

**The Value of CFA Volunteers**

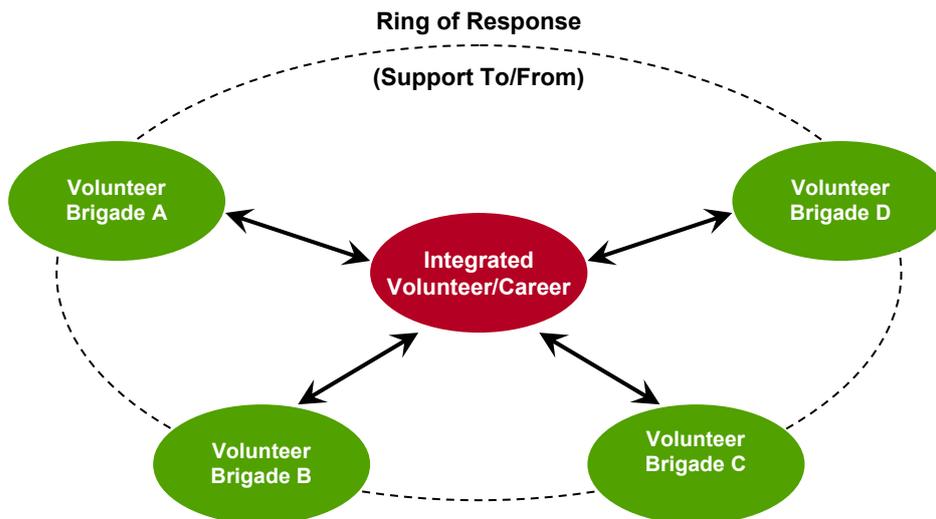
In 2001, the value of CFA volunteers, on a *service delivery replacement* basis, was conservatively valued at \$480million per annum<sup>1</sup> - a figure equal to approximately three times the actual CFA budget of the day. A decade later, the Jones Inquiry<sup>2</sup> valued CFA volunteer contributions as at least \$840 million annually: also a conservative figure recognising that much intangible value, derived through volunteer engagement in their communities, could not be given a dollar value.

Forward to 2017, it is not unreasonable to estimate that the replacement valuation of CFA volunteers is well beyond \$1billion per annum.

The government appears intent on severely undermining, if not dismantling, this community asset, not on the basis of any demonstrable improvements to service delivery but, seemingly, purely for political ideology.

**Integrated Model of Service Delivery**

**Figure: Integrated model of service delivery – “ring of response”** providing cost effective complementary support to all components. (Source: CFA)



CFA provides its emergency management services through a comprehensive network of stations manned by a mix of volunteers and career personnel. Where appropriate, first response service delivery is provided from stations crewed solely by volunteers. As service demands increase in an area, to ensure Service Delivery Standards are maintained, CFA supplements volunteer manning with paid career personnel – resulting in an integrated volunteer/career station servicing that locale.

Thus, the CFA service delivery model creates the flexibility to:

<sup>1</sup> Hourigan, M. (2001). *The value to Victoria of volunteer contributions to Country Fire Authority services*. Consultant’s report, CFA, Burwood East.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, D. (2011). *The Independent Inquiry into Effect of Arrangements on Country Fire Authority Volunteers*. Report of inquiry by retired County Court Judge, the Honourable David Jones prepared for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

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- Provide resources tailored to the specific needs of local communities
- Adjust resources and services incrementally as community needs and circumstances change
- Deploy resources from across a district, region, or the whole state to meet the requirements of the range and magnitude of incidents it attends

Moreover, the creation of a strategic network of integrated career/volunteer brigades in highly developed areas provides a nucleus from which support can be provided to surrounding fully volunteer brigades. CFA has been successfully applying this model in outer metropolitan Melbourne, in greater Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, in the Latrobe Valley, and in major provincial centres. Integrated service delivery provides a central hub from which career personnel can provide support to, and receive support from, surrounding volunteer brigades – a “*ring of response*” (see Figure).

The model is one of the means by which CFA provides support to extend the viability of fully volunteer brigades in areas of growth, thereby avoiding the more costly option - both in terms of recurrent and capital expenditure - of the *untimely* introduction of additional career personnel in growth areas. Frequently, staffing issues in areas of growth relate only to the ability to continue to provide adequate daytime coverage, and often, only Monday to Friday, when volunteers are out of the area due to their jobs. However, without the ability to employ part-time or day-shift firefighters, a transition to career firefighters requires that a 24/7 roster must be instituted. A 24/7 roster requires the employment of five people to deliver one firefighter on-shift. Suddenly, a minimum of 21 staff are required to cover a *minimum-manning roster*. Moreover, capital expenditure in the form of a new station will be required to provide for 24/7 manning.

A second major benefit of the *Integrated Service Delivery Model* is the capacity to deploy resources beyond the immediate area to provide *surge resources* throughout the state as the need arises: seasonally, for example campaign bushfires during summer, or in response to infrequent perturbation events such as the Longford Gas Explosion or the Hazelwood mine fire.

The success of the model greatly depends on maintaining the attractiveness of volunteering as a choice for the use of one’s discretionary time.

The government’s proposal is to dismantle this proven service delivery model by the handover of CFA’s 35 integrated stations to the proposed Fire and Rescue Victoria (FRV). Serious consideration needs to be given to the consequences of the removal of the integrated model:

- *Loss of attractiveness to volunteer* in areas subsumed into the FRV and the resultant loss of surge capacity
- *Loss of attractiveness to volunteer* in other areas of potential growth, anywhere in the state, due to future threat of being subsumed into FRV – loss of on-going local capacity and further loss of potential surge capacity
- *Boundary and Inter-jurisdictional Issues*: the government’s proposal creates fragmented pockets of service delivery with vastly increased inter-service boundaries creating ever increasing cross border inter-jurisdictional issues
- *Transition issues with growth and development* : CFA’s Integrated Service Delivery Model has been developed and improved over many years to cater

for the plethora of service delivery issues (from planning through prevention, response and recovery) that arise as areas transition from rural hamlets, into small townships and beyond due to population growth and commercial and industrial development. The government's proposal is to entirely dismantle the existing proven tools for managing this process.

- *Additional funding of a growing bureaucracy:* the government's proposal includes a growing bureaucracy to monitor inter-jurisdictional matters and on-going boundary transition issues thereby diverting funding to desks and chairs rather than being directed to front-line fire and emergency services delivery.

### **Career and Volunteer Personnel**

Within CFA, the distinction between a career firefighter and a volunteer firefighter is that the former is paid and the latter is not. OHS legislation, CFA's training regime and its operational protocols require the same competencies of any person engaged in a defined activity regardless of their status as paid or unpaid, male or female, part-time or full-time.

There have been suggestions by some participants and commentators in the sector that employment status should be a determinant of capacity to participate in fire and rescue service delivery, indeed, that part-time participation not be allowed.

If such is to be the case, a full consideration of that proposal should be given, including:

- The basis/rationale for holding the position that part-time participation is not suitable as part of a service delivery model. Is it that part-time participation is an indicator of lesser capability for, commitment or dedication to the job?
- The definition of *full-time* versus *part-time*, including consideration of employees' participation in more than one concurrent occupation. Does participation in more than one concurrent occupation for reward mean that a firefighter is *part-time as a firefighter*? Are current firefighters holding second jobs or simultaneously running their own businesses *part-time* or *full-time*?
- Implications in terms of indirect discrimination against females and/or sole-parents from participation in fire service delivery and the flow-on implications for other emergency services that presently allow part-time participation by females and others.
- Implications for future road rescue service delivery by the SES.

### **Conclusion**

The government's proposed legislation appears to have no merit in terms of improved service delivery, merely shifting and adding costs. However, it dismantles a proven service delivery model that has the capacity to deal with on-going growth and development throughout Victoria, directly or indirectly establishes discriminatory barriers to employment (particularly against women and sole parents) and appears to establish a foundation for further undermining of volunteerism in the broader emergency management sector.