465k for a Tanker and \$1M for a Pumper, and no administrative or project costs, so it is conservative.

Further analysis by VFBV of how many actual primary appliances have been procured by CFA on current funding over the past 10 years shows the gigantic gap between how many trucks are required, vs how many have actually been able to be delivered on current funding levels.

VFBV analysis shows that over the past 10 years, while the CFA needed to have replaced 1,000 primary appliances (100 per year), government funding only replaced a total of 404. This is less than half of what is required.

So, the government's extra \$10M over 10 years, while welcome, does not even cover this shortfall, let alone the number of trucks requiring replacement each year. It is hopelessly and completely inadequate.

Government figures of how many CFA trucks are on order are very misleading as they mischievously include smaller secondary or brigad owned appliances such as ultra-light tankers and slip-ons. These are small vehicles built on passenger vehicle cab chassis and therefore it is very misleading to include these builds in assessing CFA's primary appliance fleet age. They do not last anywhere near 20 years, and are usually replaced on much smaller time frames more relative to passenger vehicles, such as 7 years for example.

VFBV continues to advocate for an additional \$61M per year to prioritise the preplacement of CFA's ageing single cab tankers over a five year period.

13. Mr Leach also said there were 802 single cab tankers and they should be eliminated by 2036 given the recent announcement. Does that accord with your calculations?

VFBV Response

VFBV does not believe current government funding can replace the single cab tankers requiring to be replaced within the next 10 years.

The only way for current funding to even remotely address the outstanding aged vehicles is through attrition and diverting all fleet budgets to only replacing ageing Tankers, while simultaneously steering volunteer funding streams such as the VESEP grants program by asking brigades to help replace government issued appliances. Even then, we do not believe the current funding envelope stretches this far and fails to account for cost increases being experienced across the fleet manufacturing sector, noting also that the purpose of the VESEP program is to assist brigades replace brigade/community owned appliances and not State owned appliances.

By only directing existing fleet budgets to replacing tankers also ignores the fact that CFA has a fleet of 218 pumpers (larger than FRV) that also require replacement, with 145 of those currently overage. It also does not account for specialist appliances that will similarly be required for replacement.

VFBV appreciates the confusion as to the total amount of single cab appliances reported to the Committee. VFBV maintains that our figure of 650 more accurately quantifies the number of problematic single cab tankers that require urgent replacement and require firefighters to travel on the rear facing ROPS area.

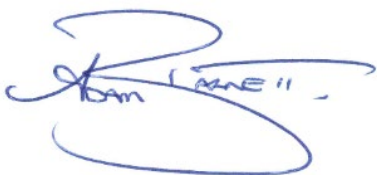
CFA continues to build single cab tankers that are not an issue. For example, CFA build brand new Ultra-Heavy Tankers that hold 10,000 litres of water. These are intentionally built as single cab tankers to distribute the weight load across the cab chassis and maximise water storage, and do not have any capacity to seat firefighters for travel on the back of these tankers.

Similarly, many smaller and mid-size appliances are built as single cab to prioritise water capacity or other functional loads.

VFBV has been clear in its advocacy, that across the entire CFA fleet, there are 650 single cab tankers that require firefighters to travel on rear facing ROPS (roll over protection systems) and where the crew is exposed to the elements and toxic smoke and fumes. These are the single cab tankers VFBV wishes to be prioritised for replacement and why VFBV's figure differs to that reported by CFA.

If there is anything further we can do to assist the Committee, please don't hesitate to let us know.

Yours faithfully,

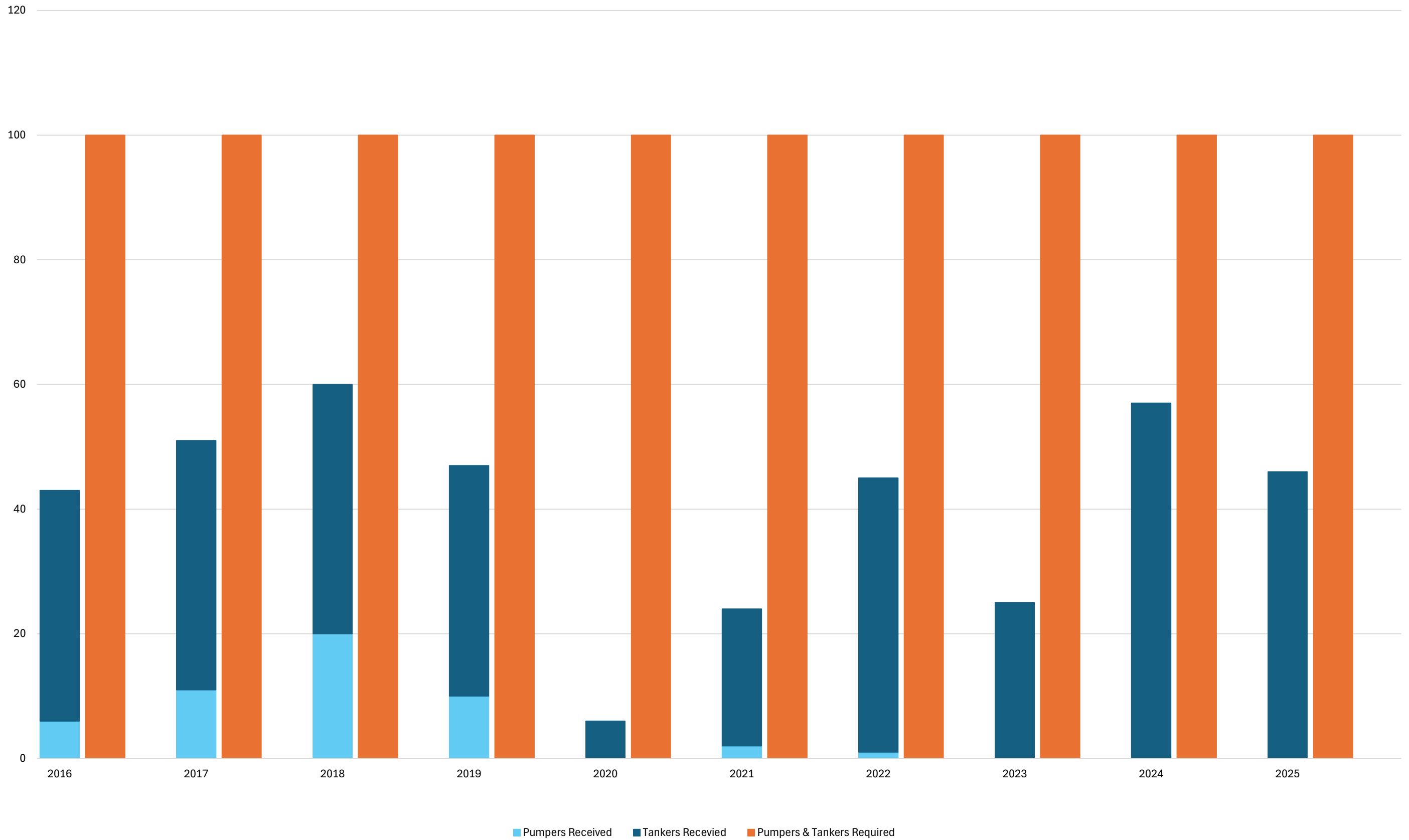
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Adam Barnett', with a large, stylized flourish underneath.

ADAM BARNETT
Chief Executive Officer

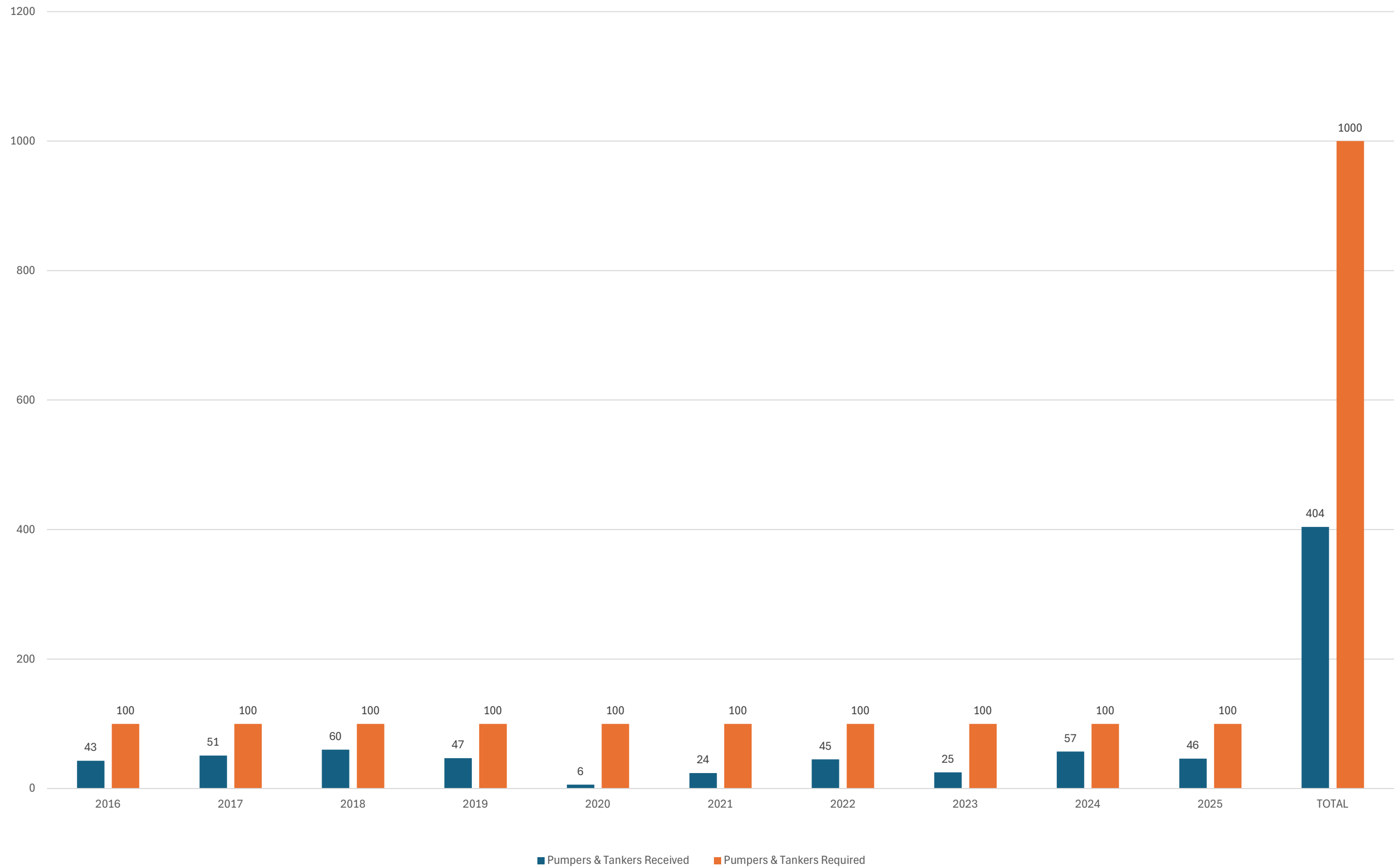
ATTACHMENTS

1. Graphical representation of 10-Year VFBV analysis comparing CFA primary Pumpers and Tankers received vs required.
2. CFA Position Paper on Roadside Barriers (2014)
3. CFA and VicRoads Joint Statement (2018)

VFBV Analysis of Pumpers and Tankers Received vs Required over Last 10 Years



VFBV Analysis Pumpers & Tankers Received vs Required over last 10 Years





Country Fire Authority July 2014

Position Paper Wire Rope Safety Barriers

Wire Rope Safety Barriers (WRSB) are progressively being installed on major arterial routes as a safety feature for motorists. The CFA recognises a balance must be made between emergency service operational activity and the safety of motorists to provide; safe and efficient means of operational activity for CFA brigades and safe carriageway for motorists.

CFA along with VicRoads has agreed that consultation at Regional level between VicRoads and CFA, in future installations of WRSBs, will be undertaken so that any issues can be resolved at the design and planning stage.

The following position and considerations are structured so that resolutions can be made by VicRoads and CFA to provide both; safe and efficient emergency service response and safe carriageway for motorists, through careful consideration to road use by emergency services during an emergency event (this includes during any bushfire event; on the road network; or potentially impacting on the road network) at the design and planning stage of establishing a WRSB.

Principles

The following good practice principles should be followed, when designing WRSB and considering fire safety objectives.

- Recognising the best roadside safety option for motorists and brigades.
- Roadside and near roadside vegetation fire risk considerations incorporated into design and planning stages of WRSB establishment.
- Emergency service response considerations incorporated into design and planning stages of WRSB establishment.
- Partnership between VicRoads and CFA brigades is essential.

Position

VicRoads to consult with CFA, at a Regional level, during the design and planning stage of WRSB installation in order to ensure that the following issues are considered:

Key Considerations

Access and Egress

- That the minimum 4 metre clearance from the carriageway to the WRSB on the left hand side; and a minimum 3 meters clearance on the right hand side on single direction divided carriageways and the desirable 4 meters on two way, two lane roads be upheld to allow minimum space for emergency vehicle parking (*Some CFA vehicles can be 3 metres wide, the additional 1 metre allows for operational access*).
- Minimum 3 metre clearance of vegetation and obstructions behind the WRSB. CFA regions to be consulted in relation to roadside vegetation fire hazard, to ensure potential fire spread and fire impact on all road users (motorists and emergency services) has been considered. Particularly where:

- High fuel loads are adjacent to the WRSB.
 - Fuel loads have the potential to increase if not maintained.
- Total WRSB length to not exceed 500/1000 metres in unbroken length. CFA supports; the desired length of 500m; and also VicRoads suggestion to generally adopt the 1000m length per barrier but no longer, to assist CFA access and egress during emergencies. 500m maximum lengths could prevent:
 - Dismantling: resultant delays in emergency response time caused by dismantling and costs of reinstallation.
 - Provides access to the road for emergency access during suppression activities for safe routes of escape should it be required.
 - Potential delays in emergency response time caused by travelling around long barrier lengths.
- Where multiple WRSBs are required along a stretch longer than 1000m a separation between barriers of at least 4m to be provided to allow emergency services vehicle access.
 - where one length may be required to overlap another, a minimum distance of 4m between parallel lengths of barriers for emergency vehicle access should be provided, in order to ensure that safe access is provided for emergency vehicles at all times
- Replacement and/or alteration of safety barriers – VicRoads are encouraged to discussed proposed alterations to safety barriers, in particular WRSB, with CFA Districts, with the aim of maximising access and egress points, as well as the ease of vegetation management potential.

Training

- Provision of appropriate training for brigades in dismantling WRSB. VicRoads will provide training sessions to interested brigades on dismantling WRSB. Requests will be directed through CFA Regional Offices, so that requests can be consolidated with the VicRoads Region. Consideration should be given to systems that do not take great lengths of time to dismantle, as this is not conducive to an emergency situation that requires rapid response. More specifically, this should occur where there is vegetation that CFA Regions consider a significant fire risk.
- CFA brigades will dismantle WRSB as a last resort, efforts will be taken to contacting VicRoads, emergency response, via Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) requesting support to dismantle.

VicRoads Reference material

- Wire Rope Safety Barrier Installation & Maintenance Guideline. August 2013
- Road Design Note 06-02B-September 2013



MEDIA RELEASE

VicRoads and the CFA stand side-by-side in the rollout of flexible safety barriers across the state's highest risk roads.

As part of the CFA mission to protect lives and property from fire and other emergencies, the CFA acknowledges the installation of safety barriers is a key road-safety initiative. These barriers and other road safety treatments will help to prevent crashes and by doing so, reduce the number of deaths on country roads and reduce the number of call-outs emergency agencies are required to attend.

Throughout the planning and delivery of this safety initiative VicRoads has held extensive consultation with the community and all emergency services including no fewer than 34 meetings, workshops and information sessions with CFA directly.

Chief Executives from the CFA and VicRoads met last week to address some remaining concerns from local brigades. A forward plan is now being delivered including the following actions;

- VicRoads to conduct detailed mapping of the barriers which will clearly identify the location of access breaks, emergency cross over points and interchanges
- Maps will be compatible with Triple Zero systems (ESTA) to assist all emergency services in effectively planning for and responding to incidents on roads where safety barriers are installed.

- VicRoads to develop training materials that can be incorporated into training sessions delivered by CFA equipping volunteers and members with the skills and expertise to respond to emergencies
- Where VicRoads are installing barriers at the Top 20 sites identified by the Towards Zero action plan, VicRoads have committed to further consultation by attending all local Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee meetings in those regions
- VicRoads acknowledges the CFAs interest in ensuring the management of fuel loads on road reserves. VicRoads will continue to install regular maintenance breaks along the barriers to facilitate the delivery of a continued roadside maintenance schedule

Many of these activities are well underway with the two authorities working in partnership to ensure these barriers continue to save lives, while allowing firefighting staff and volunteers to respond safely and efficiently to emergencies.

Flexible safety barriers are proven to prevent head-on and run-off-road crashes - the leading cause of deaths on country roads last year.

Quotes attributable to VicRoads Acting Deputy Chief Executive, Robyn Seymour,

»We are committed to working closely with the CFA and all emergency services as we roll out this important road safety initiative;

»We acknowledge there are some concerns among local CFA brigades and we are working with them to address those issues;

»Flexible safety barriers are proven life savers, and that's why we're installing them across the state;

»One life lost on our roads is one too many;

Quotes attributable to CFA Chief Officer, Steve Warrington

CFA is committed to working with VicRoads to make sure our brigades can work safely with the barriers and do our jobs;

We are also talking to other agencies across the sector to iron out any issues or concerns;

We are all on board for any measure that will see less people hurt on Victorian roads. Many of our people, as first responders know the devastation of road trauma;

ends

Author: CFA Media