



**VFBV** | VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

# **VFBV** **SUBMISSION**

Strong Volunteerism, Embraced to Build Community Resilience for a Safer Victoria.

**Prepared for**

**Fire District Review Panel  
Proposed Risk Assessment Methodology**

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# Foreword

Dear Fire District Review Panel,

VFBV welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on your **Risk Assessment Methodology** discussion paper.

This submission covers topics we feel are of relevance and interest to your discussion paper and work ahead.

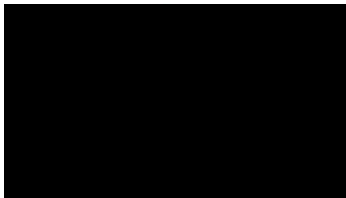
Through-out this submission, we are raising a number of topics to address areas where we feel there may be some underlying assumptions that deserve testing and to assist the Panel with some background context and knowledge from a volunteer perspective.

VFBV on behalf of CFA volunteers have an interest in your consideration of any matters that impact on Victoria's ability to maintain and build a strong volunteer-based service model for the future.

Including any arrangements that have the potential to impact on the shared responsibility model that VFBV contends is so critical to public safety and community resilience and are critical outworking's from some of the work you will do.

We would welcome the opportunity to clarify, provide supplemental information or provide context on topics that may arise during the course of your work and are happy to assist in any way.

Sincerely,



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# About VFBV

## Strong Volunteerism, Embraced to Build Community Resilience for a Safer Victoria.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) is the CFA Volunteer association and peak body established under the Victorian Country Fire Authority Act (CFA Act) to specifically represent CFA Volunteers and ensure there is meaningful consultation with the elected representatives of Volunteers on all matters which may impact upon them.

More generally, under the CFA Volunteer Charter that is enshrined in Section 6 of the CFA Act, VFBV is recognised as the association representing all CFA volunteers, providing for their general representation to the CFA Board and management and to governments, ministers, members of parliament, councils, instrumentalities, business and the public.

VFBV is not a trades union, and our history predates CFA, with our predecessor associations being formed back in 1885. We are the peak body for CFA Volunteers and operate in the spirit of mutual respect and goodwill to work in harmony and consultation together with CFA and the State of Victoria to resolve any differences of opinion which may arise.

Whilst independent of the CFA, VFBV works closely with CFA and other key stakeholders to engage volunteers and develop policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of



volunteers to provide CFA services to the community.

VFBV also represents Coast Guard brigades in Victoria and has close working relationships with other emergency service volunteer associations across Victoria and Australia.

VFBV and volunteer fire brigade associations in all states of Australia work together on issues of common interest and/or national relevance through the Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA).

VFBV is an organisation made up of the CFA volunteers it represents.

Through a state-wide network of District Councils and elected volunteer representatives, VFBV maintains direct links with grass roots volunteers over their issues, needs and concerns.

# CFA Volunteers and the commitment they bring to the protection of the Victorian community remain the core strength of CFA.

## Strong Governance

The VFBV Board meets with the CFA Board as the peak forum for strategic consultation on matters impacting on volunteers whether policy development, volunteer welfare, volunteer support, equipment and infrastructure, volunteer development or planning for CFA's future.

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## Effective Partnerships

VFBV works in partnership with the State Government, Emergency Management Victoria, CFA Board and Management, Members of Parliament, official inquiries, municipal councils and instrumentalities, business and the public to proactively shape the future of emergency management. This is achieved through day-to-day practical work in VFBV/CFA Joint Committees, through the Victorian Ministerial level Volunteer Consultative Forum, and in working to ensure positive, practical results from reviews. VFBV is strictly non-party political and works with all parties, MPs, Senators and candidates.

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## Peak Body Knowledge

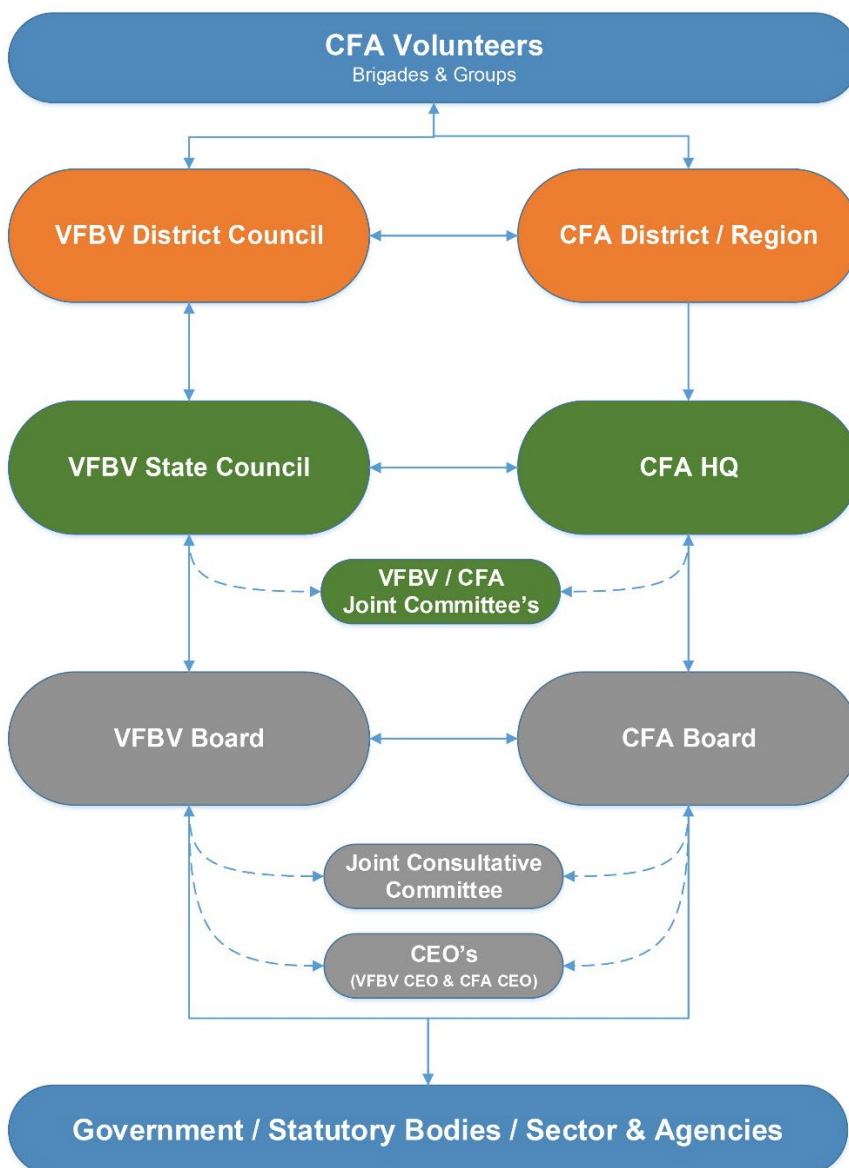
Given its organisational background, expert knowledge, access to local information and depth of experience in matters affecting volunteers and the provision of a volunteer-based service model, VFBV is best placed to provide advice on matters affecting volunteers. VFBV facilitates numerous regular state and local consultation forums and engagement activities to ensure that the views of volunteers are known and represented.

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## Safer Communities

VFBV seeks to promote and share with CFA a commitment to a community-based volunteer fire and emergency service which delivers a safer Victoria.

## Consultative Pathways



# CFA and VFBV

## **VFBV is independent from CFA yet at the same time is an important part of CFA's foundation and future success.**

CFA is the community-based brigades that form it. CFA management and staff support brigades by providing the framework, governance, leadership and systems to coordinate, support and empower this network of community-based CFA brigades to deliver a remarkable and world envied service to the community.

VFBV is an integral mechanism for enabling CFA to harness the leadership, knowledge and experience of volunteers and to engage volunteers in decision-making about matters that affect their welfare and efficiency. In an organisation such as CFA, genuine engagement with volunteers is vital not only to improve service outcomes but to maintain volunteer interest and their ongoing contribution.

Robust, meaningful, respectful, and honest communication and consultation is essential.

VFBV and CFA work hard together to maintain a good and collaborative relationship. This does not mean that CFA and VFBV always agree, nor need to agree, but the constructive and close relationship is fundamental to ensuring CFA volunteers views are known and considered well in CFA decision making.

Formal VFBV/CFA consultative processes and VFBV's volunteer engagement networks are also an essential ingredient for CFA engaging

and informing CFA volunteers. The relationship and processes are two way and focused on sustaining and strengthening CFA for the benefit of communities.

A good relationship is the foundation for CFA and VFBV to work through strategic challenges and opportunities constructively.

Often VFBV and CFA share the same frustration because not all issues can be managed within the CFA's sphere of influence.

Sometimes these shared frustrations manifest as a tension between CFA and VFBV when in fact the blockers to progress are externally caused or just plain difficult to resolve. CFA and VFBV have worked hard to significantly improve consultative effort and to build a robust, respectful and mutually beneficial relationship.

VFBV and CFA do have to deal with hard and sensitive issues, sometimes with quite different viewpoints, however the enormous amount of positive work and constructive advancement driven by the partnership between VFBV and CFA is the most valuable and rewarding effort.

CFA is an incredible organisation and the good work done by both volunteers and paid staff at all levels is something we are very proud of.





This is the volunteer fire fighter. An “organisation person” if ever there was one, for without the organisation provided by the CFA the volunteer would not be the force in the defence of their community that they are today. But, more important, without them the CFA would not have achieved its present standing.

In the fully rounded description they cannot be seen apart, for each has helped in the evolution of the other. Without this united force it would be the people of Victoria who would be the losers.

*Adapted from ‘Victoria’s volunteers against fire’ a 1973 Victorian Government publication.*

# CFA Volunteers

**CFA (Country Fire Authority) is a volunteer and community-based fire and emergency services organisation. It helps protect 3.3 million Victorians, and more than one million homes and properties across the state.**

The CFA is a statutory authority and has a nine member Board appointed by the Minister for Emergency Services. There are approximately 55,000 CFA volunteers.

CFA volunteers work at all levels of emergency response, from frontline crews, through experienced volunteers in specialist and support roles, to the highest levels of senior incident management and command roles.

CFA volunteers are among the best firefighters in the world. Every day they put their communities first, from highly complex bushfires to specialist response, road accident rescue and structural firefighting in highly urbanised areas.

They are well trained, well exercised and are sought after across the country for their knowledge and experience. They are true professionals in every sense of the word, only as volunteers they do it without pay.

All recent inquiries and commissions have recognised the fundamental importance of the current volunteer arrangements. The need for trained, experienced volunteers is growing. Already one of the most wildfire prone areas in the world, Victoria faces the twin challenges of a rapidly growing population and increased urbanisation within



an expanding metropolitan Melbourne and regional cities.

CFA volunteers across the state, and a large portion of these coming from outer metropolitan Melbourne, give Victoria its most important asset in providing the very large surge capacity required to respond early and quickly to large scale bushfires and other major emergencies. This depth of numbers of qualified volunteers means that Victoria can sustain its response over days, weeks and even months as demonstrated by last season's bushfires as well as in past years.

# Risk Methodology & Paradigm

**VFBV asserts that the assessment of risk must be much more holistic than narrowly focusing on built up environment risk models that bias response and suppression activities, and downplay prevention, reduction, mitigation, community education and recovery.**

As the Panel have correctly identified in your discussion paper, assessment of risk is complex.

VFBV asserts that a hybrid approach that takes into account quantitative and qualitative inputs is required, and these models must be flexible, transparent and evidence based.

As the Panel may have already discovered, the availability of accurate data and data that is able to be compared when it comes to assessing not only risk, but the effectiveness of fire service activities is very limiting.

These limitations are clearly documented and evidenced in previous reviews, and most recently outlined in the Fire Services Implementation Monitors year one annual report and quarterly updates.

Response data collected by CFA and FRV is not comparable. Each agency uses different standards, different definitions and the collection of data is in VFBV's view over simplistic and biased towards the FRV model of service delivery.

In simple terms, response data is not comparing apples and apples, and not even apples and oranges. VFBV cautions against an over reliance on inaccurate data, that only represents a small subset of the spectrum of prevention/response and recovery activities

of the fire services and data that is biased towards only one model of fire service delivery and ignores equally important public safety outcomes.

It is critical that the Panel is comparing like with like.

Response time statistics will be covered in more detail further in this submission.

Central to assessing community needs is transparency so that the community can be informed of likely costs of the various treatments in order for a value for money proposition being made.

The involvement of local council early in the deliberative process will also be critically important in order to assess the cultural impacts of proposed changes to a community and the possible impacts on their wider emergency management planning and practices.

## **EARLY ASSUMPTIONS**

Having regard to the fact that this is the Panel's first iteration of its early thinking, and given some of the brief descriptors around some of the narrative, volunteers have expressed considerable concern around some of the perceived 'early assumptions'.

# Risk Methodology & Paradigm

VFBV acknowledges that these assumptions are not always directly spelled out, but we feel it important to raise the concerns that have been raised with us to assist with further iterations of your methodology and general narrative.

Volunteers have expressed to us that it can be perceived that the narrative suggests;

- There is a service difference between structural response to the built-up environment provided between CFA and FRV.

VFBV asserts no such evidence exists.

While each agency uses a different service delivery model, VFBV asserts there is no evidence of loss outcomes being any different.

- The assumption that higher risk automatically means a case for increasing the FRV boundary.

VFBV asserts that this is fundamentally flawed assumption and would be based on limited analysis of risk factors and service delivery outcomes.

- The perception that the Panel is only interested in increasing FRV boundaries, demonstrated by the panels second technical schematic diagram contained in Appendix B.

VFBV asserts the legislation places no such emphasis, and it is equally possible for risk analysis and service delivery analysis to make the case that a CFA response is more efficient or effective and more appropriate to address the risk in areas currently covered by FRV boundaries.

- Too strong an emphasis on response activities only. This ignores the critical interplay between prevention and mitigation activities that have a direct bearing on service demand and fire safety outcomes.
- An over emphasis on local service delivery, ignoring the critical impacts this has on peak load capacity for major emergencies and disasters.

## **NARRATIVE**

Volunteers have expressed concern to us that some of the language used in the discussion paper is narrow and infers that the role of the panel is to simply assess risk, identify changes and then recommend additions to the Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) fire district boundaries.

Our contention would be it is equally possible for the Panel to make recommendations that areas currently covered by the FRV district boundaries need to be contracted and

# Risk Methodology & Paradigm

converted to CFA serviced areas as part of the Country Area of Victoria.

And while it is not stated, there is the perception that higher risk must mean a greater need for FRV. VFBV would caution against such assumptions, and believes such an assumption would not be supported by objective and evidence based data.

It is VFBV's contention that the provision of objective and evidence based data on service delivery outcomes will clearly show (and have shown) that the service delivery outcomes from both agencies are equally comparable. And while FRV data has a propensity to emphasise response times for the first arriving appliance, this data is deeply flawed and ignores that risk and risk mitigation must be weighed against a whole range of factors, with "initial response" only one measurement.

Furthermore, the myth around greater reliability of paid staff ignores the fact that industrial outcomes can have significant impacts on if crews are allowed to respond because of crewing numbers, appliances may have been taken offline or temporarily decommissioned, or the larger response areas of paid brigades increases risks where multiple and concurrent events are occurring.

CFA routinely outperforms FRV on fuel reduction and mitigation activities, preparation for emergencies and the building of community resilience, public safety

education campaigns, and the routine use of surge capacity to deal with multiple and concurrent incidents. CFA weight of attack also benefits considerably from the surge capacity available to CFA not only in personnel but number and diversity of appliances and density of fire stations.

The quarterly reports by the Fire Services Implementation Monitor clearly demonstrate some of these factors.

## **COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

VFBV urges the panel to explore why the FRV service model drives such a significant increase in false alarms.

False alarms are the single largest category of incidents that FRV attends and was mirrored by the old MFB model.

The FRV 2020/21 Annual Report shows FRV responded to 25,350 false alarms compared to just 11,495 fires and explosions.

VFBV asserts this is directly related to the differences between a CFA shared responsibility delivery model that use local residents and builds prevention, mitigation and resilience back into the community through engagement and public education vs FRV's response-only model.

The Panel should also be aware of the flow-on impact this increase on false alarms has on surrounding brigades, and risks to the

# Risk Methodology & Paradigm

general public by excessive trips of emergency vehicles travelling under emergency conditions to false calls.

## FUEL REDUCTION

VFBV has consistently supported recommendations to increase the annual target for planned burning on public and private land and fully supports brigades being heavily involved in planned burn and fuel reduction activities.

Where public land adjoins residentially developed communities fuel reduction measures should be undertaken with the sole and specific objective of affording maximum protection to that community.

Volunteers are of the strong belief that a significant increase in planned burning is necessary to reduce the impact of bushfire on lives, property and community infrastructure and is just one example of the risk mitigation activities that they perform routinely.

Because of the land tenure arrangements in Victoria, VFBV advocates for the need for tenure-blind planned burn planning, as well as the importance of treating private property in addition to public/crown land. Fires do not respect public/private boundaries.

Whilst the impact of fire in any particular community may in some cases be transmitted from public land, the continued propagation

of fire within a particular community often occurs from either vegetation within the community, predominately on private land and from ember attack resulting from these and other urban fuels (house to house or structure to structure).

We submit that any analysis of fire risk must also consider the issue of fuel reduction on private land also - to address the principle source of fire spread from uncontrolled fire in the urban rural interface.

The Panel should seek to undertake an analysis of how both CFA and FRV addresses and contributes to fuel reduction burning and planning, and the consequent reduction in risk these practices have.

VFBV asserts that the CFA model provides for much greater cooperation and contribution to fuel reduction activities on the urban/rural interface.

## Latrobe West Boundary Example

Just prior to the July 1, 2020 go-live date of the Governments Fire Services Reform legislation, the Government introduced a Police and Emergency Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 that made further changes to the CFA/FRV boundaries, outside of the Government's commitment to use the District Review Panel process as contemplated in their legislation.

# Risk Methodology & Paradigm

One of these significant changes was to unilaterally expand the FRV boundary surrounding the Latrobe West brigade.

There was no risk assessment, modelling or data analysis conducted to justify the proposed changes or explain the revised area. The boundary was simply expanded based on an 8 minute response time boundary sought by the UFU based on road network modelling.

No other CFA boundaries have ever been drawn based solely on road network modelling, and this represented a radical departure from current practice.

Only considering a response boundary based solely on road network modelling and an eight-minute response is seriously flawed and counter to external reports and findings on the appropriateness of relying solely on time-based response measures. In March 2015, the

Victorian Auditor-General completed his audit of Emergency Service Response Times and concluded:

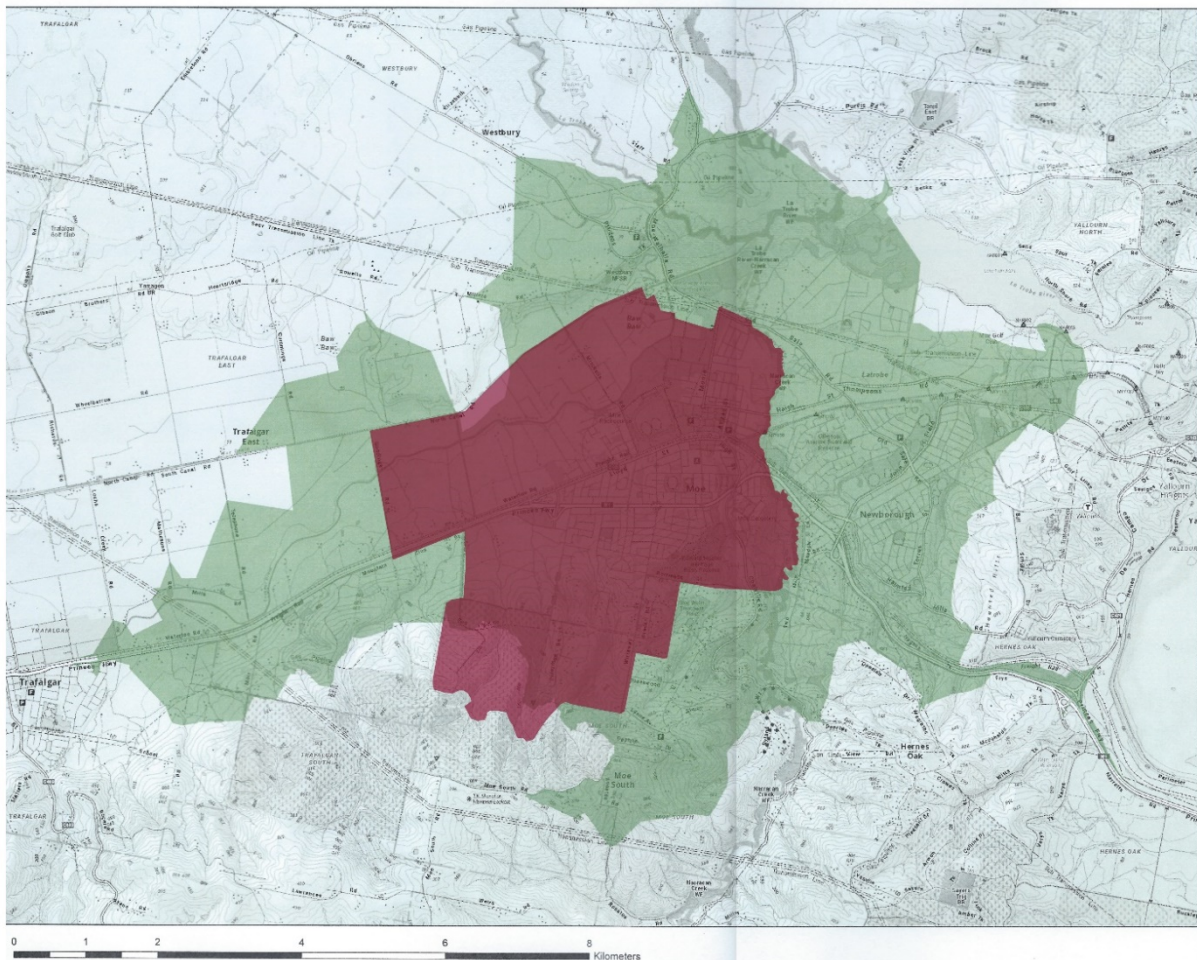
*“Targets for the number of minutes to arrive are outdated or not based on evidence. Measures are often narrowly defined and exclude significant proportions of emergency response activity. Data quality is not assured in a number of instances, and Victoria Police does not measure its response times at all.”*

**Page vii, Victorian Auditor-General’s Report – Emergency Service Response Times.**

The following image has been produced by VFBV to graphically demonstrate the expansion of area transferred to FRV. The red area represents the old CFA primary area, with the green area showing the impact of the expanded area transferred.

# Risk Methodology & Paradigm

## LATROBE WEST



VFBV submits that the current FRV vehicle typology and crew mix for the career only FRV Latrobe West location is inappropriate for large sections of the rural interface area encompassed in the changed boundary, and is contrary to all current fire service risk modelling and response planning.

For example, within the old CFA Trafalgar East area annexed from the Country Area of Victoria are 51 residential properties that are located within 150 meters of significant vegetation, and listed on the Victorian Fire Risk Register with a bushfire risk rating of Extreme or Very High.



# Risk Methodology & Paradigm

The two brigades most significantly impacted by the changes were Trafalgar and Westbury CFA Fire Brigades, and each had established an impressive Service Delivery Standard record, with both achieving 100% SDS in the year before the change.

Further, in many of those areas transferred to FRV, the CFA volunteer brigade is closer and able to respond in a more timely manner. Likewise, the volunteer brigades' tankers are the more appropriate fire appliance due to the lack of reticulated water in the area and the local road network consisting of bridges and dirt roads.

Both Trafalgar and Westbury Fire Brigades contain significant local knowledge and relationships in their own communities that aid their emergency response to emergencies arising in their local communities.

These areas rely on significant volunteer surge capacity from neighbouring brigades, and this capacity has now been put at risk.

For volunteers, their primary area is their connection and responsibility to their local community and the source of pride and responsibility. Changing their role from primary to support only, as happens when you convert a CFA area to a FRV area - will have a significant impact and will also result in fracturing their small community as responsibilities get split up.

Human nature is if you take away someone's primary motivation to do something - this has a significant impact on their desire to do it in the future. If they do not feel they have an important role and ability to make a difference they will find other endeavours in their local communities where they can make such a difference. And CFA and the Victorian Fire Services will be much the poorer without them.

VFBV urges the Panel to analyse the impacts of this specific boundary change on the surrounding brigades and conduct an assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the change under real world conditions.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

VFBV notes the overarching themes presented in the discussion papers overview of the proposed risk assessment methodology.

VFBV would be supportive of a clear, transparent and evidence based risk methodology, that is holistic of the risk and demonstrates consideration of all relevant flow on impacts, as well an assessment of current measures being undertaken to address the changed risk and its effectiveness.

VFBV asserts that it may be helpful to consider further expanding upon some of the proposed themes.

# Risk Methodology & Paradigm

For example, part of the assessment of community expectations and needs should be a consideration of fire service efficiency and value.

Similarly, an assessment of if the current service model can be supplemented to address any perceived gaps should be fundamental to any analysis of a changed risk.

Other factors relevant to the risk analysis would include:

- Topography and impacts on location of fire station, appliance selection and diversity of vehicle types to address the risk
- Weight of attack with volunteer brigades able to provide higher surge capacity and weight of attack at long duration incidents without depleting local capability
- The presence of reticulated water, as FRV appliances are more likely to be pumpers which require the presence and availability of reticulated water
- The inability for the majority of FRV appliances to travel off-road
- Performance outcomes measurements rather than simply relying on the time of the first arriving appliance
- Budgetary impacts of proposed changes
- Ability to respond to concurrent events
- The impact of public education activities on risk mitigation and prevention

- Ability for the service delivery model to scale up and down
- Assessment of current performance vs cost and resources to strengthen existing service vs duplication of an additional service/station
- Key risk drivers & mitigation
- Efficiency and value.

## **VOLUNTEER CONCERNS FOR POTENTIAL BIAS**

As part of VFBV's review of the Panels discussion paper, we provided an opportunity for CFA volunteers to provide feedback and comment on the discussion paper to help inform this submission.

It was very clear from the feedback received that there remains a very strong concern and perception amongst CFA volunteers about the panels independence and potential bias caused by some background gaps.

Whilst we appreciate the Panel may have its own view, and respecting that the Panel has been appointed by the Minister in accordance with the Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958, given the recurring theme present in volunteer feedback, we find it necessary to respectfully highlight this concern and bring it to the Panel's attention.

One of the factors that may have contributed to the perception may be the language and

# Risk Methodology & Paradigm

narrative included in the discussion paper outlining the summary and introduction.

The observation of many volunteers was this is very similar to the language and narrative used by the Government's own Fire Services reform statements.

The panel would be aware that these statements were developed very much at the height of tensions and consisted of considerable political controversy, and therefore many volunteers feel the language is insensitive, biased and not evidence based.

VFBV would suggest that in order to further demonstrate the panels independence, the panel should consider developing its own narrative for future publications.

This would also provide the benefit of hindsight from previous years controversy and would allow the panel to use its own experience and perspective informed from independent consultation and engagement since your appointment, to better set out the narrative and context of how you will go about your reviews.

An acknowledgement of some of the gaps in experience and volunteer service delivery models may also be an opportunity to highlight how the Panel intends to supplement its own knowledge and experience during its deliberations.

## **PUBLIC CAMPAIGNS**

The panel would be aware of a recent public advertising campaign launched by the United Firefighters Union that attempts to depict the service provided by CFA to be inferior to that provided by FRV, and egregiously directs viewers to a website for members of the public to send a form letter requesting action by the Panel.

It goes without saying that these kind of campaigns are highly inappropriate and unhelpful to building strong and productive relationships across the fire sector, not to mention the perception of biasing the panels discussions and perceptions.

VFBV has had to balance the need to balance the debate with the damage such public campaigns have - not only on individual firefighters (volunteer and paid), but also the public's confidence in their fire services.

It does not serve anyone for supporters of one service to be out criticising another using false data and assertions. And VFBV Is not going to engage in a race to the bottom.

Volunteers do however feel strongly that it is incumbent on the Panel to address how it will ensure these kind of campaigns will not influence or bias your discussions.

It is VFBV's contention that these kind of public campaigns seek to erode public trust and confidence in services delivered by volunteers and are a blight upon the sector.

# Risk Methodology & Paradigm

They are based on false data and misinformation and simply seek to use fear and ignorance to scare communities and decision makers who don't have an appropriate level of knowledge to dismiss what are clear and blatant mistruths.

For example, you don't see these kinds of campaigns run against other emergency services such as Police and Ambulance, both of which have much poorer response times and public satisfaction than that provided by volunteer fire brigades, highlighting these campaigns have nothing to do with public safety outcomes but are rather pursuing their own political agendas.

It is our proposition that these type of public campaigns will simply become more common and are a direct consequence from the changed arrangements enlivened by the formation and role of the Fire District Review Panel.

VFBV respectfully requests the Panel contemplate the damage that these kind of campaigns do, and seek to find ways to discourage and mitigate their impacts.

## **CFA SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS**

While Section 4K of the Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958 outlines the mandatory procedures required as part of the Panels review should there be a change in fire risk, VFBV would assert that there are also an array of

additional steps the panel should take in order to best inform itself of possible consequences.

In addition to requesting the CFA Chief Officer to give advice on how CFA will support the volunteer brigades to respond effectively to the changed risk, VFBV believes it will be crucial for that assessment to include any budgetary impacts from the changed risk and enquire as to Government support to CFA and provision of any required steps.

If CFA has identified what it needs to meet the changed risk, and this is not supported by Government provision of funding, the Panel must then assess how moving to a higher cost model with considerable upfront costs could possibly be contemplated given the reluctance to improve the existing community based service.

Conversely, VFBV believes the Panel should request the FRV Commissioner provide an outline of what FRV infrastructure and resources, including budget estimates will be required to address the perceived change in risk should there be a boundary change in order to contextualise the quantum and recommendations by the CFA Chief Officer.

For example, if a township's growth corridor has changed significantly since the fire station was originally built, and it is no longer fit for purpose or built in the wrong location, and CFA's budgetary requests to relocate the station have been consistently ignored by

# Risk Methodology & Paradigm

successive governments, then VFBV contends this is important context and is fundamental to assessing what support volunteers have received to meet the changed risk profile.

Similarly, estimates of cost and time taken to build a FRV capability in an area, and essentially duplicate some services would be instructive for the Panel when it is considering the length of time for its suspension of its review under section 4K(b)(ii).

Information as to 'how' FRV would intend on addressing the risk would also provide a basis for comparison, and value for money.

Where a high level of local capacity already exists, or there are only small gaps emerging that could be rectified with sufficient investment - this would allow the potential for the Panel to recommend investment in CFA upgrading/upskilling to meet the increased risk.

Something that volunteer brigades have long been requesting.

VFBV would also request that the Panel seek to involve and provide an opportunity for the brigade directly during these discussions. This will ensure that it has an opportunity to provide advice and comment on the assessment of support required from the brigade's perspective.

# Balancing Local Capacity + Peak Load Capacity

**The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recognised the link between arrangements aimed at improving or supporting local service capacity (the day-to-day small incidents that fire agencies respond to) and arrangements directed to improving or supporting the peak load capacity for major disasters.**

The 2009 Royal Commission did consider the impacts of potential boundary change on the State's capability and capacity.

The Royal Commission recognised the link between arrangements aimed at improving or supporting local service capacity (the day-to-day small incidents that fire agencies respond to) and arrangements directed to improving or supporting the peak load capacity for major disasters.

In the 2021 context; FRV contributes mainly only to local service capacity, whereas CFA contributes the vast majority of peak load capacity for major disasters across Victoria.

VFBV strongly supports the contention that these two requirements of local service capacity vs peak load capacity should not be considered in isolation, and it is fundamentally dangerous to do so. Changes directed to one ultimately flow through and have impacts on the other.

## **BALANCING THE NEED TO MAINTAIN LOCAL SERVICE CAPACITY PLUS ENSURING PEAK LOAD CAPACITY FOR MAJOR DISASTERS**

The term peak load capacity is used to describe the resources required to provide thousands of firefighters (sometimes for many days, weeks, or months) to a large fire

or emergency while simultaneously ensuring local coverage of other at-risk communities is maintained.

Peak load scenarios involving multiple large scale and potentially catastrophic bushfires will and do occur with significant regularity every year. Volunteer surge capacity is the term used to describe the enormous capacity and provision of weight of attack and sustained long duration human resourcing provided by CFA volunteers to these events.

Large fires require hundreds if not thousands of trained and experienced volunteer firefighters. This has been eloquently described in many publications. They mobilize and fight the fire like an army.

Volunteer officers, leaders and incident controllers are trained to use the same principles in strategy and risk assessment as a military officer uses when confronting an enemy. They pre-plan, plan and organise.

Just as emergency management volunteers are a critical 'resource' for Victoria, the way volunteers are engaged, encouraged, supported and empowered is an equally important consideration.

Community embedded volunteer fire brigades are fundamental to activating the

# Balancing Local Capacity + Peak Load Capacity

community as a model to share responsibility for their own safety and is core to building community resilience.

It is not appropriate to consider decisions about one aspect of fire service planning, resourcing, operations, management or culture without also considering the flow on impact of those decisions on Victoria's overall fire suppression, prevention and preparedness capacity including the impact on community readiness and resilience.

Regardless of the presenting issue at a local level or a specific service planning challenge one thing remains constant. And that is future consideration of fire services cannot separate the interrelationship between maintaining and strengthening capacity to deal with major disasters (bushfire, other emergencies etc); urban growth; and rural changes.

Adding resources in one area or introducing a work practice in another to the detriment of treating a more pressing issue at the risk of eroding Victoria's ability to deal with major fires, could have disastrous consequences.

**VOLUNTEER BASED MODELS ARE CRITICAL TO MEETING PEAK LOAD CAPACITY FOR MAJOR, CONCURRENT AND PROLONGED EMERGENCIES.**

Victoria is one of the most fire prone areas of the world and in recent years Victorians have experienced longer and more extreme fire season conditions.

The ability to mobilise large numbers of emergency personnel to major disasters anywhere in Victoria (and frequently interstate), often over long durations and frequently to concurrent large-scale emergencies PLUS maintain service coverage to local service risks (eg suburban areas) is one of the most critical fire service resource management responsibilities for Victoria's fire services.

Recent decades show a regular annual occurrence of major events requiring deployment of massive numbers of trained volunteer firefighters and future climate/population assessments generally predict potential for more frequent and more consequential (life, property, livelihood loss) events.

Recent years also demonstrate that large scale non fire emergencies (flood, storm, threats to critical infrastructure supply such as gas or coal) can and do occur randomly at all times of the year impacting broad community areas and significant numbers of people.

Historically, CFA brigades have serviced all of country Victoria, more than half of metropolitan Melbourne, and all provincial centres and townships across Victoria.

# Balancing Local Capacity + Peak Load Capacity

Victoria's surge capacity is derived from this entire network of CFA brigades but importantly a large portion of the volunteer surge capacity is supplied from CFA brigades in the highly populated urbanised outer metropolitan areas.

Sustaining volunteer capacity across Victoria and particularly in outer metropolitan Melbourne and provincial towns where there are larger concentrations of CFA volunteers is vitally important for Victoria's state-wide peak load and surge capacity.

The peak load capacity is not just required for high profile disasters like the 2019/20 Fires and the 2009 Black Saturday fires. Each year there are numerous days when thousands of trained firefighters need to be deployed to major emergencies.

This same volunteer surge capacity is equally important to providing the large numbers of highly trained firefighters and operational command personnel required to combat large non bushfire emergencies including major industrial fires, Hazelwood mine fire, flood events, and the Longford Gas Explosion.

Population growth and urban expansion will see even more people living in high-risk environments and more communities on the urban development/fire risk interface.

The resource approach to managing urban population growth in Victoria will have a

direct impact on Victoria's ability to deal with major fires/emergencies.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF METROPOLITAN/HIGHLY POPULATED AREAS TO VOLUNTEER CAPACITY**

CFA volunteer capacity in outer metropolitan Melbourne areas and provincial centres makes up a substantial portion of Victoria's volunteer surge and peak load fire response capacity. CFA incident statistics show that for the big emergencies sometimes up to 40 - 50% of personnel deployed are volunteers supplied from volunteer and former integrated (vol/staff) CFA brigades in the greater metropolitan area of Melbourne (excluding the old MFB district where there are no volunteer fire brigades). Maintaining volunteer capacity in these highly populated areas is vitally important for Victoria's capacity to deal with large scale emergencies.

Over the years CFA volunteer brigades have generally been able to evolve their capacity to match changes in local community circumstances and service demand increases such as those caused by urban population growth. Sometimes growth does exceed the capacity of volunteers or community circumstances challenge a brigade's ability to sustain required levels of volunteer capacity and additional support needs to be provided to the brigade.



# Balancing Local Capacity + Peak Load Capacity

When the support solution requires additional paid firefighter support the previous CFA model deployed paid firefighters to supplement and support the existing volunteer capacity. This approach was known as the CFA integrated brigade resource model.

In the past the CFA Chief Officer had reasonable flexibility in determining when, where, what roles and how many additional paid resources might be deployed based on local community need and brigade volunteer capacity. In recent years the CFA Chief Officer's influence and control of additional paid firefighter deployment decisions has become highly influenced and controlled by industrial agreements which has significantly impeded his/her ability to allocate and manage resources flexibly to meet changing community and brigade support needs.

This resource model enabled CFA to grow volunteer brigade capacity to meet growing service demand in urban growth areas and at the same time maintain the volunteer 'surge' capacity to manage large scale, long duration and concurrent major emergencies.

Changes introduced over the past year to Victoria's Fire Services as a result of the Victorian Fire Services Reform Bill legislative change have the real potential of weakening or eroding this vital agency/community partnership not only for the CFA service areas to be removed from CFA but also for future

communities removed from CFA through anticipated further boundary reviews conducted by this panel.

The Panel should inform itself of the impacts occurring at those brigades which are now co-located with FRV brigades, and assess the damage being done to their morale, capacity and capability.

## **IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

Developing community resilience is the foundation for effective disaster preparedness, response and recovery with the community's sharing responsibility for their own safety.

Emergency management volunteers, who live, integrate and operate within their communities on a daily basis are best placed to embed this philosophy, prepare their communities, build the capacity of their communities and know their local community vulnerabilities and strengths.

The work done by local volunteer fire brigades and other emergency management volunteers is critical to supporting communities:

- Recovering from disasters.
- Leading change and coordinating effort.
- Understanding risks.

# Balancing Local Capacity + Peak Load Capacity

- Communicating with and educating people about risks.
- Partnering with others who can help achieve change.
- Empowering individuals and communities to exercise choice and take responsibility.
- Risk reduction and
- Fostering relationships, networks and capabilities to improve resilience.

Improvements to community resilience are in large part due to local leadership, local drive and local ownership. This local ownership and empowerment is a significant enabler.

Any future changes that reduce this local involvement will be detrimental to ongoing community resilience.

Volunteers frequently raise concerns about an increasing first option by agencies and departments to attempt to administer and/or undertake community resilience building activities via systems and persons remote to and not known to or linked with local communities.

Without the buy-in, input and ownership of local community-based volunteers who live within, operate within and execute resilient outcomes in times of need many programs are likely to fail.

The preferred approach must be to place the emphasis and resources at the closest

possible level to the grassroots and local community.

These community engagement and capacity building processes cannot be seen to be run as 'top-down' city-based activities or they will not be accepted, nor readily adaptable to the local community environment and most importantly embraced by the volunteers and/or communities who they are intended to support.

## REFORM IMPACTS ON BASE ASSUMPTIONS

VFBV is concerned that the impact of boundary change influences has either already weakened the fundamental conditions and foundation arrangements that existed in the first place or are likely to have a significant negative effect on CFA base capacity, and therefore Victoria's emergency management arrangements in the future.

VFBV urges the Panel to undertake an assessment of impacts and risks from the changes already made, in order to assess the potential for further deterioration of peak load capacity.

Specifically, VFBV has concerns that the impact of further changes will lead to:

- diminished volunteer firefighting capacity particularly for surge capacity required during major events;

# Balancing Local Capacity + Peak Load Capacity

- diminished volunteer involvement in incident management/leadership;
- reduced empowerment of local community capacity and engagement of local knowledge in areas to be excised from CFA responsibility
- more fragmentation and duplication of Victoria's fire services;
- confused operational command and control;
- weakened ability for fire agencies to control decision making and policy settings for operational resource allocation, preparedness and deployment of resources;
- significant weakening of Victoria's ability to sustain a strong volunteer and fully integrated culture;
- restrictions and limits on how volunteers are supported, recognised and deployed in Victoria; and
- unreasonable external interference on resource allocation, costs of services, standards and priority setting.

None of the expert reviews conducted during the past decade recommended the changes now enshrined in the 2019 Fire Services

Reform legislation. The legislation was developed without appropriate consultation, without transparent assessment of the options and impacts; and without implementation detail.

VFBV asserts there is a need for greater ongoing transparency, independent inspection and monitoring specifically to:

- undertake robust and independent ongoing impact analysis of boundary changes;
- measures to act as an early warning system should capacity deteriorate faster than expected
- monitor for unintended consequences and record them for future reviews

It is VFBV's strong view that the Panel's risk assessment must not only assess the change in fire risk, but also the risk of changing the model of service delivery and the flow on impacts to the State's peak load capacity and other factors such as community resilience, public value and risk mitigation activities.

# Response Data

## **In broadest terms, VFBV cautions the Panel on relying on existing response data to draw any conclusion about the performance of CFA brigades against formally adopted standards.**

VFBV urges the Panel to carefully understand the context of what exists currently in terms of formally adopted service standards and the confines of these; the pitfalls of representation of performance statistics inconsistent with the standards; and very real potential for incorrect or prejudiced representation and/or interpretation of both the performance standards and performance measures.

The Victorian Auditor General's report into Emergency Response Standards, March 2015 (VAGO Response Times Report) outlined some of the limitations and strongly advised that response times alone do not adequately describe emergency service performance and must be considered alongside information on outcomes, service quality, efficiency and cost effectiveness for emergency service to be understood.

Bridging service gaps is predominately a resource and funding issue.

The first step in any future contemplation of service gaps must be to understand what the desired performance outcomes are, what service standards are required to achieve these outcomes and what resource support will be required to enable community embedded CFA brigades to achieve these expectations.

In simple terms, it is not appropriate to judge the performance of a brigade or a current service regime against a performance measure or standard that has not been adopted, articulated or specifically resourced and pursued.

The quarterly reporting of response data, how it is captured, and the methods used to attempt to compare them is highly inaccurate and biased against CFA.

The data provided and format of the quarterly reporting has potential to misdirect analysis and lead to fundamentally flawed conclusions. In addition to the requirement for any analysis to be grounded against formally adopted standards it is also important that the Panel develop a full appreciation of the intricacies and pitfalls involved with how performance against that standard is measured.

The CFA SDS performance has, for many years, been measured, reported and assessed as applying to the response received by 'the customer' regardless of which of the CFA brigades in CFA's network responded to or was first to attend the scene. CFA resource allocation and service planning is based on CFA maintaining a network of brigades who collectively create an ability to achieve target response to the incident. Each CFA brigade has a primary response area and whilst there

# Response Data

is data to show the response profile of the primary brigade's fire appliance to an incident, CFA measures performance against the standards in terms of 'customer performance' (i.e. the time it takes for a fire appliance to arrive at scene regardless of whether it is the primary brigade's appliance or another brigade).

Furthermore, the Panel needs to contemplate the inconsistency in analysing CFA brigade performance at a brigade by brigade level, and within this at an incident by incident dissection when the current practice for MFB/FRV performance analysis is to aggregate and analyse response performance only at an overall organisational level.

Doing to FRV what the statistics attempt to do to CFA are like measuring response times of FRV by shift, and reporting on each of the five shifts performance in response times.

It is inappropriate to make comparison of one agencies performance against the other if one agency is aggregating performance data (averaging out the performance of individual brigades) and the other agency is being analysed at a brigade by brigade level.

In addition, simply analysing pass/fail to be on scene within 8 minutes or 10 minutes is quite superficial. A better measure is to consider what time the fire service arrived on scene for 90% of fires (see Victoria's 2016/17 Budget Paper – Service Delivery Budget Paper 3 (p 262) target).

By way of example the NSW Fire and Rescue Annual Report 2015/16 (page 3) references "crews arrived at calls in 9 minutes and 58 seconds for 90% of calls to structure fires".

The NSW performance reporting highlights two important things the first being a more meaningful way of understanding time based performance and the second being the more serious question as to what logic has underpinned the Victorian Standard being an 8-minute response for urban areas compared to the logic applied in NSW and Sydney metro area.

The Panel is encouraged to review other jurisdictions, and see for itself, the data and evidence on response times, and the frequently misused data on flashover are all very dated and reflect different countries with different building standards and profiles.

## FORMALLY ADOPTED STANDARDS

Responsibility for determining operational standards for emergency sector responder agencies rests with the Emergency Management Commissioner (EM Act 2013), Sections 32, 48, 49, 64).

The 'Emergency Service Standards' published by EMV (Emergency Management Performance Standards, version 2 Dec 2016), does not prescribe any further detail relating to response standards, targets or expectations.

# Response Data

VFBV urges the Panel to review performance standards for Police and Ambulance to highlight the large discrepancy and bias within the fire services limited performance standards.

# Climatic Conditions

It is VFBV's position that climate change is occurring and will continue to have a significant impact on fire services in Victoria.

Climate change is already increasing the risk of bushfires and will further rely on CFA's ability to maintain and strengthen the State's peak load capacity to deal with more frequent, longer running and concurrent disasters.

Climatic conditions have a significant impact on fire behaviour and are causing an increase demand for fire services. Recent fires have been influenced by record hot, dry conditions and in southeast Australia the fire season is becoming longer.

CFA recently contributed to research modelling that indicates a 10 to 20 per cent increase in extreme Forest Fire Danger Index. The greatest relative change was in the number of 'Very High' days per year in central and eastern parts of the state, with modelling suggesting a doubling and tripling in the number of 'Very High' days.

Australia, and particularly the southeast of Australia is one of the most fire impacted areas in the world. This is due in large part to a number of complex interactions but put simply involves our population, the location of human settlement, our flora, our climate, our weather, and our associated land use.

From direct observation and experience, it is clear that the main effects of climatic changes

impacting on the fire services in Victoria can be summarised as:

- Longer fire seasons, with seasons starting earlier and finishing later;
- Increased challenges to the conduct of planned burning and other fuel reduction practices reliant on weather and burning;
- Greater frequency, duration and intensity of bushfires;
- Greater frequency of extreme weather events involving temperature, humidity, wind speed and the dryness of grass and flora;
- Periods of extended drought placing strain on water resources, land use, and the environment including a decrease in the resilience of the natural landscape to withstand and recover from fire; and
- A higher incident and frequency of storms, floods and other natural disasters which places further demand on emergency services;

These factors will continue to have significant impacts on our fire services more directly such as:

- Greater frequency and intensity of fires requiring a corresponding increase of

# Climatic Conditions

- demand on resources;
- More difficult fire suppression leading to longer campaigns;
- More intense and erratic fire behaviour which increases the risk to firefighter safety;
- More prolonged mop-up and patrol of fire lines and impacted areas which further stretches resources;
- Increased fatigue and draw down of suppression resources;
- Increased demand for water and a higher incidence of dry firefighting techniques, chemical retardants and heavy machinery;
- More pronounced impact on community resilience with frequency and duration of fires increasing that will stretch and test community reactions to emergencies with communities needing to cope with more frequent disruption; and
- Higher demand for recovery and relief services to impacted communities.

The need for additional human resourcing is likely to be acute to deal with these changes and impacts.

Higher demand for limited resources and equipment will naturally bring cost pressures and competing interests.

This is where VFBV asserts that current Government policy appears to be more focussed on isolated local capability gaps, rather than strategically planning to protect CFA's peak load capacity to deal with major emergencies.

For example, over recent years the Victorian Government has prioritised investment and policy focus on structural fire services through a highly inefficient fully paid model. This model is expensive, inflexible and highly inefficient.

Investment in resourcing has been heavily biased and done with little to no cost benefit analysis or understanding of resulting impacts on public value and community safety or resilience to deal with large scale emergencies.

The increased occurrence of natural disasters and emergencies will bring with it a need for further increased numbers of emergency management volunteers and the importance of caring, sustaining and protecting them.

Because of their critical importance, their corresponding positive links to building community resilience and their generation of immense public value – the State must take positive and deliberate action to encourage,



# Climatic Conditions

maintain and strengthen the involvement of emergency management volunteers.

In VFBV's view, volunteer numbers are being left to chance with historical retention being heavily reliant on the goodwill of volunteers themselves.

Attributing dropping volunteer numbers solely to external factors such as rural decline or a change in Australian attitudes to volunteering ignores the significant body of evidence that shows volunteer satisfaction with how they are resourced, supported and respected continuing to drop.

The last several years of controversy surrounding the Government's reforms have also had a significant impact on morale and volunteer numbers.

These observations have also been documented by the Fire Services Implementation Monitor in his Year One Annual Report.

Too frequently, volunteers feel far too much emphasis is placed on resourcing volunteer recruitment activities as the silver bullet to dropping volunteer numbers, ignoring the significant issues and feedback from volunteers that gets raised time and time again that goes to the heart of volunteer retention and satisfaction.

VFBV would urge the Panel to consider the impacts of its decisions and deliberations on the morale of CFA volunteers and the

corresponding impact poor morale is having on Victoria's peak load capacity to deal with major emergencies.

Further, changes to boundaries that seek to demoralise or move volunteers to support roles, will impact on volunteer numbers, has have been demonstrated over recent years.

This is not only due to changing borders, but the lack of a cooperative service delivery model that respects both unpaid and paid firefighters equally.

Rather than rely on what the 'promise' of a cooperative service delivery model looks like, VFBV urges the panel to use actual data and evidence of the impacts that these changes are having on CFA's peak load capacity to analyse the actual impacts.

# Volunteer Welfare & Efficiency Survey

**The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is an initiative of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) and is conducted each year in Victoria.**

This annual survey was designed by and for volunteers and has been conducted since 2012.

The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency survey gives CFA and other decision-makers clear feedback, directly from volunteers, about the issues that are affecting volunteer efficiency and welfare.

The survey measures what volunteers say is important to their welfare and efficiency, and how they think CFA and Government are performing according to what they are experiencing on-the-ground.

The survey is one of the biggest volunteer-based emergency services welfare and efficiency surveys in Australia. As such it plays an important role to give a voice to volunteer views.

The survey provides evidence-based, quantitative and qualitative data on matters of importance to volunteers.

With such a strong participation rate, these results are a true indicator for CFA's volunteer workforce.

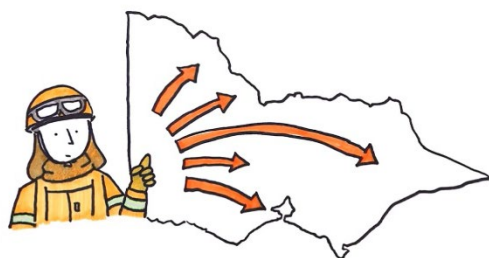
We are more than happy to share results from the annual survey to help inform the Panel on various issues that may be relevant to your assessment of impacts and effects of proposed changes.

The results also allow us to track differences of views between different type of brigades, including from those of the former integrated, and co-located stations.

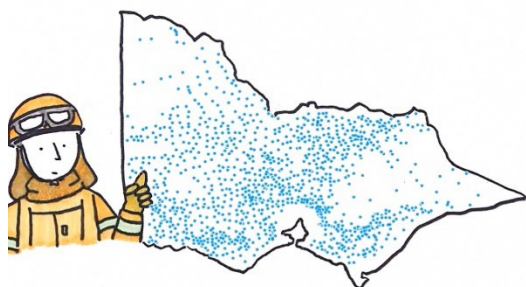
# Volunteer Surge Capacity

**To assist the panel better understand what is meant by peak load capacity and volunteer surge capacity, the following overview is provided.**

CFA volunteer surge capacity is the ability to field thousands of trained, experienced volunteer firefighters at short notice while at the same time maintaining normal day to day service delivery and protection of local communities.



One of the fundamental benefits of the CFA volunteer-based model is the depth of capacity and capability it provides to maintain response across Victoria to widespread, large scale, multiple and concurrent emergencies whilst maintaining local fire cover for the rest of Victoria.



The blue dots on the map above show the location of CFA volunteer brigades across

Victoria that provide a network of brigades all contributing to volunteer surge capacity.



CFA volunteers attend local fires, day to day emergencies and major disasters anywhere in the state.



They are professionally trained and equipped for all fire risk situations - from houses, shops and factory fires to major hazards, bushfires and motor vehicle accidents.

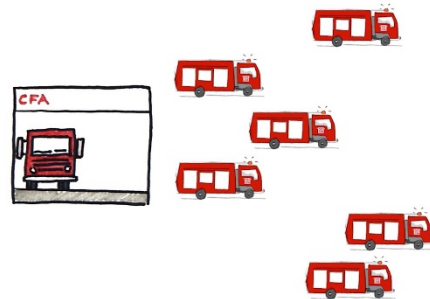
# Volunteer Surge Capacity



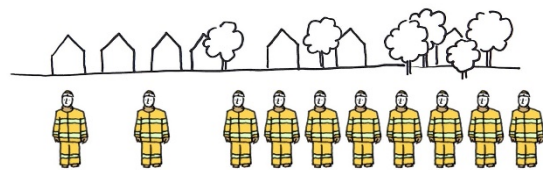
Your local CFA volunteer brigade is much more than just 3 or 4 firefighters on duty – it's dozens of volunteer firefighters on call and ready whenever needed 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Every day of the year.



This regular activation results in a well-motivated, exercised and prepared emergency force that maintains operational readiness across the whole year. This not only keeps communities safe but ensures the highest levels of firefighter safety due to frequent use of their skills.



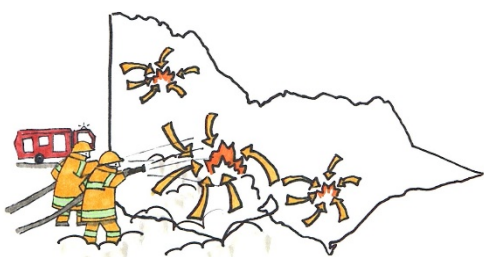
CFA's volunteer numbers mean Victoria has the ability to combat multiple fires at a time and keep supplying firefighters on the ground. Often for weeks, months or more as required.



A huge portion of our CFA volunteer surge capacity comes from the ever-growing outer metropolitan Melbourne and provincial cities.

So maintaining our volunteer numbers in these areas is vitally important for Victoria.

# Volunteer Surge Capacity



These volunteers from outer metro along with CFA volunteers right across the state means we have thousands of trained, experienced volunteer fire-fighters in the field ready to be deployed every hour of the day and we can keep supplying these firefighters for weeks at a time wherever they are needed.



This enormous surge capacity is recognized by fire experts as one of the most fundamental benefits of the CFA volunteer workforce.

They are embedded in cities, suburbs, regions and even the smallest rural communities.



The 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission said that the CFA volunteer surge capacity, together with the local knowledge and the ability of CFA volunteer fire brigades to mobilise a rapid response was a key strength during the 2009 Black Saturday Fires.



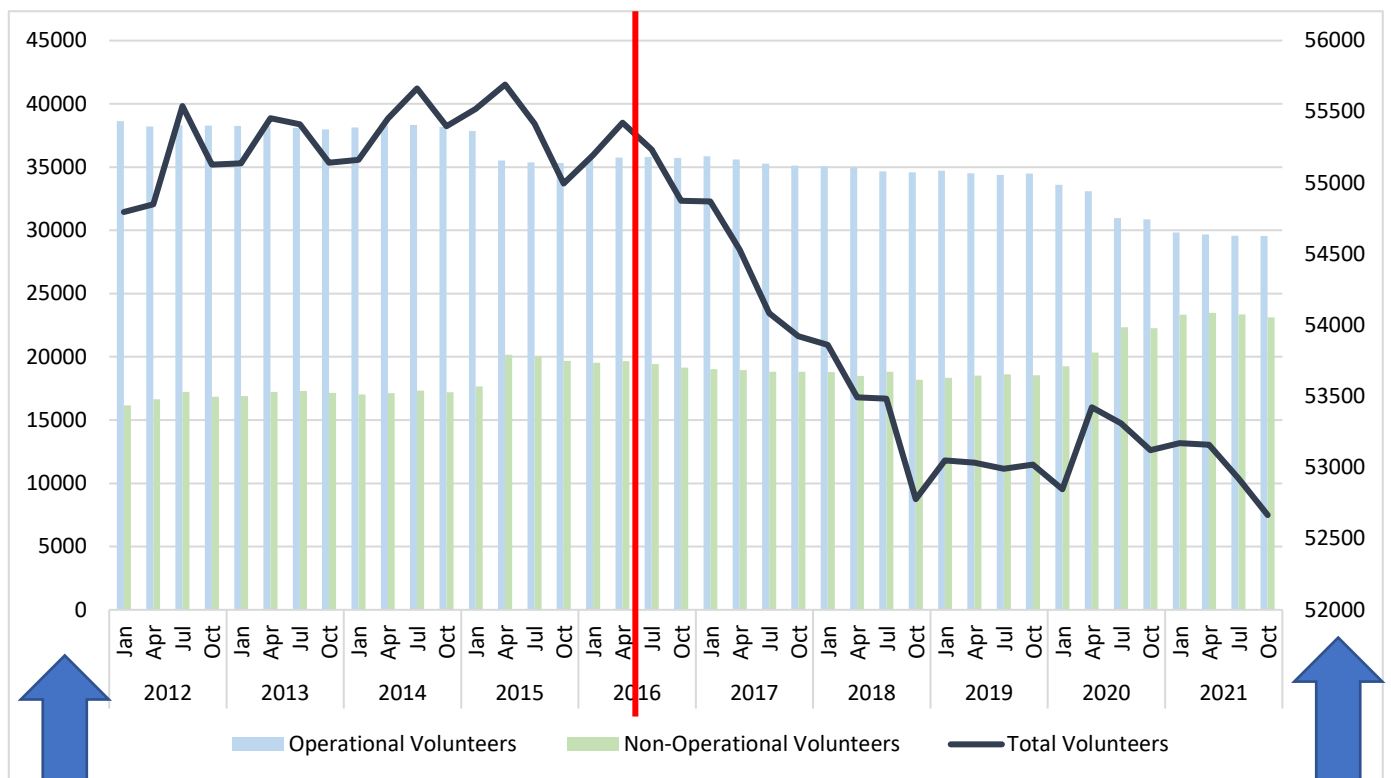
This capacity is not just demonstrated during summer, but across the entire year. The 2014 Hazelwood Mine Fire is just one example of a non-bushfire emergency that extended over 45 days and required thousands of well-trained volunteers. And this volunteer surge capacity is essential for Victoria's continuing ability to deal with large fires.

# Decline in Volunteer Numbers

The following graph shows the devastating impact on CFA volunteer numbers over recent years following the announcement of the Victorian Government’s Fire Services Reform.

The red line indicates the time period where the Premier intervened and the Victorian Government’s position changed, resulting in the resignation of the Emergency Services Minister.

VFBV’s warning of the impacts of the changes went unheeded, and we urge the Panel to further consider impacts to CFA’s peak load capacity from further changes proposed.



Number of Operational  
(Blue) & Non Operational  
(Green)

Total number of Volunteers  
(Black line)

# Decline in Volunteer Numbers

Longer and more intense fire seasons, as well as an increase in frequency of multiple concurrent events, require a very large force of volunteer firefighters. As the 2019/20 fire season showed, we can't always rely on pulling down reserves from other State's like NSW and SA should they also be impacted at the same time.

Large numbers of volunteers have traditionally been drawn from all over the State, with highly urban/populated communities responsible for contributing a very large number of additional volunteers for state-wide surge capacity. The impact of Victoria's recent reform legislation and the creation of FRV and associated changes will be felt most strongly in these highly urban densely populated communities.

Volunteers require respect, recognition and a purpose for them to continue to be engaged.

Training, volunteer support and operational utilisation are also critical factors in retaining them and maintaining operational readiness for deployment.

Since the introduction of Victoria's highly controversial and divisive fire services reform, the number of CFA volunteers has dropped markedly.

VFBV remains very concerned that this frontline ready force may continue to be diminished with further conversion of CFA areas into FRV in urban and regional areas.

It remains to be seen what moving volunteers to 'support' only roles will have on long term numbers as will the rate at which the FRV footprint is expanded.

Historical evidence demonstrates that when volunteer roles are diminished or they feel their contribution is no longer valued or respected, they disengage. For many volunteers, this means finding a different avenue with a different organisation where their contribution to their community is better spent.

Experienced volunteer firefighters take many, many years to grow, develop and train. Current volunteer statistics only report on the gross numbers of volunteers 'on the books', and therefore reflect 'new joins' the day they register or graduate. Volunteer resignations on the other hand only counts those volunteers who have formally resigned.

These factors mask the true impact of the significant years of service being lost from the organisation when veteran volunteer firefighters move on, or where they simply 'withdraw' or reduce their services without formally resigning.

The ratio of available firefighters to those in use at any one time is built into fire service long term planning.

For example, career firefighters are planned for by a 1:5 ratio which means for every firefighter on shift, you have to hire 5 to

# Decline in Volunteer Numbers

account for planned leave and off shift time. Additional firefighters are hired to cover unplanned relief arrangements.

The same logic should not be dissimilar for volunteers. Those that are available and active will change over time.

A cradle to grave volunteer model ensures flexibility to account for changes in lifestyle and career/family changes, or life pressures such as starting a family or new business. A flexible model that buffers this ebb and flow of availability is key to its long-term success and sustainability.

Last year's reports from interstate services experiencing volunteer overcommitment that in some cases has hurt their livelihoods provides early warning signs that current pools are becoming strained, and therefore need to be grown and topped up.

VFBV and volunteers have been calling for bi-partisan support for initiatives that protect, encourage, support and strengthen Victoria's emergency management volunteer surge capacity to best prepare Victoria for future disasters.

Clearly, Victorians continue to be attracted to joining CFA as volunteers. This is continually demonstrated through healthy recruiting figures following busy seasons. VFBV maintains that declining satisfaction among CFA volunteers is a serious threat to retaining them.

Recruitment, retention and respect go hand in hand with ensuring Victoria has a volunteer pool strong and resilient enough to meet future peak load demands.

History shows us that volunteers must have meaningful roles to motivate and encourage them, and this is the biggest threat to boundary changes under the current model, because their ability to do meaningful roles is significantly diminished.



# The Hidden Value of Volunteers

**Victoria's Emergency Management Volunteers contribute a conservative indicative value of \$1.9 - \$2.5 billion dollars of value to Victoria every year.**

We urge the Panel to consider the broader value of volunteers and volunteerism when assessing impacts and undertaking risk analysis.

VFBV asserts that the risk of losing this value is as just as much a risk as treating other hazards/risks.

VFBV has worked alongside our partners at the Victoria State Emergency Service Volunteer Association (VicSESVA), Ambulance Victoria, St John Ambulance, the Victorian Council of Churches Emergency Ministry and Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) to research and report on the value of Victoria's emergency management volunteers, volunteering and volunteerism.

This project is referred in shorthand, as the 3V's. (Volunteers - Volunteering - Volunteerism.)

The 3V's project has involved exploring additional ways to analyse the value of Victoria's emergency management volunteers, volunteering and volunteerism. It has provided a framework and model that illustrates various layers of value, and explores the breadth of that value at the local community level. It was sponsored by the Volunteer Consultative Forum (VCF) which VFBV is a founding member of, and worked

with Lateral Economics to produce a fresh and original perspective to this unique task using fit for purpose logic, structure and evidence.

The full Final Report, and the Interim Report (published in 2017) are both available from, EMV or our website.

The reports discuss the 'hidden value' that arises incidentally from the 3Vs that might not otherwise be known, captured and hence appreciated. It aims to bring this value to life through a new way of talking about volunteers, their activities and impact on society, while being accurate and credible.

The 3Vs Final Report presents a simple logic for how the 3Vs generate value to Victorians. Volunteers undertake activities which have positive outcomes or 'value', and value can be described in different ways. Describing value in its diversity allows the State to recognise and build on the value accrued by Victorian communities from the 3Vs. In this way, the 3Vs can be conceived not only as an emergency management workforce and a mechanism for building emergency related community resilience, but also as a way to strengthen communities.

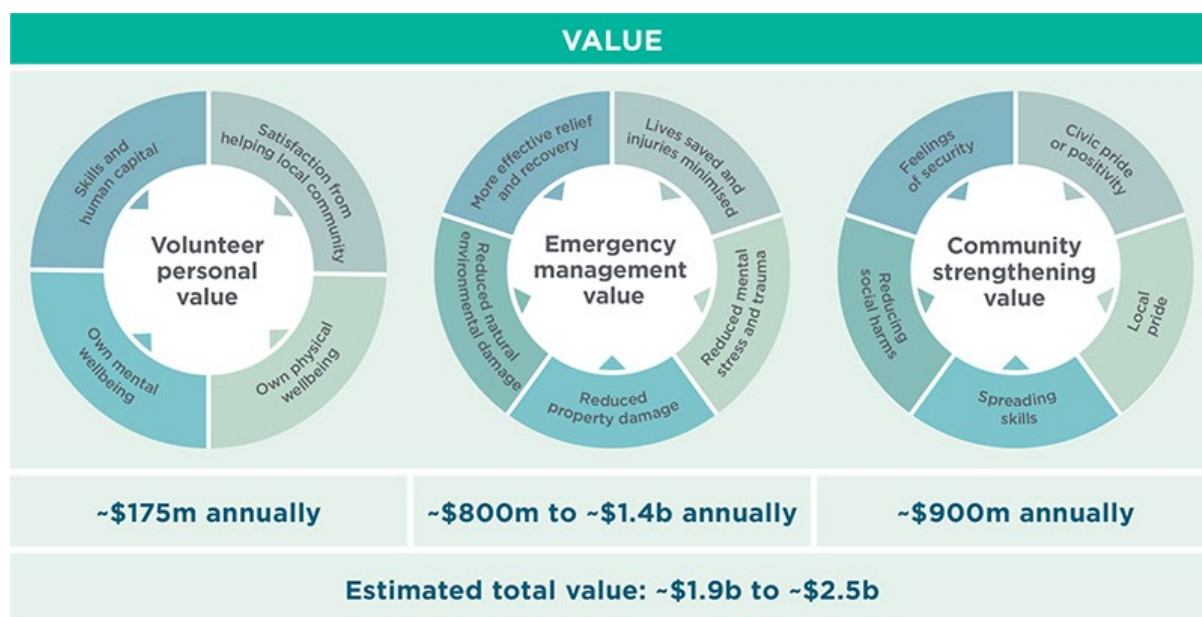
Even a preliminary analysis of this kind shows that the value of volunteers is large, and

# The Hidden Value of Volunteers

widely distributed across the community. Discussing the size of the 3Vs' value puts in stark contrast the flip-side of the issue: the possible losses and risk to Victoria from lower 3Vs activity.

Visible, active, positive emergency volunteerism in a community can make a difference to society as a whole. This difference has both tangible and intangible

aspects. Emergency Management Volunteers are fundamental to emergency management in Victoria. It is therefore critical that their value and importance be recognised, and their collective interests and needs be protected, encouraged and supported to ensure they can deliver their services safely and effectively for the benefit of the Australian community.



Overview of value creation from Victoria's emergency volunteers, volunteering and volunteerism.

# The Hidden Value of Volunteers

It is estimated that approximately 100,000 Victorians contribute their time, skills and resources to ongoing volunteer work in local communities before, during and after emergencies. While it is helpful to know how many people volunteer, it provides no real insight, evidence or facts about the value that volunteers are providing to the state of Victoria.

The final report builds on the 3V's interim report released in August 2017 and provides

further evidence of the value generated by Victoria's emergency management volunteers, volunteering and volunteerism and also a framework and model that identifies three layers of value: volunteer personal value; emergency management value; and community strengthening value.

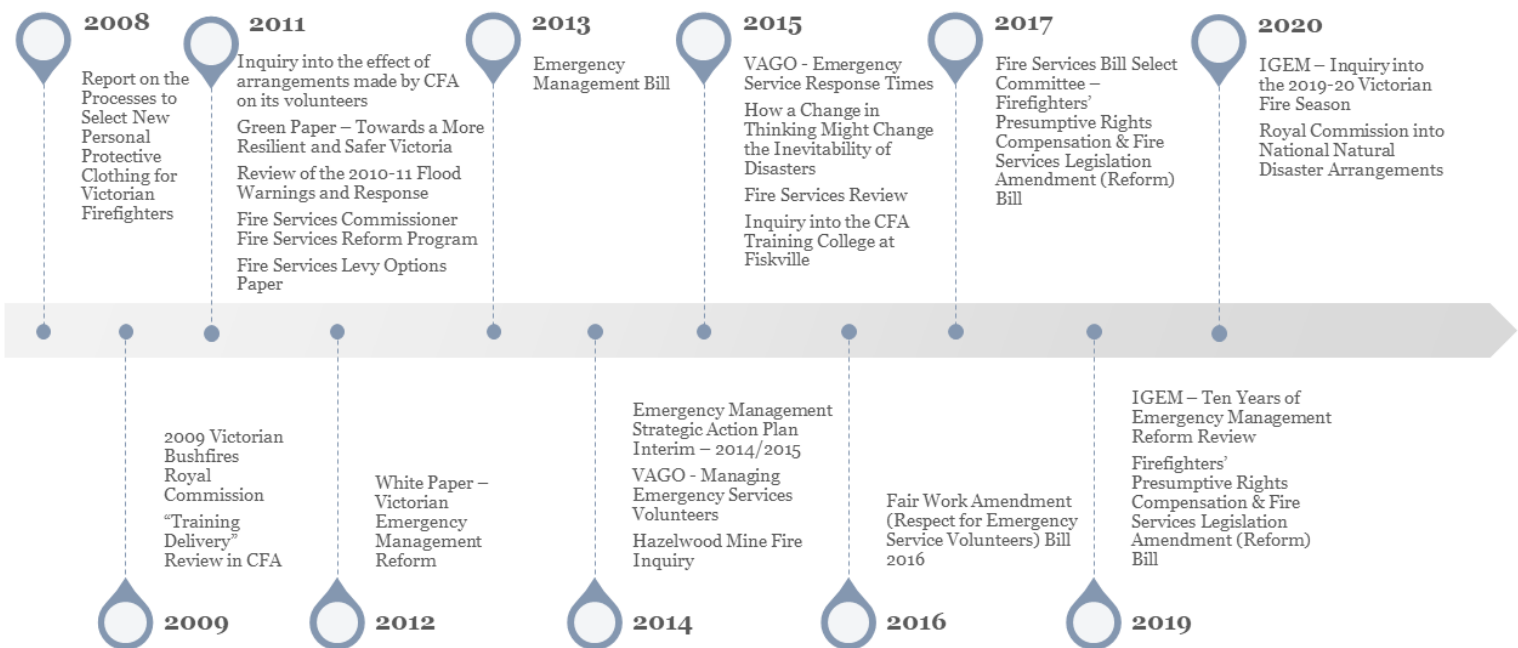
The value created by Victoria's emergency volunteers, volunteering and volunteering is estimated at between \$1.9 billion to \$2.5 billion annually.



# Previous Inquiries

For the benefit of the Panel, we have provided a brief summary of significant previous review and enquiries to affect the fire services over the past decade.

*“VFBV shares the frustration of many volunteers who have participated in a plethora of reviews, often with perceptions of little ultimate improvement to the support of volunteers and their communities with local service planning, preparation, delivery and recovery.”*



# Key Findings & Themes

**The following is a summary of key findings, recommendations and themes emerging repeatedly in various reforms and reviews of the past decade in Victoria.**

VFBV wishes to draw attention to the following common and important themes identified frequently during Victorian reviews over the past decade.

- That a priority for fire services is to ensure planning and resource allocation addresses preparedness and capability for the high consequence major events and avoid potential for local level planning and resource allocation to monopolise scarce resources or divert attention from major disaster readiness;
- That the frequency and severity of major fire and other disasters is predicted to increase and growing population in risk interface areas will mean increase potential life, social and economic impact will increase;
- The importance of the CFA volunteer-based model for the provision of rapid response, local knowledge and surge capacity required to manage peak load situations where huge resources are required to respond to major, concurrent and long duration emergencies at the same time as maintaining day to day service coverage in urban areas, townships and communities across Victoria;
- The need to improve genuine consultation with volunteers;
- The need to improve planning, resourcing, delivery and access to training for volunteers;
- The need for proactive, deliberate and accountable design and implementation of policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers and the community;
- The need for increased focus on prevention, education, and community sharing responsibility for their own safety;
- An assessment that Victoria currently has one of the highest cost per capita fire services; that simply adding more paid firefighter resources to fire services and fire suppression will not always be the most effective or cost-efficient way to improve community safety outcomes; and question whether Victoria's fire response standards are causing resources

# Key Findings & Themes

to be directed to the wrong solutions;

- That CFA volunteers are vital to Victoria's emergency management capability and despite there being ongoing social, demographic and other challenges to volunteering there are also many opportunities to improve the attraction, retention and support to volunteers. Considering the vital importance of volunteers to Victoria's emergency management capability there needs to be more focussed effort and investment in maintaining and strengthening volunteer capacity; and
- Instead of making changes to the structure and/or management arrangements of the fire services there is better opportunity and precursor work required to improve shared effort; establish common operating systems; align work practices and culture; achieve commonality in operational doctrine and procedures; use compatible equipment; pursue integrated preparedness/response/prevention/recovery effort etc.

There is a consistent recognition throughout all of the reviews, reforms, reports or inquiries over the past decade, of the importance of community-based CFA and other emergency service volunteers to Victoria's capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

# Significant Report Summaries

The following summary lists key volunteer aspects of the major reviews/reforms.

## **Inspector-General for Emergency Management Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season (2020)**

The Phase 1 of this review was handed down on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

This report found that having the right balance in maintaining a level of readiness to respond to bushfire in Victoria is a complex calculation. The required resources in terms of personnel, vehicles, equipment and aircraft need to be scalable according to seasonal requirements and cannot readily be switched on and off if conditions alter rapidly.

The Inspector-General found the extent to which the organisational changes attached to the Governments 2020 reforms and how they will affect the delivery of bushfire preparedness and response in Victoria remains to be seen.

The 2019–20 fires highlighted the ongoing need to arrive at realistic community understanding about shared responsibility; and specifically, the role of the individual in addressing the risk of bushfire, its eventuality and consequences, versus the role of the State and its agencies. The recent past has already brought larger and more frequent bushfires. Adapting to a future in which that is the norm means shifting beliefs, approaches and actions on the part of both the emergency

management sector and the wider community.

## **The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020)**

The Royal Commission presented its report on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

The Commission found that every state and territory suffered fire to some extent during the 2019/20 Fire Season. The fires did not respect state borders or local government boundaries. On some days, extreme conditions drove a fire behaviour that was impossible to control.

Thousands of Australians – locals and holidaymakers – became trapped. Communities were isolated, experiencing extended periods without power, communications, and ready access to essential goods and services, or access to cash or EFTPOS to pay for their most basic needs.

It found that achieving an effective national approach to natural disasters requires a clear, robust and accountable system capable of both providing a comprehensive understanding of, and responding to, the aggregated risks associated with mitigation, preparation for, response to and recovery from natural disasters.

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The Commission found that natural disasters are expected to become more complex, more unpredictable, and more difficult to manage. We are likely to see more compounding disasters on a national scale with far-reaching consequences. Compounding disasters may be caused by multiple disasters happening simultaneously, or one after another. Some may involve multiple hazards – fires, floods and storms.

The Commission stated that to make Australia more resilient to natural disasters demands action on multiple fronts. It said **we need to do much more than put out fires**. A resilient nation will seek to mitigate the risk of disasters through a wide range of measures, and it will attend to all of the complex and sometimes long-term consequences.

Importantly, it found efforts to make Australia more resilient to natural disasters are likely to become increasingly costly, and therefore will call for more resources and a more effective and efficient use of resources.

The Commission also highlighted the importance of local government and councils in emergency planning. It raised concerns with the capability and capacity of local governments to fulfil the responsibilities delegated to them and that their capability appeared to depend on factors including their relative size, natural disaster risk profile, demographics and the resources available to them.

## Inspector-General for Emergency Management Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector (2019)

This review is instructive reading for anyone who states that Victoria's fire services arrangements had remained 'largely unchanged until July 2020'.

The Inspector-General found that the Victorian emergency management sector has undergone significant reform in the 10 years since the 2009 Victorian bushfires. Much of this reform has been guided by major reviews including the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, the Review of 2010–11 Flood Warnings and Response, and the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry.

IGEM considered that the 10-year anniversary of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires presented an opportunity to consider whether the significant program of reforms introduced since 2009 are effective in supporting Victorians to become safer and more resilient.

Through the review, IGEM found that many aspects of the sector have significantly improved since 2009. The creation of new enabling legislation, bringing with it the establishment of Emergency Management Victoria, the Emergency Management Commissioner, and the Inspector-General for Emergency Management have been pivotal.



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In its report, IGEM makes eight observations, 33 findings, and five recommendations identifying good practice and opportunities for continuous improvement. The recommendations relate to the critical areas of risk management, community information, recovery, outcomes frameworks, and capability and capacity.

The review found that shared responsibility became a prominent theme in emergency management following the 2009 Victorian bushfires and 2010–11 Victorian floods. The sector acknowledged that it did not have the capacity to ensure the safety of all Victorians and community members should be supported to take responsibility for their safety and wellbeing.

Shared responsibility is also a positive mechanism to facilitate greater engagement between the sector and community, improve levels of emergency preparedness and build community resilience.

Despite significant reform in the sector, the review outlines concerns that community resilience is decreasing and reliance on the sector and government is growing. IGEM noted that the sector does not clearly articulate its expectations of communities in emergency management and often tries to 'fix' problems for communities. While these actions are well-intentioned, it can disempower individuals and communities and create confusion about the meaning of

shared responsibility in emergency management.

## **Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017**

This inquiry was conducted by a Victorian Parliament Select Committee formed by the upper house and found that the restructure of the Country Fire Authority and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade as proposed in the Bill was not included among the recommendations of the fire services reviews undertaken over the last decade.

The Committee also found that the Government had developed its restructure proposal secretly, hastily and without involving representatives from Emergency Management Victoria, the Country Fire Authority or the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

It found that the Government did not meet its statutory obligations to consult with volunteers and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria as required by the Volunteer Charter and the Country Fire Authority Act 1958.

The Committee said this reinforced the perception of a bias towards the United Firefighters Union, and undermined confidence in the restructure proposal.

The Committee was concerned that the Government's claimed level of consultation was found to be false and observed that the Government's failure to acknowledge and

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correct those errors until prompted by the Committee undermined confidence in the claimed consultation process.

The Committee expressed concern about the Government's failure to undertake implementation planning in parallel with developing the restructure proposal, reinforcing the importance of ensuring Victorian firefighting surge capacity was not diminished and highlighting its concern that the impact of the restructure on this vital surge capacity was unclear.

Key recommendations were:

- Not to proceed with the proposed Bill due to the lack of implementation, operational and funding certainty; failure to undertake consultation; and consequential polarisation of fire services volunteers and staff;
- Separate 'Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation' legislative changes from legislation to restructure the fire services;
- The Government ensure compliance with its consultation obligations under the Volunteer Charter and the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 prior to proceeding with any further reform of the fire services;
- The Government undertake meaningful and balanced consultation with Emergency Management Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, staff and volunteer representatives prior to proposing any further reform of the fire services;
- The Government develop and publish a detailed implementation plan in parallel with any further fire services reform proposal;
- Country Fire Authority staff should continue to be employed directly by the Country Fire Authority, and solely within the Country Fire Authority chain of command. Secondment should only be used for staff exchange/development opportunities, not as a default employment mechanism;
- The Government and its agencies not endorse any EBA, instrument or accord, which has the effect of limiting the exercise of statutory powers of the chief officer(s) of the fire service(s);
- The Government ensure adequate infrastructure funding for the fire services independently of the restructure;
- The Government develop and publish a detailed funding plan in parallel with any

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further fire services structural reform proposal. The funding plan should identify and address the impact of:

- resource and asset transfers between the Country Fire Authority and Fire Rescue Victoria;
  - the creation of the Fire Rescue Victoria fire district on the Fire Services Property Levy revenue base beyond the two-year freeze period; and
  - any changes to the differential charging rates for the Fire Services Property Levy beyond the two-year freeze period; and
- The Legislative Council refer the Department of Premier and Cabinet to the Legislative Council Privileges Committee for investigation of its interference with the Committee's inquiry.

The minority report associated with this Committee agreed or agreed in principle with all but two of the overall recommendations.

Both the full report and the minority report agreed that a detailed implementation plan needed to be published in parallel with any future consideration of the reform.

## **Victorian Fire Service Review – Drawing a line, building stronger services (2015)**

Both the Victorian Fire Services Review (2015) report and the State Government response recognised the importance of CFA volunteers and CFA as a volunteer based and fully integrated organisation to Victoria's emergency management system.

The report calls to improve leadership and to address a concerning culture that has tolerated treating people differently based on pay status; bullying and harassment; poor front-line worker and management relationships; and a them and us approach.

There is a strong call for everyone in the sector to focus more energy on working as one. There is strong recognition of the need for CFA to have more flexibility in the way it deploys resources to support local brigades and community circumstances, and there is an identified need to improve leadership from agency executive level through to Brigade level and across the sector's collective leadership.

The review recognised the strengths of the existing fire services and said that effort should be focussed on ensuring the separate fire services share common effort, reduce duplication and work as one. The report explicitly advises against any contemplation of amalgamating the MFB and CFA, reporting that this would have a negative rather than constructive impact.

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The report acknowledged the extensive and essential capacity of CFA's volunteer Brigades and the fundamental value of sustaining and building strong integration in those communities where paid staff are required to supplement volunteer capacity. The report identified the essential nature of CFA's volunteer Brigade surge capacity for major and concurrent events.

There are 20 recommendations, and the Government identified an action to address 18 of these. Several recommendations were earmarked for further discussion/work and the Government committed to work with VFBV and others on the detail of these. All work on this report ceased after the resignation of the Emergency Services Minister responsible.

## **Emergency Services Response Times (2015)**

Victorian Auditor-General's Report undertaken to assess how accountable emergency service organisations (and others) are for their response time performance.

Key findings included:

- Targets which relate to the number of minutes for emergency services to arrive at a structure fire are based on outdated scientific research from 1987;

- Current response times set for performance standards do not necessarily reflect better outcomes or service efficiency;
- Response times do not represent the extent of emergency response activity or adequately describe emergency service performance; and
- The work of fire services extends well beyond responding to fires and this must be considered in relation to assessing resource requirements and protecting Victorian communities, this issue is complex and requires significant consideration of all aspects of the work undertaken

## **Managing Emergency Service Volunteers (2014)**

Audit undertaken by the Victorian Auditor General to assess the CFA and Victorian SES on their effectiveness and efficiency at managing emergency services volunteers.

Key findings include:

- CFA does not have a sound understanding of the total number of volunteers needed to fulfil its operational requirements;

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- CFA does not know how many volunteers it needs;
  - An evidence-based assessment of the current workforce capacity and capability is needed for CFA to understand what is needed to meet service delivery;
  - Weakness in the processes to identify volunteer training needs limit the effectiveness of CFA training. Training is inconsistent and not always available when needed with career firefighter training prioritised; and
  - The management of recruitment and lack of focus on retention, particularly through gaining and understanding why volunteers leave needs to be addressed
- There is an anticipated increase in frequency, severity, duration and consequence of extreme weather events, which will likely result in great pressure on emergency services;
  - This potential increase in extreme weather events will result in the need to have a standing capacity of agencies both to prepare for, and to respond to, emergencies; and
  - It is uneconomic to maintain full-time paid fire and emergency services that are capable of combatting all conceivable events.

Any future consideration of resource requirements for the State needs to consider the potential future impact of extreme weather events, and the critical support needed to sustain volunteers to ensure the State's capacity and capability to respond to these events.

## **Senate Inquiry 'Recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events' (2013)**

Undertaken by the Environment and Communications Reference Committee to review recent trends on the frequency of extreme weather events and an assessment of the preparedness for key weather events from infrastructure, planning, and insurance to prevention and response.

Key findings include:

## **Independent Inquiry - His Honour David Jones AM (2011)**

Commissioned by Deputy Premier Peter Ryan to examine the effect of arrangements made by CFA on the recruitment, training, deployment, and support to CFA volunteers.

His honour Mr Jones was appointed to conduct the inquiry with terms of reference

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relating to the examination of the effect arrangements made by CFA were having on CFA volunteers and make recommendations to address any shortcomings of difficulties it identified.

The report was a landmark in bringing together an independent examination of issues negatively affecting CFA volunteers, spanning key issues including recruitment, retention, training, engagement & effective consultation, institutional discrimination and deployment.

The report itself is an important document to gain an insight to agency arrangements and their effects on volunteer satisfaction and retention.

Key findings relevant to this review:

- The process for addressing service needs and allocating resources must be clear and transparent. Decisions about allocation of additional career firefighters may affect the involvement of volunteers. Consequently, in accordance with the Volunteer Charter volunteers can reasonably expect to be consulted. 'Decisions such as allocation of resources and possible consequences on volunteer involvement should be made by the CFA Board and CFA Chief Officer not by a Dispute Panel or Board or Reference formed by an industrial agreement';
- Communication and information technology investment is vital to the sustainability of the CFA model and to facilitate effective involvement of volunteers;
- The CFA model of one integrated force (volunteer and paid members) can serve the community very well;
- CFA encouraged to develop service models, standards and resource planning processes that are evidence based;
- Developing a better skills database to capture the skills and qualifications of volunteers to holistically drive volunteer development and utilisation; develop a cadet scheme that taps young members of the community and promotes volunteerism to retiring and resigning employees; explore legislative options for protecting volunteers in relation to their employment;
- That the CFA's volunteer-based, and community embedded service model is fundamental to achieving community-based responsibility for their own safety and engagement with local communities;
- CFA culture, leadership and human resource management are keys to maintaining and strengthening the

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community's understanding of, confidence in, support for and active participation in the volunteer-based emergency service model for Victoria, which is consequently, fundamental to the future success of the CFA;

- Achieving an appropriate CFA organisational culture and providing sound organisational leadership driven by a commitment to principles and policy designed to achieve a successful volunteer-based organisation are critical;
- Improving leadership in CFA from top to bottom is key to the success of the CFA integrated model – this cannot be over emphasised and is one of CFA's biggest challenges. Entry to leadership positions (including operational paid staff) needs to be opened up to ensure the right people hold relevant positions;
- Changes need to occur to single tier entry for paid firefighters;
- All position descriptions and key selection criteria for roles in CFA require knowledge of and commitment to a statement of CFA vision, mission and values which need to include principles that support and complement the principles in the Volunteer Charter and recognise the volunteer-based nature of

CFA;

- The changing circumstance of Victoria further emphasises the need for CFA to ensure it remains attractive to future potential volunteers, and more critically, that the CFA volunteer-based model that provides such valuable services is sustainable into the future;
- Women are currently an untapped resource for CFA volunteer recruitment and specific action is required that facilitates the involvement of women as volunteers in the CFA at all levels;
- CFA should further develop its community education programs to specifically engage culturally and linguistically diverse communities to address the importance of ethnic diversity; and more needs to be done to engage young people in CFA – there may be scope to do more work with schools;
- Developing initiatives and strategies to maximise involvement of young people as volunteers and their retention as volunteers is of vital importance to the sustainability of the CFA model;
- Industrial arrangements should not limit or restrict utilisation of volunteers; appointments to positions in CFA should be based on merit, appropriate

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competency and experience that do not discriminate against volunteers. CFA employment arrangements should be flexible and matched to support/service need;

- Barriers to lateral entry and secondments are contrary to the best interests of CFA in that it inhibits the ability of CFA to appoint the most suitable person to the position. Where it prevents vacancies from being filled it is an unacceptable situation. CFA needs to revisit this arrangement with the United Firefighters Union (UFU). Restrictions to lateral entry is causing delays in CFA's ability to fill key operational and management vacancies – sometimes for more than 12 months;
- High turnover of Operations Officers and industrial arrangements which inhibit the appointment of suitably qualified volunteers to Operations Officers and Operations Managers who have a very important role in the management, leadership and support for volunteers and their brigades, significantly affects CFA brigades;
- The industrial barrier to CFA employing part-time or casual employees is too restrictive and inhibits the CFA in being able to best resource the needs of the organisation. This restriction should be revisited by the CFA with the UFU;
- First Aid training and maintenance of currency qualifications – improvement is necessary with the delivery of First Aid training for volunteers;
- There has been a lack of organisational and strategic planning for training. Forward strategic planning, in what is a dynamic area, is essential. It needs to be short term (next 12 months), mid-term (next two or three years) and long term (next five to 10 years). Such planning needs to include the allocation of resources and training resource levels need to be driven by training need. A solution needs to be found so that capacity can meet demand;
- The need for volunteer training is increasing but the availability is reducing. Availability and accessibility to FTGs (Fire Training Grounds) is another consistent concern and issue. CFA must take initiatives to improve FTG accessibility to volunteers for training;
- The availability of career training instructors at times that are likely to be convenient to volunteers as governed by industrial agreements is too restrictive;
- The use of sessional instructors has a role to play in the effective, efficient and



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cost-effective delivery of training. However, again this is being inhibited by industrial arrangements, although, hopefully, some satisfactory outcome can be negotiated; and

- Existing qualified volunteers are underutilised in Incident Management Teams. There certainly is a perception amongst volunteers that they are a last resort resource. That should not be the case as their better utilisation is beneficial to volunteer morale and the CFA.

There is a range of other findings and recommendations on such matters as consultation and communications processes, internal dispute resolution, disciplinary arrangements and the creation of a Volunteer Ombudsman.

## **Victorian Government Review of the 2010/11 Flood Warnings and Response (2011)**

Examined the emergency management arrangements in response to significant and widespread floods of late 2010 and early 2011, which were severely tested.

Key findings include:

- The need for CFA volunteers to be sustained, supported and equipped to enable the additional capacity required,

and expected of them, to support and respond to other emergencies such as floods;

- The need for Victoria's emergency management arrangements to have scalability for both small- and large-scale events; and
- Victoria's volunteers must not be disenfranchised as the state relies so heavily on them for emergency management capability.

Whilst the report focusses on the Victorian SES as primary responders to flood, its relevance is in highlighting that it is appropriate for Victoria to maintain an 'all hazards, all agencies' philosophy for emergency management and therefore resourcing considerations are not to be limited to local fire response.

## **2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC)**

This was an extensive inquiry with its final report stretching over five volumes. Hearings were conducted from May 2009 through to July 2010. Final report published in July 2010 included extensive observations plus 67 formal recommendations.

The VBRC gave particular recognition and acknowledgement to the strength of the CFA

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volunteer base and specifically the value of 'the surge capacity, the local knowledge and rapid response of volunteers.

Council Assisting the VBRC advised that any changes to emergency management arrangements in Victoria should be treated against two key and interdependent aspects, these being how the changes improve Victoria's ability to (a) manage bushfire prone areas (including preparing for and responding to major fires); and (b) service Victoria's expanding urban fringe and growing regional towns.

These two aspects are highly interdependent, and volunteers emphasise strongly that the soon to be replaced CFA service model in Melbourne's growing urban fringe was absolutely fundamental to Victoria also having capacity to mobilise the large numbers of highly trained volunteer firefighters required for peak load and surge capacity associated with major state level emergencies, including bushfires.

The VBRC recommendations are extensive and formal implementation monitoring processes and reviews also exist, so a full analysis has not been included here. Several matters of particular interest in the context of reform and resourcing are:

- Importance of CFA volunteers for surge capacity, local knowledge and rapid response;

- Need for reliable technology for resource identification and tracking when preparing for and responding to incidents;
- Need for reliable and effective communications equipment and need to overcome black spots and other communications problems between vehicles, fire crews and command and control personnel including incident management teams;
- Need for appropriate numbers of command and control vehicles, strategically located around the state for rapid deployment; and
- Need for increased numbers of trained, qualified and endorsed personnel for level 3 incident control and specialist incident management roles – including importance of harnessing and effectively utilising the volunteer resource and experience.

## **CFA “Training Delivery” Review by David Garnock (2009)**

This review was undertaken following concern over the need for CFA to improve its ability to meet a number of the training delivery needs of firefighters.

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The report identified that the rectification of the training issues will be largely dependent on additional allocation of resources. The provision of effective and accessible training based on brigade needs to ensure they have the correct profile of active qualified volunteers for the brigade risk and role is fundamental to fire and emergency service delivery.

Issues raised in this review and also in previous/subsequent reviews suggest the problems identified are still pertinent today. VFBV suggests issues requiring close attention is improved funding of training in CFA and the removal of industrial agreement provisions or work practices that inhibit training and better utilisation and empowerment of brigades and volunteers to support their own training and assessment needs.

Successive annual VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency surveys highlight issues relating to flexibility of, access to, formats and resourcing of training remain the areas of most concern and dissatisfaction amongst volunteers. Not all of these concerns are issues that CFA can address alone and issues of funding, work practices and industrial arrangements have been raised by VFBV with successive Governments.

The review focussed on organisational arrangements and cultural issues and identified the need to address issues or face

continued impediment to CFA's capacity to rectify some longstanding training delivery issues.

Relevant to this review, a summary of key findings includes:

- CFA needs to improve flexible scheduling, delivery and availability of training to volunteers;
- There are industrial agreement provisions impeding training of CFA volunteers and these need to be addressed;
- CFA needs to develop options to increase delivery of training in locations and at times more accessible and suitable to volunteers;
- CFA needs to improve duration and review any unnecessary mandatory requirements of training to improve flexibility and ensure training is aligned to actual need; and
- Consistency of training approaches to skills maintenance training and recording and RPL/RCC processes need to be improved.

**Independent Government Review – Judge Gordon Lewis (2008)**

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Instigated by Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Bob Cameron to determine the key obstacles in decision making processes for procuring firefighter equipment.

Relevant to future reforms is the sad fact that the problems identified in the Lewis review remain largely as bad today as they were in 2008. Internally, CFA senior management frequently discuss circumstances of external process interference and industrial negotiations barriers that prevent, delay and sometimes destroy CFA management ability to develop, procure, deploy and utilise vital firefighting equipment and resources in a timely, cost effective or operationally efficient manner.

VFBV encourages sector leaders to actively explore the current reluctance or inability of CFA management to speak with independence about these concerns in a manner that will ensure facts are on the table without fear of reprisal.

Also within CFA there is frustration amongst volunteers that too often commitments are made to act but action is not delivered; that consultation with volunteers is not always genuine; that decision making processes are not transparent; and that there is a culture that punishes those who speak out against views of the clique or views of senior managers.

These criticisms are not targeted to CFA management alone, there are many examples of delays and frustrations manifesting within CFA yet caused by problems, behind the scenes agreements or pressure at a broader Government, EM sector or external interference level.

The impediments to CFA operating with the degree of statutory independence, transparency and accountability required to ensure policy, organisational arrangements, operational decisions and resource allocation priorities is driven by community needs, risk and cost effectiveness need to be fully examined.

Key findings relevant to future reform:

- CFA and MFB EBA agreements with paid firefighters effectively give power of veto to UFU, preventing management decisions being made and seriously delaying procurement of firefighter protective equipment;
- CFA and Government failed to meet their commitment and obligations to consult with volunteers;
- Firefighters and the public of Victoria poorly served by the inability of the UFU, CFA and MFB to work cooperatively; and
- Future stakeholder relations effort and consultation arrangements must involve

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consultation with volunteer firefighters in Victoria and volunteers must be entitled to participate in any discussions directed at matters that affect them

VFBV participated and/or submitted extensive submissions to each of these reviews, all of which are publicly available. Should you require any assistance locating a submission, or wish to explore any in further detail, please don't hesitate to make contact and we will facilitate your request.

Similarly, we are committed to assisting in any other capacity as required to help better understand the concerns and/or themes frequently raised by volunteers.



**VFBV** | VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

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**Volunteers play a critical  
role in the delivery of  
emergency management  
across Victoria.**