



Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee

Hearing date: 1/05/2026

Questions taken on notice

Directed to: Country Fire Authority

Received date: [office use only]

1. P.16 Melina Bath

Question: Thank you very much indeed. I have multiple, multiple questions here, but I want to potentially first go to vacancies, and CFA vacancies. How many CFA assistant chief fire officer vacancies and commander positions are allocated to district 22, and how many of these positions were vacant in the week commencing 5 January 2026? You may need to take it on notice.

Jason HEFFERNAN: The exact number of seconded staff available in district 22 – I do not want to mislead the committee, so I will take that one on notice.

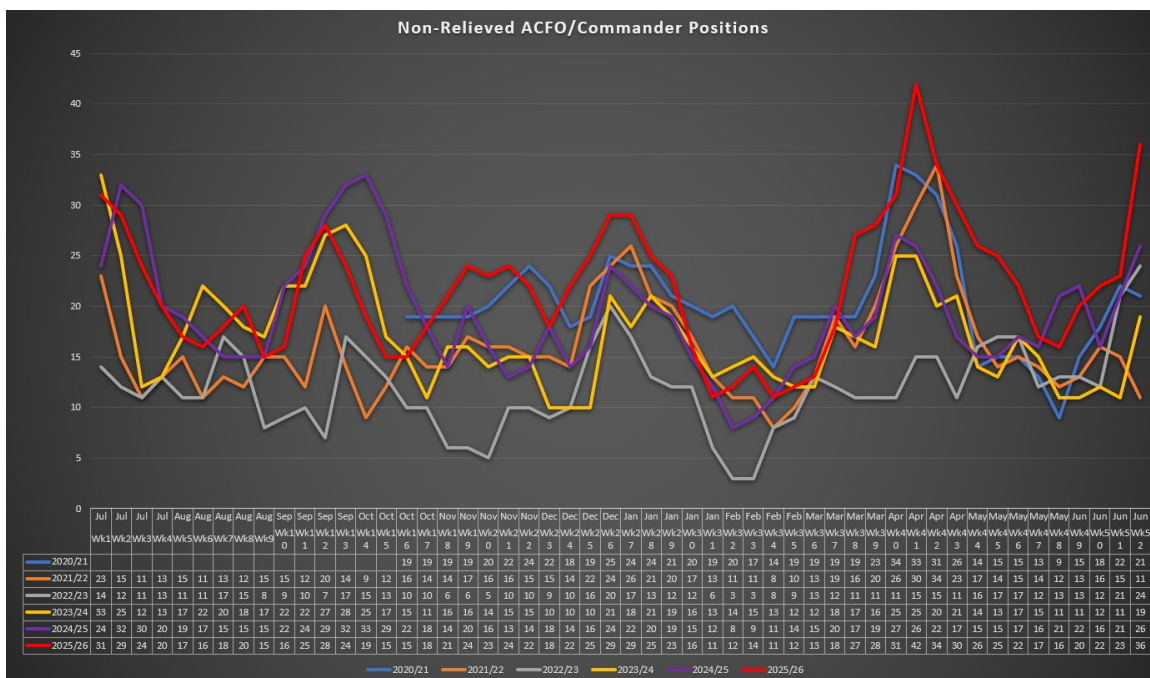
CFA Response:

- In the week commencing Monday 5 January 2026:
 - 3 of the 5 AFCO/Commander positions to be provided to District 22 under the Secondment Agreement were vacant.
 - CFA's senior operational leader workforce was reduced from the Secondment Agreement level by 29 FTE or 18.5 % (4 ACFO and 25 Commander roles) due to vacancy and non-relief issues.
 - The term 'non-relief' is applied in circumstances where a position has an incumbent assigned to that position, but that incumbent is unavailable due to circumstances such as annual / long service leave, temporary duties in another position etc. The term vacancy is applied where a position has no incumbent allocated to the position.
 - CFA had a total of 25 vacant/non-relieved Commander roles with critical gaps (over 50% reduction) in 5 district locations. These critical gaps include District 22 (where the Longwood fire ignited) and District 2 (where the Harcourt fire ignited). Both Districts were required to immediately commence 24/7 ongoing operations with significant command resource constraints.
- Since record keeping began in October 2020 CFA has been required to operate with a reduced operational command workforce on average of 17.2 persons per week (a combination of ACFOs and Commanders). This average equates to a reduction of services of 11.4%.
- Ongoing vacancy and non-relieved positions at senior operational levels persist.
- The below table lists command resourcing for the week commencing 5/1/2026.

| District | No. of ACFO/Commander positions to be provided under secondment arrangements | Substantive Vacancies 05/01/2026 | Non-Relief week commencing 05/01/2026 |
|----------|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2 | 7 | 3 | 3 |
| 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| 5 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| 6 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| 7 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| 8 | 11 | 6 | 3 |
| 9 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| 10 | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| 11 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| 12 | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| 13 | 7 | 3 | 0 |
| 14 | 7 | 1 | 2 |
| 15 | 7 | 1 | 1 |
| 16 | 5 | 3 | 1 |
| 17 | 5 | 4 | 1 |
| 18 | 6 | 3 | 2 |
| 20 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| 22 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| 23 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| 24 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| 27 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| HQ | 22 | 2 | 4 |

| | | | |
|----------|-----|----|----|
| Regional | 14 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 158 | 41 | 29 |

The below graph shows the consistent issues with vacancy and non-relief issues being experienced by CFA in relation to ACFO/Commander positions since CFA began keeping records in October 2022:



When analysing the data, the number of command positions impacted by vacant/non-relieve by each given week and the percentage this equates to for ACFO/Commander positions:

| Year | Vacant / non-relieved Command Positions | | | |
|---|---|-------|-----------|--------|
| | Min # | Max # | Average # | % |
| 2020/21 | 9 | 34 | 20.27 | 14.2% |
| 2021/22 | 8 | 34 | 16.12 | 11.3% |
| 2022/23 | 3 | 24 | 11.96 | 7.4% |
| 2023/24 | 10 | 33 | 17.1 | 10.6% |
| 2024/25 | 8 | 33 | 19.37 | 12.1% |
| 2025/26 (to date and projected to 30 June 2026) | 11 | 42 | 21.9 | 13.86% |

2. P.21 Wendy Lovell

Question: -In the past six years, has CFA sought additional funding from government by any means, including business cases that have been denied by government departments or the government, and if so, can you provide the details of those?

Greg LEACH: Yes, certainly. We can, again, take that on notice

CFA Response:

With annual base capex of \$30m, annual VESEP capex grants \$22m, is insufficient to support CFA's asset base of \$2.2b. CFA continues to be in the position of needing to bid for supplementary funding through the State Budget process. In the three years FY 2022-23 to FY 2024-25 inclusive, CFA has submitted requests to the State Budget process totalling \$330.57m, with \$117.95m approved. CFA works through the Sector Investment Team within the Department of Justice and Community Safety to submit its initiatives list and then develops the full budget bids that have been authorised to proceed through the process.

The announcement of \$148.6m for CFA in the 20267-27 budget is very welcome. This includes an additional \$100 million over 10 years for new CFA tankers and pumpers and funding for station builds/upgrades, land acquisition, and protective gear, training resources and wellbeing support for firefighters. The additional investment in fleet will go a very long way to removing the aged single cab appliances from the CFA fleet, and as usual CFA will seek to retire the oldest appliances from service. What this means in practice is in addition to brigades receiving new appliances, greater than 100 brigades will receive a younger cascaded appliance.

3. P.30 Melina Bath

Question: -Can we please be provided a table with the breakdowns of all CFA appliances by type – pumper and tanker – and age profiles? I am putting that on notice. Can you include whether these appliances are brigade owned or CFA owned? I know that there is some data, but it is actually old data now. It is 2023 data, and it was released in 2024. I think it is important for the committee to understand those profiles.

CFA Response:

Table: CFA emergency response fleet number and age, by funding source (as at 15 January 2026)

| Appliance type | Number CFA owned | Number Brigade owned | Total Number | CFA owned - average age (years) | Brigade owned - average age (Years) |
|----------------|------------------|----------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Pumpers | 214 | 4 | 218 | 16.8 | 17.5 |
| Pumper tankers | 41 | 3 | 44 | 21.9 | 19.7 |
| Tankers | 1,413 | 548 | 1,961 | 19.3 | 10.8 |
| Specialist | 55 | 83 | 138 | 13.3 | 11.5 |
| TOTAL | 1,723 | 638 | 2,361 | 18.9 | 11 |

Source: Total number from Whole of Victorian Government submission

Table: Appliance type, by age (all funding sources)

| | 0-5 years | 5-10 years | 10-15 years | 15-20 years | 20-25 years | 25-30 years | 30-35 years | 35-40 years | Total |
|---------------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Pumpers | 1 | 43 | 11 | 85 | 56 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 218 |
| Pumper tankers | 1 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 8 | 12 | 3 | 0 | 44 |
| Tanker | 260 | 229 | 408 | 339 | 186 | 242 | 231 | 66 | 1,961 |
| Specialist Vehicles | 25 | 44 | 28 | 20 | 12 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 138 |
| Total | 262 | 272 | 419 | 444 | 250 | 274 | 236 | 66 | 2,361 |

4. P.36-37 Gaelle Broad

Question: –Just with CFA, the volunteer numbers have dropped by nearly 14,000 operational firefighters – my understanding is it was 40,000 operational firefighters in 2009 to 28,855 in 2026 – despite high community interest. We have heard a lot about the lack of support that many CFA volunteers feel that they have got, and the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund-We have heard you mention today about the CFA needing to replace about 100 trucks a year, I think you said, and you mentioned the rolling fleet program had stalled over the last 10 to 15 years. I am just interested if you could, on notice, provide how many CFA appliances by type – and also FRV – have actually been purchased by our state each year over the last 12 years. If you could take that on notice. And just with the recent government announcement, there was \$100 million announced for new appliances over the next 10 years – how many will this actually buy over the forward estimates and over the next 10 years? Are you able to provide that information?

Greg LEACH: We can give you some estimates of that. It will vary depending on what type of truck we build each year. For example, a medium tanker is around half a million dollars, a heavy tanker three-quarters of a million dollars and a pumper \$1.2 million, so it depends on the configuration that we will build each year. But we can give you some information around that.

CFA Response:

A fit for purpose fleet is critical to ensuring all Victorian communities are effectively protected from fire and other emergencies, regardless of where they live. The announcement in the 2026-27 State Budget of \$100 million over 10 years for new tankers and pumpers is very welcome.

This announcement by the Government allows industry to invest and resource up to meet the anticipated CFA demand. CFA is reliant on an internationally competitive market for cab chassis. Build delays have been experienced with all manufacturers in recent years primarily due to the global pandemic affecting skilled labour and material supply. Whilst this has stabilised in the past 18 months, there is still a backlog of build programs across the sector affecting the commencement of any new orders. This backlog is quickly reducing however CFA is also actively seeking alternate suppliers, and possible partnership with agencies in other jurisdictions to leverage existing contract relationships that could help mitigate delays. From the time that funding has been secured, and an approved appliance design is in place and a supplier contract has been awarded, there is typically a 12-18 month build timeframe before receipt of the vehicle.

When CFA introduces a single new appliance into its fleet, it cascades other existing appliances to brigades within the CFA network which delivers an increase in overall capability across the brigade network. For every new appliance given to a particular brigade there can be up to 3-4 other brigades that receive an appliance better suited to their brigade area risk profile.

CFA modelling suggests that the additional investment will allow it to purchase approximately an additional 200 fire fighting vehicles. The precise mix of appliances to be ordered is subject to confirmation. CFA will use its cascade program to remove the oldest appliances from the fleet.

In relation to the question about appliances purchased over the last 12 years. The number of new appliances delivered or received by CFA over this same period is possibly more practical considering procurement and lead time complexities. The following tables provide this information.

| Type | CFA | Brigade | Total |
|---------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Pumper | 50 | 1 | 51 |
| Pumper Tanker | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Tanker | 385 | 337 | 722 |
| Specialist | 32 | 52 | 84 |
| Total | 468 | 390 | 858 |

Table: Appliances delivered since 2014 as at 15th January 2026 (**not** including appliances transferred to FRV in 2020 as a requirement of Fire Services Reform)

| Type | CFA | Brigade | Total |
|---------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Pumper | 65 | 1 | 66 |
| Pumper Tanker | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Tanker | 385 | 337 | 722 |
| Specialist | 32 | 52 | 84 |
| Total | 483 | 390 | 873 |

Table: Appliances delivered since 2014 as at 15th January 2026 (including appliances transferred to FRV in 2020 as a requirement of Fire Services Reform)

Additional questions

Wendy Lovell

CFA - Funding

1. Have changes in government policy such as the establishment of the Community Safety Building Authority (CSBA) who are now responsible for the procurement and construction of new CFA fire stations realised financial benefits to CFA or the Victorian Taxpayer?

- What did it cost CFA previously to build a new / replacement fire station for a small rural community? Perhaps you could provide the cost of both a single and double bay station?

- Currently, what cost are CFA being asked to pay to CSBA for them to construct the same types of station?

CFA Response:

In August 2022 the then Minister for Emergency Services requested CFA to transition the delivery responsibility for 20 identified major capital projects to the Community Safety Building Authority (CSBA).

CSBA’s cost to deliver CFA station builds is up to 3-4 times more costly than CFA equivalent station builds.

In the 13 years prior to the transition to CSBA, CFA built 386 fire stations (average of 29 per annum). Since the transition in August 2022, there have been 9 new stations delivered to CFA volunteers solely by CSBA (average of 2 per annum).

The table below shows the cost to build different station types in the years 2018, 2020, 2022 by CFA commensurate with our Whole of Life Asset Plan, and again in 2024 by the CSBA.

Stations in small rural communities are station type 1A and 1B.

| Typology | 2018 | 2020 | 2022 WoLP | 2024 CSBA | Variance to last build | % variance | Variance to WoLP | % Variance | Comments |
|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|------------|------------------|------------|--|
| 1A | \$550,000 | \$650,000 | \$750,000 | \$2,284,623 | \$1,634,623 | 251% | \$1,534,623 | 205% | No laundry or drying room facilities required. Increase to motor room length, approx. 1m (10m2). |
| 1B | \$770,000 | \$850,000 | \$1,200,000 | \$3,952,912 | \$3,102,912 | 365% | \$2,752,912 | 229% | No laundry or drying room facilities required. Increase to motor room length, approx. 1m (10m2). |
| 1C | \$1,650,000 | \$1,750,000 | \$2,500,000 | \$5,665,219 | \$3,915,219 | 224% | \$3,165,219 | 127% | Laundry and drying room included – Included in 2020 Increase in motor room widths in end bays by 0.4m across 12m length not in standard designs initially (10m2). |
| 2A | \$2,200,000 | \$2,300,000 | \$2,900,000 | \$7,626,834 | \$5,326,834 | 232% | \$4,726,834 | 163% | Laundry and drying room included – Part of station typology Increase in motor room widths in end bays by 0.4m across 12m length not in standard designs initially (10m2). |
| 2B | \$2,600,000 | \$2,700,000 | \$3,500,000 | \$7,863,972 | \$5,163,972 | 191% | \$4,363,972 | 125% | Increase in motor room widths in end bays by 0.4m across 12m length not in standard designs initially (10m2). |

Table: Cost comparison CFA vs CSBA

| Station Type | Risk Profile | Brigade Classification | Current Number |
|--------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| 1A Station | Remote Rural | Class 1 | 556 |
| 1B Station | Rural | Class 2 | 376 |
| 1C Station | Small town or Semi Urban | Class 3 | 137 |
| 2A Station | Large Town or Urban Interface | Class 4 | 57 |
| 2B Station | Large Town or Fully Urban | Class 4 & 5 | 73 |

Table: station type, by risk profile and classification

2. Have changes in Government Policy regarding the purchase / disposal of vacant land for agency use impacted CFA in any way?

CFA Response:

The changes in policy now require the Government to centrally list all sites surplus to requirement, manage the disposal and retain the proceeds.

CFA does provide the full list to Government regarding surplus sites (on the First Right of Refusal portal) and CFA manages the disposal process. In accordance with the CFA Act all moneys resulting from the sale, exchange or letting of any property by the CFA is then applied in the purchase of property for the CFA or the improvement of the property of the CFA.

3. Why is CFA dependent upon DEECA for fuel management funding?

CFA Response:

CFA's fuel management program expanded dramatically with the implementation of the Governments Safer Together (**ST**) policy. The joint agency program has supported CFA to build its capability in fuel management and work in partnership with Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (**DEECA**) to improve the state fuel management program. Since the inception of this program, the budget has been provided to DEECA from Treasury, and funding allocated to DEECA and CFA through an annual budgeting (business planning) process conducted by a joint agency team. While this was useful in the initiation of the funding in 2017/2018, the majority of the funding now supports ongoing staff in both agencies.

CFA is actively seeking an ongoing appropriation funding transfer of \$7.352m (the 2025-26 budget for CFA) between the DEECA and the Department of Justice and Community Safety (**DJCS**) for CFA's government funded initiative to reduce bushfire risk from the 2021/22 budget announcement and the ST Program. This is to mitigate against proposed funding cuts to the ST Program by DEECA which currently receives the \$14.704m output funding and then CFA annually negotiates a proportion to deliver an agreed program of works.

The ST Statement released in 2015 was the Government's response to an inquiry into planned burning and fuel management performance targets. The ST Program funding commenced in 2017 to support implementation of the statement.

The initial funding of ST was through two 2-year pilot projects with funding provided to the then Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (**DELWP**) and to CFA through a partnership approach. DELWP and CFA developed a collaborative program of projects, which subsequently led to ongoing staff and operating programs supporting community engagement, joint agency fuel management activities, and research and knowledge application initiatives.

Ongoing funding was sought in 2021 and in the 2021-22 State Budget the 'budget announcement aiming to protect Victorians from bushfire risk' was made as a response to

the recommendations of the Inspector-General for Emergency Management Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season.

This initiative contributed to DELWP's Fire and Emergency Management output with \$339.6m over 4-years allocated to continue to fund Forest Fire Management workers and firefighters, as well make sure technology, fire towers and equipment was maintained.

Under the State Government budget announcement in 2021/22 aiming to protect Victorians from bushfire risk, 5 pillars were agreed by the Chief Fire Officer, Forest Fire Management Victoria (**FFMVic**) to reducing bushfire risk. CFA and FFMVic agreed funding of \$56.7m over 4-years and \$14.704m ongoing under pillar number 5 'Working in partnership to protect communities.

CFA - Chief Officer

4. Many of your volunteers are unhappy with the way some of the fires were managed. What are you going to do to improve it?

CFA Response:

CFA is committed to an evaluation and improvement cycle - capturing lessons, translating them into changes, and ensuring they are reflected in our capability, training and operational arrangements. An after-action review (AAR) is a structured review or debrief process for analysing an incident to help us improve our performance. It considers what was planned, what happened, why it happened and how it can be done better/differently. These are standard practice in CFA.

The 2025-26 Post Season Debrief Program is underway to gather feedback and insights from members. CFA has designed various mechanisms to gather input and is seeking to hear from all members. Mechanisms being used include:

- Facilitated AARs with fireground leaders following significant incidents
- Tailored surveys to Strike Team Leaders, Sector Commanders and Divisional Commanders
- Targeted interviews with key personnel, particularly those involved in the transfer of control to an Incident Control Centre from a fireground
- District and Region surveys and facilitated AARs for those that had significant operational activity.

To date, there have been 19 fireground AARs for significant incidents, attended by over 450 members from more than 140 brigades. The team has so far captured in excess of 2,000 observations that have formed approximately 100 insights, covering a range of topics.

In addition, CFA & FFMVIC are leading a Combined After-Action Review program across all the major bushfires at the Incident Management Team level.

Once this work is complete CFA will ensure the key findings and our intended response is shared broadly with our members.

CFA - Sustainable brigades & volunteerism

5. From VBRC 2009 “Bushfire is an intrinsic part of Victoria’s landscape, and if time dims our memory we risk repeating the mistakes of the past. We need to learn from the experiences of Black Saturday and improve the way we prepare for and respond to bushfires”

- Are agencies such as CFA better equipped, supported and enabled now in 2026 than you were in the lead up to that tragic day in 2009?

CFA Response:

This is a complex, multi-dimensional question. The risk environment continues to change rapidly, with climate-driven increases in severity/frequency of emergency events and changes in where and how people are living.

At the system level, the sectors shift to an all agencies, all hazards approach has delivered both benefits and challenges. For example, a single integrated emergency warnings platform for all agencies to leverage when seeking to alert the community in times of emergency has delivered significant benefits. Likewise, all agencies operating out of a single State Control Centre has improved co-ordination and connection.

Bushfire remains the most significant natural hazard to Victoria as demonstrated by the cyclical nature of major bushfire emergencies. The 2009 VBRC made numerous recommendations specific to the States preparedness for and response to bushfire. Subsequent policy shifts have diluted the focus on the bushfire hazard with a broadening scope to emergency management across all hazards. Changes to the fire management planning framework and Victoria’s command and control arrangements for Class 1 emergencies (that include bushfire) are notable examples of this shift that inevitably impact the States preparedness.

Responding to these challenges, CFA would welcome the committee making recommendations that strengthen the effectiveness of local fire management planning arrangements that empower brigades, communities, stakeholders and agencies to work together with a focus on the bushfire hazard to mitigate fire risk.

Likewise, CFA would welcome the committee strengthening the role that bushfire hazard specific knowledge in a local context plays within the management arrangements of bushfire planning, preparedness and leading major emergency responses.

Fuel management, community resilience and the application of a ‘shared responsibility’ policy approach in respect to bushfire preparedness and response has been highlighted as a challenge by many previous reviews and inquiries and remains so. Complex land tenures, conflicting value propositions and stated objectives (e.g. safety V’s environment) and a complex regulatory environment continue to constrain fire mitigation effectiveness and policy development.

In respect to vegetation management, CFA would welcome the committee in making recommendations that:

- Strengthening the effectiveness of CFA's powers as they relate to enforcing vegetation management standards and dealing with bushfire hazard complaints (e.g. roadside vegetation).
- Explore options to streamline environmental and cultural checks and approvals required at local and state levels associated with priority bushfire hazard reduction works.

CFA believe that an inherent connection between agricultural landowners and the fire service exists; this was once again demonstrated through the use of private units across the 2026 fires. An opportunity exists to more fulsomely partner with the agricultural sector using the shared responsibility proposition. CFA would encourage the committee to consider making recommendations to explore policy options for CFA to more effectively partner with and support agriculture and our farming communities, especially as it relates to water access, vegetation management and the coordination and use of machinery and private appliances. The successful use of high-speed disc tillage tools (or speed tillers) this season has been notable.

Similarly to the long-standing challenges associated with vegetation management and planned burning, Victoria once again experienced the consequences of vulnerable critical infrastructure. The loss of power and telecommunications had a significant impact on both fire agency operations and community. CFA would welcome any recommendations that seek to improve the resilience of Victoria's communications infrastructure; especially the Mobile and Radio network and investment that supports improved technology and connectivity on the fireground for CFA crews.

At the agency level, CFA has an ongoing focus on financial sustainability to underpin its ability to meet the increasing demands for investment in asset improvements and new services whilst not transferring unnecessary burdens to volunteers. Whilst the bushfire hazard continues to present challenges, so do other external environmental changes such as rural decline and urban sprawl which both directly challenge CFA's capability and capacity.

CFA has a large emergency response vehicle fleet and significant fire station footprint and seeks to make improvements as budget is made available. Asset condition remains an area of ongoing focus. Currently many stations are still without basic amenities and there are 802 single cab tankers in the fleet.

As knowledge and safety standards change, CFA must continue to ensure it can invest in contemporary protective clothing and equipment for volunteers and comprehensive wellbeing support services. Recent investments into the wildfire personal protective clothing, fit for purpose gloves and boots for female firefighters and improved respiratory protection are positives.

CFA continues to invest in research which is fundamental to its ability to understand changing conditions and ensure it can deploy evidence-based tactics and strategies in fire response.

CFA is a community-based volunteer emergency service and relies on a sustainable pipeline of community members willing to commit the time to protecting the life and property of others.

Volunteering Victoria's recent report¹ notes the longstanding impact the COVID pandemic has had on formal volunteering and that volunteering is becoming "more informal, more diverse, more digital, and more integrated with people's lives." CFA is working to respond to the changing needs of contemporary volunteers with deep consideration being given to a contemporary membership model and focused improvement to services across the volunteer lifecycle. It is critically important for CFA to adequately support and enable volunteers to deliver services and not overwhelm them with administrative and management responsibilities.

Fire Services Reform, implemented in July 2020, fundamentally impacted CFA, significant challenges continue to be experienced in relation to implementing the secondment arrangements, mainly in the supply and retention of important senior operational leadership roles, particularly Commanders. Since record keeping began in October 2020 CFA has been required to operate with a reduced operational workforce on average of 17.2 persons per week (a combination of ACFOs and Commanders). This average equates to a reduction of services of 11.4%. CFA is continuing to work closely with FRV to ensure implementation of the secondment arrangements are effective.

The 2025/26 fire season challenged the human resource capability and capacity. Some challenges were immediate such as suitable numbers of Incident Management personnel whilst others resulted from more systemic constraints. CFA would welcome the committee making recommendations that seek to enhance and provide an uplift to strengthen CFA's human resource capacity and capability required to support Incident Management, the management of major bushfire events and the provision of reliable and capable support to our volunteer membership, brigades and groups.

The 2025 CFA annual Bushfire Community Survey, run since 2009-10, showed 30.9 per cent of community members would wait for emergency authorities to tell them what to do and 28.6 per cent would stay until they felt threatened. The survey showed 44.4 per cent of people believed CFA is responsible for protecting them during a bushfire, and 43.8 per cent believed CFA is responsible for protecting their home. Over the last two years, the survey shows the perception of a bushfire being a threat to Victorians and their property has declined from very large to small, with 50 per cent of people not showing concern and nearly 40 per cent are not alarmed enough to warrant direct interaction with CFA. There is some evidence to suggest that for some Victorians the lessons and memory of 2009 have faded. Ongoing focus and effort is needed by CFA to inform the community of their fire risk and the practical steps people can take to prepare for fire and to calibrate community expectations of the fire service in large scale bushfire events.

¹2025 State of Volunteering Report [VV0012-VV-SOVR-Report-FINAL.pdf](#)

6. Are CFA members receiving the quantity and quality of training they request?

CFA Response:

The diverse nature of CFA's membership brings a diversity of views on the suitability of CFA's training. CFA's training of volunteers to a high level commensurate with national standards supports interoperability and safe operations.

Training includes formal courses, awareness packages, fleet/equipment inductions and skills maintenance. Training occurs in a variety of settings (brigade level and through RTO-offered courses either delivered locally or at campuses) and a variety of modes (face to face, blended, fully online). CFA's training campuses are located across the state for ease of access of members (and made available to other agencies).

The foundation of CFA's training delivery and development capability relies heavily upon a paid instructor cohort provided by FRV via the secondment arrangements. This model inherently contains some constraints that can inhibit CFA's ability to be responsive to all the needs of a volunteer workforce.

CFA has established a training pathway to support the developmental needs of members and provides guidance on the progression of qualifications required to meet the various roles within CFA. The training pathway is being implemented across the state and together with the redevelopment of the Brigade operating skills profile (under development) will better guide CFA in the determining training demands and priority courses.

CFA operates as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO, through the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority) to deliver nationally recognised training and enterprise packages to volunteers. National units of competencies are aligned to the Public Skills packages. Some members may claim that the RTO brings a level of bureaucracy to training that prevents members obtaining the skills but having highly trained volunteers supports volunteer safety and interoperability.

Starting with the AFAC peer review in 2021 CFA has had a focused program of work to enhance its training offerings. This work is ongoing, including exploration of a General Fire fighter 'on the job' training model for our class 1 and 2 brigades in rural areas that may be better suited to their needs. The Training Enhancement Program (TEP), now in its second year, includes 23 specific initiatives to improve CFA's training offering to our members.

7. What impediments exist in being able to improve the quality and meet the demand?

CFA Response:

The key impediment relates to the effects of the implementation of the Secondment Agreement between CFA and Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), which was a key feature of Fire Services Reform. As a result of Reform, impacts have been observed in relation to instructor management (a change made solely as a result of fire services reform), a revolving door of staff, limited resources and reduced access to key subject matter expertise.

Paid instructor management is a current pain point with 53 seconded instructors, required to be supervised by two (2) Assistant Chief Fire Officers (**ACFOs**) centrally located within CFA's Operational Doctrine and Training Department. These arrangements compromise the ACFO's capacity to develop programs and training policy whilst being required to act as a line manager for the scheduling, tasking and management of the instructor cohort commensurate with the needs of a decentralised training delivery model.

The effective utilisation of instructors is compromised at times due to inconsistent application of the secondment arrangements, delays in recruitment and the need to induct and endorse new instructors against the courses scheduled to be delivered and within the individual instructor skill mix to ensure compliance with Registered Training Organisation requirements.

No longer having access to a full operational workforce has inhibited CFA's ability to identify, access and engage various subject matter experts in the development of training courses and materials has become compromised, further placing at risk CFA's training quality.

| | FY 2021 | FY 2022 | FY 2023 | FY 2024 | FY 2025 |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Courses delivered | 1,869 | 1,916 | 1,997 | 2,182 | 1,669 |
| Members trained | 10,437 | 13,551 | 13,738 | 14,370 | 12,126 |

Table: Summary of number of courses delivered and members trained, by year

CFA is also constrained in enhancing the digital learning experience for our volunteer workforce by the adequacy of the current ICT software platforms and limited asset funding envelope. The current platforms provide an inefficient student management capability and sub-optimal learning experience for our members.

Fiskville Training College was the State Training College for members of the CFA. Following site tests which revealed high levels of contamination and various inquiries, on 26 March 2015, the Victorian Government announced that the Fiskville facility would be closed permanently. A redress scheme was announced in 2022. CFA no longer has a State

Training College and is hindered by a lack of accommodation and conferencing facilities with the loss of Fiskville, this has limited our ability to establish effective training delivery of enhanced firefighter and command and control programs. CFA is currently undertaking master planning at the Central Highlands Training Campus (Ballan).

8. Why is CFA dependent upon other agencies such as EMV and FRV to deliver training?

CFA Response:

The Secondment Agreement between CFA and Fire Rescue Victoria (**FRV**), which is a key feature of Fire Services Reform, sets out the role types and number of roles that CFA must source from FRV. This includes Assistant Chief Fire Officers, Commanders and – relevant to training – Instructors (53 roles in total) and Practical Area Drill (PAD) staff roles (29 in total comprising 8 PAD Supervisors and 21 PAD Operators); those who maintain and operate CFA’s network of field training grounds.

CFA is limited to the terms of the Secondment Agreement for the employment of paid instructors for firefighting training. The future growth in training delivery within the volunteer focused fire service places more emphasis on the use of volunteer instructors to meet growing demands.

CFA is seeking to strategically build and support the number of volunteer instructors who, along with the seconded instructors, who are the backbone of CFA’s training excellence. Their dedication, experience, and passion for sharing knowledge is vital to ensuring that every member, whether they are a new recruit undertaking General Firefighter training or a long-serving member advancing in Incident Management, Advanced Firefighting, or Fire Investigation—receives the highest standard of instruction. Instructors deliver training and conduct assessment in accredited and non-accredited training courses. They play a critical role in building the capability, confidence, and safety of our members.

Whilst upskilling CFA volunteers as instructors provide some benefits and assist with a local capacity being established, this strategy naturally has a threshold in respect to sustainability. Competing demands, social and economic pressures all inform and constrain a member’s ability to volunteer more time with CFA.

In relation to Incident Management Training (IMT), Emergency Management Victoria’s decision to centralise of the development and delivery of IMT training programs has impacted CFA’s ability to develop, plan and deliver programs that focus on the management of fire, build CFA command capability and provide opportunities that are suitable for volunteer member participation.

CFA has recently commenced developing its own IMT training programs to better meet the needs of a volunteer workforce with a bushfire hazard focus. The delivery of this training will utilise both volunteer and paid IMT practitioners who have a wide range of operational experience in IMTs.

CFA - Vegetation / roadside fuel management

9. Do CFA have adequate powers to require the management of vegetation on roadsides?

CFA Response:

CFA conducts planned burning along roadsides managed by both the Department of Transport and Planning (major arterial roads) and roadsides managed by Local Municipalities (Council Roads).

The management of roadsides for fire prevention purposes is specifically referred to in the CFA Act in Section 43(1), which states that:

*It shall be the **duty of every municipal council and every public authority** to take all practicable steps to prevent the occurrence of fires on and to minimise the danger of the spread of fires on or from:*

*any land vested in it or under its control or management, **and any road under its care and management***

CFA has developed roadside fire management guidelines that focus on eliminating the source of ignition but it does **not** have any power or authority to enforce these Guidelines.

Guidelines provide for different strategies to achieve fuel free areas adjacent to roadsides. Where fuel free roadsides cannot be achieved CFA Guidelines call for a slashed verge to be maintained at 10cm in height during the Fire Danger Period.

CFA would welcome a recommendation from the Committee strengthening the effectiveness of CFA's powers as they relate to enforcing vegetation management standards (e.g. roadside vegetation) and dealing with bushfire hazard complaints.

10. Are public land managers who are responsible for roads and infrastructure (such as mobile phone towers and water systems) adequately managing fuel loads on their land? If not, what powers do CFA have to ensure public safety?

CFA Response:

Anecdotally, CFA has heard that some critical infrastructure had significant vegetation and fuel loads adjacent to it that would could cause a critical outage or failure due to the intensity of heat during a wildfire. Whether this is the public land managers responsibility or the leaseholder's responsibility is not known to CFA. Roadside vegetation management remains a challenge (see response to Question 9).

While CFA actively engages with critical infrastructure operators to provide guidance on fire risk management practices, CFA has limited powers to compel land managers to manage vegetation and fire risk or comply with standards.

Considering the impacts of bushfire on critical infrastructure and the subsequent consequences of fire impacts, CFA encourages the Committee to make recommendations about strengthening CFA's powers as they relate to treating fire risk and separately, improving the resilience of Victoria's communications infrastructure; especially the Mobile and Radio network and investment that supports improved technology and connectivity on the fireground for CFA crews.

11. Why is CFA dependent upon DEECA for funding vegetation management activities? Has this quantum reduced or is it at risk of not continuing?

CFA Response:

CFA's fuel management program has grown with the successful implementation of the Safer Together program. Funding of both planning staff and operational activities comes through this program. While the program has become ongoing and operating with a similar budget for the last six years, the funding pathway has not changed and is negotiated with DEECA and provided through an annual agreement. The quantum has not reduced however progressive funding cuts to DEECA, which have also been applied to the Safer Together program, has resulted in a more constrained program overall and further cuts would pose a real risk to the CFA fuel vegetation management activities.

See also response to Questions 3 and 12.

12. Have DEECA reduced the quantum of funding to CFA through the Safer Together initiative?

- If so, is this despite the fact that DEECA now receive funding certainty from the ESVF?

CFA Response:

For the ongoing program for ST (over the period 2021-22 to 2025-26) funding has generally been allocated in roughly equal proportions between the CFA and DEECA. The quantum of funding to CFA has not yet reduced, however CFA is very concerned this may occur in future years.

CFA is actively seeking an ongoing appropriation funding transfer of \$7.352m between the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) for CFA's government funded initiative under the Safer Together (ST) Program. This is to mitigate against proposed funding cuts to the ST Program by DEECA's Forest Fire Management which currently receives the \$14.704m output funding shared with the CFA in equal proportions (\$7.352m).

See also response to Questions 3 and 11.

13. Have DEECA communicated a position in respect to the continuance of Safer Together and their ongoing partnership with CFA?

CFA Response:

See response to Questions 3, 11 and 12.

There has been no formal advice with respect to the continuance of the ongoing partnership with CFA. However, with the implementation of funding cuts within DEECA there has been an implied narrowing of the scope of partnership together with progressive staffing changes in DEECA and significant movement in roles all of which has resulted in a reduced attention and interest in collaborative approaches initiated under Safer Together. For example, DEECA made positions in the joint agency Community First program redundant. The remaining positions in this program sit in CFA. With limited positions in this subject area within DEECA, working in partnership is challenging.

14. The establishment of the Office of Bushfire Risk Management was an outcome of IGEM's review into the 2019/20 Black Summer Bushfires and a decision taken by this Government. How would you describe the effectiveness of this new body and would any changes (either previously sought by CFA or new) to the current arrangements benefit bushfire at risk communities and CFA in meeting your statutory obligations of preventing fires.

CFA Response:

The Office of Bushfire Risk Management (**OBRM**) has been established with minimal policy development beyond the IGEM inquiry. That lack of policy has led to ambiguity about the role of OBRM, for example, it is unclear whether its focus on fuel management solely (as per the Premier's letter when the office was established) or broader.

The implementation of the OBRM has also created ambiguity as it resides as a unit inside the Planning and Policy Section of DEECA. While ostensibly set up to be independent, it operates as specific policy section within a directorate and overlaps with policy development in other areas of Bushfire and Forest Services.

Recently, the unit has changed its name to the Emergency Management and Office of Bushfire Risk Management and under the Director Emergency Management and Office of Bushfire Risk Management (recently advertised position). This reflects the practical/current operation of the Office.

The OBRM was envisaged by the IGEM as a unit that provides independent advice to the Secretary of DEECA, however, the way it was created is not conducive to independence from other parts of DEECA Forest and Fire Policy Division.

OBRM was also tasked by the Premier to look at fuel management across public and private land. CFA has not seen any outcomes that support better tenure-blind fuel management or interagency operations. Responsibilities and powers as they relate to private land remain opaque.

CFA would suggest that a joined Office (possibly virtual) with people from both organisation working on solving problems and improving fuel management, would be a more appropriate construct for the OBRM.

There are two other options to replace the OBRM:

- One would be to abolish the OBRM and continue managing fuel management arrangements within the existing multi-agency governance structure in place (Bushfire Risk Mitigation Group). In practice, this has achieved much greater tangible outcomes for joint agency activities and efficiencies both prior to the establishment of OBRM and since this time.
- A second option would be to place those functions within CFA as that would have less conflict of interest as CFA is not a land manager or landowner.

In CFA's experience, supporting the work of OBRM has been time consuming for staff with less benefit and/or duplication of other interagency work activities.

The OBRM has not assisted CFA in meeting our statutory obligations, nor facilitated or enabled greater utilisation of CFA's fuel management services.

15. Reference Chapter 3 of the “Report of the Board of Inquiry into the occurrence of Bush and Grass Fires in Victoria” ordered by the Legislative Assembly in October 1977. This report provided considerable attention to roadside vegetation management. Some 50 years on, it appears these issues persist. Can CFA meet its statutory obligation to prevent fire and protect lives and property from bushfire under the current arrangements?

CFA Response:

[See response to Question 9.](#)

16. What is the status of the recommendations of IGEM review (fuel management) – why haven’t the recommendations been implemented despite the government accepting those recommendations?

CFA Response:

[CFA continues to work with DJCS and DEECA to implement the fuel management recommendations made by IGEM post the 2019/20 fires. Some of those recommendations include legislative amendments which CFA continues to advocate for, and which were due to be submitted for Bill at Cabinet in April 2026. Changes to fuel management legislation would allow greater interagency cooperation and efficiencies in planning and delivery. It would also remove ambiguity in legislation and the rationale for engagement of volunteers and other stakeholders in planned burning and insurance for members and agency staff engaged in these activities. Changes to fuel management legislation have currently been put on hold. The rationale for this pause is not clear. CFA would welcome recommencement of work to progress these changes.](#)

[The Joint Fuel Management Program \(JFMP\) is a rolling three-year plan developed between FFMVic and CFA. The JFMP supports the identification of areas requiring fuel reduction, through risk assessment processes and consultation with brigades. CFA exceeded its target in FY2024-25. CFA would welcome greater funding certainty for its JFMP-related work.](#)

[CFA’s Planned Burn Taskforce began as a pilot in 2019 with the aim of increasing capacity for carrying out planned burns. It is a mobile, volunteer workforce drawn from CFA districts across the state to support both CFA and FFMVic \(now more than 900 registered CFA volunteers across Victoria\).](#)

[The taskforce increasingly supports FFMVic burns, mainly for asset protection along the rural-urban interface.](#)

[In 2024-25 FY there were 44 Taskforce deployments contributing to 61 planned burns mostly in the state’s south-west and west \(source: CFA Annual Report 2024-25\).](#)

[The Taskforce was also used to complete planned burning preparation works which allowed local brigades to then deliver the burns themselves or in conjunction with the Taskforce.](#)

17. Changes to the Emergency Management Act made under this government established 'all hazards' emergency management planning committees. In doing so, these changes removed the statutory requirement (under CFA Act) to establish municipal and regional fire management planning committees. Have these changes improved or hindered CFA's efforts in preventing and mitigating bushfires in Victoria?

CFA Response:

Although, several bushfire committees still continue to operate in some municipalities and regions, CFA's position is that the current arrangements have shifted focus away from bushfire prevention and mitigation reducing the effectiveness of bushfire risk mitigation at the local level.

A further consequential impact from the change has been the additional time and resource commitment made by stakeholders to emergency management planning as it pertains to other types of emergencies. While this shift may have yielded positive results, it is CFA's experience that it has frequently resulted in trade-offs being made by stakeholders with time and resources being shifted away from a bushfire risk management focus.

CFA would like to see those bushfire specific committees being required and reinstated with supporting guidance. CFA would encourage the Committee to consider recommendations that seek to strengthen bushfire planning and risk management arrangements at the local level, that would support the operationalisation of stronger powers to undertake / enforce / treat unacceptable fire risks.

18. Now municipalities have a reduced role in fire prevention (as per the planning legislation changes) why do they retain other statutory responsibilities under CFA's legislation?

CFA Response:

That part of the legislation was not looked at when the changes to the planning arrangements and committee structures were introduced. It was envisaged that the newly formed emergency management committees will continue to provide a focus on bushfire prevention and mitigation.

CFA's legislation was drafted many decades ago at a time where the role of municipalities in managing / mitigating fire risk was a much higher focus than is observed today. The role and expectations of both municipalities and CFA have shifted overtime, with expectations on CFA to lead and manage fire risk increasing whilst resource constraints are inhibiting some municipalities from contributing to the levels preferred or required. These shifts are illustrated in the operation of fire management planning arrangements, roadside and vegetation management, fire trail / track maintenance, provision of resources under the emergency resourcing program and changing expectations as it pertains to relief and recovery. In the most obvious example, many municipalities are now requiring a fee payable by residents seeking a permit to burn inside the Fire Danger Period; CFA do not charge a fee for application.

The possible improvements would be to provide CFA broader powers to audit the work conducted by the LGA's or alternatively for CFA to undertake that work on behalf of LGA's. However, the second option will require shifting of resources to CFA, including increased funding.

- Should municipalities be required to issue fire permits under CFA legislation?

CFA Response:

There are many municipalities that have stopped issuing permits since introduction of the online permit system. That has increased workload for CFA officers.

CFA position is that municipalities should be issuing permits under the current model, however, CFA should be responsible to audit the permits issued by municipalities.

The alternative model would be for CFA to be resourced properly to undertake all the bushfire functions (mitigation and prevention) currently required to be undertaken by municipalities.

19. Should municipalities be required to monitor fire safety and enforce fire prevention notices?

CFA Response:

Yes, unless the roles of municipalities for fire prevention and mitigation change.

Under the current model, this arrangement should be retained. The Country Fire Authority Act 1958 gives CFA the legal authority to issue Fire Prevention Notices (FPNs), although this function is primarily delegated to local councils.

The current FPN process operates as follows:

- Primary responsibility sits with municipal fire prevention officers, who inspect properties and issue notices to private landowners requiring fuel reduction. Typically this is long grass, heaps of vegetation, prunings etc. FPN's are not typically used for the purpose of broad acre planned burning, although the legislation does not prevent them being used in this manner.
- While councils issue most notices, CFA may step in under limited circumstances, such as where a council fails to act or during complex multi-agency incidents.

CFA's powers could be strengthened by allowing it to issue FPNs under the same rules that apply to municipal councils and/or specifically for fuel management activities, in particular planned burning. With planned burning, the need for this activity would have been identified and planned by CFA staff, and CFA would have the capacity to implement the burn.

20. Is it reasonable for municipalities to undertake these functions to the satisfaction of CFA within their constrained resources (rate capping)?

CFA Response:

This question is probably more appropriate to be directed to the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and/or municipalities themselves rather than CFA.

In this context, CFA employs 1 full-time equivalent staff member (with support of other staff) whose full-time responsibility is to support Municipal Fire Prevention Officers to understand their responsibilities and how to carry out municipal functions consistently.

21. Why aren't CFA primarily responsible for administering your own legislation?

CFA Response:

CFA is primarily responsible for administering its own legislation, in line with the statutory responsibilities that the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* assigns to the Authority and roles of Chief Executive Officer and Chief Officer.

Fire Services Reform fundamentally changed the day-to-day operating arrangements with CFA however, since it precluded CFA from employing its own career firefighters (ie Assistant Chief Fire Officers and Commanders). These positions and their associated budget were transferred to Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV). CFA and FRV were required to enter into a Secondment Agreement that identified the number and type of roles that FRV would be required to supply to CFA. These roles (including ACFO's, Commanders, Instructors and PAD Staff), while working in CFA, are under the command and control of CFA's Chief Officer but remain employees of FRV.

Furthermore, the CFA and FRV also entered into Service Level Deeds of Agreement (SLDA's) which outlined particular service delivery where the agencies would provide services to the other agencies. The SLDA's were high level and required significant work to implement at the technical level and necessitated the development of instruments of delegations and authorisations, a deed of indemnity to support FRV employees performing certain functions on behalf of CFA and for CFA and FRV to agree Service Delivery Plans on a range of topics. Since 2020, seven (7) Service Delivery Plans have been developed and three (3) are still under development and negotiation.

CFA's ability to provide the required delegations is dependent on whether the power and authority resides with the Chief Officer or the Authority. Where constraints have impacted CFA's ability to delegate its powers and functions (such as fire safety regulations that apply to caravan parks), inefficiencies have been evident.

In relation to land use planning and dangerous goods, as a result of inadvertently transferring primary resources (fire safety officers) to FRV in July 2020, an interim arrangement for FRV to undertake administrative and ancillary work on behalf of the CFA was agreed between the agencies. The CFA has a quality assurance role and final sign-off because, by law, the function and liability remain with the CFA and cannot be delegated to FRV.

The Victorian Planning Provisions prevent the CFA from delegating functions and powers to FRV to process (end to end) dangerous goods applications.

CFA - Fire Service Reform impacts on CFA

22. Did the District 22 ACFO attend the Longwood fire on the 7/1/2026 soon after it started, only to depart a couple of hours later and leave volunteer firefighters staring at the worst fire they have ever seen without support and leadership to return home and rest?

CFA Response:

We are aware of concerns about a CFA Acting ACFO, and this is an interpersonal issue that we are working through. We continue to listen to our brigades.

Prior to 7 January 2026 and at the time of the incident, District 22 was significantly under-resourced in relation to senior operational leadership. For the week commencing 5 January 2026, the district was operating with an Acting ACFO and one Commander; whilst 3 Commander positions had no relief available. In the weeks leading up to 5 January, this under-resourcing was consistent, resulting in sustained operational pressure.

23. What has been the reaction from your volunteers to the actions of the District 22 ACFO?

CFA Response:

The Committee has heard firsthand from CFA members including via the 'open mic' sessions about their reflections and views towards the management of fires throughout the Northeast Region and the levels of support provided by CFA District teams. Many CFA members have raised concerns around the operation of the current secondment model and CFA's chain of command directly with the Committee.

CFA values the significant contribution of Assistant Chief Fire Officers and their Command staff who perform critical roles within CFA, directly supporting brigades and volunteer leaders with skills, knowledge and leadership that is critical to enabling success and maintaining safe systems of work. We continue to work closely with Fire Rescue Victoria on the implementation of the secondment arrangements.

24. Did you or CFA have any say in the decision to appoint the incumbent to the position of District 22 ACFO – the Officer in Charge of 73 CFA Volunteer Fire Brigades.

CFA Response:

Under the secondment agreement and associated policy, Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) holds primary responsibility for recruitment and selection into CFA positions, both on a permanent and temporary basis.

CFA considers there would be significant benefit in having a more direct role in recruitment and selection processes for FRV employees appointed to senior operational leadership positions within CFA. This would support improved alignment between role requirements and candidate capability and help ensure that appointed incumbents possess the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to effectively lead within a volunteer-based service and community-focused operating environment.

25. How would you describe the effectiveness and performance of District 22 prior to the change of leadership? Who appointed the previous ACFO in District 22?

CFA Response:

The previous Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) for District 22 was appointed prior to the implementation of Fire Services Reform and was retained in the role following 1 July 2020.

Historically, the stability of leadership provided through long-term CFA-employed ACFO appointments has been a key contributor to the effectiveness and performance of Districts, including District 22. This continuity has supported strong relationships with brigades, consistent operational leadership, and deep local knowledge.

Since Fire Services Reform, the management of the senior operational workforce, including recruitment, appointment, and development of secondees, has transitioned to Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV). As a result, CFA's ability to influence leadership continuity has diminished.

Importantly, CFA is not currently positioned to implement structured succession planning or mandate professional development pathways for personnel transitioning from Commander to ACFO roles. This limits the ability to systematically prepare and equip secondees for the unique leadership, community engagement, and volunteer management responsibilities associated with leading a CFA District.

As long-term CFA-employed leaders continue to retire, and key leadership positions are increasingly filled through secondment arrangements, often on a temporary basis, these challenges are likely to persist, with implications for consistency, capability development, and overall district performance

26. How many CFA Commander positions are allocated across the four CFA Districts that encompass the Gippsland EM region? How many of those commander positions were filled by an incumbent and available for work on the 17/2/2026 when the region was subject to a TFB.

CFA Response:

In response to widespread elevated fire risk, a total fire ban (TFB) was declared for multiple fire weather districts on Tuesday 17 February 2026, this included West & South Gippsland. The Gippsland region had been subject of numerous major bushfire emergencies throughout the summer, namely the Snowy and Wonnangatta Complexes of fire. The Gippsland element of CFA's South-East Region consists of Districts 9, 10, 11 and 27 and encompasses two fire weather districts, one of which was declared a TFB for the 17/2/26.

At this time the four CFA Districts were at a combined strength of 50% command staff, with 2 in 3 Commander positions vacant / unrelieved.

CFA Gippsland District Workforce Status (week commencing 16/2/26)

- Total positions: 18
 - ACFO: 4
 - Commanders: 14

- Status of Positions with incumbents (week commencing 16/2/26)
 - ACFO: 4 (two acting)
 - Commander: 5 (9 positions vacant / unrelieved)

Thankfully, February 17 did not see any new major fires commence in the Gippsland Region; should they have, CFA's command integrity would have been immediately tested. This level of command resourcing available across these districts is not an anomaly. Since Reform, this region has routinely experienced a high level of vacancies / non relief. The circumstances of the 25/26 fire season coupled with the command resourcing challenges has been sighted by some as being a contributing factor for workplace health and safety concerns that have led to some incumbents commencing periods of personal leave.

27. Has CFA communicated the capabilities it requires from FRV through the secondment agreement? If so, are they being met?

CFA Response:

CFA has consistently raised concerns regarding not only the capacity of resources provided by FRV, but also the capability of those resources.

Upon the commencement of reform, CFA was required to transfer 52 ACFOs and 141 Commanders to FRV. Despite no change to statutory responsibilities, the number of CFA fire brigades or volunteer members, a reduced number of command staff (45 ACFOs and 96 Commanders) was returned to CFA via the Secondment Agreement. During the operation of the current arrangements staffing levels have been adjusted and currently reflect 50 ACFOs and 108 Commanders – equating to an 18% reduction on pre-reform levels if all roles were filled at all times.

Issues with CFA operational resourcing (particularly at Commander and Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) rank) persist. These roles are provided to CFA by FRV under the Secondment Agreement and associated arrangements. Focus must continue to be on both provision of the adequate number of staff (as defined in the Secondment Agreement) and staff with the appropriate skills (as defined by the CFA Capability Statement).

Since record keeping began in October 2020, vacancy and non-relief has meant CFA has been required to operate with a further reduced operational command workforce, on average of 17.2 persons per week - a combination of ACFOs and Commanders. This equates to a 11.4% reduction in workforce.

In the week commencing Monday 5 January 2026, CFA's senior operational leader workforce was reduced from the Secondment Agreement level by 29 FTE or 18.5 % (4 ACFO and 25 Commander roles) due to vacancy and relief issues.

As FSIM has noted in numerous of its annual reports, the Secondment Agreement has driven constant, fundamental and systemic challenges. Vacancies and the 'revolving door' of command staff incumbents result in a disrupted chain of command, lack of leadership continuity, reduced management capacity, operational capability, and inhibits CFA's ability to adequately support brigades, members and stakeholders.

The CFA Capability Statement was first developed and provided to Fire Resue Victoria in June 2022 and sets out the required technical skills, behavioural and personal attributes and knowledge and experience for these positions. This is important because CFA's operating context is vastly different from that of FRV and its organisational needs vary from FRV's. The CFA Capability Statement provides a clear articulation of these requirements against what it requests FRV to supply with the appropriate numbers of staff. CFA does not have an ability to be systematically part of selection decisions nor can it undertake performance management or FRV employees (or have visibility of any actions FRV takes).

In response to CFA's concerns, CFA and FRV established a Joint Secondment Workforce Advisory Group, comprising key representatives from both agencies, to develop an action plan supporting implementation of the CFA Capability Statement. However, progress has been slower than anticipated, noting that any proposed measures to address capacity and capability must be approved through the relevant industrial processes, in line with the consult and agree provisions of the FRV/UFU Enterprise Agreement.

28. How would you describe FRV's ability to supply you with the required personnel?

CFA Response:

FRV's ability to supply the required personnel continues to present challenges for CFA. FRV is funded to deliver seconded staff regardless of whether those personnel are provided (equates to \$7.3 million worth of service not provided to CFA in the FY 2024-25).

The implementation of the secondment arrangements has remained complex, with ongoing issues relating to both vacancy rates and the provision of relief, as outlined in response to Question 1. CFA's operational command workforce (Commanders and ACFO's) is acutely affected by these challenges; the supply of resources to other functions such as training ground staff has been less consequential.

These challenges indicate that FRV is not consistently able to supply personnel at the levels required to meet CFA's operational needs.

Since record keeping began in October 2020:

- CFA has been required to operate with a reduced operational command workforce on average of 17.2 persons per week (a combination of ACFOs and Commanders). This average equates to a reduction of services of 11.4%.

In practical terms, this reduced capacity has a direct impact on service delivery, particularly in relation to the level and continuity of support provided to brigades and volunteers. Gaps in resourcing can limit leadership presence, reduce engagement, place additional pressure on existing personnel and volunteers who are asked to "do more" which negatively impacts on overall operational effectiveness.

Updated demographic analysis of the seconded workforce undertaken by CFA in May 2025 (and presented to CFA-FRV Heads of Agency Steering Committee) shows there is a critical risk in the workforce. Familiarity with CFA operations will diminish as former CFA personnel retire and the pipeline to provide operational staff with the capabilities needed to take up these significant community-based leadership roles will be a significant challenge.

- 27% of the seconded workforce is aged 60+ (an increase of 3% since the August 2023 analytics) and 20% is between 55 and 59 years (a decrease of 4% since the August 2023 analytics). However, it is reasonable to expect that 47% of the current seconded workforce will retire over the next 5 years
- 46% of substantive incumbents in CFA seconded ACFO roles are likely to retire or transition to retirement in the next five years.
- 45% of substantive incumbents in CFA seconded Commander roles are likely to retire or transition to retirement in the next five years.
- 47% of substantive incumbents in CFA seconded Instructor roles are likely to retire or transition to retirement in the next five years.
- 62% of PAD Staff are 55 or above, with a 38% being aged 60+ and 50% of current seconded PAD Supervisors aged 60+.

Considering the challenges presented by the demographics of the current workforce and the ongoing resource deficiencies, CFA don't expect any significant improvements to emanate from the current arrangements.

29. Do you believe FRV genuinely seek to provide you with the capabilities CFA require?

CFA Response:

CFA considers that FRV is committed to maintaining the secondment model and, through established governance forums, demonstrates an ongoing willingness to engage in discussions regarding capability and capacity.

CFA seeks to do everything within its remit to support the success of these arrangements. A number of established forums continue to operate between CFA and FRV, most notably the CFA–FRV Heads of Agency Steering Committee. This Committee met weekly for an extended period and now meets on a fortnightly basis. Operational capacity remains a standing agenda item, supported by a CFA developed dashboard that serves as the agreed source of truth. These meetings enable regular identification of critical gaps.

In addition, the Heads of Agency Steering Committee has established a Joint Secondment Workforce Advisory Group (JSWAG). This group has been tasked with developing a coordinated workplan of short, medium, and long-term actions aimed at improving FRV's ability to meet CFA's workforce capability and capacity requirements.

Notwithstanding these arrangements, there are inherent structural challenges within the secondment model. Both CFA and FRV have senior operational roles, including ACFO and Commander positions, that require resourcing. This can create competing priorities in workforce allocation and may limit FRV's ability to consistently meet CFA's requirements.

There is also a perception at times that, given differing operating environments and limited familiarity with the CFA volunteer-based model, FRV's approach may place greater emphasis on directing how services should operate, rather than fully incorporating CFA's operational needs and context.

Further, the ongoing and sustained issues of vacancy and non-relief raise concerns about financial gains to FRV as a direct result unfilled positions in CFA.

While CFA acknowledges FRV's engagement and intent to make the arrangements work, these factors collectively contribute to a view that the current model does not yet consistently deliver the level of capability required to fully support CFA's operational needs.

30. Why don't CFA train and develop your seconded (middle management) workforce – this would be part of any organisation's priorities – to develop their middle / senior management cohort and would it deliver better outcomes if you were responsible?

CFA Response:

Senior operational leaders (operational middle management) are employees of Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), and as such, FRV retains primary responsibility for the recruitment, professional development, and ongoing capability of this workforce. FRV also holds the budget for these positions, including associated on-costs, which further reinforces its role in managing workforce development.

While this limits CFA's ability to directly train and develop the seconded middle and senior management cohort in a formal or mandated way, CFA recognises its responsibility to support these personnel to be effective in the CFA operating environment. In particular, the transition into CFA, leading a volunteer-based organisation with unique community, governance, and operational characteristics, requires targeted induction and support.

In that regard, CFA is undertaking work to strengthen induction arrangements, improve onboarding, and provide clearer guidance and support frameworks to assist senior operational leaders to adapt to the specific requirements of their roles working in CFA.

Notwithstanding these efforts, the inability for CFA to directly influence structured succession planning and professional development pathways for this cohort represents a limitation within the current model. There is a strong view that CFA lead development, particularly in preparing personnel for working with volunteers, managing complex HR issues, and for progression from Commander to ACFO roles within the CFA context, would support improved capability, leadership continuity, and ultimately better outcomes for brigades and communities.

Whilst CFA is currently not positioned to directly develop its senior operational leaders, and does not have the appropriate funding mechanisms to do so, it is actively exploring opportunities to establish development pipelines that support the growth and capability of personnel operating within the CFA environment.

CFA sees significant value in enabling the organisation to directly train and develop its operational middle management cohort, particularly given the markedly different operating environments between CFA and FRV. In this context, CFA is best placed to design and deliver development that is tailored to its volunteer-based service model, ensuring leaders are appropriately prepared for the unique demands of the role.

31. Are paid CFA instructors (seconded from FRV) delivering the same quantity of training sessions and courses as CFA instructors did prior to reform?

CFA Response:

Since 2023 CFA has developed the configuration and structure of courses which means a direct comparison of delivery volumes pre- and post-reform does not provide a like-for-like view.

However, when we examine delivery at a proportional level, specifically the split between career (instructors seconded from FRV) and volunteer instructors, it is apparent that there has been an increase in the percentage of courses delivered by volunteers:

2019:

- Career instructors delivered 907 courses (**61%**)
- Volunteer instructors delivered 563 courses (**39%**)

2025:

- Career instructors delivered 798 courses (**51%**)
- Volunteer instructors delivered 768 courses (**49%**)

This represents a **10% shift**, indicating an increased reliance on volunteer instructors to deliver training to CFA members.

In summary, while overall course configurations limit direct comparison of absolute volumes, the proportional data demonstrates that more is being asked of volunteers who are now delivering a greater share of training relative to career instructors compared to pre-Reform arrangements.

32. What feedback are you receiving from CFA volunteers in respect to the impacts of reform & support they are receiving from your senior leaders?

CFA Response:

CFA acknowledges the significant contribution of many senior operational leaders who continue to support the organisation, its brigades, and volunteers with a high level of professionalism and commitment, often under challenging circumstances.

Feedback from CFA volunteers indicates that the impacts of Fire Services Reform continue to be experienced, particularly in relation to leadership continuity, capability, and the level of support provided by senior operational personnel.

Volunteers consistently report challenges associated with senior operational roles being vacant and/or non relieved or subject to frequent change. This has resulted in a number of practical impacts, including reduced continuity in support and follow-through on requests, limited presence of senior leaders within districts, and a perceived inconsistency in capability and experience. The “revolving door” nature of some positions has made it difficult to establish trusted relationships and maintain momentum on local support initiatives.

From an operational perspective, volunteers have also identified that gaps in leadership, or variability in capability, can affect the timeliness and quality of support provided on key operational matters, as well as broader engagement with brigades and communities.

Additionally, there is an emerging concern that, over time, the connection, trust, and reliability historically built through long-standing relationships with CFA's station-based staff will diminish. The limited opportunity for CFA to develop and maintain strong engagement with FRV station-based personnel, who represent the future pipeline of senior operational leaders, will result in a reduced understanding of the CFA operating environment, including its volunteer model and community context. If unaddressed, this has the potential to further impact continuity, capability, and the strength of relationships between leaders and the volunteers they support.

33. There were media reports at the time of the Clarkfield fire of CFA cancelling FRV fire trucks from responding to a fire that impacted a caravan storage facility? Was this true? Are issues of one fire service ignoring the capability / availability of the other fire service in dispatch and response still an issue?

CFA Response:

Both FRV and CFA attended a grass fire near Clarkfield that impacted a caravan storage facility. CFA is not aware of any response issues that negatively impacted the management of this fire.

In general terms, CFA is at times made aware of instances where the dispatch of resources can be improved. CFA and FRV continue to work together to implement a complementary fire service model across Victoria which includes the timely and effective dispatch of the nearest and most appropriate resources.

34. Fire Services Reform was intended to provide for a complimentary fire service to Victorians' – how do examples of the closest fire stations not being dispatched to emergency calls because of the agency badge reflect a complimentary fire service?

CFA Response:

CFA supports the intent of Government policy – a complementary fire service so that all Victorians can rely on the best fire and emergency service response, regardless of where they live. CFA works with FRV and other partners (including 000Vic) to seek to ensure that the nearest and most appropriate appliances are dispatched to all incidents. CFA's mission is to protect life and property in the Country Area of Victoria, engaging actively with the community to support the prevention of fire and with partners in managing emergency incident response.