



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

Address: 9/24 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East, 3151
 Email: vfbv@vfbv.com.au
 Telephone: 9886 1141
 Chief Executive Officer: Andrew Ford

Post: PO Box 453, Mt Waverley, 3149
 Website: www.vfbv.com.au
 Fax: 9886 1618
 State President: Nev Jones AFSM



WA ACTS ON CANCER LAW

Western Australia has just introduced presumptive legislation to give firefighters fairer and simpler cancer compensation.

The Bill before the WA Parliament does not match the current standard met by Queensland and South Australia, where volunteers and staff are treated equally, but it is well ahead of the out-of-date and discriminatory Tasmanian legislation being considered as a model for a possible Victorian Bill.

The WA legislation lists the same cancers and years of service requirements that appear in other States' legislation, and is backdated to 13 November 2013, the date WA's legislation for career staff took effect.

However, the WA legislation also includes an additional eligibility requirement that only applies to volunteers, who must have at least five years' volunteer service where they have attended an average of at least five hazardous fires per year, where hazardous fires include building, vehicle or rubbish fires.

In Victoria, CFA volunteers are still waiting, with unanswered questions about whether the proposed Victorian legislation will treat career and volunteer firefighters equally, and whether it will be retrospective, providing cover for volunteers who have already been diagnosed with cancer.

VFBV continues to press this issue with the Government and MPs. Let your local MPs know this issue is important to all volunteers.

CFA VOLUNTEERS AND COMMUNITY MAKE A STAND

By Andrew Ford, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

As we go to press, CFA is poised at a potential turning point in its history.

We have staged a successful rally, with all political parties invited to be represented, where 3,500 volunteers heard words of support from the Prime Minister and the Victorian Leader of the Opposition, and there was extended applause from the crowd for Victorian Minister for the Emergency Services, Jane Garrett, but the issue remains unresolved.

We face the prospect of an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement between CFA and the United Firefighters' Union that will mean the progressive dismantling of CFA as a volunteer and community based, fully integrated service.

And while Cabinet has delayed a final decision, the

Premier's comments still suggest he is forging ahead regardless of our concerns, to the exclusion of volunteers' opinions or the consultation and involvement in decision making guaranteed by the recognition of the provisions of the CFA Volunteer Charter in the CFA Act.

We have written to the Premier, Deputy Premier, Minister and every member of Cabinet, urging them to meet with us and understand our concerns before decisions are made.

To make matters worse, Fair Work Australia has rejected VFBV's application to be heard on behalf of volunteers; our letter to FWA is available on our website, and makes the point that "the proposed EBA contains a significant number of clauses which affect and impact CFA volun-

teers and related organisation and operation of CFA."

Lined up against the objectionable parts of the UFU's proposed Enterprise Bargaining Agreement is the unified opinion of volunteers, CFA senior managers, CFA's Chief Officer and CEO, the CFA Board and Minister for Emergency Services Jane Garrett.

The CFA Board has reaffirmed its stance against the union's log of claims, publishing a list of 14 threshold issues, and saying they would:

- Remove or diminish the ability of the Chief Officer to allocate and deploy resources flexibly and with agility
- Require agreement or provide veto to UFU over CFA management decision
- Restrict or negatively impact on volunteers and BASOs.
- Be discriminatory

The United Firefighters Union has persistently denied that the proposed EBA will affect volunteers, but that does not match up with our reading of the document, CFA's detailed responses to the union's claims – as published for all members on the CFA website – and Minister Garrett's published comment that the UFU's demands are "over the top, unaffordable and compromise community safety".

Both the CFA Board and VFBV are still pressing for meaningful discussion with the State Government, and volunteers have taken to the streets to show their support for the Minister who has clearly supported us and the communities we volunteered to protect.

We cannot afford to back down on this issue.

The marginalisation and progressive destruction of urban volunteerism set off by this EBA would mean Victoria loses its world renowned surge capacity to fight simultaneous large bushfires and long duration fires whilst maintaining fire and emergency services to local communities.

We have no interest in nor argument with the paid firefighters negotiating hard for pay increases and those aspects of the EBA that deal with legitimate employment conditions of individual paid employees such as leave and rosters. Our only wish is that those matters be resolved as quickly as possible and that the government provide additional funding to CFA to cover the full costs of these increases.



Our interest is the future of the volunteer and community based CFA, the future of CFA volunteerism and the protection of our communities.

These will be testing times but we must remember not to make this debate a personal one, and at all times we need to respect one another as volunteers and paid members of CFA who work well together today and must continue to work well together tomorrow for the benefit of the Victorian community.

Volunteers need to remain ready to escalate action publicly if the government's decision making process looks like delivering an unfair or foolish outcome.

In the meantime, members should continue actively publicising our concerns at every opportunity you have and activate all of your community networks and continue writing your concerns to MPs and decision makers.

At a national level, the collective body of volunteer firefighter associations is mobilising and keenly watching a problem developing in Victoria that has serious flow on implications in each state. In addition, our 250,000 brother and sister fire volunteers, along with SES volunteers, have a direct and keen conviction to pursue Federal Legislation that protects and respects volunteers. This has been a priority for some time and the time to pursue this with vigour has never been better than now, particularly given that the message has now resonated right up to Prime Minister level. We will be actively seeking to talk to all sides of Federal politics to encourage and obtain their active support for this fundamental issue and volunteer right.

VFBV is working hard as the voice of volunteers, you can now add volume to that voice, by contacting local MPs and local media with your concerns. Every volunteer's voice deserves to be heard, and the State's decision makers must hear it.



The Fiskville Inquiry's final report includes 31 recommendations and 125 findings, covering the management of hazards at the site, future safety measures, remediation of the site, the health consequences, and the effects on those directly exposed and others including nearby landholders.

VFBV fully cooperated and supported the Inquiry with detailed written submissions and more than an hour of evidence.

The issues we presented to the Parliamentary Committee began with the paramount concern of the safety of our members and ongoing support to any members who have been exposed in the past.

From the beginning, VFBV had pressed for expert, independent, transparent and accountable analysis of decisions, and the Parliamentary Committee's Fiskville Inquiry represented the opportunity to ensure decisions, messages and treatment are based on facts, established independently by experts, in a properly transparent process.

VFBV also pressed for immediate government action to fill the gap in training capacity left by Fiskville's closure. Just as being safe in training is paramount, there is

FISKVILLE INQUIRY

a huge risk to firefighters when they are confronted with real life situations if they haven't had access to appropriate real-to-life training.

Over the years, Fiskville provided hot fire training and the full range of state level and specialised skills in incident management, incident leadership, operational decision making and real-to-life operational exercises.

The Inquiry has called for ongoing support measures for those affected, and VFBV continues to press for the urgent introduction of sufficient training capacity to replace Fiskville and meet CFA's needs, and for the sector to set and support clear water standards based on expert opinion, for all agencies – something that has been lacking.

Around 3,500 CFA volunteers and supporters attended a rally, organised by VFBV, where they later assembled on the stairs of Parliament House. Volunteers attended from all parts of the State in a show of support.

More details on pages 7, 8 and 9 in this edition of Fire Wise.

Survey: register now

The 2016 VFBV Volunteer Welfare & Efficiency Survey will open on 15 July. CFA volunteers can register online now at www.vfbv.com.au/cfa or visit the vfbv website to find the link.

We are also hosting a version of the survey for other Victorian emergency volunteers, who can register at www.vfbv.com.au/vcf and from this year interstate fire volunteers can register at www.vfbv.com.au/cavfa

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare & Efficiency Survey is an annual snapshot of volunteer opinion, which includes 33 questions on issues chosen by volunteers. Last year a record 2,500 volunteers took part. Your comments are confidential, but the results go straight to the decision makers.

There's more information at www.vfbv.com.au or talk to your VFBV State Councillor.

AFFILIATION DUE NOW

Renewal notices for your Brigade/Group's VFBV Affiliation and Brigade's VFBV Volunteer Welfare Fund subscription are with your Secretary now, with a due date of 30 June, 2016.

VFBV's representation of CFA volunteers continues to win growing approval and support, with a record 94% of Brigades affiliating in 2015/16. We also strongly encourage Brigades to subscribe to the VFBV Welfare Fund in the interests of supporting your members in times of personal hardship. See the Member Services area of the VFBV website www.vfbv.com.au

THE LATEST NEWS

Get the latest in our email newsletter or VFBV's popular Two Minute Briefing from the VFBV/CFA Joint Committees. Register at www.vfbv.com.au - click on the VFBV Newsletter box.

Join the discussion on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/cfavol; follow on Twitter www.twitter.com/vfbv or Instagram @volunteer_fire_brigades_vic

VFBV MULTI-AGENCY YOUTH NETWORK

VFBV is making great progress with our Youth Network.

On the back of a very successful CFA Youth Forum on 21 May over 60 young people from all across Victoria have signed on to join the VFBV Multi Agency Youth Network. The link below has been forwarded to all District Council executives for circulation. Please pass this link to any young CFA volunteers, or young volunteers from other agencies, who might be interested.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/vfbvyouth>

Champions have been identified in 10 Districts so far. If there is someone in your District who would do a great job of being the young volunteers' connection with District Council and source of experienced CFA and VFBV knowhow, please encourage them to contact their District Council executive or Chris Fryer at 9886 1141 or c.fryer@vfbv.com.au