



## **VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA SUBMISSION TO VICTORIAN STATE GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF THE FIRE SERVICES - August 2015**

### **Preamble**

Given the short timeframe for this review, it has been difficult to compile information on all issues, and supplementary information will be provided on request. The Government's formal commitment to principles, intent and obligations of the Volunteer Charter are very important to volunteers and these have not been met by this limited Review process.

Volunteers have noted with interest the Minister's statements at the time of the announcement of the Review, that an amalgamation of CFA and MFB "is not on the Government's agenda" and that "Victoria's fire services and their boundaries will remain intact". VFBV's submission has been made on the understanding that these issues are not being considered by the Review.

In recent years there has been extensive discussion relevant to this Review but broader than looking at the fire services alone, with the *Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria* Green Paper exploring ways to improve service delivery to Victorians, build community resilience, achieve a genuine 'all-hazards, all-agencies' approach and support the volunteers who are vital to emergency response and recovery.

During the 'green paper' and subsequent steps volunteers actively engaged in discussions in a highly constructive way and in good faith. The discussions and change journey ultimately led to the formation of Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) in 2013. During those discussions volunteers supported improvements to structures, systems and processes that enhance and drive interoperability, standardisation, coordination and streamlining of governance and oversight that would enable and empower volunteers to get the best combined effort from all existing resources.

Volunteers were particularly encouraged by the suggestion from the *Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria* review that the future arrangements would include empowering local level decision making through all aspects of emergency management so that real benefits to service delivery on the ground could be achieved. Volunteers supported overarching arrangements to drive greater cohesion, coordination, standardisation and interoperability, and to generally get agencies to operate more closely together. Volunteers also supported and in fact encouraged a common operating environment, communications systems and training.

As part of volunteers' support for the above, the retention of CFA, the CFA Board and its statutory autonomy was seen as important to continuing volunteer support. There was also a strong view and desire for the retention of the powers of the CFA Chief Officer and for these powers to be able to be delegated to the local level to empower volunteers to undertake their roles.

During discussions that ultimately led to the formation of Emergency Management Victoria there was strong concern from volunteers about the potential for an overarching Board or overly centralised emergency management bureaucracy to;

- cause a loss of identity;
- decision making becoming too remote from community based brigades;
- lose focus or water down attention to agency-specific issues;
- cause a loss of existing resources, and
- create a breadth of issues to be dealt with too big to deal with effectively.

During those extensive discussions there was also strong feeling about the logic and volunteer expectation that volunteer expertise continues to be a key element of the composition of the CFA Board, and that this must extend to any new overarching arrangements that may arise.

There has been some good progress made since the early announcements of new emergency management arrangements in Victoria and since the formal creation of Emergency Management Victoria. But there is significant work still to be done and many of the improvements discussed during the formation of EMV are yet to be realised.

On another level the Council Assisting the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission advised that any changes to emergency management arrangements in Victoria should be tested 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 current CFA service model in Melbourne's growing urban fringe is absolutely fundamental to Victoria also having the 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.

Over the years as community risk situations have changed CFA brigades and volunteers have proven an ability to grow and strengthen their firefighting capacity to manage highly urbanised fire risk. Today's CFA volunteers are professionally trained, equipped and capable of servicing the most complex urban, industrial and high risk service environments as well as the rural and bushfire risk environments that most people are aware of.

CFA already implements a range of resource support options to assist or build volunteer capacity and where CFA determines there is a need, one option enables paid firefighters to be employed to supplement existing volunteer capacity. The work of paid staff in CFA is just as crucial as the work of volunteers, and volunteers respect, appreciate and welcome the support and teamwork of their paid counterparts.

Consistent with the intent set down in CFA legislation, the CFA resource model is designed on the basis that paid firefighters and volunteer firefighters work as one integrated professional team. This is a valuable service/resource model for Victoria, not just because it is the only cost effective way of servicing Victoria's high fire risk but also because it keeps active highly trained volunteer firefighters throughout Melbourne's outer metropolitan areas. The CFA volunteers currently servicing outer metropolitan Melbourne contribute the large portion of Victoria's vital volunteer surge capacity that is required for peak load, high consequence major emergencies.

The existing CFA integrated brigade service model is at the core of CFA being able to balance the two priorities identified by Council Assisting the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. There is no evidence to suggest the CFA integrated brigade service model cannot be sustained unless the fire agencies fail to or are disabled from fostering and supporting it.

There is no evidence to suggest that the arrangement commenced with the formation of EMV nor the structures, resource models, boundary arrangements of agencies within EMV are failing. Volunteers agree there is room for improvement and encourage the Review to closely examine issues already identified by previous reviews. These recent detailed reviews, including the noteworthy Jones Inquiry (2011) that identified clearly that culture problems within the fire service; industrial agreement provisions; under-utilisation of volunteers; difficulties resourcing and suboptimal volunteer access to training; past agency leadership and management inefficiencies; and red tape are distracting from the best end result.

Given the very limited timeframe for the conduct of this review and the likelihood that analysis will be reasonably brief, VFBV encourages the Review team to carefully analyse the findings, recommendations and action plans arising from the large number of recent inquiries and reviews. This Review needs to examine progress against actions to address the findings/recommendations arising from the major recent inquiries/reviews as a key to informing this its deliberations.

Where agencies report progress has been made against various recommendations of recent reviews/inquiries, VFBV recommends the Review team talk to volunteers and paid firefighters and communities to confirm what has actually been achieved on the ground.

VFBV shares the frustration of many volunteers who have now participated in a plethora of reviews, often with little ultimate improvement to fire service delivery or supporting volunteers with local service delivery. Volunteers patiently participate in this and other reviews because that is our nature, but there has been strong reaction to this review that volunteer patience will only last if there is transparency, genuine endeavour, respectful engagement and tangible community outcomes.

Volunteers support active questioning about whether things can be done better, how to plan and prepare for the future and a need to address problems that need to be fixed. Active campaigning by unions to destabilise or destroy public confidence in CFA and CFA volunteers for the pursuit of their own union agenda cannot continue to go unanswered. Volunteers expect Government and CFA to balance the debate, recognise the strengths of CFA and educate communities about the actual facts which tell a story of excellent service delivery and community safety outcomes in Victoria compared with other States.

Volunteers give their service without expectation of reward and with a pride in delivering professional services to their communities and to Victoria. Volunteers are not expecting accolades or reward, but they do demand respect, common courtesy and transparent engagement on matters that affect them; they expect fair play.

## Background

### Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria Inc.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) is the body established under Victorian law, the Country Fire Authority Act, to represent CFA volunteers on all matters that affect their welfare and efficiency. VFBV is an independent Association operating autonomously from CFA but at the same time working closely with CFA and other key stakeholders to engage volunteers in CFA and other deliberations and provide advice on all matters affecting CFA volunteers. 95% of CFA Brigades and CFA Groups elect to pay an annual financial affiliation contribution to the running of VFBV.

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. VFBV works in partnership with the State Government, Emergency Management Victoria, the 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.

VFBV's values, direction and effort is driven by a vision of creating ***'strong volunteerism, embraced to build resilient communities for a safer Victoria'***.

VFBV actively partners with Government and emergency management agencies to ensure that volunteers and their communities remain actively involved in emergency management decision making at every level; through day to day practical work in VFBV/CFA Joint Committees, through the Ministerial level Volunteer Consultative Forum, and in working to ensure positive, practical results from reviews such as the Jones Inquiry and the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) report on Managing Emergency Services Volunteers.

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.

### Country Fire Authority (CFA)

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) is a community and volunteer based emergency service, consisting of approximately 60,000 volunteers and 1,300 paid operational and support staff. CFA Brigades protect 60% of suburban Melbourne, regional cities and all of country Victoria every day and night of the year.

CFA brigades support communities to manage their safety on a day to day basis and prepare for the worst eventualities of fire and other emergency events. CFA brigades are available every day, 24 hours a day to respond to structural fires, bushfires, rescue, road accidents, industrial accidents, hazardous materials incidents, emergency medical response, flood, storm and other calls for emergency assistance.

CFA's volunteer based resource model is the only approach capable of economically and practically dealing with the quantum, scale, spread and simultaneous occurrence of fire and other emergencies experienced in Victoria while still providing day to day emergency response.

CFA's unique integrated volunteer and career staff operating model is fundamental to the surge capacity required to deal with large scale incidents while still providing professional standards of emergency response in Brigade service areas across the state.

The CFA volunteers' contribution to the community is incalculable – the value of their labour alone is estimated at one billion dollars a year, without considering the replacement cost of their expertise, local knowledge, fundraising, leadership and the substantial losses that would be suffered through fires and other emergencies if the volunteers were not there.

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

The need for that resource of 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.

Because volunteers are fundamental to Victoria's emergency management capability, fundamental to community resilience and at the core of communities sharing responsibility for their own safety, it is vitally important to ensure that they are involved in decision making on all issues that affect them, both to make the most of their frontline knowledge and to help sustain Victoria's essential volunteer resource.

**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 the 2002-2003 campaign fires and 2009 Black Saturday fires).

The bulk of this vital surge capacity only exists because the CFA system has built, over generations, a significant volunteer force of local men and women in Melbourne's metropolitan areas and towns across Victoria, who train, qualify, maintain and exercise their skills and capacity through their role as local responders working closely with police, ambulance and other emergency responders.

In the suburbs of Melbourne there is a mutual aid agreement between CFA and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) established to achieve a seamless fire and emergency service to Melbourne residents regardless of the badge on the side of the truck. Under the same dispatching system it is common for CFA volunteers to respond to fires and emergencies in areas covered by the MFB and vice versa. It is a proven and effective arrangement.

## **VFVB and CFA**

VFVB is independent from CFA and 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 provide the framework, governance, leadership, systems and expertise to direct, 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 a community and volunteer based organisation such as CFA, genuine engagement with volunteers is vital. 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 are able to 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. In the past few years in particular, CFA and VFBV have worked hard to significantly improve consultative effort and worked hard to build a robust, respectful and mutually beneficial relationship.

CFA is an incredible organisation and the good work done by both volunteers and paid staff at all levels is something to be very proud of. CFA is continually evolving and changing to keep up with, and when possible lead, changes in the environment we operate in. VFBV and CFA volunteers are always ready to consider new ideas, address challenges and embrace opportunities. 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.

In whatever way it might be relevant to the Review it is in this spirit that VFBV approaches and appreciates our relationship with CFA.

## **Concerns raised by CFA volunteers regarding the timeframe and approach to this Review**

Volunteers across Victoria have made strong representation to VFBV that the period set for the review was unreasonably short and not consistent with the spirit nor obligations of the Volunteer Charter. VFBV formally raised these concerns with the Review leader Mr David O' Byrne and with Minister Garrett in the days after the review was announced.

Following the announcement of the Review, meetings with Mr David O'Byrne and the office of Minister Garrett advised that the short time frame set by the Victorian State Government for the Review, meant that it is likely the Review will be limited to considering improvements that could be made pre summer and early opportunities to improve interoperability but would not allow sufficient analysis to make decisions on more complex issues. VFBV is hopeful that the review will not attempt to make recommendations for changes that are beyond the scope of the time constraints set for the Review. In addition to this submission VFBV remains willing and available to assist the Review and Government to engage volunteers in further consideration and follow up of any issues discovered during the Review period but not addressed in this submission.

The level of ongoing concern about the short time frame and consultation period for this Review will depend on the scope of the Reviews' deliberations. CFA volunteers are generally supportive of progress and have participated via VFBV constructively in this and previous reviews. There is an expectation however that the playing field is fair, that there is appropriate effort made to ensure genuine consultation and it follows that the more complex, more sensitive or more significant the issue then the more robust and careful the analysis, impact analysis and engagement. This is a sensitive issue for CFA volunteers not just because of the circumstances surrounding this review but also, as outlined in this submission because of contemporary, ongoing and significant examples of failure to consult with volunteers and industrial agreements that have prevented meaningful consultation with volunteers in the past.

The CFA Volunteer Charter places mutual obligations on CFA, Government and volunteers to consult on matters that affect volunteers before decisions are made. Volunteers take some comfort in the fact that the Volunteer Charter is backed by CFA Legislation and appeal to the Review leadership to ensure both the spirit and obligations set out in the CFA Volunteer Charter are met.

Beyond the two month period set for the review, CFA volunteers deserve and will expect adequate opportunity for further consultation on any major change options/proposals that might affect them before decisions are made.

VFBV remains willing to assist the review team in whatever way we can and look forward to the opportunity for volunteers to be further engaged in discussion prior to decisions being made.

## Significant relevant recent Reviews, Inquiries and Reports

Over the past seven years, and particularly since the tragic 2009 bushfires, there has been a number of thorough independent reviews and inquiries into Victorian Fire Services; the emergency management arrangements in Victoria; arrangements to support CFA volunteers and CFA volunteer brigades; factors inhibiting the ability of fire services chiefs to manage the fire services effectively; the cost and funding of the fire services; problems with industrial interference with fire service decision making; fire service governance; and arrangements to effectively manage training across the fire services (particularly provision of training to volunteer brigades).

In the case of CFA (and no doubt MFB, DEWLP and other emergency services) there has also been continuous internal review and analysis of challenges and opportunities to improve fire service performance and preparation for the future.

One recurring concern held by VFBV and CFA volunteers is the lack of action against some of the critical recurrent issues identified in these reviews.

The lack of action cannot be attributed to CFA alone – successive Governments, Emergency Management Victoria, CFA and perhaps others must share the leadership criticism. The degree of external interference and constraints inhibiting CFA from being able to properly and transparently manage its affairs and operational performance is also an issue that must be addressed by this Review and is an issue that should be of most concern to Victorians.

VFBV supports measures to improve coordination and interoperability between emergency management agencies (including, but not limited to, MFB and CFA) and these issues were extensively discussed in the input to the creation of Emergency Management Victoria. However in considering any changes VFBV reinforces the important observation made by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission that any consideration of change to the overall structure, governance arrangements and command structures of the fire services in Victoria must be tested against balancing two key requirements. These being how the changes improve (a) Victoria's ability to manage bushfire prone areas (including preparing for and responding to major fires); and (b) service Victoria's expanding urban fringe and growing regional towns. VFBV urges the Review to understand the interdependence of these two requirements and to ensure they are not considered in isolation.

The most recent reviews/inquiries with important relevance to the terms of reference of this Review are:

- 2008 Independent Government Review by Judge Gordon Lewis – Report on the Processes to Select New Personal Protective Clothing for Victorian Firefighters - obstacles to fire services decision making and equipment procurement;
- 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission; -
- 2009 CFA Independent Review by David Garnock – “Training Delivery” Review in CFA
- 2011 Ministerial Inquiry by His Hon. David Jones AM – Inquiry into effect of arrangements made by CFA on its volunteers;
- 2011 Government Discussion process ‘Green Paper – Towards a More Resilient and Safer Victoria’. Resulting in White Paper and Creation of Emergency Management Victoria to drive coordination, interoperability and improvement
- 2011 CFA Act changes – legislating the fundamental importance of CFA ‘being first and foremost a volunteer based organisation with paid firefighters and volunteers working

together in a fully integrated manner' and the requirement for CFA to establish policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers to deliver CFA services

- 2011 Victorian Government Review of the 2010-11 Flood Warnings and Response
- 2011 Fire Services Commissioner Fire Services Reform Program
- 2011 Victorian Government Fire Services Levy Options Paper
- 2013 Emergency Management Bill
- 2014 Emergency Management Victoria – Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan Interim – 2014/2015
- 2014 Victorian Auditor-General's Report – Managing Emergency Services Volunteers
- 2015 Victorian Auditor General's Report – Emergency Service Response Times
- VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Surveys – 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 (underway)
- 2015 Emergency Management Australia – How a Change in Thinking Might Change the Inevitability of Disasters

There are common important themes emerging from this collection of detailed reviews/inquiries/reports and these themes should shape the deliberations of this 2015 Fire Services Review. VFBV wishes to draw attention to the following common and important themes emerging from these reviews/inquires:

- 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 importance of CFA's fully integrated paid staff and volunteer firefighter manning model, designed to achieve paid and volunteer firefighters working together as one integrated team, using same equipment, same nationally accredited training framework, and responding to fires as one integrated firefighting force
- The need to remove industrial interference and barriers to effective CFA decision making, particularly those barriers that prevent CFA being able to make decisions about resource allocation; prevent flexible resource deployment provisions enabling CFA to target solutions matched to local community and volunteer brigade capacity gaps; unduly delay commissioning of firefighting and operational equipment; and restrict provision of training/support to CFA volunteer brigades
- 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 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.
- 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.

The dot points included in the summaries provided below are findings of the Reviews, Reports and Inquiry.

**Independent Government Review – Judge Gordon Lewis (2008):** instigated by Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Bob Cameron to determine the key obstacles in decision making processes for procuring firefighter equipment.

Key findings relevant to this review:

- 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.
- Future stakeholder relations effort and consultation arrangements must involve consultation with volunteer firefighters in Victoria and volunteers must be entitled to participate in any discussions directed at matters that affect them
- 'Machinations and intransigence of CFA, MFB and UFU contrasted starkly to the Volunteer's cooperative approach'

Relevant to the pursuit of interoperability; achieving a culture of cooperation and respect; and improving support to CFA Volunteer Brigades 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 the review team 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 by the Review.

**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.

Mr Jones was appointed to conduct the inquiry by the Deputy Premier of Victoria and Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the Hon Peter Ryan MP on 4 April 2011. In brief, the Terms of Reference related 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. Mr Jones made 41 recommendations to address the problems he identified and these were presented to the CFA for action overseen by a working party that included central government public service representatives, the CFA and VFBV. The success of this process is a matter of disagreement between volunteers and CFA; VFBV continues to be disappointed on the outcomes for volunteers against many of the comments and recommendations made in the report.

The report itself is an important document which we strongly recommend be examined by the Fire Services Review as part of its deliberations in addressing issues regarding CFA's resourcing, operations, management and culture.

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 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;
- People are CFA's greatest asset and must be looked after
- 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
- Free up the process for volunteers transferring from one CFA brigade to another
- CFA identify and address barriers to retention of existing CFA volunteers
- 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 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 ten 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;
- CFA Training Instructors - Despite increased demands, there has not been any substantial increase to the instructor base over the last ten years;
- The availability of career instructors at times that are likely to be convenient to volunteers as governed by industrial agreements is too restrictive.
- New approaches are needed and they must involve greater and better use of volunteer instructors and assessors;
- The use of sessional instructors has a role to play in the effective, efficient and cost effective delivery of training. However, again this is being inhibited by industrial arrangements, although, hopefully, some satisfactory outcome can be negotiated.
- [There are a range of other subsidiary findings and recommendations contained within the 'Jones Report' regarding training issues, including the availability of specific types of training, consultation and design and support for the Garnock Report on training – see document provided.]
- Deployment and Utilisation of Volunteers – CFA volunteers are a valuable resource and it would benefit the CFA to ensure experienced and qualified volunteers are utilised at all levels of the CFA, in leadership, as well as incident management roles;

- 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.

**2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission** – Extensive Inquiry. Hearings conducted from May 2009 through to July 2010. Final report published in July 2010 included extensive observations plus 67 formal recommendations. It gave particular recognition and acknowledgement to the strength of the CFA volunteer base and specifically the value of ‘the surge capacity, the local knowledge and rapid response of volunteers’.

Matters of particular note in the context of this review

- 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;
- 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

Some progress has been made on these matters since 2010 but further progress needs to be given priority

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

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
- consistency of training, approaches to skills maintenance training and recording and RPL/RCC processes need to be improved.

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 and is an area VFBV suggests needs close attention by the Review and recommendations leading to improved funding of training in CFA; 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.

**Victorian Government review of the 2010/11 Flood Warnings and Response (2011)** - examined the emergency management arrangements in response to the significant and widespread floods of late 2010 and early 2011, which were severely tested.

This is relevant to the Fire Services Review as it “revealed significant shortcomings in Victoria’s emergency management arrangements”, and makes regular reference to CFA.

With 93 recommendations, this review was comprehensive and thorough.

Key findings relevant to this review 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.
- 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.

**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.

Relevant to this review are the key findings that:

- 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.

- It is uneconomic to maintain full-time paid fire and emergency services that are capable of combatting all conceivable events.

Consideration of resource requirements for the State need 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.

**Managing Emergency Services 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 (references to SES have been removed as not relevant to this review) include:

- CFA does not have a sound understanding of the total number of volunteers needed to fulfil its operational requirements.
- 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.
- The management of recruitment and lack of focus on retention, particularly through gaining and understanding why volunteers leave needs to be addressed.

The focus of this report was on the workforce capacity and requirements rather than the needs of volunteers. The report importantly acknowledges that "volunteers are essentially unpaid professionals and valuable assets."

**Emergency Service Response Times (2015)** - Victorian Auditor-General's Report undertaken to assess how accountable emergency service organisations (and others) are for their response time performance.

Relevant findings for this review are:

- 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.

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.

**How a Change in Thinking Might Change the Inevitability of Disasters**, released by Emergency Management Australia earlier this year focusses on the need to prepare for large disasters as a core and fundamental part of resource and capacity planning.

## **Underpinning factors critical to ensuring Victoria Remains the leader in Fire Services**

Relevant to the all of the Terms of Reference for this review, VFBV submits that there are some fundamental factors which are critical to the future success of Victoria's firefighting capability and these factors must underpin any decisions made about the resourcing, operations, management and culture of the collective fire services.

### ***Balancing the need to maintain local service capacity PLUS ensure peak load capacity exists for Victoria's major fires/disasters***

The Minister, in announcing the Fire Services Review, described it as a 'review to ensure Victoria Remains a leader in fire services'.

The 2009 Bush Fires Royal Commission (BFRC) recognised that any consideration of change to the overall structure, governance arrangements and command structures of the fire services in Victoria must be tested against balancing two key requirements. These being how the changes improve (a) Victoria's ability to manage bushfire prone areas (including preparing for and responding to major fires); and (b) service Victoria's expanding urban fringe and growing regional towns. VFBV strongly supports the contention that these two requirements should not be considered in isolation.

Decisions about one aspect of service planning, resource allocation, training, equipment etc invariably have flow on effect to other areas of fire service capability. 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 Victoria's 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 or at the risk of eroding Victoria's ability to deal with major fires, could have disastrous consequences.

### ***CFA community embedded and volunteer based model underpins community sharing responsibility for their own safety***

CFA had the legislative duty of superintending, enforcing and taking all necessary steps for the prevention and suppression of fires and for the protection of life and property in the case of fire. In addition to its own fire suppression and prevention efforts, a shared responsibility between CFA and the community is core to CFA's service delivery approach. This approach requires active effort to build and maintain community awareness and capacity to support and participate in their own safety as an essential ingredient to success of the fire services effort.

The CFA community embedded and volunteer based service model not only provides the state's surge capacity to deal with major disasters it also provides a vital direct link for community participation and shared responsibility. Apart from its enormous economic and fire response capacity contribution, the CFA's volunteer based service model provides significant foundation for social cohesion and community resilience. It is essential therefore that all CFA (and in fact emergency management sector) service delivery planning and resource effort includes a focus on building community and volunteer capacity.

***CFA volunteer based model is critical to meeting Victoria's peak load and surge 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 (ie to be expected) 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.

CFA brigades service all of country Victoria, more than half of metropolitan Melbourne, and all provincial centres and townships across Victoria. 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 statewide peak load and surge capacity.

The peak load capacity is not just required for high profile disasters like the 2009 Black Saturday fires, each year there are numerous days when thousands of trained firefighters need to be deployed to major emergencies. Even at a local level, large events (eg. large fires, industrial, commercial fires etc) frequently require an ability to deploy very large number of trained volunteer firefighters sometimes for many days and at the same time needing to manage normal response availability in the surrounding areas.

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, 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.

***CFA integrated resource model is vital to maintaining Victoria's volunteer surge and peak load capacity at the same time as managing urban service growth challenges***

As outlined above the 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 40 - 50% of personnel deployed are volunteers supplied from volunteer and integrated CFA brigades in the greater metropolitan area of Melbourne (excluding the MFB district where there are no volunteer firefighters). Maintaining volunteer capacity in these areas serviced by the CFA integrated brigade model 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. When the support solution requires additional paid firefighter support the current CFA model deploys paid firefighters to supplement and support the existing volunteer capacity. This approach is known as the CFA integrated brigade resource model.

The key difference between the CFA integrated brigade model and the MFB paid only model is that the CFA integrated brigade resource model enables the CFA Chief Officer to employ paid firefighters at targeted CFA volunteer brigades to supplement existing volunteer capacity with paid firefighter support, adding to but not displacing the vital volunteer firefighting capacity at these locations. In the past the CFA Chief Officer has 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 ability to allocate and manage resources flexibly to meet changing community and brigade support needs.

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

All CFA brigades are volunteer based and in approximately 35 of CFA's 1220 brigades there are also CFA paid firefighters working with and alongside the CFA volunteers as 'CFA integrated brigades'.

VFBV strongly supports the continuation of the integrated brigade model however notes there needs be stronger CFA leadership and more proactive effort to lead, facilitate and support local volunteers and paid firefighters to achieve good integration. Despite there being some examples of excellent integration, the VFBV 2014 Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey results indicate that volunteers at integrated brigades are less satisfied with the way they are supported, utilised and respected compared with volunteers in the broader CFA. VFBV sees this as a strategically vital improvement opportunity for CFA and has actively sought to work with CFA and integrated brigades

with this endeavour. CFA's lack of progress against specific agreed integration improvement actions arising from the 2011 Jones Inquiry has been disappointing.

VFBV supports any opportunity to establish more focussed work involving volunteers, paid firefighters, VFBV and the UFU to support strong integration. For several years VFBV has encouraged CFA to take a more active lead role in this area. Specific improvement opportunities suggested by volunteers at integrated brigades have been provided to CFA and can be provided should the review wish to drill into this detail.

***There needs to be a range of flexible support options available for volunteer brigades based on local circumstance/need – a 'continuum of support'***

Throughout metropolitan Melbourne and major provincial centres across Victoria there are numerous examples of purely volunteer CFA brigades coping well with high workload and highly urbanised fire risk environments. In other locations brigades with similar risk profiles and experiencing challenges sustaining the required volunteer capacity have addressed the volunteer capacity gaps by adopting innovative solutions to volunteer recruitment, focussed operational training, satellite volunteer infrastructure, brigade administrative support, community fire prevention etc.

Deploying additional paid firefighters to support a CFA volunteer brigade is not the only support option for busy CFA brigades and there are many other volunteer and community capacity building options that should be explored and implemented before needing to progress to the high cost option of requiring additional paid firefighters.

VFBV submits that a continuum of support options, one of which is the flexible provision of additional paid firefighters needs to be available to ensure CFA volunteer brigades maintain a service capacity matched to local need. The 'continuum of support' and where additional firefighters are required the 'CFA integrated brigade' resource model are fundamental to maintaining Victoria's volunteer surge capacity for major disasters.

CFA Board and Chief Officer approved a brigade resource support model often nicknamed 'the continuum of support' some years ago. The approach intends to apply a range of capacity building support options for volunteer brigades such as active recruitment support, targeted training assistance, administrative support, leadership support, smart volunteer alerting/dispatch systems, additional infrastructure (such as satellite facilities and additional fire appliances (ie fire trucks) to extend service to the outlying areas of a brigade's service profile, fire appliances matched to risk, community/industry partnerships, operational response arrangements and so on.

Many volunteer brigades feel that CFA has not taken sufficient proactive steps to implement the range of other solutions for building volunteer capacity. This lack of action can lead to an avoidable decline in volunteer capacity. VFBV has previously raised concern with CFA Board and management that insufficient effort and governance has resulted in this course of action being hit and miss to the detriment of volunteer capacity and at the cost of ever increasing fire services expenditure.

In previous years a highly successful program known as the Community Support Facilitators (CSF) Program was implemented by CFA. The CSF program appointed paid non firefighter staff to volunteer brigades to assist with community education, risk mitigation planning, fire awareness and targeted avoidable fire reduction programs, administration and implementation of community/industry partnerships to build community and volunteer capacity. At the time (the year

2000 or thereabouts) there were approximately 50 -60 full time CSF positions appointed by CFA working across conceivably 70 of CFAs busiest brigades. The CSF program was highly successful, cost effective and extremely well received by volunteers. The CSF program was abolished because of industrial pressure from the UFU against the wishes of CFA management and despite its success in building community capacity, improving community safety and sustain strong volunteer capacity.

***Community understanding, confidence and buy in is fundamental to success of Victoria's Fire Services***

Hand in hand with the above there needs to be ongoing community education and information about the professionalism, capacity and performance outcomes delivered by Victoria's volunteer based CFA. This will require deliberate and sustained effort by both fire service leaders, the emergency management sector leaders and Government.

The education must go beyond the traditional themes of summer, bushfires and thanking volunteers for their dedication and commitment. Communities need to be made aware that CFA volunteer brigades are professionally equipped and trained, providing services 365 days a year, 24 hours a day to service to communities in all risk environments including not just rural Victoria and bushfires but also the growth areas of Melbourne, provincial centres and townships across Victoria.

For the public attacks, driven by union or any other interest group agenda to be allowed to mischievously mislead the community into thinking they are somehow lesser protected by the CFA volunteer based fire service to go unanswered by fire agencies, the emergency sector leaders and the Government is disappointing.

Volunteers expect Government, Emergency Management Victoria and the fire agencies to ensure that the community know the facts about the professional level of fire service and the excellent capacity of volunteers to continue to deliver this service. For officials to sit back, say nothing and suggest that tensions about union community message campaigns, designed to erode community confidence in the capacity of CFA's volunteer brigades, are due to tensions between volunteers and paid firefighters is unreasonable and short sighted.

## Addressing Terms of Reference:

### Resourcing requirements necessary to ensure Victoria is appropriately equipped and fire ready

#### Overall comments

1. Nationally and internationally there is strong recognition that emergency management (and therefore including this Inquiry's focus on fire services) planning, preparedness, response and recovery effort must be approached as a shared responsibility between Agencies, Government and the community. It is assumed the Review intends to consider this term of reference from the interdependent perspectives of resourcing agencies to perform their role as well as resourcing and supporting communities to share responsibility for their own safety.

The approach taken to this issue of shared responsibility will shape consideration of the resourcing requirements necessary to ensure Victoria is appropriately equipped and fire ready. This issue was extensively analysed by the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission and the 2011 Victorian 'Towards a More resilient Community Strategy' and these plus related works needs to inform the Review deliberations. VFBV submissions to these bodies of work have already been submitted to the Review.

2. The Review's assessment of Victoria's resourcing requirements must consider the arrangements required to achieve both the capability and capacity required to service day to day local service demands and the ability to respond to peak load situations involving broad scale high consequence disasters. This is a balancing challenge, and in a Victorian context, the resource solutions or service approach applied to meet urban risk environments has a direct impact on the State's ability to manage multiple large scale, high life/property consequence disasters such as the 2009 Black Saturday Fires. VFBV is deeply concerned to ensure this review does not make changes that jeopardise Victoria's ability to respond to major fire and other emergencies.
3. Victoria is one of the most fire prone areas in the world. Statistics for recent decades demonstrate that peak load scenarios (*multiple large scale and potentially catastrophic bushfires*) will occur with significant regularity every year throughout summer. In addition, other major disasters (eg Floods, Longford, Hazelwood Mine fire) requiring *significant resources* well beyond normal day to day workload/capacity planning can occur at any time of the year.
4. Incident statistics are available to demonstrate the critical dependence on being able to mobilise and sustain huge numbers of trained volunteer firefighters and also volunteers in incident management roles during peak load situations.
5. Numerous recent inquiries, including the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, have recognised the vital importance of the CFA volunteer based model in Victoria for its:
  - resource 'surge' capacity, enabling rapid mobilisation of huge numbers of trained volunteers throughout Victoria to major incidents and the ability to sustain over many weeks and/or

escalate this capacity as more incidents occur at the same time as maintaining service delivery in local communities;

- local knowledge of volunteers before, during and after disasters;
  - community embedded volunteer service provision, leadership and networks that build community capacity and community resilience; and
  - contribution to achieving the community sharing responsibility for their own safety.
6. The CFA volunteer resource is fundamentally necessary to ensure Victoria is equipped and fire ready. The CFA community embedded volunteer based model is also fundamental to activating the community as a resource to share responsibility for their own safety and is core to building community resilience. Research shows that emergency service volunteers, who live, integrate and operate within their communities on a daily basis are best placed to build community capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters. The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience says that a key indicator of a disaster resilient community is when 'the emergency management sector is strong'.
  7. Just as the volunteers are a critical 'resource' for Victoria, the way volunteers are engaged, encouraged, supported and empowered is an equally critical 'resource' consideration. The vital importance of the volunteers is recognised in CFA legislation which requires CFA to 'develop policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers to deliver CFA services. When considering the resource question the Review also needs to consider how the volunteer 'resource' and community based nature of this resource needs to be nurtured, supported and managed to ensure its ongoing sustainability. This issue needs to permeate through the Review deliberations on each of the Terms of Reference.
  8. Resource priorities need to be determined by the CFA Chief Officer in an objective, risk driven and transparent manner. The CFA Chief Officer and CFA must not be constrained or limited in the performance of their statutory duties by industrial agreements. Within the constraints of fair work conditions, the CFA Chief Officer must have the power to determine the numbers, hours of work, rosters and locations of his paid firefighters. The CFA Chief Officer is currently hamstrung when it comes to managing his operational workforce and does not have the power to manage his operational workforce based on his assessment of operational need.

In November 2014 the current State Government announced 350 additional paid firefighting positions to be employed by CFA over the next four years. VFBV is concerned with the lack of transparency underpinning this decision, particularly since the CFA Chief Officer had not identified the need for the 350 additional paid firefighters as a priority in the next four years, nor was it identified as the priority need compared to more training, volunteer brigade, community education staff.

Additional paid firefighters are a welcome support when and where they are required but the process for determining resource support solutions and resource allocation should sit with the CFA Chief Officer.

9. Furthermore the Government's requirement for CFA to employ these additional paid firefighters in the next four years is particularly concerning given that CFA has not been provided with the additional funding to recruit, train, equip them; no funds been allocated to build the facilities required to accommodate the additional personnel; CFA does not have the training facilities

required to train the new staff without diminishing training to existing CFA volunteers and paid staff.

Estimates indicate the cost for recruiting, training, equipping and accommodating these additional paid firefighters is in excess of \$300M over the next four years. The ongoing additional annual cost post the four year initial implementation period is estimated to be ~\$60M per year. It is a concern that other aspects of CFA funding, including training, truck replacement, protective equipment and support to volunteer brigades could be forced to be cut to support this currently unfunded Government policy commitment.

VFBV understands that the \$300M cost of the additional firefighters over the next four years is yet to be factored into the Fire Service Levy. Given the large additional funding impact yet to be factored into the Fire Service Levy, VFBV is concerned that funding pressures in the coming four years will prevent other important CFA operational capability and volunteer support investments such as training, community education, aged firefighting equipment replacement being funded.

10. Further concerns relate to industrial agreement provisions that restrict and override CFA's ability to deploy these additional paid firefighters to locations and at times where they are needed most. It is widely discussed within CFA at all levels of management that the current industrial agreements impose barriers to deploying paid firefighters on a daytime roster, deploying resources flexibly to address short term volunteer brigade capacity gaps or seasonal service demand peaks. Whether it is because of industrial limitations, stakeholder pressure or some other side agreement, the CFA Chief Officer does not seem to have the power to allocate resources based on operational need. Despite this issue being extensively analysed and documented in previous Reviews/Inquiries the problems persist.
11. The inadequate base arrangements for essential ongoing fire-fighting infrastructure (fire station, fire trucks, training facilities, firefighting equipment etc) asset upkeep and life cycle replacement has been raised by VFBV with successive Governments. VFBV understands that a Victorian Department of Treasury Base Funding Review conducted in about 2014 found that the CFA's budget allocation does not provide sufficient annual allocation nor long term funding commitment required to manage and maintain CFA's asset base.

VFBV has been actively campaigning for crucial ongoing CFA base funding to ensure safe and fit for purpose CFA firefighting fleet replacement and growth expansion (to meet urban growth demands etc.) addressing:

- Guaranteed multiyear funding based on reasonable replacement cycle
- Funding mechanism to recognise service demand growth and changes in infrastructure required to match changing community risk profiles (for example where urban growth requires the addition of a firefighting pumper to a brigade)
- Funding to address the 'catch-up' gap created by recent underfunded years

VFBV position is that CFA needs to aim for a twenty year firefighting truck replacement cycle consistent with the age limit replacement cycle accepted by fire services across Australia.

VFBV urges the Review to consider recommendations for sufficient ongoing base funding as part of CFA's budget, with a five year rolling plan of truck replacement. CFA's out of date trucks are well maintained, but lack the firefighting capacity and crew protection features of modern trucks, such as; anti-lock brakes, fire resistant brake lines, larger pumps, foam systems etc.

12. Funding for fire trucks is an easy issue to highlight because it is easy to understand that you generally need fire trucks to put fires out. There are also too many brigades with inadequate basic facilities such as room to operate safely in the engine bay or for storage and donning of firefighters Personal Protective Clothing; basic storage and administration; access to hot/cold water, toilets and basic amenities; meeting facility; fume extraction or management.
13. There needs to be equal treatment of volunteers and paid staff when it comes to CFA approach, foundation principles, funding and priority setting on all resource matters whether this be facility design, fire truck allocation, personal protective gear or various firefighting equipment, access to training. Everyone understands that resources are finite and that choices will need to be made but the approach, equipment design, distribution or allocation, brigade roll-out sequencing and funding source must be equitable, service delivery driven, risk based and transparent.
14. There are a range of more detailed concerns raised with VFBV as part of the Review input process including issues such as:
  - Inconsistency across CFA Districts about basic equipment allocation;
  - Inadequate provision of personal protective equipment for new volunteers recruits;
  - Need for increased CFA funding to increase numbers of valuable direct brigade support roles such as community education support, Brigade Administrative Support Officers, Trainers (full time, casual and sessional to ensure availability at times and locations required for the brigade);
  - Lack of internet access for brigades;
  - Lack of funding of CFA's commitments to increase provision of First Aid training to volunteers ;
  - A need for an increase to the current CFA general allowance to cover incidental expenses and basic administration, support and day to day running costs for brigades.

## **How CFA and MFB staff can be best supported in protecting communities, taking into consideration operational needs as well as Occupational Health and Safety best practice and training methods**

1. The narrow wording of this Term of Reference has caused significant concern amongst volunteers. The CFA Act appropriately describes CFA as a volunteer based and fully integrated organisation. At the core of CFA's design is the intent that volunteers and paid staff work together, support one another and work as one integrated team.
2. The Jones Inquiry (2011) recognised the importance of CFA being 'resourced by both volunteers and employees, constituting one integrated firefighting force not two' advising that considerations about CFA need to recognise this fundamental attribute from the outset.

Changes to the CFA Act in 2011, unanimously supported by Parliament, reinforced this paradigm recognising the fundamental importance of volunteers in CFA and the importance of volunteers and paid staff working together 'in a fully integrated manner'. The CFA Act now makes specific reference to a core support mindset required for all CFA effort stating the requirement that CFA is *"... to develop policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteer officers and members to provide the Authority's services"*.

The CFA legislation articulates a clear statutory direction to the CFA Board and management on the nature of the organisation.

3. Following initial concerns about the nature of this Review's Terms of Reference, VFBV was encouraged by subsequent advice from the Review leader Mr David O'Byrne clarifying that the reference to staff should be taken to include both paid and volunteer members of CFA. VFBV has approached this term of reference with this broader interpretation. Because of the confusion about the wording of this Term of Reference VFBV is concerned that review submissions applying the more narrow interpretation will lead to deficient analysis of opportunities and challenges by the Review.
4. Issues associated with training are by far the most frequently raised concern for volunteers and it is distressing to say that many of these concerns are common themes over a number of years. Key recurring themes relevant to this Review:
  - Problems with availability of and access to training at times, locations and in formats suitable for volunteers;
  - CFA budget constraints limiting training availability rather than training being driven by assessment of need and appropriately funded;
  - inconsistent approaches to the support and delivery of training for volunteers;
  - Field Training Grounds that are closed when volunteers need them;
  - Industrial arrangements that limit who can deliver training; limit the availability of paid staff instructors for training and assessment; create an effective impossibility of using qualified paid sessional instructors; and place restrictions on filling paid instructor vacancies;

- Inconsistent CFA staff attitude toward the use of qualified volunteers for instruction and assessment in many parts of the state.
  - the length of time it takes to administratively process a new recruit, arrange minimum skills training and the failure of CFA to issue personal protective clothing (PPC) to volunteer recruits for the duration of minimum skills training (the recruit's brigade normally has to scrounge to provide a trainee with such PPC)
  - Recognition of Prior Learning
5. Access to training facilities is fundamental to hot fire simulation and other practical training for firefighters, operational leaders and volunteers in a range of specialist and support roles. The ongoing priority of ensuring adequate investment in and funding to enable volunteer access to training facilities is a fundamental support requirement. A combination of current circumstances means that access, cost and safety of these facilities needs heightened attention by Government and agencies.

Short or long term closure of VEMTC Fiskville and the extraordinary paid firefighter recruitment training to be undertaken over the next four years will place an impossibly heavy strain on fire agency training facilities. Volunteers have already lost access to VEMTC Fiskville and volunteer access to the new VEMTC Craigieburn training facility is already being heavily constrained by the paid firefighter and normal staff promotional training load. The cost per head for training at the new VEMTC Craigieburn facility has already created a cost barrier for CFA volunteer attendance at VEMTC Craigieburn and less than a handful of CFA volunteers have had an opportunity to train at this facility in the last 12 months.

6. Water quality and firefighter safety concerns raise the question of a need for water treatment facilities at all Victorian firefighter training facilities.
7. Noting that the Fiskville Inquiry is still underway, VFBV urges the Review team to take up the issue of the short term impact of the cessation of training at VEMTC Fiskville; the longer term impact and alternatives if VEMTC Fiskville is not able to reopen; and also the need and funding required to establish safe water treatment facilities at all Victorian hot fire training facilities to return confidence to the people who need to work and train at these facilities.
8. As mentioned above, the costs associated with undertaking training at state of the art and safe hot fire training facilities is a basic cost of doing business. Volunteer access to training must not be reduced simply because it has become more costly. In the long term the cost of not accessing training will be far greater than the investment in training.

Agency budgets need to reflect the current day cost of accessing the new training facilities and training and as recommended in the Jones Inquiry (2011) training budgets should be driven by training needs not the other way round as is currently the case where volunteers are not able to access essential training because of supposed budget limitations. If training is required then funding for it should be set aside as a priority in agency budgets and there should be no lesser access to training for volunteers simply because they are not paid or because the requirement to train them is not enshrined in an industrial agreement.

9. As far as sharing resources and common training is concerned, VFBV is highly supportive. VFBV supports the State Fire & Emergency Services Training Framework released in May 2013 and the EMV State Emergency Services Training Framework which seeks to ensure all VEMTC training centres are affordable, accessible to and efficiently used by all agencies, volunteers, departments and local government. Despite these intentions, volunteers identify concerns with

training in general, access to training, the need for common training and equal prioritisation of access for paid staff and volunteers as areas requiring improvement.

VFBV supports EMV's Victorian Emergency Management Training Centres Strategy – Implementation Plan of **January 2015** which proposes to address:

- Ability of agencies to operate at each facility including:
  - Personnel able to operate facilities
  - Common booking process and system
  - Common business systems and standard business processes
  - Recognition of the differences in operating principles between agencies
- Ability of agencies to operate each facility
- Costing model applicable to achieve a maximisation in the accessibility at all VEMTC facilities by emergency management agencies
- Standard governance arrangements, including establishing facility user groups

The Review should examine training facility cost and funding restrictions, work place arrangements (eg hours of work, recognition of volunteer trainer/assessor endorsements), stakeholder blockers, facility design/capacity to operate 'after hours' (ie when volunteers are available) and any other barriers preventing these principles from becoming reality.

10. There should be no organisational or industrial barriers to volunteers being trained, qualified and deployed in any emergency service role. In fact, the active promotion and facilitation of volunteer involvement and front line deployment in all facets of fire and emergency management must be an organisational priority.<sup>1</sup>
11. Developing, retaining and effectively utilising the pool of experienced volunteers for the range of critical incident management, command and leadership roles is equally important and is an area highlighted in previous reviews as an area needing improvement. Building and sustaining the pool of volunteers needed for incident management and leadership roles requires deliberate, proactive and accountable effort by agencies and EMV. This includes proactive effort to target the development of volunteers for senior leadership and operational roles; training, recognition of prior learning and support to make this volunteer career progression as easy and mutually beneficial as possible; mentoring; and then utilising these volunteers after they have been trained and endorsed.
12. Optimum and efficient utilisation of the available volunteer capacity plus the untapped volunteer potential in communities and within existing volunteer ranks could be addressed under several of the terms of reference but included here as an aspect of support seems logical.

Initiatives that need to be actively pursued include:

- targeted ongoing effort to attract, recruit, train and actively deploy volunteers at brigade level;
- conscious effort to target recruitment of underrepresented community demographics (for example: female members, young people, community groups from diverse cultural backgrounds, shift workers and other people who are at home and available at times

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<sup>1</sup> VFBV Submission, 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Amalgamation of the Fire Services – Organisational Structure, 19 April 2010, page 14

required for brigade response, people interested in performing non-operational and brigade support roles and so on) ;

- progressing and equipping new recruits to be operationally active as quickly as possible;
- productive and respectful use of volunteers' time always;
- respect and recognition of the skills that the volunteers have; and
- provision of appropriate support, equipment, training etc;

13. Volunteer skills and performance in Incident management and fire ground roles must be recognised and accepted by all agencies operating in the emergency management sector. For example, during the early days of the Hazelwood Mine Fire incident, suitably qualified, endorsed and experienced volunteers performing vital Sector Commander roles were not recognized by some MFB & CFA paid staff crews. It took several days for a written directive authored by the CFA and MFB Chief Officers to remind career firefighters that volunteers performing these roles operated within the chain of command and were as legitimate as paid firefighters performing these same roles.

Similar objections were raised from career crews who objected to other career firefighters below the rank of Leading Firefighter performing sector command roles, highlighting the potential incompatibility between incidents managed under the principles of AIIMS, where rank is not a factor to be considered when selecting personnel for incident management roles, compared to interpretations that prioritise role by rank and do not strictly observe AIIMS in the incident command structures.

14. Another noteworthy impediment to effective use of available resources relates to inconsistent interpretation of existing industrial agreement clauses dealing with arrangements for Strike Teams comprised of both volunteers and paid firefighters (composite or integrated strike teams). Less ideal interpretations of these clauses are interpreted to mean that paid firefighters won't accept operational command from qualified volunteer strike team leaders. Such interpretation is contradictory to the CFA Chief Officer's direction that operational roles are performed based on an individual, having completed recognised training, being endorsed to perform the role, not pay status. Industrial barriers to Victoria's fire services being able to recognise suitably qualified and endorsed volunteers significantly reduces the availability and flexibility required for response to major emergencies and also actively discourages integrated/composite strike teams, which are important to retain from a culture and interoperability perspective.

15. Issues associated with improving volunteer access to incident management training; the need for better utilisation of trained, endorsed and experienced volunteers; and the need for more volunteers to be trained in incident management roles was extensively discussed during the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and VFBV encourages the Review to refer to its relevant references and findings on these matters.

16. Victoria needs to catch up with other States on introducing presumptive legislation to provide CFA volunteers and their career colleagues with a fairer and simpler path to compensation for firefighters who contract typical firefighter cancers.

Current Victorian compensation arrangements already provide for cancer compensation, but it is almost impossible to access because the firefighter has to show evidence of fires or incidents they attended that might be 10 or 15 years ago and prove on the balance of probabilities which incidents or which toxic exposures caused their cancer.

The proposed presumptive legislation would work by reversing the onus of proof – the firefighter’s cancer would be presumed to be work related provided the firefighter has sufficient years of service. A firefighter’s claim could still be rejected if it could be proven that the cancer was not related to firefighting duties.

VFBV submits that presumptive legislation in Victoria should reflect the current standard, as does the South Australian legislation, by treating volunteer firefighters and their career colleagues equally and listing the same 12 cancers and years of service requirements as appear in legislation around Australia.

## **The interoperability between CFA and MFB**

**AND**

## **The interoperability across fire agencies responsible for preventing and suppressing all types of fires in Victoria**

### **VFBV overall comment**

1. VFBV supports efforts to achieve greater coordination and interoperability between agencies and agrees with Government that this is a far more productive pursuit than fundamentally altering the structure of the existing fire services. This issue was extensively considered by the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission which determined that effort should be devoted to improving interoperability and coordination; and establishing a single line of operational control.
2. VFBV has previously stated support for increased effort to actively pursue initiatives to improve how the fire and emergency management agencies can work together as one. Opportunities previously submitted include:
  - Operational human resource planning; availability/utilisation tracking; incident allocation and deployment;
  - Integrated fire management planning;
  - Fire prevention planning and works;
  - Common operating platforms/systems:
    - standardisation of IT and information systems;
    - communications network and systems, radios and radio channels;
    - seamless command and control structures, protocols, terminology;
    - operational doctrine; standard operating procedures; standing orders;
    - intelligence systems; and,
    - warning systems.
  - Training:
    - IMT and other accreditation/endorsement processes; and,
    - cross agency training and exercising.
  - Firefighting vehicles and equipment – couplings, hose, small gear
  - Induction training and ongoing culture shaping programs for sector personnel
  - Community education/engagement programs
  - Compliance regimes – including structural fire safety
  - Infrastructure including Incident Control Centres and supporting infrastructure/systems
  - Community centred leadership, tenure blind emergency management planning
3. Volunteers support the establishment of a common and seamless operating platform but caution that this does not translate simply to universal one size fits all standards. Interoperability is about being able to work together seamlessly but it does not necessarily mean everything has to be the same. Volunteers understand the need for standardisation but also feel strongly that agencies, through their Chief Officer, still need to be able adopt service

approaches/solutions relevant to local community risks, capacity, support need and operating environment.

4. Maximising interoperability is a good thing but achieving interoperability is not an end state in itself. The goal of interoperability pursuits must be to get best benefit from combined effort and to achieve an even better end result than status quo. Analysing and understanding the impact of changing procedures, equipment, resources etc. on each component of system you are trying to make more interoperable is vital to ensuring interoperability does not come at the expense of a reduced individual or collective capacity.

Likewise, if decisions are made to change equipment, procedures or resourcing to achieve interoperability then there must also be adequate resourcing and support to ensure none of the required capacity of the previous approach is lost. For example, deciding to adopt one training approach for a particular issue will not achieve a net positive result if it means a large part of the previously trained workforce no longer have access to the required training; or if it means the new approach is prohibitively expensive; or specifically in the case of Victoria's fire services, if the solution works against sustaining the preferred level of volunteer participation.

5. VFBV submits that there needs to be a structured interoperability leadership focus across the fire services with representation of agencies and key stakeholders (including VFBV and the UFU).
6. Pursuit of interoperability opportunities must be tested to ensure the result of achieving interoperability does not erode, or detrimentally impact on the combined service capacity or capability across the EM sector. In particular, in the same way that interoperability proposals need to be analysed to test that they will deliver service outcome improvement, cost logic, firefighter safety etcetera they must also include formal volunteer impact assessment to avoid unintentional negative impact on encouraging, maintaining and strengthening the capacity of volunteers to deliver CFA services.
7. Pursuit of interoperability solutions needs to be objective, transparent and a level playing field, above interference from external blockers, such as industrial agreements, which give effective power of veto to any stakeholder. Volunteers have consistently stated a willingness to work with all agencies and all parties to pursue better coordination and better interoperability but volunteers do not accept an approach that leaves them out of discussions; disables objective management based decision making; or allows biased analysis simply because of bully tactics, poor leadership, interest group pressure or industrial restriction.
8. VFBV believes the current approach to discussing interoperability opportunities is not transparent and not balanced. Volunteers are sick of this situation and frustrated that key decision makers at CFA, MFB, EMV and Government level continuously blame each other, brush this internally well-known problem aside or worse, aid and abet the elements causing it. With good leadership, transparent process, genuinely fair deliberations and most importantly no industrial interference, much of the interoperability and coordination journey might well have happened already via steady evolution.
9. Radio communications interoperability is fundamental and VFBV supports Victoria's Emergency Management Long Term Communication Plan released by EMV in October 2014 which proposes

to leverage new state contracts to move to a single integrated voice network & establish a state-wide sector-wide broadband capability.

VFBV understands that currently the sector utilizes over five different technologies and networks for its voice communications, which all have differing levels of capability;

- CFA Operates The Regional Radio Dispatch Service which is a Digital P25 Phase 1 Network, provided by Telstra's Regional Mobile Radio Network for the whole state excluding outer metropolitan areas (CFA Districts of 7, 8, 13 and 14) which were not funded through the Regional Radio Network business case
- CFA operates an analogue Voting Network in these outer metropolitan CFA Districts
- MFB operate the digital MMR network cover the Metropolitan Fire District of Melbourne
- DELWP part operate on CFA's legacy regional radio network which is made up of 209 strategically placed radio sites owned and operated by CFA. DELWP also operate on an analogue State Mobile Radio Network (SMR)

Volunteers recognize the importance of critical communications structure in time of emergencies, and support the establishment of a single integrated voice network as a high priority for action and funding

Furthermore, the majority of CFA fire stations continue to have no access to data or broadband networks, and are unable to connect to agency intranets and networks.

10. In addition to the above, the following issues are equally relevant:

- Need to continue to build on initial improvements since 2009 Black Saturday events such as communications; command and control arrangements; BA upgrades; some ICC facilities; consistent sector wide IMT training.
- Need active leadership to build respect for volunteers by paid personnel across EMV, MFB, CFA and DELWP (recognition of skills/expertise, use of volunteer time, local knowledge)
- Need to consider measures to further integrate volunteers into MFB and to encourage active volunteering within the current MFB area.
- Where achieving interoperability requires changes to equipment, procedures, systems, training etc, these changes need to be fully funded and roll-out of new/changed equipment must be risk based and equitable – not limited to paid firefighters or paid work places. Underfunded and prolonged change over periods do not produce interoperability and can sometimes have the effect of being divisive.
- Need to ensure training is provided to improve understanding and appreciation between agencies. More exercising and focussed effort on relationships and cross agency team building. Regular personal contact to build relationships between CFA, MFB, DWELP, SES etc leaders and personnel
- Common communications networks and systems (includes radios, frequencies, pagers, alerting). Need to pursue Federal Government support for common emergency services radio frequencies across Australia.
- Common operating platform - training; terminology, Standard Operating Procedures; hoses/couplings; Breathing Apparatus; command structures and operational doctrine - use AIIMS as foundation;

- Establish a formal and active panel/process which includes volunteer representation to examine opportunities for interoperability and make recommendations to the agencies and Government.
- Widespread view that volunteers must be engaged and formally represented in discussions/committees established to consider issues relating to interoperability.
- Concern that existing EMV and agency processes include representation of industrial bodies but not volunteers or perpetuate segregated consultation.
- Some concern that this ought to have been the role of EMV and questions about what the current formal EMV process is; what opportunities have been identified already; what progress has been made toward agreed pursuits; and what process to engage volunteers, undertake formal volunteer and service impact assessments before decisions are made.
- EMC has legislated responsibility to consider impacts on volunteers - how is this being done? Concern that industrial interference is over-powering a balanced analysis of opportunities and potential solutions.
- There is strong support for removing barriers to seamless operations between all fire services not just between CFA and MFB.
- Strong view that pursuing interoperability must be successfully achieved as a precursor to any contemplation of change to shared support functions, structures etc.
- Establish framework and process to include all key stakeholders, including fire agencies, municipalities, Vic Roads, Private Land Owners representatives, Victorian Farmers federation and the public for coordinated approach to prioritising, planning and monitoring fire prevention.
- Recent improvements that have enabled more engagement of CFA brigades and volunteers during planned burning including priority setting, planning and burn activity are good advancements and an example of what can be achieved if parties collaborate well.

## **CFA and MFB management structures and management work practices**

**And**

### **Enhancing workplace culture, including fostering greater respect and cooperation between management and its workforce, as well as enhancing workplace innovation**

#### **1. *CFA and EM Sector culture, work practices and work force management arrangements need to be designed and managed to support, encourage and strengthen a volunteer based and fully integrated CFA***

Because the volunteer based approach is core to achieving community capacity, community sharing responsibility and the service capacity required in Victoria, the CFA culture (and the emergency management sector culture overall) need to be deliberately designed and actively managed to ensure all personnel understand, are trained and are held accountable to act in ways that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers. In addition to their firefighting or technical roles, this underlying role of maintaining and building volunteer (and community) capacity makes the contribution of CFA paid staff even more valuable than many people recognise. Certainly volunteers know and value the contribution paid staff make, particularly at the brigade and local level and wherever it is working well, it is deeply appreciated by volunteers and VFBV.

The need for all personnel to be skilled and committed to encouraging, maintaining and building volunteer capacity means that CFA staff need to be carefully selected, highly trained, values driven and well recognised for the crucial role they perform in supporting and sustaining thriving volunteerism. This cannot be left to chance and requires active leadership from the top down. Recent CFA and VFBV surveys suggest there is opportunity for significant improvement in this area in some locations or on some work shifts. Workforce design, including enterprise agreements should be structured to deliver and reward work systems, roles, values, behaviours, work design and performance that achieve this outcome.

2. On a general organisational workforce design note, for CFA this means that work arrangements (hours of work, rosters, responsibilities etc.) workforce configuration (roles; position descriptions; human resource planning and deployment principles; promotion and reward frameworks; development and promotion systems) training and development; accountability frameworks; core governance processes; and leadership/management focus and so on should be intentionally designed and held accountable to support the CFA volunteer based and fully integrated culture and work arrangements. The review by His Honour David Jones (2011) covers these issues extensively and still provides a blue print for needed actions on many issues.

#### **3. Remove industrial interference in CFA Chief Officer operational decision making**

VFBV has submitted previously that Victoria's fire services are unduly hamstrung by restrictive industrial and workforce management practices, industrial interference, arbitrary resource allocation decisions and a Government/Agency complacency about what needs to be done to

encourage maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers and communities. The statutorily appointed CFA Chief Officer and CFA senior management regularly privately report interference by or reluctance to stand up to Government pressure even when they question the impact certain actions or failure to act might have on community safety.

4. In the ten year period from the year 2000, there were significant changes in the CFA's industrial arrangements with career firefighting staff and a shift in senior management focus, affecting the volunteer based ethos of CFA. The industrial arrangements had the effect of significantly extending the union's influence over management and CFA operations to the point of establishing effective control over key management decisions directly affecting CFA operational capability and also volunteers.

As a consequence, there were a number of negative impacts on CFA volunteers affecting such things as training, volunteer brigade support, and equipment selection.

The failure to appropriately manage the CFA as a volunteer based integrated organisation, the significant change in the balance of resource allocation away from volunteers, industrial limitations on the provision of such things as accessible training for volunteers and volunteer representatives being frozen out of genuine consultation on matters that affected them created hard feelings and division. In essence, CFA management dropped the ball on their responsibility to volunteers and put at risk the volunteer based integrated model of operation that serves Victoria so well.

At the 2010 Victorian election both the Labor Party and the Coalition promised to address these issues. In the autumn session of the Victorian Parliament the following year, legislation was unanimously carried by both Houses of Parliament that made clear that the CFA is first and foremost a volunteer-based organisation in which volunteers are supported by employees in a fully integrated manner.

The legislation, entitled *Country Fire Authority (Volunteer Charter) Act 2011*, also enshrined at law what was known as the CFA Volunteer Charter, first signed in 2001, that provided for meaningful consultation between representatives of the volunteers, the CFA and Victorian Government as well as certain other obligations and duties between the parties. The Charter was re-signed by Premier John Brumby on 4 October 2008 and Premier Ted Baillieu and Deputy Premier Peter Ryan on 27 February 2011 as a prelude to introducing the *Country Fire Authority (Volunteer Charter) Bill to Parliament on 3 March 2011*. Apart from different names appended to the Charter at each iteration, the terms of the Charter remained unchanged.

The legislation articulates a clear statutory direction to the CFA Board and management on the nature of the organisation and their organisational and operational obligations. It was widely believed that actions arising from this legislation will begin to redress the problems of the previous ten years.

### **CFA Legislation**

On 3 March 2011, The Hon Peter Ryan, introduced the legislation. It was supported by all parties in both Houses of Parliament and assented to on 10 May 2011.

The legislation states:

1. **Recognition of Authority (ie CFA) as a volunteer-based organisation** – The Parliament recognises that the Authority is first and foremost a volunteer-based organisation in which volunteer officers and members are supported by employees in a fully integrated manner.
2. **Recognition of the Volunteer Charter** – The Parliament recognises that the Volunteer Charter –
  - a. is a statement of the commitment and principles that apply to the relationship between the Government of Victoria, the Authority and volunteer officers and members; and
  - b. requires that the Authority recognise, value, respect and promote the contribution of volunteer officers and members to the well-being and safety of the community; and
  - c. requires that the Government of Victoria and the Authority commit to consulting with the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria Incorporated on behalf of volunteer officers and members on any matter that might reasonably be expected to affect them.
3. **Authority to have regard to Volunteer Charter** – The Authority must, in performing its functions, have regard to the commitment and principles set out in the Volunteer Charter.
4. **Authority's responsibility to encourage, maintain and strengthen capacity of volunteers** – The Authority has a responsibility to develop policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteer officers and members to provide the Authority's services.

These are clear statutory instructions on the CFA's method of operations, resourcing, management, culture and service delivery approach.

5. In both Houses of the Victorian Parliament, members rose to support all aspects of the Bill. Proudly, Labor members argued with force that the Volunteer Charter and all of its requirements was their creation in 2001 and they had done more to support CFA and its Volunteers than any previous government. Many stressed the importance of the CFA's integrated model of 1,500 paid staff working side by side supporting CFA's 60,000 volunteers and the need to maintain what they described as the successful, world regarded model. Coalition members were quick to respond that it was their government making the legislative running and they pointed out their ongoing support for CFA Volunteers. At any rate, the unanimous legislation constituted a clear direction to the CFA's leadership and management by all of the State's legislators.

By virtue of this unanimously supported amendment to the CFA Act, the requirements and responsibilities of CFA Volunteers, the CFA and the Government of Victoria spelled out in the Volunteer Charter now have clear legal standing and are obligatory on the parties.

The Volunteer Charter goes beyond the important requirements of meaningful consultation and having regard to volunteer views, and includes directive obligations that :

- the necessary resources will be provided to enable new or changed policies, procedures or approaches which impact on them as CFA volunteers will be implemented efficiently and effectively;

- adequate resources will be provided to enable volunteers in CFA to deliver agreed service; and,
- within available resources Volunteers will be provided with administrative, operational and infrastructure support to perform their roles safely and effectively.

There are also obligations to, amongst other things, provide to volunteers (within CFA's available resources):

- effective and comprehensive training
  - support and assistance for volunteers in applying for employment as CFA employees
  - compensation for accidents, injuries and losses.
  - procedures to address issues of discrimination against volunteers,
6. The legislation puts beyond doubt that CFA is first and foremost a volunteer based organisation and importantly that volunteers are to be supported by employees in a fully integrated manner to deliver CFA services. The legislation places the nature of the organisational relationship beyond doubt and requires CFA "*... to develop policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteer officers and members to provide the Authority's services*".

The effect of the legislation is to create a requirement for CFA to give priority to these matters which are the enablers of volunteers to deliver the CFA's services in an efficient and cost effective manner.

This legislation makes clear to the CFA leadership, successive governments, other relevant stakeholders and the public at large the role and responsibility of the CFA to engage with, maintain and strengthen its volunteer workforce to provide CFA's fire and emergency services to the community.

The test the Fire Services Review should apply to CFA in their deliberations is whether resourcing, operations, management and culture is meeting their statutory obligations in the provision of its services by volunteers. If not, what changes should be recommended to meet those obligations in order to deliver an even more effective fire service.

We submit that there is significant need for improvement in both CFA's priorities and resourcing to meet its obligations which of course enables a better, cost effective fire and emergency service cover for Victoria.

7. In all organisations but even more so in a volunteer based organisation, the importance of genuine consultation and engagement of volunteers in decisions that affect them cannot be overstated. A failure to genuinely consult with or listen to volunteers and under-utilisation of the knowledge and experience of volunteers is an area that still requires significant attention despite being clearly identified as a priority for improvement by most recent reviews/inquiries.

VFBV Annual Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Surveys indicate that volunteers place a very high priority on being consulted before decisions that affect them are made. VFBV's 2014 Volunteer Survey Results indicate that CFA has improved performance in this area in recent years however performance still falls well below volunteer expectations.

Whether it be in new policy/initiative development, new equipment design, systems and support design, training delivery, community education or in senior roles for which they were trained and used in the past, a failure to engage volunteers ignores valuable resource/expertise; demotivates volunteers and negatively impacts on volunteer retention. Failure to consult with volunteers creates a real risk that policy, procedure and systems decisions might not be practical in a volunteer based organisation

8. Volunteers also express deep frustration about restrictive industrial agreements and the impact these have on creating inequity between consultative arrangements for paid staff versus those for volunteers. Volunteers have no interest in the pay and conditions of paid firefighters and respect the rights of paid firefighter unions to negotiate hard for the best possible pay and conditions for their members. Volunteers also respect the rights of paid staff to be consulted about matters that affect them or about matters where their expertise could make a productive contribution to decision making.

The CFA and EM sector as a whole needs to be able to consult with both paid staff and volunteers openly and on a level playing field. Volunteers do not accept second class treatment or differential outcomes for volunteers and paid staff simply because volunteers aren't paid. Industrial agreement clauses that restrict CFA's ability to genuinely consult with all parties or restrict CFA management's ability to make decisions have caused significant concern in recent years and these issues need to be resolved. CFA must be able to consult with both paid staff and volunteers as equals. Notwithstanding the need to ensure due and fair process is followed, CFA must have the ability to make decisions and no industrial agreement or secret side agreements should give a union the power of veto over CFA management decisions.

VFBV has actively sought to work with CFA and EMV to improve a number of current consultative processes (for example those considering a range of new equipment such as Protective Equipment, Personal Protective Clothing, Breathing Apparatus) that currently segregate the consultation with volunteers and paid staff and has sought to establish a single combined process for these issues. VFBV encourages the Review to explore exactly what the barriers are to this occurring and can provide copies of relevant correspondence and detail to assist in this regard.

9. There is a need to achieve better cooperation at all levels between agencies. The view of many volunteers is that it works well at the local level where agency members know each other and establish mutually respectful relationships and trust but this breaks down further up the hierarchy and also sometimes when new personnel are deployed to an area.
10. In the suburbs of Melbourne there is a mutual aid agreement between CFA and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) (an all career staff brigade) that ensures a seamless fire and emergency service to Melbourne residents regardless of the badge on the side of the truck. Under the same dispatching system it is common for CFA volunteers to respond to fires and emergencies in areas covered by the MFB and vice versa. It is a proven and effective arrangement.

## Options for the establishment of a Career Firefighters Registration Board

1. It is difficult to comment on the establishment of a Career Firefighters Registration Board without having any detail or information on what might be proposed, what problem the Government is trying to address or what improvement the Government is trying to achieve.

VFBV note that the United Firefighters Union were pursuing this agenda as part of the 2014 Victorian State election campaign however we have no further information on the Government's deliberations, objectives or analysis of this matter. To date there has been no discussion by EMV or CFA with VFBV or volunteers about any registration panel or the like prior to the announcement of the Victorian Fire Services Review.

2. Based on the limited information available, VFBV does understand that the AFAC scheme is not limited specifically to career firefighters and is not restricted to Victoria. It is our understanding that the AFAC proposed scheme, presumably with the involvement of CFA, MFB and EMV, will primarily focus on highest level operational incident management roles and will involve a certification scheme aimed at complementing rather than replacing agency training, promotions and endorsement frameworks (applicable to either career or volunteer personnel).

Our understanding is that the proposed AFAC certification system is still in development and is subject to further consultation with agencies and the national Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA). Certainly no decision should be made about a Victorian firefighter registration board without reference to the AFAC work or without consideration of national implications, including implications for volunteer firefighters nationally.

3. In researching the purpose of 'registration board' type schemes in other jurisdictions VFBV have learned that they are most commonly schemes applying to professions where workers have the ability to work independently and impact on the wellbeing of consumers/clients. Professions covered by registration boards include, building practitioners, health professionals, legal practitioners, architects, vets, surveyors, tax professionals and the like.

With the exception of the Police Registration and Services Board (PRSB), most of the schemes have very similar features. In many cases they issue a license to practice which is based predominantly on qualifications. Additional criteria for registration may include having liability insurance, meeting police check requirements and paying a fee.

Registration Boards are most likely to be independent statutory authorities, and often constituted under Acts relevant to the profession. As well as providing advice or information to consumers, they will deal with customer complaints.

Another primary purpose of the schemes is to enable workforce mobility. Qualifications are generally recognised across the profession and fully transportable, if someone is a registered practitioner. They may also review overseas qualifications and align to Australian standards to determine suitability to practice. Most schemes are either national or have state authorities which link through to a national body.

The PRSB has recently replaced the Police Appeals Board in Victoria. VFBV has limited understanding of the PRSB scheme but understand it is State based and more focussed on internal procedures and reviews. Whilst this Board does provide information on professional

standards to police officers, it appears to mostly deal with internal appeals and reviews focussed on promotion, transfer and disciplinary matters. It does not deal with members of the public.

4. Victoria is well serviced by professional firefighters, both volunteer and career. All firefighters undergo comprehensive and ongoing training, aligned to the Public Safety Training Package. Firefighters must have undertaken appropriate training before participating in firefighting tasks.
5. Firefighters in Victoria are already regulated as service providers under the relevant fire agency legislation. The role of a firefighter and requirements for service delivery are defined and clear. The regulation of the role of firefighter in relation to training requirements and professional standards is generally managed by one of the three major fire agencies, all government departments or statutory authorities. In addition, firefighters do not operate independently and therefore the potential for 'harm' to the public is very low, particularly when comparing to other professions such as in the health, trades or financial sectors.
6. It is therefore difficult to understand the real benefit of this type of scheme for Victorian firefighters. Predominant input from volunteers about this issue is a question about why the need for such a Board.
7. Creation of a Board such as this Term of Reference suggests fails to recognise the experience, knowledge and professional skills of volunteers.
8. VFBV cautions against a career only Firefighter Registration Board which fails to recognise the experience, knowledge and professional skills of volunteers who undertake training from the same training packages and deliver the same services as their paid counterparts. This scheme could actively work against the enhancement of interoperability and a fully integrated workplace culture, which the review has identified as an area for consideration in the terms of reference.

Consultation with volunteers highlights that a Career Firefighters Registration Board has the potential to further disenfranchise volunteers.

9. VFBV fully support it to be in the State's best interest to have a cohesive and united approach to emergency services, which includes volunteer and career firefighting qualifications, training and professional standards. In the event of an emergency, firefighters must work together and therefore consistent approaches to enable interoperability are welcome. It is difficult to identify how such a scheme would benefit this approach.
10. Volunteers have raised concern about the additional funding required to set up any form of registration board and the ongoing running costs when weighed up against the benefits.
11. If the government considers the registration of firefighters essential or beneficial to the profession, then VFBV considers it crucial that volunteer representation is included in any committee or group established to work through the development phase of this or any related scheme. In addition, VFBV proposes the following to be core precursors to considering any scheme:
  - it would need to be established as an independent statutory authority, with wide representation, including representation and skills sets with an understanding of volunteer context.
  - it must be open to all of those in firefighting roles, whether they be paid (full-time, retained, seasonal) or volunteer.

- The logic of a state versus national scheme must be considered. Most registration boards allow the carrying of qualifications across different employment types, and actively promote the transfer of skills. A state based scheme would be limited in its effectiveness and contradict COAG policy.
  - any scheme would need to be free for volunteer firefighters. Fees for registration in other schemes are often borne by the applicant. Where paid workers are required to pay a fee personally this is eligible for tax deduction and can be built in as into fees charged to clients for service or remuneration for employees. For volunteers, who already donate their time and often incur financial burden as a result of their volunteering, to charge a fee to be a part of the scheme, or as a result of not participating due to the financial constraints associated with joining the scheme, would not be ethical.
  - any scheme must not be overly burdensome or bureaucratic to administer or apply to.
12. It would be disappointing to see the establishment of a registration board for firefighters that works against a fully integrated EM sector or works against sustainable volunteerism and recognition of the professionalism, training and service provided by volunteers to the State of Victoria.
13. As an alternative to a registration board VFBV would welcome any changes to current work practices and industrial agreements that create discriminatory barriers to the recognition of volunteers' qualifications, skills and experience simply on the basis of pay status. This issue was identified as a problem for CFA by the Government initiated Independent Jones Inquiry (2011) and agreed by CFA and Government as a priority for action, however industrial arrangements have prevented the changes being made.

## **The best mechanism to provide support for volunteer brigades to ensure their viability in providing emergency services**

1. The issues raised against each of the preceding Terms of Reference are directly relevant to and combine to answer how to provide support to volunteer brigades in providing emergency services.

Several key issues need to be re emphasised

2. There needs to be a range of flexible support options available for volunteer brigades based on local circumstance/need. VFBV submits that a continuum of support options needs to be available to ensure CFA volunteer brigades maintain a service capacity matched to local need. CFA needs to deploy a range of capacity building support options for volunteer brigades such as:
  - active recruitment support,
  - targeted training assistance,
  - administrative support,
  - leadership support,
  - smart volunteer alerting systems,
  - infrastructure and firefighting equipment appropriate for the brigades service profile, fire appliances matched to risk, community/industry partnerships, operational response arrangements and so on.
3. Brigades across Victoria, but particularly brigades in more rural areas still do not have adequate basic facilities such as toilets, wash facilities and data/broadband. Whilst CFA brigade requirements are not universal there are too many brigades with inadequate room to operate safely in the engine bay or for storage and donning of firefighters Personal Protective Clothing; basic storage and administration; access to hot/cold water, toilets and basic amenities; meeting facility; fume extraction or management.
4. Brigades in communities experiencing urban growth face different challenges to other brigades and in addition to the support outlined above there is need for support to upgrade facilities and fire trucks (eg pumpers or pumper/tankers), firefighting equipment and additional structural firefighting PPC (personal protective clothing) appropriate for their changing risk environment. These brigades may also need extra support to build the structural firefighting skills base of the brigade; extra support with recruitment; targeted support to engage new community members; support working with specific high risk groups/locations; etc.

Many volunteer brigades feel that CFA has not taken sufficient proactive steps to implement this escalating support as brigades' risk profiles change.

5. An ideal support mechanism for brigades in both growing and declining communities was the highly successful Community Support Facilitators (CSF) Program operating from about 2000 – 2003 (dates may need to be checked). The CSF Program appointed paid non firefighter staff to volunteer brigades to assist with support such as:
  - recruitment
  - brigade capacity building
  - community education,
  - risk mitigation planning,
  - fire awareness and targeted avoidable fire reduction programs,

- administration and
- implementation of community/industry partnerships to build community and volunteer capacity.

The CSF program was highly successful, cost effective and extremely well received by volunteers. The CSF program was abolished because of industrial pressure from the UFU against the wishes of CFA management.

6. Throughout metropolitan Melbourne and major provincial centres across Victoria there are numerous examples of purely volunteer CFA brigades coping well with high workload in highly urbanised fire risk environments. In most of these other locations, brigades have evolved their volunteer capacity gaps by adopting innovative solutions to volunteer recruitment, focussed operational training, satellite volunteer infrastructure, brigade administrative support, community fire prevention etc.
7. For some brigades deploying additional paid firefighters to support a CFA volunteer brigade is required. As discussed earlier in this submission, the CFA integrated brigade resource model enables CFA to grow volunteer brigade capacity to meet growing service demand in urban growth areas and at the same time maintains the volunteer 'surge' capacity to manage large scale, long duration and concurrent major emergencies.

VFBV strongly supports the continuation of the integrated brigade model however notes there needs be stronger CFA leadership and more proactive effort to lead, facilitate and support local volunteers and paid firefighters achieve good integration.

8. The CFA Chief Officer must have the flexibility to determining when, where, what roles and how many additional paid resources might be deployed to support a brigade(s) based on local community need and brigade volunteer capacity. Specific continuing concern relates to the apparent inability for the CFA Chief Officer to employ day time support for busy volunteer brigades where day time volunteer availability becomes a challenge for example in brigades where members are working away from the brigade area during the day. This issue is not only frustrating to volunteer brigades but also leads to missed opportunity to get broadest possible geographic coverage from finite paid firefighter numbers. The Review needs to make itself fully aware of the cost difference between allocating paid firefighters on a daytime roster versus the existing industrial agreement requirement to transition all paid firefighter positions to a 24 hour roster. The cost of providing 24 hour paid firefighter support to a brigade is generally at least 5 times more expensive than providing daytime paid firefighter support.

## **Emergency Medical Response and the Fire Services**

The issue of Emergency Medical Response (EMR) provides an interesting case study in interoperability, resourcing the fire services, support to volunteer brigades and is therefore relevant to several of the terms of reference. Beyond this it is also a case study of these issues in the broader sector context.

The following is provided as a case study of opportunity and also some frustration for CFA volunteers.

Emergency Medical Response through the fire services sees Fire Brigades co-responded at the same time as Ambulance Victoria to attend “priority zero” calls. This category includes patients in severe life threat such as in cardiac arrest, drowning, suicide, drug overdoses or as a result of breathing emergencies.

Firefighters trained in EMR are able to assist with CPR and airway management, perform oxygen therapy, operate a semi-automatic external defibrillator and provide level two first aid until paramedics arrive. They are also able to perform initial spinal injury and initial respiratory distress/chest pain management as well as provide initial treatment to trauma victims and respond to other medical conditions.

EMR was first introduced to the MFB as a pilot around 1998, and formally adopted and introduced into the MFB in 2001. The MFB program was developed between the MFB and Monash University, and is licensed by the MFB.

CFA formally commenced an EMR pilot on the 6th February 2008. The CFA EMR program was developed between CFA and Ambulance Victoria, and used Ambulance Victoria’s clinical practices in order to ensure full alignment between the Primary agency (Ambulance Victoria) and the support agency (CFA).

### **EMR Pilot Program Commencement**

CFA’s EMR pilot program was a program designed to trial the introduction of EMR services. It was to include 10 CFA location (5 fully volunteer and 5 integrated) and was to be a 12 month evaluation.

All five fully volunteer brigades formally started the pilot on the 6<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

Agreement could not be made between the CFA and the UFU, and as a result, the 5 integrated stations and their associated staff were prevented by a grievance to participate in the pilot.

Issues that required dispute resolution through Fair Work Australia included;

- Design and length of the EMR Training Package
- Approved EMR equipment
- CFA classify EMR incidents as Level 1 incidents. (MFB do the same). Under CFA/UFU business rules – Leading Firefighters are permitted to be the senior firefighter (crew leader) of a level 1 incident. However the UFU disagreed with CFA on allowing Leading

Firefighters to be Crew Leaders at EMR incidents.

- CFA permitted Level 1 firefighters to be training in EMR for the pilot. The UFU initiated arbitration through FWA to prevent Level 1 Firefighters being allowed to train and perform EMR. (The MFB do not allow Level 1 firefighters)

The 5 integrated stations and staff finally agreed to commence the pilot on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011, which was later delayed to 25 September 2011 due to issues at ESTA to do with CAD updates.

9,600 hours of career staff overtime had to be spent on the training of career staff (off shift) for EMR following the negotiated outcome of these Fair Work Australia hearings.

Whilst the 5 volunteer brigades had completed 3 years of evaluation whilst waiting for the industrial dispute to end, it was decided that the formal 12 month evaluation period start on the 25 September 2011 through to the 25 September 2012.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2015, Emergency Management Victoria announced through a public media release that it was working towards a single Victorian EMR management team, established and located at MFB, Burnley. Neither VFVB nor any volunteers have been invited to take part. CFA have not been able to provide any clarification as to its role or purpose.

### **Differences between Training Volunteer/Staff**

All CFA volunteers and staff trained in EMR are trained to the exact same level, sit the same assessment and gain the same competency.

However there is a difference in contact hours and course design for the two groups. Both the CFA and MFB courses result in the same competencies.

By agreement with the UFU, CFA staff must be trained for the same duration and using the same course design as agreed with the MFB. This course is 8 days long, and all staff must be re-trained in Level 2 First Aid as part of the course.

The CFA course is 4 days long, as Level 2 First Aid is a pre-requisite. Both the 8 day course and the 4 day course have the same theory and practical assessments, and result in the same competency and qualifications.

The current course licensed by the MFB, and registered with the Victorian Registration & Qualification Authority (21899VIC) contains a pre-requisite which discriminates against volunteers, in that it lists as a pre-requisite “A minimum of twelve months experience as a professional career firefighter” which volunteers are unable to meet.

CFA has been unsuccessful in having this pre-requisite removed, and thus has relied on its training package developed in collaboration with Ambulance Victoria to work around this restriction. In 2011, CFA’s training materials were evaluated against MFB’s (with the MFB’s permission) and any discrepancies between the two courses were removed, so that both packages perfectly align with the same learning outcomes.

### **Pilot Outcomes**

The pilot was successfully implemented and showcased a successful collaboration between Ambulance Victoria and CFA. The pilot report documented evidence of CFA’s involvement in

EMR significantly reduced the response time to Priority Zero events, and there was a trend of increased survival for patients found in a shockable rhythm who were defibrillated by the CFA.

The EMR 90<sup>th</sup> percentile response time to EMR eligible cardiac arrest patients was 12.2 minutes, compared to 14.0 minutes for AV alone. Modelling from data sourced from the Victorian Ambulance Cardiac Arrest Registry indicates that survival to hospital discharge is reduced by 11.7% for every one minute delay in response. Thus, the evaluation report anticipated that the CFA EMR program would have a significant impact on cardiac arrest survival over a longer term period.

### **Advantages of CFA's integrated Model to EMR Response**

- Does not commit, in most cases a brigades only Pumper, to a non-fire related support agency role
- Ability to make primary appliances (Pumpers) available for fire calls once a second appliance is on scene - maintaining full fire coverage for the community. (CFA's principle role)
- Surge capacity to enable brigades to respond to multiple concurrent events in their communities
- Considerable OH&S improvements gained by having a second crew for CPR rotations during protracted cardiac events and ability to release crew to respond to other events if required
- Brigade Identity and Integration between Staff/Volunteers maintained
- Compliance with the Section 6i of the CFA Act 1958

A hybrid model between the 2 pilots, involving each Integrated brigade sitting down and designing an Integrated EMR response plan based on each brigades individual capacity and risk profiles that actively encourages and makes efficient use of available volunteer capacity would be required to roll out a truly integrated model. Factors to consider in that hybrid would be;

- Response arrangements that would see volunteers actually being able to respond to EMR events and use their skills
- Crew rotations to ensure skills utilization and ability to contribute
- Ability to respond when staff are busy at another job
- Flexible skills maintenance and reaccreditation processes to provide adequate opportunity for volunteers to maintain their skills without too much imposition on their work/life balance. Including making training accessible at times, dates and locations suitable to volunteers

### **EMR Costs**

In June 2014, as part of CFA's evaluation of EMR, CFA engaged CDL & Associates Pty Limited to undertake an analysis of the projected initial and ongoing financial impacts associated with a wider rollout of the EMR program.

VFBV understands that initial additional training and set up costs for introducing EMR at a CFA integrated brigade is in excess of \$200,000 per brigade compared with a CFA volunteer brigade initial training and set up cost in the order of \$30,000. CFA will have actual figures to verify this.

VFBV also understands that the ongoing additional recurrent costs for delivering EMR at a CFA integrated brigade are in the order of \$90,000 per year compared to approximately \$15,000 per year for a CFA volunteer brigade.

### **Preferred Ambulance Victoria Locations for EMR Expansion**

CFA requested Ambulance Victoria to conduct a detailed analysis of incidents over a three year period in order to establish a base case scenario of EMR expansion. AV identified 156 brigades to be rolled out over a five year period, ranked in priority order. The prioritized ranking took into account;

- Number of Priority Zero EMR events over a three year period; and
- Response time difference between CFA and AV

The Ambulance Victoria priorities for EMR expansion in Victoria in Year One (ie the most immediate priorities from a community service delivery perspective) identify 32 CFA brigade locations, 14 of these are CFA volunteer brigades and 18 are CFA integrated brigades. In Year Two of the Ambulance Victoria priorities program there are a further 32 CFA brigade locations identified, of these 24 are CFA volunteer brigades and 8 are CFA integrated brigades.

There is a Government funding initiative to roll out EMR in CFA integrated brigades but no funding nor decision to roll out EMR to the priority communities serviced by CFA volunteer brigades. Given the community priorities, the limited budget available for EMR roll out and the obvious cost and community benefit to an EMR roll out to these volunteer brigades as part of the first priority, VFBV is perplexed as to how the Government policy and decision making processes worked on this occasion. VFBV encourages the Review to investigate this issue in detail and to ascertain whether there are policy logic, analysis or other barriers causing volunteer brigades and the communities they support being treated differently to integrated brigades.

### **2015 Government Announcement for EMR Expansion**

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, the State Government announced that it would expand EMR only to CFA's Integrated Stations.

Given the EMR pilot conclusively showed that volunteers can and are willing to provide EMR services, and the cost differentials as well as Ambulance Victoria's own priority location modelling VFBV was somewhat surprised that expansion of EMR was restricted to only CFA Integrated locations, and requested the Government explain on what basis that only these stations were funded.

VFBV has also assumed that the funding provided for CFA's 33 Integrated Stations also includes training and equipping volunteers at those locations, in line with CFA's integrated model of service delivery. However, at this time CFA have been unable to confirm that the funding also includes provision for volunteers at those locations.