



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

STATEMENT

23 June 2022

VOLUNTEERS WELCOME RELEASE OF INDEPENDENT REVIEW

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) welcomes today's release of the independent external review of culture and issues management conducted by Dr Helen Szoke AO and Allen+Clarke Consulting.

VFBV believes the commissioning and release by CFA of this review provides a watershed moment for not only the Country Fire Authority, but for other partner agencies across the emergency services sector.

We welcome the findings and support all ten recommendations.

You can't fix what you can't see, and after many years of VFBV being the canary in the coalmine on these issues, our hope is that the stories and experiences of all the courageous volunteers and staff who contributed to this review will be the catalyst for positive change.

CFA's acknowledgment and apology to those who have experienced negative workplace culture and behaviours that have caused harm is welcomed and represents an important milestone in CFA's accountability and change journey.

As is clear throughout the report, VFBV has taken an active role in the review, and has supported Dr Szoke and her team throughout.

Our vision is for CFA to be the exemplar of healthy, safe and respectful workplaces across the fire sector. VFBV accepts its leadership role to support and contribute to this work and we thank and acknowledge not only those members who bravely contributed to this and previous reviews, but all those members who model and exemplify our shared values of safety, teamwork, respect and integrity every day of every week, and act as a beacon for all to follow.

The review recognises that culture is led from the top, nurtured in the middle and supported by all.

Having discussed these issues with CFA Chair Greg Wilson, CEO Natalie MacDonald and Chief Officer Jason Heffernan, we admire their commitment and determination in commissioning the review and committing to releasing it in full and implementing all its recommendations.

The test will now be how effectively they are supported across the organisation and across the sector to ensure real change is not only achieved but is long lasting.

And while we are cautiously optimistic that CFA will use this review as the catalyst to address these long standing and related issues, they will need the support of government, stakeholders and the sector as a whole to ensure this work is joined up, resourced, and transparent.

This review gives CFA a solid baseline and framework to strengthen and support the vital goal of promoting diversity and ensuring all CFA members feel safe and have access to robust systems of accountability. As CFA volunteers, we want to be part of a fire service where all members are encouraged to speak up about the importance of a safe and respectful workplace, and one that walk's the walk.

VFBV will remain vigilant by contributing to the next phases of the implementation journey and will also monitor progress and efforts to independently verify that members receive the support they require. We will also seek to ensure that CFA does in fact implement improvements to complaint systems and we will continue to advocate for systems that are victim centred, trauma informed and embedded with the principles of equity, natural justice and procedural fairness.

We are seeking a collaborative approach and are requesting CFA pursue improvements in partnership with volunteers.

CFA members, volunteers and staff spend their lives and careers protecting the safety of their communities and putting their fellow Victorians ahead of themselves. They deserve no stone to be left unturned when it comes to- ensuring they themselves are protected and have safe and respectful workplaces.

The release of this report is an important step forward and one that all CFA and VFBV members take together.



About VFBV: VFBV is established under the Country Fire Authority Act and is the peak body for CFA Volunteers in Victoria. VFBV works tirelessly to represent, advocate and support CFA volunteers to the CFA Board and management, governments, ministers, members of parliament, councils, instrumentalities, business and the public. Our vision is for ***Strong Volunteerism, Embraced to Build Community Resilience for a Safer Victoria.***

Media: Quotes may be attributed to VFBV CEO, Adam Barnett on behalf of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.