



VFBV

VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

## 2 Minute Briefings March 2022

The 2 Minute Briefings are a quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from recent Joint Committee discussions between CFA and VFBV.

They are intended to update members on key issues that have recently been discussed. Effort is made to include any related items that may have been progressed out of session or through other avenues that are related to each committee's subject matter. Priority is given to topics where recent progress has been made. Topics where no progress has been made or where there are differences of opinion are sometimes included to ensure members are aware of VFBV efforts in continuing to advocate for progress or outcomes.

Joint Committees are formal committees between CFA and VFBV made up of VFBV delegates appointed by VFBV State Council, and CFA management representatives appointed by CFA. They are a critical loop in our consultative structures. They endeavour to work collaboratively and cooperatively on issues but may also be required to escalate issues where resolution or common ground cannot be found - requiring executive attention.

# Joint Communications & Technology Committee

2 Minute Briefing



March 2022

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## CYBER SECURITY POLICY

The Committee have discussed the CFA Cyber Risk Mitigation Project, with delegates requesting further discussion on potential volunteer impacts prior to the proposed changes being made to the logon protocols for CFA Members Online.

While supportive of some of the benefits to increased security, such as protecting confidentiality of information assets like personal and health information, providing integrity by controlling access to information in line with best practices and enabling availability of data and information for emergency services in a secure and managed form, some of the changes may present some practical issues. Changes to multi factor authentication (the use of security questions), greater control of log on password usage (specific mix of characters and formats), regular password change requirements (every 60-90 days) and the use of a verification code system to a phone (SMS pin notification) need to be properly tested to understand what impacts this may have on regional and remote based IT systems where internet access is not always reliable.

Delegates have requested broader consultation and testing before the introduction of these changes to better understand real world usage and reliability of systems to cater for volunteers who often need to use their own devices and equipment.

## MEMBERS PORTAL FEEDBACK

Delegates have provided initial feedback on recent changes to the members online website including changes to the search functionality, an opt-in subscription service to target roles, a semi-regular reminder to update your member's details and an option asking whether you would like a CFA email address to name just a few points of discussion. Delegates have also discussed issues identified when setting up the CFA members email address in Microsoft Outlook.

CFA have confirmed the intent to provide better member access to members online and to provide greater information for volunteers through the online portal and welcomed the feedback provided.

Delegates have also raised the issue of inconsistency with logins, with some applications using the firstname.lastname@members log in, whilst others require you to enter your volunteer number@cfa instead. Members have also highlighted the ability to have role-based access or notifications would greatly assist newly elected officers of brigades and groups. Additional feedback complimented the use of the recent documents as a good feature however, noted difficulty in searching for them when they disappear from the recent documents page.

Document accuracy and versioning continues to be a challenge, with delegates highlighting that some information is circulated from CFA via email and then takes some time before it is available, with conflicting versions sometimes causing confusion. All members are encouraged to provide feedback on the online portal changes via a link on Members on Line Home page (under feedback link at the very bottom of the page) or via <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/help/members-online-how-to-guides/contact-members-online>

## COMMAND TALK GROUPS

Back in November 2020 CFA reported to the Committee about the introduction of RMR Admin and Command Talk groups however at the time they were not available for access by FFMVic radios. CFA has advised that DELWP have now completed the work to reflash all their fire vehicles with the new channel plan. This means the use of the RMR Admin and Command Talkgroups is available between CFA and FFMVic.

An update with the new RMR sites is also available for the Uniden scanners via:

<https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/operational-communication-equipment/uniden-scanners/update-to-uniden-scanner-rmr-sites-channels>

# Joint Community Safety Committee

2 Minute Briefing



March 2022

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## NEW AUSTRALIAN FIRE DANGER RATING SYSTEM UPDATE

The committee have reviewed progress of Australia's new Fire Danger Rating System planned to be introduced nationally in mid 2022. Australia's current Fire Danger Ratings are nearly 70 years old and are applied and displayed differently in each state. This can lead to confusion about what the ratings mean particularly in the border regions and holiday destinations. Eight years ago, agencies came together to begin developing a national system of Fire Danger Ratings that would be consistent across all jurisdictions in appearance and messaging. The 2019/20 'Black Summer' fires added urgency to the need to complete this project, and the resulting Commonwealth Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements recommended this work be expedited.

The new national system will have four fire danger rating categories (instead of the current six) and will be intended to have clear and concise meaning for each of the categories so that they are easy to be understood and incorporated into people's fire plans. The science behind the new ratings has also been completely overhauled, replacing the current reliance on just the grass and forest indexes, and moving to a new system that predicts fire behaviour across eight broad fuel types. (Grasslands, buttongrass, savanna, spinifex, mallee heath, shrubland, forest and pine.)

The replacement of the existing road side Fire Danger Rating signs is intended to commence mid-year with work currently being undertaken in consultation with brigades to establish which locations provide the best visibility for motorists as well as ensuring the safety of members who update manual signs. VFBV delegates to the committee are continuing to call for more automatic signs to replace the manual signs, with the manual signs requiring volunteers to manually update them often alongside busy roads which present significant safety risks. Further information on the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System can be found at <https://www.afac.com.au/initiative/afdrs/afdrs-overview>

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Committee members are providing input on the development of the CFA Community Engagement framework public facing document. Work has been ongoing on developing a framework for how CFA can better engage with communities on matters of community safety. This framework is designed to give a consistent approach while also acknowledging that our communities are diverse, with each facing a different risk, as well as the importance of drawing on local knowledge and experience from within each individual community. A vital part of this development has been the acknowledgement of shared responsibility – where community safety is an equal partnership between CFA and community members.

Feedback is also being sought from the public, community groups, leaders, government bodies, businesses etc. on how they want to be engaged by CFA and what they see their role is in relation to fire preparedness. We will provide updates on the development of this as it progresses.

## SCHOOLS IN FIRE COUNTRY

The Schools in Fire Country (SiFC) project is a multi-agency collaboration to design and develop a bushfire education program for upper primary school children following recommendations from numerous public enquiries. The program has been developed using over ten years of research and inspired by some of the programs already existing in the school system.

Schools in Fire Country aims to best understand how students most effectively learn about fire and other natural disasters. The program will be designed as a series of modules which are to be delivered in classrooms but will place emphasis on the importance of local knowledge and using local experts. The first trial school is underway but, if members are aware of a school that works closely with its local brigade in Fire Safety and Community Engagement, they can nominate by talking to your Community Safety Manager in your District Office.

# Joint Equipment and Infrastructure Committee

2 Minute Briefing



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Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## TANKER RADIATOR TRIALS

The Committee has continued to investigate reports from some Districts of late model tankers overheating due to the radiators getting clogged with debris. While CFA agreed to redesign the radiator shrouding early last year to alleviate the problem, recent reports from some parts of the state suggest the issue remains. DMO's are now trialling a few possible solutions, including a trial on some 3.4C tankers where a piping system has been installed with air flow nozzles that allow brigades to blow out and clear the radiators with compressed air either on the fire ground or when the tanker is returning to station.

Delegates will continue to monitor and have also requested CFA consider the location and type of radiator as other options continue to be investigated. Brigades are encouraged to report any overheating to the DMO's so that the issue can be tracked. Drivers of late model tankers are also requested to remain vigilant in monitoring the temperature when involved in fireground operations, especially in conditions with a lot of ground debris that may potentially block radiators.

## BA PRESCRIPTION INSERTS

More than 400 Breathing Apparatus (BA) wearers across the state have registered for a prescription spectacle insert during the roll out of the MSA G1 Breathing Apparatus.

Members with the BA competency who wear prescription glasses may benefit from a new spectacle insert, which allows them to wear prescription glasses without compromising the fit and seal of their BA mask, with a headset update on how to get the glasses kit installed as an insert on the headsets now complete. Members who require a spectacle insert will need to contact the district office and then visit a participating OPSM fitment outlet nearest to them to ensure the correct prescription lens is fitted. This may differ from their current prescription as the focal length between the eye and the spectacle kit will be different to typical prescription glasses.

The issue and fitments of the inserts will be a District based responsibility, but it is up to the individual to visit an approved optometrist who will manufacture and send them out to the individual.

## QR CODE DMO FAULT REPORTING

Members will remember in our June 2021 Edition we reported on an initiative developed by the DMO workshops for a mechanical fault reporting system via QR code. We can now report that after extensive testing the QR code reporting system is now operating across all district workshops. Improvements to the system are being made as issues arise.

The QR code makes it easier for members to report any non-urgent mechanical faults by simply scanning the code with a mobile device and fill out the simple online form with details of the fault and contact details. The report is then sent to the closest DMO workshop so the work can be scheduled and rectified. The QR code reporting is not intended to replace the existing mechanical fault reporting that brigades are used to, but rather as another option for members.

## NEXT GENERATION PUMPER

CFA has confirmed that it has agreed to establish a Next Generation Pumper working party to scope the capabilities and performance requirements of the next generation pumper. Members will remember the extensive consultation and volunteer input into the current Type 3 Scania Pumpers and it is hoped that volunteer input into the next generation pumper will mirror the last successful pumper build program. While the initial target will be to replace up to 50 NSW backed medium pumpers that are approaching end of life, the working party will also consider the needs of the future. The working party will be made up of volunteers and subject matter experts who will first develop a role statement then oversee the program as it progresses. We will keep you updated as this exciting project progresses

# Joint HR, Welfare and OH&S Committee

2 Minute Briefing



March 2022

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## COMPLAINT RESOLUTION PROCESS

The Committee have discussed the progress of the improvements being made to CFA's complaint resolution process and the roll out of the CFA Behavioural Standards and new Complaint Resolution Guidelines.

During discussions with delegates, CFA has clarified that the case management systems initially explored by CFA were so financially prohibitive, that case management would now fall under the remit of the current HR Business Partners. Discussions also revealed that HR Business Partners (HRBPs) would be acting as the facilitators, providing the facilitated sessions of the Behaviour Standards to the 61 "High Priority" brigades identified by CFA.

There are currently seven HR Business Partners with one embedded across each of the five CFA Regions and two who are situated at Headquarters in Burwood, plus one senior manager. Delegates have expressed concern at the level of responsibility now falling to the HR Business Partners in the very sensitive and difficult area of complaints management and have sought clarification on how workload is being monitored. Delegates have also pointed out that there could be perceptions of bias considering the range of matters that a HR Business Partner is expected to manage locally within their allocated Region. Concerns have also been raised of the possible conflict of interests with HRBPs conducting initial mediation and then potentially launching investigations while simultaneously acting as case managers. Given the important role HRBP's will play, Delegates have requested a review of to ensure HRBP's training and skills are upskilled and supported given the increased responsibilities within the role. VFBV has requested ongoing updates as this work continues.

## REPRESENTATION FOR VOLUNTEERS CALLED TO CFA HEARINGS

VFBV have been advocating ardently for volunteers called to CFA Hearings to be afforded formal CFA support to help them in the hearing process and maintain CFA's duty of care to both the respondent as well as the organisation. At present volunteers must either represent themselves or find and potentially fund legal or other representation. And while VFBV can support and assist members navigate the process, the CFA Act limits our capacity in matters of discipline. For many, the hearing process can be difficult to understand, daunting, and some don't feel confident in defending themselves, or feel confident that they will get a fair hearing. VFBV acknowledge that engaging legal representation is not necessarily the best option at times, as a CFA hearing is not a court of law and the matters argued are not often of a legal nature but of a procedural nature. However, the committee agreed it was important for volunteers to be equally assisted in understanding and preparing for the process of a CFA Hearing in a less combative and more restorative environment. After long advocacy and following repeated requests of delegates over many years, CFA has now agreed to form a dedicated working group with VFBV delegates to investigate and identify further advocacy options best suited to volunteers and the CFA Hearing process. VFBV commend the decision of the new CFA leadership to finally acknowledge this issue and agree to address this long-standing inequity, and we look forward to further discussions.

## EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS & COMPANIES CONTRACTED BY CFA

The committee discussed the unique nature of emergency response volunteering and community based fire brigades that do not always present as the usual 'workplace' environment that many external companies engaged by CFA might expect. Delegates have requested that prior to CFA contracting the services of any company, that these companies should undergo a formal induction and endorsement process to be made aware of the unique environment and the need to be flexible and more agile in their approach. The importance of allowing Brigades and Groups to contribute to the process should not be underestimated, and the need to adapt their service delivery to suit the local environment. In most cases, volunteers will give up their time and make themselves available if required, but external consultants and companies sometimes fail to grasp that this often means operating outside the typical nine-to-five business day environment, and timelines need to be flexible and account for other circumstances and competing priorities to accommodate volunteer needs.

# Joint Operations Committee

2 Minute Briefing



March 2022

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## LOCAL RESPONSE DATA PROJECT

The Committee have discussed CFA's Local Response Plan project which has been reviewed and updated with a name change to Local Response Data (LRD) and incorporates a more user-friendly approach with the inclusion of Avenza Mapping software. In the past local response plans were produced by brigades with support from the local group, district, and other emergency services with the goal to enhance bushfire or grassfire operational planning, preparedness and response. The new format LRD is not intended to replace the response plan, but rather support and inform them by providing information and mapping that will enhance the capability and knowledge of the incident controller. Avenza mapping is a mobile phone compatible mapping based product, that will allow a member to easily access information and store it on the phone for use at an incident. The working group are researching the opportunity to have maps also available at staging area's via an easily to use QR code that will improve fireground briefings.

## MEDICAL RESPONSE

Delegates have long advocated for CFA's emergency medical response capability to support those areas where Ambulance Victoria need enhanced support for priority life threatening incidents. The committee continues to advocate for those Brigades that have written to VFBV requesting our support for regional areas. The Committee is monitoring ambulance response times and advocates for the program to be targeted to areas in most need and where good brigade capability exists. The strength of CFA's medical response program has been the close cooperation and collaboration between CFA and Ambulance Victoria, which has seen a strong synergy and partnership develop with the Ambulance Victoria Community Emergency Response Teams. VFBV will continue to support these discussions.

## BREATHING APPARATUS STRATEGY

Delegates are calling on CFA to refresh and modernise its BA strategy and has requested CFA consult and communicate its strategy to the broader membership. Since Fire Service Reform shifted most of the CFA owned BA vans across to Fire Rescue Victoria in 2020, the need to revise and update CFA's BA strategy is critical.

Thanks to the generosity of Victorians and the wider community over the Summer of 2019/20, the CFA Donations Trust has allocated donated funds to purchase an additional 200 BA sets (400 cylinders) and additional associated gear. The new equipment is in the process of being distributed across the State as it becomes available, with some delays to the procurement caused by COVID-19. Delegates believe this should be the impetus to initiate more formal and robust discussions around a planned structured state-wide BA strategy that involves volunteers, brigades, groups, regions and districts. VFBV has requested consultation commence as soon as possible and looks forward to contributing to the discussion.

## HAZARDOUS TREE ASSESSOR PILOT

VFBV enrolled 4 volunteer subject matter experts to undergo the Hazardous Tree Assessor Pilot program late last year with the support of CFA. Reports back from the delegates who attended the training at Mt Macedon were positive and generally complimentary of the training. Each provided valuable and constructive feedback on the program. The program was developed with the assistance of DEWLP trainers who undertake tree assessing across the state all year round and not just during the fire danger period. There are some concerns that CFA's aspirational target for qualified tree assessors may be a bit ambitious with committee members believing that something as important as hazardous tree assessing is more about quality than quantity. Discussion continues about how to ensure that qualified members are able to continually maintain their skills outside of the fire danger period and what the district endorsement process will look like, including ensuring the awareness training available to the wider membership continues to adequately prepare and protect members for this critical risk.

# Joint Training Committee

2 Minute Briefing



March 2022

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## TRAINER & ASSESSOR DEVELOPMENT

Volunteer representatives have again advocated for our peers at the recent Joint Training Committee, expressing increased concern and frustration over the inconsistent approach to the recognition, training and communication of new and experienced volunteer trainer and assessors (VTA's). VFBV is aware that many VTA's have withdrawn from training and assessing for CFA because of continued lack of communication regarding qualifications and frustration over access to training material handovers and resources. CFA have accepted these concerns and committed to work with regions and districts to ensure that we have a consistent and fair process across the state when it comes to our trusted and relied upon VTA's. VFBV and CFA are also pleased to report that 18 VTA's across multiple districts have been accepted to participate in a dual-diploma course in Vocational Education and Training and/or Training Design and Development. These courses are fully funded as part of a state-wide initiative to upskill and build capacity within our VTA cohort.

VFBV is also happy to report that CFA has recently enacted upon a formal request to provide professional development opportunities to VTA's, with more than a dozen resource materials recently added into LMS. There is an Educator Professional Development tab under Catalogues, which include webinars and pre-recorded videos. Although these recently added materials don't cover all aspects and are digital only, it is a good start and progression to further professional development opportunities for TA's. As part of the additional development opportunities, CFA has also taken suggestions from the Committee to ensure all professional development undertaken via the LMS will be saved within the system, resulting in members not being required to separately log it as part of their resumes. We encourage all VTA's to provide feedback to CFA on these new opportunities. Regional and district Learning & Development teams are made aware of these updates as they occur and should be providing this information out to all volunteer trainer and assessors.

## LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS) UPDATES

Delegates have recently requested additional changes within the Learning Management System (LMS) based on feedback from brigade users. Thank-you to all members that have submitted feedback and suggestions.

The intention of the changes is to make the system more user friendly and minimising the requirements for brigades to continually contact District Offices. One of these improvements includes the ability for brigade and group supervisors to change the priority of a member's self-nomination when approving the nomination. VFBV has also requested the ability for members to have the opportunity to provide times that would best suit the member to conduct the course i.e., normal business hours or weekends, leading to courses being planned and programmed by Districts when it suits the majority of members waiting for the course. VFBV understand that changes in LMS can take some time and will continue to work with CFA to improve the system.

## STRUCTURAL FIREFIGHTER

In a good news story for delegates the new proposed Structure Firefighter course which underwent drafting and consultative scoping in 2019 is finally stepping closer to reality after two-years of extensive advocacy by VFBV to pilot and resource the initiative. CFA have reported that South East Region has offered to conduct flexible, block style piloting of the new proposed Structure Firefighter course. South East Region has confirmed that both courses are fully subscribed. It is still intended that North-East Region will pilot the gap training which focus on bridging the gap between Search and Rescue and Structure Firefighting as well as other ancillary equipment including thermal imaging camera operation. VFBV representatives are looking forward to consolidating the feedback from the pilot courses and ensuring that improvements are made to satisfy the end-users, before the program is released to all districts.

# Joint Volunteerism Committee

2 Minute Briefing



March 2022

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

## VOLUNTEER NUMBERS AND RESIGNATIONS

Delegates continue to raise concerns with the sudden decrease in volunteer numbers over the last few years, noting the impacts of government reforms, CFA leadership churn, pandemic mandates, and HR issues all contributing. VFBV continues to flag the significant impact on surge capacity for state-wide emergencies such as the Black Saturday Fires of '09 and the Black Summer Bushfires of '19/20. Delegates are requesting CFA establish focussed programs that utilise available data to actively promote programs that increase the retention rates amongst members, while also acknowledging the value of state-wide respect and recruitment programs. The Committee continues to review data from exit surveys and utilise VFBV's Welfare and Efficiency Survey to review trends and issues.

The committee has requested CFA review the flexible volunteering project in particular, and consider a state-wide media campaign like that run for the Army Reserves, to strengthen recruitment and promote the Volunteer Recruitment Hub. Delegates have cautioned that recruitment alone is not a silver bullet, and focus must also be on retention to ensure that volunteers are encouraged to stay. Key areas of focus suggested have been a reduction in administrative burdens, volunteer respect and professional development opportunities to assist Brigade officers upskill their HR management skills. CFA representatives have confirmed that the CEO and Chief Officer support a focus on retention and delegates look forward to contributing to this work in collaboration with CFA.

## YOUTH CADETS

Delegates are pleased with the progression and collaborative approach CFA is taking to develop a pilot program for 16/17 year old's. The aim of the program is to increase participation and retention of 16/17 year old's and encourage junior members to continue to progress to senior membership. Parents and guardians of these members have had the opportunity to opt out of the program which commenced at the end of 2021 and is planned to conclude June 2022. The working group has been developing modules around flexible learning around mental health, adapting to change, FEM, Vegetation Management, community engagement along with advice from delegates regarding practical aspects, visits to field training grounds and possible site visits. Brigades are encouraged to support any young members participating in this pilot program. Once completed a review will be conducted to review how the new program affected retention.

## NEM 2019-20 BUSHFIRES

Delegates have continued to monitor the progress of the National Emergency Medal nominations that are being sent to Canberra. Due to the extensive number of medals for the 19/20 Bushfires, nominations have been sent to the Australian Honours Secretariat in batches of 500 with Districts that were most impacted from the fires to be awarded first, followed by successive districts. A working group with Regional Business Managers, VFBV and Headquarters staff has been established to investigate best practice for award ceremonies, particularly with learnings from the '09 NEM presentations. With limited funding available, ceremonies are likely to be region based which will make for challenging logistics. The medal and clasps (for those already awarded the medal) maybe presented by the Governor-General, Governor, MP's, CFA Board Members, CEO, CO or DCO where available. Delegates are seeking further clarification for the attachment of 19/20 Bushfires clasp to members who already hold the medal.

## BRIGADE MANAGEMENT MANUAL FEEDBACK

CFA are currently reviewing the brigade management manual together with delegates to ensure that it remains a comprehensive, relevant and up to date manual that is available to members. Any feedback is greatly appreciated, and members should contact your State Councillor, District Council or Committee member with any suggestions. Feedback can also be sent to Mark Dryden via [m.dryden@vfbv.com.au](mailto:m.dryden@vfbv.com.au)