

Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review

Drawing a line, building stronger services



David O'Byrne, October 2015

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Executive Summary

Firefighters are the embodiment of commitment to the community. Whether in the middle of the night, during the working day, or at times when families and communities are celebrating special events, Victoria's firefighters step into difficult and dangerous situations to protect property and save lives.

Firefighters do more than put out fires. They also provide road accident and specialist rescue, response to hazardous materials incidents, emergency medical response, guidance on structural fire safety, community education and other community engagement activities.

Service to the community must be the focus for all decisions and activities undertaken by the fire services. As Victoria faces new challenges around population growth, demographic changes, climate change, urbanisation and globalisation, community needs and expectations are changing. Victoria's emergency management arrangements must be responsive to these shifts.

In a crisis, the community requires and expects that those who are able to provide assistance will be there to do so as quickly as possible. It is blind to the badge on the truck or the uniform of those who come to help it. When the crisis is major, the community requires and expects that many actors will join forces, working together cohesively to limit the damage and loss.

Current emergency management reform is focused on working as one and achieving greater interoperability in the emergency management sector. The fire services must seize opportunities to work more closely with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES), and other emergency management organisations.

A common approach must be supported by common standards.

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB) both operate in urban areas and on the urban fringe, delivering the same broad range of services but utilising slightly different procedures, appliances and equipment to do so. The CFA also operates in rural areas. The Review considers that personal protective clothing, equipment, appliances, systems, training, communications networks and operating procedures should be standardised where this will result in an improved outcome for the community. The continued efforts of an expanded Victorian Fire Service Agencies Interoperability Committee, that includes both paid and volunteer firefighter representation, would help bring this about.

Interoperability does not mean amalgamation or making the CFA and MFB the same. Achieving interoperability must take into account CFA and MFB's different organisational cultures, expectations of their workforce, and connections to their communities. Improving interoperability will better enable CFA and MFB to know and understand how each other operates, trust in each other's capability, utilise each other's resources, and, if necessary, join each other's crew. Adopting a common rank structure would further support this streamlined service delivery, as well as expand development opportunities for firefighters.

Victoria will continue to rely on both paid and volunteer firefighters. Service delivery must be appropriate for the community that is being served. While current service delivery models are still valid, new ones need to be added to the mix to provide the fire services with the range of options they need to respond in new and evolving circumstances. These should include seasonal staffing, day staffing, hub and spoke brigades, satellite stations and a shared model for CFA and MFB firefighters to work freely across agencies and agency boundaries in the greater Melbourne metropolitan area.

CFA could also strengthen its integrated brigade model by developing a planning and implementation process for integration that draws on the successes of existing integrated brigades and provides ongoing support. More deftly managed integration would strengthen the overall relationship between paid and volunteer firefighters and preserve the vital surge capacity that volunteers provide and upon which the state relies. The Review believes there are also advantages to operational firefighters being engaged to provide administrative and other support to volunteer brigades.

Service delivery models should be supported by a broader scope of working arrangements, such as part-time hours and job sharing for those returning from parental leave. These should be introduced in a manner that is reasonable and workable and does not unravel the current 10/14 roster system or undermine its strengths.¹

The broad range of services now provided by firefighters requires the equivalent breadth in training programs. Clear training strategies and programs must be developed and communicated so that firefighters are aware of training priorities and opportunities and can identify potential development pathways for themselves. All training must offer flexible delivery to accommodate volunteer access and availability.

Morale can play a role in operational effectiveness. The Review found morale in the fire services was at its lowest ebb in decades, with an enormous divide between senior management and firefighters. This has a number of causes, including the strained adversarial climate that exists between the fire services and its workforce, as represented by the Victorian Branch of the United Firefighters Union of Australia (UFU), and the aggressive industrial strategies deployed under the previous government.

At times, the relationship between the leadership and firefighters seems like trench warfare. The Review believes it is important to outline what has contributed to the current situation but not to perpetuate the division. The Review does not intend its report to be another instalment in the Western Front, resulting in little movement and little gain.

The structure of the fire services, with the Chief Officers reporting to Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), has contributed to the disconnect between corporate and operational members and created some uncertainty.

With the current state of morale and strategic and operational leadership, the fire services appear to be in an extremely unhealthy state; a situation that must not be allowed to continue. There has been a fundamental collapse in trust and goodwill. Significant change is required to create more harmonious fire services that work collaboratively with their key stakeholders to ensure their firefighters are as equipped and operationally ready as possible to meet the needs of the community.

The fire services should be led by an operational chief. However, transitional arrangements must first be put in place to recalibrate the fire services and ensure the success of necessary changes.

A more respectful and inclusive environment is also essential to encourage diversity within the fire services. The fire services must make a genuine and public commitment to understanding and addressing the very real barriers to diversity that currently exist in their organisations and act on it.

Recognition is part of respect. In an effort to be formally recognised for their skills, firefighters have sought the establishment of a Firefighters Registration Board. The Review believes the idea has merit and has proposed some key features for such a body.

¹ Firefighters work a rotating cycle of four days on duty, followed by four days off duty. This consists of two 10-hour day shifts (0800 – 1800 hours), followed by two 14-hour night shifts (1800 – 0800 hours). See the CFA UFU Operational Staff Enterprise Agreement 2010, clause 76; MFB UFU Operational Staff Agreement 2010, clause 77.

Being a firefighter is both physically and psychologically demanding. The fire services need to enhance support for the health and wellbeing of their members and assist a dignified transition when firefighters can no longer undertake operational duties. This support must be provided as a part of an overall, whole-of-working-life regime.

The Review recommends that a single Board be established as the governing body for both CFA and MFB, replacing the existing boards. A single Board would help bring needed cohesion to the fire services and support a more integrated effort, including through common procurement and investment. The fire services legislation should also be reviewed and a single contemporary Act adopted that clearly and cohesively outlines the organisations' functions and responsibilities and the accountability for their delivery.

The resources of the fire services are state resources, with the exception of some CFA brigade assets, and should be purchased with a state-wide focus on need and allocated accordingly. There is a need for more efficient and rigorous financial, project and resource management. Clear and transparent plans should be developed for station builds and maintenance, as well as vehicle replacement and maintenance. Operational input should be sought on station and appliance design.

It is also important that the fire services engage with other emergency services organisations, particularly DELWP and VICSES, to identify opportunities for broader common procurement and sharing of stations and resources.

The Review identified a largely untapped culture of innovation in the fire services, which could contribute to equipment and procedural enhancements, and which all levels of the organisation should support.

The Review is in no doubt that the Victorian community remains well served by firefighters across the fire services. But the high level of response is being held together by the goodwill and effectiveness of those on the front line. This is not sustainable and, if left to continue, would potentially pose a risk to the Victorian community.

Significant change is required, particularly in terms of morale, governance and joint effort. The Review seeks to outline the current situation in Victoria's fire services and plot a journey towards returning them to the world-leading position they once held.

Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
AFAC	Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council
AV	Ambulance Victoria
BASO	Brigade Administrative Support Officer
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFA	Country Fire Authority
CFA Act	<i>Country Fire Authority Act 1958</i>
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
EM Act	<i>Emergency Management Act 2013</i>
EMC	Emergency Management Commissioner
EMV	Emergency Management Victoria
ESTA	Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority
FWC	Fair Work Commission
gMa	greater metropolitan area
GPS	Global Positioning System
IT	Information Technology
MDT	Mobile Data Terminals
MFB	Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board
MFB Act	<i>Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958</i>
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
SAP	Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2015–2018
UFU	United Firefighters Union of Australia – Victorian Branch
VBRC	2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission
VFBV	Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria
VICSES	Victoria State Emergency Service
VSO	Volunteer Support Officer

Note: In this report “fire services” is used in the same manner as in the Terms of Reference, meaning CFA and MFB but excluding DELWP. When needing to refer to both organisations, the Review will follow alphabetical order and refer to “CFA and MFB”. DELWP’s role in fire prevention and suppression is acknowledged and discussed in the report.



Introduction

Firefighters are the embodiment of commitment to the community. Whether it be in the middle of the night, during the working day or at times when families and communities are celebrating special events, Victoria's firefighters respond to whatever confronts them with professionalism and outstanding bravery and commitment.

Fires are an inevitable feature of the summer landscape in Victoria. But the risk of fire is present all year round: in homes, high-rises, factories and businesses, as well as in the state's forests, farmland and grasslands.

Service to the community must be the focus for all decisions and activities undertaken by the fire services, with primacy of life the single most important priority. This means operations, and particularly the people who carry them out, must be front and centre of the organisations' structures, systems and procedures.

Operations, for the fire services, are no longer limited to putting out fires. They undertake an extensive range of activities including responding to all types of fires and hazardous materials incidents and providing road accident and specialist rescue, emergency medical response, guidance on structural fire safety, community education and other community engagement activities.

This Review focuses on how the fire services can reach their potential. Many reviews are initiated in response to an incident or particular crisis. This is not the case for this Review and it is not directed to one particular aspect of the fire services but has been asked to take a much broader view.

The fire services have faced a number of challenges over recent years, which, despite their commitment to improvement, have started to drag them down. It is therefore timely to reset their direction and outline a path to a more positive future.

The time allowed for the Review has been much commented on. While many of these comments are valid, it was important that the Review not act as a distraction during the summer season or for the summer season to be a reason to defer its important work. However, if accepted, some of the recommendations can be implemented immediately and bring about positive change. The timing of other recommendations will need to take the summer season into account.

It was also important for the government not to simply leave things as they are. It is abundantly clear from the submissions to the Review that change is not only desired but desperately needed.

The timeframe for the Review created some pressure for organisational stakeholders, firefighters, and other interested parties in making their submissions. I thank the many organisations, brigades and individuals who devoted significant time to making meaningful and comprehensive submissions, for their openness and goodwill. The number and quality of submissions received, both public and confidential, reflect the seriousness of the issues being considered. I appreciate the genuine interest and commitment to positive and lasting change.

Victoria's firefighters, like the police, paramedics, VICSES volunteers and other emergency services workers, step into difficult and dangerous situations to protect and save lives and property. Both the CFA and MFB have history and traditions of which they can be proud. The Review was repeatedly urged not to allow current challenges to obscure the great things that have been achieved and to which so many have contributed. Many of these successes are evident in the way that firefighters come together in a crisis and in their readiness to continually put themselves on the line.



The Review also encountered a number of negative, long-held beliefs – some truths, some myths – regarding the capability and intentions of different elements of the fire services and their representative bodies. While I acknowledge these beliefs, at times they act as barriers to more harmonious, integrated and effective fire services.

While interoperability between the fire services has been advanced, parallel and duplicative structures persist. It is time for greater strides, building on what has already been established. This does not mean amalgamation of the fire services but strengthening the relationships between them, standardising equipment, and sharing resources where this best meets the community's need.

The Review acknowledges that some of its proposed reforms build on work that is already underway. In particular, it notes that some of the proposed reforms fall within priorities identified in Victoria's Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2015–2018 (SAP), meaning the SAP could provide a framework for their implementation if adopted. The Review has indicated where its recommendations align with SAP priorities.

The fire services play a significant role in community education and engagement. The Review did not consider this aspect of their work in any detail but can see it presents an opportunity for leadership by the fire services.

The Review also did not examine the state's command and control arrangements. It is informed that these arrangements have benefited from significant reforms over recent years and that the command and control framework is now integrated across the emergency management sector.

The Review acknowledges the thousands of men and women who make up the fire services, playing different roles to contribute to public safety. The Review has not addressed each of these roles but focused on firefighters and organisational management.

The fire services operate in complex environments. Their success is dependent on both paid and volunteer firefighters, whose futures are therefore inextricably linked. Firefighters must be able to work together, in a respectful environment, that ensures a high level of service and professional dignity. They need support and inspiring leadership.

Victoria has a diverse landscape and a diverse community. The state faces many challenges around population growth, demographic changes, climate change, urbanisation, globalisation and different community expectations. Its emergency management arrangements must be flexible and responsive to these shifts.

The demographic changes and evolution in land use pose particular challenges for volunteerism. Declining rural communities, longer daily commutes, the time pressures of modern life, the financial pressures on employers that limit their ability to release volunteers, and the differing interests of the next generation in terms of what they seek from volunteering, will all have an effect on the traditional volunteering model.

Volunteers will continue to provide significant fire service delivery across Victoria, particularly in those areas where the provision of a paid service is impractical or uneconomic. Volunteer surge capacity will continue to be an essential feature of Victoria's emergency response arrangements and needs to be encouraged and developed. But new service delivery models will need to accompany traditional ones to meet community expectations and safety needs. All models will need to fully engage volunteers and recognise their value.

In the course of this review, I have had the privilege to meet and hear from hundreds of Victorians and organisations that in turn represent thousands of Victorians. To a person, their passion for their work and their commitment to their community is nothing short of inspirational. Across generations, individuals, and in many cases families, have shown the same spirit in ensuring the safety of millions of Victorians.

This desire to provide the best response to the community is what unifies all those involved in the fire and emergency services in Victoria, even where siloed decision-making has created many unnecessary differences between the services. Providing the best service means the right numbers of highly trained people responding in the quickest possible time with the right equipment for the task at hand. Common effort, relationships and trust are also crucial for ensuring operational success.

In line with this, the Review has placed optimum service to the community and optimum support for the operational arm of the fire services at the centre of its considerations and recommendations.

Establishment of the Review

On 29 July 2015, I was appointed by the Minister for Emergency Services, The Honourable Jane Garrett MP, under section 93 of the *Inquiries Act 2014* to constitute a Formal Review to inquire into and report on the resourcing, operations, management and culture of the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board and Country Fire Authority (collectively known as the “fire services”).

Terms of Reference

The Review's Terms of Reference state:

The Formal Review will inquire into, and make recommendations on, the resourcing, operations, management and culture of the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB) and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) (collectively, the “fire services”), including, but not limited to the following matters:

- (a) an assessment of the resourcing requirements necessary to ensure Victoria is appropriately equipped and fire ready;
- (b) 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 best training methods;
- (c) the interoperability between the CFA and MFB;
- (d) the interoperability across fire agencies responsible for preventing and suppressing all types of fire in Victoria, whether on public or private land;
- (e) CFA and MFB management structures and management work practices;
- (f) enhancing workplace culture, including fostering greater respect and cooperation between management and its workforce, as well as enhancing workplace innovation and diversity;

- (g) options for the establishment of a Career Firefighters Registration Board; and
- (h) the best mechanism to provide support for volunteer fire brigades and to ensure their viability in providing emergency services.

The Formal Review is to report on its inquiry to the Minister for Emergency Services by 30 September 2015.

At my request, the Minister granted an extension of time until 19 October 2015 to allow the Review to complete a thorough analysis of a number of difficult and complex issues that had been raised with it.

Methodology

Meetings with key stakeholders

The Terms of Reference nominated nine key stakeholders:

- CFA
- MFB
- DELWP
- Emergency Management Victoria (EMV)
- UFU
- Community Public Sector Union
- Australian Workers Union
- Australian Services Union
- Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV).

The Review held separate, extensive discussions with senior representatives from each of these organisations.

Submissions

On 7 August 2015, the Review invited interested parties to make public or confidential written submissions responding to the Review's Terms of Reference by 31 August 2015. The Review acknowledges that this timeframe put some pressure on those people who wished to submit to the Review.

The Review received 180 submissions, the majority of which were made by individuals, primarily firefighters. The remaining submissions were made by brigades, CFA groups and districts, and key stakeholders. Of the submissions, 67 were made confidentially. The remaining 113 have been published on the Review's webpage: <http://myviews.justice.vic.gov.au/fireservicesreview>.

Site visits

The Review considered it was essential to meet with firefighters at their stations, to hear and witness first-hand some of the challenges faced by the brigades.

Between 27 August and 17 September 2015, the Review visited the following 18 brigades:

- CFA brigades – Ballarat, Ballarat City, Bendigo, Boronia, Cranbourne, Corio, Echuca, Lara, Lockington, Melton, Monbulk, Moorooduc, Werribee
- MFB brigades – Clayton, Deer Park, Northcote, Richmond, Sunshine.

CFA brigades have different models and operate in a number of different environments. To gain an understanding of these differences, the Review visited integrated urban, volunteer urban, integrated regional centre, volunteer regional centre and volunteer rural brigades. This resulted in the Review visiting more CFA brigades than MFB brigades. The Review acknowledges that each brigade, whether CFA or MFB, has a unique operating context.

The Review also visited the State Control Centre to understand integrated command and control arrangements at the State level.

Background materials

The Review was provided with and researched a vast range of background materials. These included previous reviews into the fire services, as well as reports, plans, operational documents, academic articles and discussion papers. The Inspector-General for Emergency Management provided assistance in summarising the current status of implementation of recommendations from some of the recent reviews.

Recommendations

The Review is mindful of the many reviews that have gone before it and the number of recommendations that remain outstanding from some of those reviews. Some of the Review's recommendations, if adopted, may override previous recommendations that are yet to be implemented.

A table of the Review's recommendations is at Appendix 1.

Acknowledgements

The Review is especially grateful for the level of interest in its work and for the time and careful consideration given to its Terms of Reference by the people with whom it met and those who prepared written submissions. Despite the time constraints, submissions were thoughtfully constructed and provided significant insight into the fire services, as well as very positive, and often innovative, suggestions as to how they could be improved and the community better served.

The Review also greatly appreciated the stories, information and hospitality shared by the brigades and the unexpected opportunity to accompany the Melton Fire Brigade on a call. Special thanks goes to the volunteer and off-duty paid firefighters who attended those meetings when they did not have to be at the station.

The Review was particularly struck by the candour and openness of everyone who engaged with it. A number of common themes emerged and these have been reflected in the Report. The Review has recommended some significant reforms, drawing on the clear desire for change expressed to it.

On a personal note, I would like to thank the Review team for their assistance: Lisa Jones, Executive Officer, Stella Tan, Senior Legal Policy Officer and Sally Waring, Executive Assistant.

Context

Since the devastating 2009 bushfires, Victoria's emergency management sector has undergone significant reform. Required changes were particularly highlighted in the 2010 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC) Final Report and the Review of the 2010–2011 Flood Warnings and Response. The latter recommended that the State “undertake major reforms of Victoria's emergency management arrangements to bring about an effective all hazards, all agencies approach”.²

The 2012 White Paper on Victorian Emergency Management Reform draws on the findings of the VBRC and the Flood Review, as well as community feedback to the 2011 Green Paper *Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria*. It builds on the renewed emergency management strategic intent for Victoria provided by the Fire Services Commissioner in 2010, which focussed on the community as the centre of all activities and primacy of life as the single most important priority.

The White Paper covers the full spectrum of before, during and after emergencies and sets out the government's 10-year “road map” for reform. It represents a fundamental shift in emergency management in Victoria, with an increased focus on community resilience and community involvement, achieved through the all-hazard, all-agency approach.

Initial reform efforts have led to better systems of work and improved interoperability between the fire services and with the broader emergency management sector.

In 2014, EMV and the role of the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) were established to drive the implementation of strategic and operational reforms in the emergency management sector.³

The emergency management sector now has a shared vision of “safer and more resilient communities” and a shared goal of “a sustainable and efficient emergency management system that reduces the likelihood, effect and consequences of emergencies”. This means the sector is to work as one, with government, agencies, community and business all having a role to play in achieving this vision.

The SAP sets out the shared vision and goal and outlines the sector's key priorities. These focus on driving further enhancements through clear governance and strengthened leadership, a positive workforce culture of respect and cooperation, integrated and agile systems and service delivery models, and empowering communities and business to develop shared responsibility and strengthen resilience.

The SAP also describes many of the challenges for Victoria. It notes that although it is the second smallest state, Victoria accounts for roughly one quarter of Australia's population and that, as the fastest-growing city in Australia, Melbourne's population will increase significantly over the coming decades. This increase in population is attributed to immigration and the availability of employment (75 per cent of Victorian jobs are based in Melbourne), tertiary education, recreation

² Review of the 2010–11 Flood Warnings and Response, recommendation 66.

³ EM Act, ss.14, 17, 24 and 32.

and entertainment. Housing affordability is predicted to attract settlement into peri-urban landscapes and bring cultural and socio-economic diversity. Similarly, it is expected there will be an increase in the number of people moving to major regional inland and coastal centres as they move out of more rural areas and from Melbourne for a 'tree/sea change', often without a full understanding of their new environment.⁴

Victoria can also expect hotter, drier summers and more frequent and intense storms.⁵

To address the current and emerging needs of Victorian communities, the fire services must strengthen their understanding of where to focus their attention and resources to deliver the best service.

MFB is a fully paid fire service. As at 30 June 2015, it had 1,877 firefighters in 47 stations throughout the Metropolitan Fire District, supported by 339 corporate staff.⁶ CFA is a predominantly volunteer-based service, with paid firefighters working alongside volunteers in a number of integrated brigades. As at 30 June 2015, CFA had 57,311 volunteers, of whom 35,367 were described as operational and 21,944 support, and 972 paid firefighters, supported by 935 corporate staff. CFA has 1,180 brigades, of which 33 are integrated.⁷

Community expectation is a crucial driver for the fire services in terms of their effectiveness, efficiency and public value. As the emergency management sector in Victoria continues to evolve, it is essential that the fire services meet that expectation in an integrated and cooperative manner, working as one with the emergency management sector.

⁴ Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2015–2018, p.12.

⁵ Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), 2013, *Australian climate variability and change – Time Series: Annual mean temperature anomaly – Australia (1910–2012)*; CSIRO and BoM, *State of the Climate 2014*; Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2009, *Victorian Climate Change Green Paper*.

⁶ MFB Annual Report 2014–15.

⁷ CFA Annual Report 2014–15.

Operations

Operations are the core of the fire services. Protecting life and property is their reason for being.⁸

Meeting community need

In a crisis, the community requires and expects that those who are able to provide assistance will be there to do so as quickly as possible. When the crisis is major, the community requires and expects that many actors will join forces, working together cohesively to limit the damage and loss. The community is blind to the badge on the truck or the uniform of those who come to help it. It is not aware of the invisible lines that separate brigade response areas. It is not concerned with the organisational arrangements that give primary responsibility to one agency or another.

While these lines and arrangements are important for guiding and coordinating response, they should not operate as barriers to providing optimum assistance to persons in need.

Interoperability

CFA and MFB both operate in urban areas and on the urban fringe and deliver the same broad range of services. Each service covers approximately half of the urban fire risk across the state. In doing so, they utilise similar but slightly different procedures, appliances and equipment. Both organisations provide effective service delivery, so the differences between them are marginal in terms of the impact on their individual performance. But the differences are sufficiently significant to prohibit or hinder, often without further training, the ability of a member of one fire service to utilise the equipment or temporarily join a crew of the other fire service. For example, each organisation uses different hose couplings. The couplings work effectively but are incompatible for joint operations. Therefore, each organisation has to carry adapters,

and does not always have enough, to use the other's pumpers.

Since 2010, there has been an increased focus on improving interoperability between the fire services and within the emergency management sector more broadly. Mutual aid agreements have been established and revised. In 2010, CFA and MFB signed the Joint Operation Activities Memorandum of Understanding to govern the deployment of CFA and MFB resources to fires in areas nominally the responsibility of the other.

The secondment program between the CFA and MFB, trialled in 2012 and re-introduced in 2015, has strengthened interoperability between the two organisations. The secondment program not only provides the opportunity for CFA and MFB firefighters to work together in a range of environments but also to spend time at the station and understand one another's culture and practices. Establishing cross-agency networks and relationships is important for interoperability and the secondment program should be further enhanced.

While these efforts have improved the way that the CFA and MFB operate alongside one another, the next step, and the focus for the fire services, must be to allow a more effective sharing of resources and the ability for firefighters to operate across agencies, without obstacles or restrictions.

The Review heard examples of MFB crews backfilling at CFA stations and taking their own appliances and equipment with them when they should just be able to arrive and use the equipment that is there. As both organisations provide largely the same services, there is a clear opportunity to use the same equipment and apply the same systems and procedures so that crew, appliances or equipment can be deployed to where they are most needed and immediately utilised.

⁸ CFA's mission is 'to protect lives and property'; MFB's mission is 'protection of life, property and the environment'.



At present, the mismatch of equipment used across the state has an impact on forming strike teams and responding to major events.

Interoperability is not just about equipment and processes. It covers governance, standard operating procedure, technology, training and exercises, and usage (encouraging and facilitating the increased use of common capabilities and joint procedures).⁹ Improving interoperability is about enhancing and utilising the state's firefighting resources in a manner that provides the most effective and efficient service to the community.

Interoperability is not about making the CFA and MFB the same. Achieving interoperability must take into account their different organisational cultures, expectations of their workforce, and connections to their communities.

For firefighters, true interoperability would mean that they know and understand how one another operates, can trust in each other's capability, utilise each other's resources, and, if necessary, join one another's crew.

Interoperability Committee

The Review considers that personal protective clothing, equipment, appliances, systems, training, communications networks and operating procedures should be standardised where this will result in an improved outcome for the community. It does not consider that every process and system across the fire services needs to be standardised but this should be the starting point for consideration. In the majority of cases, standardisation will result in real benefits.

The Victorian Fire Service Agencies Interoperability Committee, established by the EMC, is already taking this approach. Through its sub-committees, it is currently developing proposals for the following and will add others to the list:

- standard breathing apparatus
- standard structural firefighting helmets
- standard personal protective clothing
- standard personal protective equipment
- standard design specifications for appliances
- a single appliance replacement program
- a single recruit course for paid firefighters
- the secondment program for CFA and MFB paid firefighters.

The Interoperability Committee comprises the EMC, the CFA and MFB's Chief Officers and the UFU Secretary. The Review recommends that the Committee's membership be expanded to include a member of the VFBV so that the work ahead benefits from consultation with both paid and volunteer firefighters. Given that some of the Committee's work is already well advanced, the Review proposes that, as a transitional arrangement, the EMC consult with the VFBV representative on the work to date, with the VFBV representative to join Committee discussions on new initiatives in six to twelve months time.

The Review similarly encourages the CFA to move towards running its consultation processes with paid and volunteer firefighters as a common process rather than perpetuating the separation between the two groups.

As chair of the Interoperability Committee, the EMC should have responsibility for convening the Committee, setting its priorities and reporting to the Board on progress. The Committee should agree on a simple and effective mechanism for making timely decisions, once any necessary research is completed, consultations have been undertaken, and occupational health and safety concerns have been resolved. Where the Committee fails to advance issues or make timely decisions, the EMC should make a binding decision.

The Review acknowledges and applauds the initiative of the Interoperability Committee and the progress that has been made. It recommends that the Committee continue its work to standardise appliances, equipment, training, systems and operating procedures for the fire services as appropriate. With this should also come standardised terminology. The Review encourages the Committee to increase the urgency of its activities.

The Review notes that there may also be benefits for DELWP, industry brigades such as forest industry brigades, and VICSES to participate in the work of the Interoperability Committee and adopt its decisions regarding relevant appliances, equipment and procedures. However, this is beyond the scope of the Review and a matter for government and those entities.

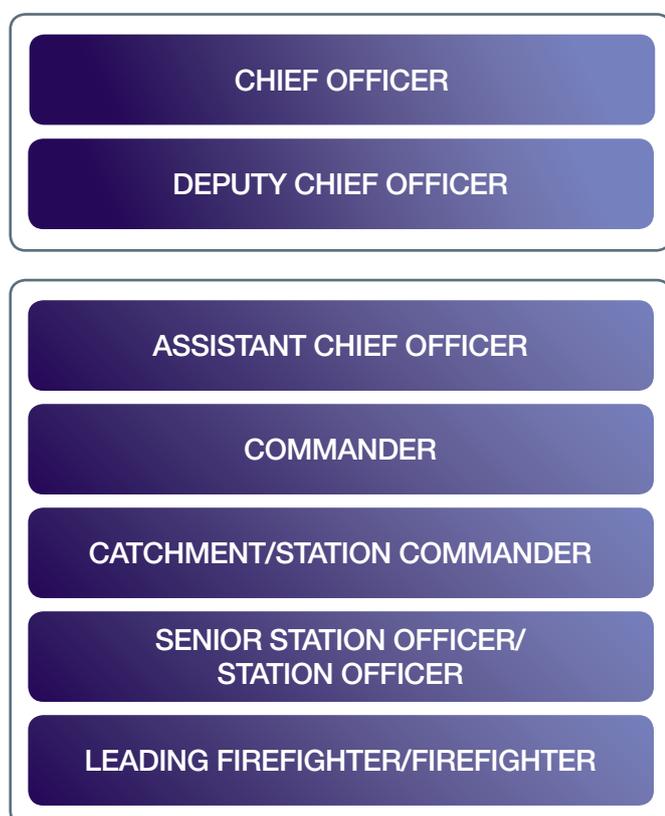
⁹ Dr David Boyd, *Interoperability Continuum: A tool for improving emergency response communications and interoperability* (2006), United States Department of Homeland Security.

Common rank system

The CFA and MFB have each adopted a slightly different rank system for paid firefighters, with different insignia and nomenclature. This creates inconsistency between the organisations. The alignment of the paid firefighter structure would resolve these issues and support streamlined service delivery.

The following model (see Figure 1) is based on a suggestion by EMV, with some minor changes, that draws on the strongest elements from both organisations' current structures.

Figure 1: Fire Services Operational Staff Alignment



As EMV notes in its submission, the common model allows for common professional development, organisational awareness and interoperability, secondments, transfer and promotion at level or above and across the two services, backfill opportunities and career progression.¹⁰

The Review recommends that the Interoperability Committee develop a common rank system, rank insignia and nomenclature for paid firefighters, drawing on the above model.

Interoperability is not necessarily easy to implement. Changes to appliances, equipment, or procedures can have a range of impacts and significant cost implications. For new appliances or systems to be adopted, people need to be trained in them. This will place a significant burden on already stretched training resources and place additional demands on volunteer time. The rolling out and transition period needs to be carefully managed so that response capability is maintained as new systems are adopted.

Recommendation 1:

The Review recommends that the Fire Service Agencies Interoperability Committee:

- a. continue its work to standardise appliances, equipment, training, systems and operating procedures for the fire services as appropriate, as well as develop a common rank structure for paid firefighters
- b. following a transitional period of bilateral consultation between the EMC and the VFBV, be expanded to include a VFBV representative
- c. extend participation to other sector organisations, where relevant, to ensure broader alignment across the sector and enhance efficiencies and cost savings.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority G relating to interoperable systems, assets and services.

¹⁰ Emergency Management Victoria Submission to the Fire Services Review, August 2015, p.18.

Service delivery models

The fire services operate in different environments, facing different challenges across the state. The community profile and risk is changing in many of these environments. Service delivery must be appropriate for the community that is being served. While current service delivery models are still valid, new ones need to be added to the mix to provide the fire services with the range of options they need to respond in new and evolving contexts. The Chief Officers, after assessing service delivery needs and following consultation with firefighters, should determine the most appropriate model to apply in a given location.

Greater metropolitan area

Both CFA and MFB provide the same range of services in the greater Melbourne area: the MFB in the Metropolitan Fire District¹¹ and the CFA from this boundary outwards, referred to in legislation as “the country area of Victoria”.¹² While Melbourne has grown enormously in its geographic size and population, the boundary of the Metropolitan Fire District has barely changed since it was established over 100 years ago. More than half of Melbourne’s metropolitan area now falls within “the country area of Victoria”.

To meet this changing need, CFA expanded its service delivery model to include integrated brigades, where full-time paid firefighters join volunteer firefighters to provide an integrated service. Integrated brigades, as well as volunteer-only brigades, now operate in the outer Melbourne metropolitan area and regional cities.

Where required, CFA and MFB provide mutual aid and support each other across the boundary between them. This boundary is largely unknown to the communities that straddle it.

The community expects consistent and seamless service delivery throughout the greater Melbourne

metropolitan area (gMa). The gMa extends beyond the central areas of the city into expanding urban growth corridors that adjoin grasslands, bushland, coastal plains, flood plains or industrial areas. The gMa covers 31 municipal boundaries from Wyndham and Hobson’s Bay to the west of Melbourne, up to the City of Whittlesea and Yarra Ranges, down through to Cardinia and the Mornington Peninsula in the south,¹³ and has a resident population of 4.44 million people.¹⁴

The Review recommends that the fire services adopt a shared model for the gMa that allows both CFA and MFB paid firefighters to work freely across agencies and agency boundaries, in partnership with volunteers. This model would be based on enhanced integration and standard operating procedures for the gMa. The model would serve to strengthen firefighter skills, as well as improve service to the community. The gMa area could be regularly reviewed, for example five-yearly, as growth areas expand.¹⁵

The fire services should develop a common understanding of the risk profile across the gMa and the resources that are required to meet that risk to an acceptable level. Brigades would need to understand the capability of neighbouring brigades and how it is deployed. The CFA and MFB have different systems for assigning appliances and crew to an incident. They also have different systems for determining who is in charge of the response to an incident. Standard operating procedures would therefore need to address response protocols, as well as command and control arrangements.

Recent sector-wide collaborative analysis identified there is a mix of engagement activities across community, business and government.¹⁶ The fire services should agree an approach, with other emergency management agencies, to community engagement within the gMa and how and by whom activities will be implemented.

¹¹ The “Metropolitan Fire District” is defined in s.4 and Schedule 2 of the MFB Act. Its genesis is in s.3 and the First Schedule of the *Fire Brigades Act 1890*.

¹² CFA Act, s.3.

¹³ Live in Victoria, Metropolitan Melbourne <http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au/living-in-victoria/melbourne-and-regional-victoria/melbourne>, (as cited in the submission of Emergency Management Victoria).

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *3218.0 Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2013–14*, www.abs.gov.au.

¹⁵ The New South Wales Fire Services Joint Standing Committee periodically reviews the boundaries of fire and rural fire districts. See *Fire Services Joint Standing Committee Act 1998* (NSW), s.5.

¹⁶ Victorian Emergency Management Capability Blueprint 2015–2025.

Some submissions proposed that the Metropolitan Fire District boundary be reviewed and changed. The Review considers that to change the boundary now would simply be changing the border of the current problems. It is more beneficial to the community to implement the above reforms regarding the gMa than to focus on a boundary review.

Support for volunteer brigades

The Review received a range of information on the challenges faced by some volunteer brigades to maintain service delivery standards at all times of the day and night. These included:

- commuting to work outside the brigade area
- increased external demands on volunteer time, such as family commitments and involvement with other organisations
- increase in residential population and urban development placing greater service demands on the brigade
- economic pressures making it more difficult for employers to release employees for emergency response.

Captains of volunteer brigades take on enormous, and largely unacknowledged, responsibility to make sure that trained and capable firefighters turn out to all incidents within their area. The Review frequently heard of volunteers' commitment to the community receiving the service it needs, and their desire to consider the various ways that this can be achieved. This was often accompanied by frustration at the apparent rigidity of the current arrangements.

CFA, VFBV and volunteers described the continuum of support under which CFA operates as a range of flexible support options for volunteer brigades based on local circumstance and need. Various examples were provided of steps that could be taken to support volunteer brigades as service demands increase and stretch the brigade's capacity to respond. These included targeted recruitment, establishing satellite stations, targeted training assistance, administrative support, leadership support, smart volunteer alerting systems, equipment and appliances matched to risk, community/industry partnerships, and new operational response arrangements. There was a strong view that

when volunteer brigades require assistance, it should be provided to the level needed, based on considered discussions with the volunteers concerned.

Seasonal staffing

One challenge faced by volunteer brigades in key tourist areas is the sudden and dramatic influx of people during particular seasons. For example, at Lorne, the population over the summer holidays increases from 1,000 to 20,000. The increase in people brings an increase in risk and requires an increase in capacity. A local brigade might not be able to meet this demand on its own and full-time paid firefighters need to be rostered to the station for the season. The same happens during winter at Mount Buller, when an Operations Officer is rostered to the local brigade.

However, it becomes an unjustifiable waste of resources to have the paid firefighters remain when the season ends. Flexibility for seasonal arrangements was addressed in the 2009 Board of Reference decision, which proposed a seasonal roster for Lorne and Phillip Island.¹⁷ Another proposal made to the Review was for DELWP seasonal firefighters to supplement CFA stations in peak tourist areas, where resources permit. At Anglesea, the local brigade arranges in advance for volunteer firefighters visiting the area during the summer to turn out with it.

Day staffing

A common issue raised with the Review was the difficulty for some brigades, particularly in the peri-urban areas, to guarantee a response during week days when many of the brigade's volunteers had commuted to work in other areas. The most common solution put forward was to allow volunteer brigades to be supported by day staffing – the rostering of paid firefighters to the station to provide coverage during week days, with the station reverting to being volunteer only during evenings and weekends, when there is sufficient volunteer presence to provide the first response to any incidents.

¹⁷ Relates to staffing decisions made in 2009 by the CFA UFU Board of Reference/Dispute Panel established under the CFA UFU Operational Staff Agreement 2000.

The current CFA UFU Operational Staff Enterprise Agreement allows for day staffing if there is an agreement that the station will move to the 10/14 roster at a specified later time.¹⁸ The Review heard that there is an understanding that this will generally occur within a 12-month period. The apparent lack of scope for maintaining day staffing for an unspecified period, or adopting different service delivery models to support identified needs, is a source of enormous frustration for volunteers and acts as a barrier to greater volunteer engagement.

Many acknowledge that there will be a need for some volunteer brigades to convert to integrated brigades on a 10/14 roster at a certain point in time but believe that interim day staffing should be a possibility for as long as this meets the community's needs, rather than be bound by a timeframe that is fixed in advance. They argue that to move to integration on a 10/14 roster before it is needed is a waste of the state's resources and has a detrimental impact on volunteerism at the relevant brigade, disempowering an otherwise viable brigade.

Some volunteer brigades struggle to continue providing 24-hour service delivery for longer than is ideal, rather than raise their hand and seek day-time assistance, as to do so spells an automatic end to the nature of the brigade that they have built with their community. Some of this reluctance stems from an awareness of the tensions that exist at some integrated brigades, an issue that is addressed later in the report.

Integrated brigades

The most significant issue for integrated brigades seems to be the ongoing role and contribution of volunteers. When only one or two paid firefighters join the brigade, there is a stronger sense that they are there to support the volunteers and the volunteers continue to play an essential role in responding to incidents.

When the brigade has four or more paid firefighters, they are able to respond to some incidents without needing to call on volunteers at all. In some instances, volunteers are not paged and the paid firefighters respond on their own. In others, volunteers turn out with the paid firefighters but are not fully involved in the response and might be left with less meaningful jobs such as rolling up the hoses and re-stowing vehicles.

This has an enormous impact on volunteer morale, as well as on the ability of volunteers to maintain their skill sets. It is also disrespectful of the time and commitment that volunteers freely give to their communities. While some volunteers in high demand areas might welcome no longer having to turn out to each and every call, there is clear evidence of active volunteer numbers dropping away once brigades have become integrated. This is highly detrimental to the provision of surge capacity for major incidents and sustained campaigns, and also has an impact on building community engagement and resilience.

The state's surge capacity is dependent on there being a trained, fit and ready pool of volunteers available throughout the state. Being trained, fit and ready requires ongoing skills maintenance and involvement in responding to real events. In general, it should be standard practice that once a volunteer crew is responding, it should not be called off en route but engaged in the key task still at hand.

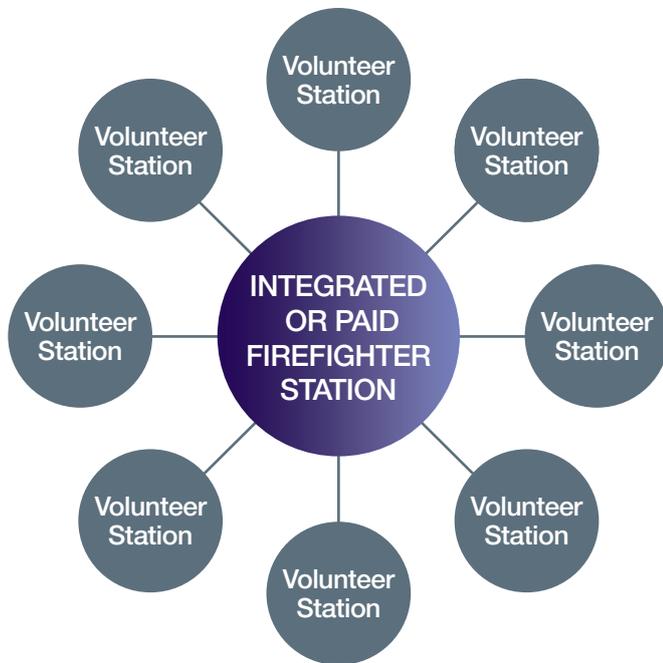
There are a range of other practical challenges that arise from integration. An integrated station requires a significantly larger footprint than either a paid-only or volunteer-only brigade. As the numbers of paid firefighters increase, there is less and less room to accommodate volunteers at the stations they have often contributed to building. For example, at Cranbourne station, the arrival of an additional six recruits means the volunteers mess needs to be converted to dormitories and there is no longer any room for volunteers to respond on the existing appliances.

Hub and spoke

An alternative model is the hub and spoke model where an integrated brigade or a brigade staffed by paid firefighters sits at the hub and is surrounded by a number of volunteer brigades (see Figure 2). Under this model, paid firefighters can support a number of volunteer brigades and enhance the response to a broader section of the community. Establishing an adequately staffed and equipped paid station at the hub means an effective response can be provided by both paid and volunteer firefighters, without the same impact on volunteer numbers. It also has the advantage of requiring a smaller station footprint. It would also be possible for a very strong volunteer brigade, such as Werribee Fire Brigade, to operate as the hub.

¹⁸ CFA UFU Operational Staff Enterprise Agreement 2010, clause 80.

Figure 2: Hub and spoke model



The hub and spoke model provides greater flexibility to the fire services, as it avoids the need to invest heavily in fixed long-term locations that may not be ideal for future needs. The model allows the strategic allocation of resources to maximum advantage. It allows paid and volunteer firefighters to play a more active role at their respective stations, increasing experience and boosting morale. It also eliminates many of the tensions and personnel issues that have plagued some integrated brigades by focusing attention and resources on integration on the fireground rather than at the station.

The hub and spoke model could also be used as a mechanism for providing day staffing at one of the volunteer brigades if needed. A nominated crew of paid firefighters on the day shift could clock on at the hub brigade and then travel to the volunteer station where daytime support is required. At the end of shift, the crew would return to and clock out at the hub brigade. The crew is thus able to respond rapidly to incidents in the volunteer brigade's area but is also able to support its own and other brigades as part of the broader hub and spoke model.

Satellite stations

One of the particular challenges for volunteers is that they must first travel to the station before turning out to an incident, which can consume precious minutes. Some brigades have established satellite stations to increase the locations where appliances are housed and from which volunteers can turn out, enabling them to respond more rapidly. Satellite stations help to increase the coverage of the brigade without having to replicate all brigade functions and administration at each location.

Pre-positioning vehicles

Rather than a satellite station, other volunteer brigades have sought simply to build a shed or small secure facility in another area of their town to house one of their appliances. This enables a crew, who keep their protective clothing and equipment with them, to respond more quickly to that area whilst other volunteers attend at the station to pick up a second appliance.

As time is a critical element of response and currently forms the basis of the service delivery standards, securely pre-positioning appliances in higher-risk areas which are some distance from the station might be a valuable option.

Industry participation

If the idea of pre-positioning some appliances in non-station locations is advanced, industry partners may be able to offer suitable locations on their premises rather than requiring the fire services to custom-build sheds. This would afford the fire services some flexibility as needs change. For this model to be successful, clear procedures would need to be established regarding access and security.

The Review also heard some ideas on the role that industry could play in different service delivery models. Recent reforms to emergency management have placed a strong emphasis on working with community, government, agencies and business. The Review believes there is more to be gained through engaging with industry partners.

Interoperability with DELWP

DELWP has primary responsibility for fire suppression on public land and works with its portfolio agencies and delegated land managers, including Parks Victoria, Catchment Management Authorities, water authorities and committees of management.

Mutual aid agreements exist in all DELWP regions between CFA and DELWP and cover resource sharing for emergency response. DELWP also contributes significantly to fire and emergency management through integrated resourcing of state and regional control arrangements. As CFA and DELWP both administer regulatory controls to prevent bushfires, they work jointly to streamline the delivery of those responsibilities. A model of regional cooperation before, during and after emergencies, could be expanded to include other agencies.

The Review heard many comments about the positive relationships that have developed between CFA and DELWP at all levels over recent years, overcoming much of the tension that existed between the two organisations in the past. However, some of the relationships at the local level are held together through goodwill, making them potentially vulnerable to changes in personalities.

The Review also heard that sometimes, during the response to an incident, the different working arrangements for DELWP staff and volunteer firefighters can lead to tensions when these are not properly understood. For example, for occupational health and safety reasons, DELWP staff are required to leave the fireground when they time out at the end of their shift. This is sometimes perceived as disrespect for volunteers when DELWP staff walk off leaving volunteers to finish the work.

The Review recommends that CFA and DELWP continue to identify opportunities to strengthen their organisational bonds. To date such efforts have led to increased engagement by CFA in DELWP's planned burning program which offers a valuable training opportunity for CFA firefighters, particularly for recruits. A further improvement would be for DELWP to consistently advise CFA when it is about to undertake a planned burn.

Both organisations are now working on greater cross-tenure collaboration to deliver the State's planned

burning program. To increase integration between their agencies, they have piloted co-delivery of fuel management on public land and are aiming to expand fuel management on private land. CFA has also co-located staff with DELWP's bushfire-risk landscape teams to enhance collaboration and integration.

Given these moves towards greater cooperation and a shared approach, the provisions of the *Forests Act 1958* that only permit DELWP and Parks Victoria firefighters to fight fires in, or within 1.5 km of, state forests, national parks or protected public land, unless the CFA or MFB request DELWP's assistance, seem out of date.¹⁹ The Review recommends that these provisions are reviewed in line with a more contemporary, state-wide approach to addressing risk.

Expanded working arrangements

In addition to new service delivery models, the Review believes it is essential to consider additional working arrangements for individual brigade members. Contemporary workplace practice involves offering a range of working arrangements. This is important for existing staff but is also essential for attracting a broader and more diverse pool of applicants to the fire services and retaining them throughout their working life cycle.

The state invests an enormous amount of money in training its firefighters and ensuring they remain capable and ready for service. It is poor governance and leadership if this investment is unnecessarily lost because of a change in an individual's circumstances, such as becoming a parent.

There is a need for a broader scope of working arrangements to assist persons returning from parental leave. The Review is aware of the intricacy of the 10/14 rostering system, the detailed formula for penalty rates and allowances, and the need for consistency of response and working effectively with one's crew members.

The Review believes it is possible to introduce additional working arrangements for persons returning from parental leave, without unravelling the fabric of the 10/14 roster system, to create opportunities to retain and attract competent staff. In particular, consideration should be given to introducing part-time work, job sharing and day-shift rostering (short-term or ongoing) for operational staff.

¹⁹ *Forests Act 1958*, ss. 3, 20 and 62.

Recommendation 2:

The Review recommends that:

- a. the fire services introduce new service delivery models to better meet community needs in a given location, including joint operations in the gMa, day staffing, and hub and spoke integration. The fire services should consult with both volunteer and paid firefighters and their representative bodies on the most appropriate model to adopt in a given area, with the ultimate decision to be made by the Chief Officers
- b. the CFA and DELWP continue to identify opportunities to strengthen their organisational bonds through joint initiatives
- c. the government review the provisions in the *Forests Act 1958* that limit, based on distance, the ability of DELWP and its partner organisations to support a sector-wide approach to responding to emergencies
- d. the fire services introduce a broader scope of working arrangements, including job-sharing and part-time options, for persons returning from parental leave.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority G relating to a service model that is relevant, efficient and effective and SAP Priority D relating to a sophisticated workforce management approach.

Standards

Interoperability must be underpinned by common sector-wide standards. The EMC has a statutory responsibility to develop and maintain operational standards for the performance of emergency management functions by responder agencies.²⁰

The Review is advised that this provision has sometimes been narrowly interpreted as only applying to service delivery standards. This may be because of confusion regarding what is covered by “operational”. Others have stated that the provision should be read more broadly, in line with the principles of statutory interpretation, to promote the purpose or object

underlying the Act.²¹ Still others have suggested that the provision be expanded to apply to the sector more broadly and not limited only to responder agencies.

The objectives of the *Emergency Management Act 2013* include establishing governance arrangements that facilitate cooperation between agencies and ensure the coordination of emergency management reform, and implementing an “all hazards-all agencies” approach based on networked arrangements and greater interoperability.²² The EMC’s standards-setting power should enable the emergency management sector to achieve this aim.

The Review recommends that the scope of the EMC’s standards-setting function be reviewed, so as to remove any ambiguity and enable the EMC to deliver a comprehensive set of standards to support integration and interoperability within the emergency management sector.

The EMC’s responsibilities also include coordinating the activities of emergency services agencies and leading and promoting the implementation of the SAP to the extent that it relates to the improvement of the operational capability of the agencies.²³ Under their respective legislation, the objectives of the fire services and VICSES include contributing to a whole of sector approach to emergency management and promoting a culture within emergency management of interoperability. The responsibilities of those agencies, as well as DELWP, include using their best endeavours to carry out their functions in accordance with the operational standards developed by the EMC.²⁴

Some have argued that the reference to using “best endeavours” creates some discretion for the agencies in terms of complying with the EMC’s standards.

Achieving interoperability requires a unity of purpose and effort. It is therefore necessary to eliminate any barriers and workarounds that detract from this goal. The Review further recommends that the legislative responsibility of the fire services and other agencies to contribute to a whole of sector approach, including through implementing the EMC’s standards, also be reviewed.

²⁰ EM Act, ss.32(1)(j) and 48. Section 3 defines “responder agencies” to include CFA, DELWP, MFB and VICSES.

²¹ *Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984*, s.35(a).

²² EM Act, s.5(c).

²³ EM Act, s.32(1)(a) and (h).

²⁴ CFA Act, s.6D; MFB Act, s.7AC; *Victoria State Emergency Service Act 2005*, s.4C; *Forests Act 1958*, s.61E.

Service Delivery Standards

A few submissions commented on the service delivery standards set for the fire services and how these are measured and captured. CFA and MFB measure and record slightly different information making comparisons difficult. Some submissions contested that the reporting of response times was not always consistent and that this distorted the overall understanding of the fire services' performance.

The 2015 Victorian Auditor-General's Office *Report into Emergency Service Response Times* found that some of the measures used are based on historical and outdated information. It also questioned whether a response time measure was the best indicator of agency performance and best outcome for the community.

The Review has not investigated this issue. It understands that EMV has embarked on a process to review all performance measures, with the intention of implementing new measures in 2016–17. This will provide for consistent methods of measurement and form the basis for reporting across the sector.

Recommendation 3:

The Review recommends that the *Emergency Management Act 2013* be reviewed to:

- a. enable the EMC to deliver a comprehensive set of standards to support integration and interoperability within the emergency management sector
- b. eliminate any barriers, or potential for workarounds, to the fire services, and other agencies, implementing the EMC's standards.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority E relating to performance standards to guide effective and efficient governance and enable the sector to measure its performance.

Training

The best equipment and the best service delivery models will vastly enhance the protection afforded to the community. But it is the firefighters who get the job done and must be supported to attain and retain peak competence.

Training is the means to readiness – the essential element of being a firefighter. The broad range of services now provided by firefighters requires the equivalent breadth in training programs. After being acquired, skills must be maintained through practice and repeated learning. Constant advances in technology mean constant variations to equipment and appliances and new systems to be mastered. The training program to be delivered by the fire services is complex and ever evolving. It is further complicated in the CFA because of the sheer numbers of firefighters involved and the need for flexible delivery to accommodate volunteer access and availability.

Issues around training were a constant feature of submissions and discussions with the Review. They have also been a constant feature of previous reviews with little sense on the ground that real progress has been made.²⁵ This is despite the level of attention given to training at headquarters.

From the firefighter perspective, access to training beyond station-based drills seems to be a matter of persistence and luck. The Review heard numerous stories of people seeking places on training courses time and time again with no success. It heard stories of people being trained on specialist rescue equipment but not having access to that equipment where they were stationed. It heard stories of people being stationed with specialist rescue equipment but not trained to use it, sometimes for many years. It heard of specialist training being delivered with no refresher courses offered, sometimes for a gap of more than a decade. It heard of people with specialist training needing to remain on station with the specialist equipment in case it was needed and therefore unable to attend regular call outs and maintain those skills.

²⁵ 2011 Report of Inquiry into the Effect of Arrangements made by the Country Fire Authority on its Volunteers; Garnock D, January 2009, CFA Training Delivery Review, Report of Findings and Recommendations.

A training strategy

From the firefighter perspective, there is no cohesive training strategy beyond attaining minimum skills and no sense of who will be trained to do what and when.

The Review is aware that the CFA has developed a training strategy,²⁶ but its operational arm seems to have limited knowledge or awareness of its content. At a minimum, this is a serious gap in communication. Until recently, CFA's training programs and training facilities have been managed by multiple, independent groups in the organisation, preventing any cohesive or consistent state-wide approach to training and its delivery. CFA has now introduced a common, organisation-wide approach to training, refreshed its strategy, established a learning and development plan,²⁷ and restructured and integrated the elements of the organisation involved in developing, implementing and supporting training. It is also seeking to maximise cross-sector opportunities. This entails a significant shift for the organisation and will require committed effort, at all levels, to implement.

The MFB does not currently have a training strategy. Its Corporate Plan 2015–2018 refers to establishing a learning and development strategy that will set out a suite of skills acquisition and skills maintenance training programs. It seems extraordinary that this is not already in place.

Brigades develop their own training plans for what can be delivered at the station, but these do not cover specialist courses or skills. The lack of a clear training agenda is a cause of great frustration and anxiety for firefighters. Without refresher training in certain skills, they feel ill-prepared to undertake those tasks if called on.

The fire services seem to have a practice of training people in specialist skills to the minimum required numbers. Once numbers drop below the identified need, more people are trained in that skill. However, if the skill is not utilised or refreshed, actual capability may be below what is recorded. Some senior firefighters who acquired specialist skills many years earlier, but have not since practised or refreshed them, have unsuccessfully sought to have that competency removed from their record.

If resources permit, the Review proposes that flexibility be built into the system by training slightly more people than required to meet minimum need for specialist skills. This would allow firefighters to move across different appliances and not lose either core or specialist skills at the expense of the other. It would also limit the instances where those with specialist skills need to be retained or recalled to duty.

Firefighters also commented that there are episodic and reactive training “blitzes”, when training to respond to a particular risk is widely offered following an incident related to that risk, but with no follow-up courses. There does not seem to be any forward thinking around training, linked to brigade profiles and assessments of current and future risks, with appropriate training then introduced in a planned manner over time.

Volunteers have varying expectations around training. Some seek only the skills necessary to meet the main risks in their brigade area. Others look for opportunities to broaden and enhance both their leadership and technical skills. CFA's training program must find an appropriate balance to meet these differing needs. This will also serve to attract a range of volunteers to the organisation.

It is clearly not viable for the fire services to offer all forms of training to whomever seeks it. Training must be delivered in line with risk-based capability requirements that will ensure that the right skills are available at the right locations. A training strategy must focus on future significant risk and not just on the last major risk faced. For example, the focus may need to include major structural fire and not only major bushfire. It is important to lock in the skills and experience gained from responding to major events, as well as to look to where there are gaps in experience regarding key risks that are yet to be faced.

²⁶ CFA Fire and Emergency Management Training Strategy 2013–2018.

²⁷ CFA Fire and Emergency Management Learning and Development Plan 2015/2016–2017/2018.

As training underpins operations, the training strategy must be guided by the Chief Officer in line with his or her operational strategy. A clear and transparent training program, with explanations as to who is being targeted for different competencies, would alleviate a lot of concern and uncertainty and enable firefighters to identify a potential development pathway for themselves. Firefighters should be consulted on the development of the strategy.

Training delivery

The delivery of training is also vexed. A positive development is that training centres now operate as state training centres for both fire services, rather than each maintaining its own. However, there is enormous pressure on these training centres with the closure of Fiskville and the large number of recruit courses underway. Despite the introduction of mobile props, there is still relatively limited access to hot fire training for firefighters in rural areas.

There are also a limited number of paid instructors in the CFA. Paid instructors deliver the majority of their training during week days, which is not practical for volunteers who require training on evenings or weekends. Within limits,²⁸ paid instructors can and do make themselves available at these times, but volunteers are generally trained by other volunteers, except at integrated brigades, or brigades neighbouring integrated brigades, where paid firefighters sometimes also deliver training and drills. It is important that the CFA increase the pool of persons available to train volunteers at suitable times. The CFA's training strategy identifies a role for paid instructors to identify, develop and support volunteer trainers and assessors.²⁹

For paid firefighters, more advantage could be taken of time at station to undertake drills. This can be difficult for busy stations but if properly planned, could be managed through moving up crews from other brigades.

The high demand for training and its limited availability has created some tensions within the fire services as the priorities are not understood. Both paid and volunteer firefighters feel they are missing out on

opportunities because resources are being directed to the other. Firefighters noted that budget limitations were frequently cited as the reason for limited training offerings. This was sometimes difficult to accept when they saw money being spent on initiatives that they believed had less importance than fundamental training. The comment was made that the budget should follow the training needs, with an affordable, comprehensive training program developed and funds identified to support it.

Firefighters offered suggestions for different methods of training delivery, such as online modules, classroom delivery at locations other than the training centres to relieve pressure on those resources, and the use of third party providers. The first aid training delivered by Ambulance Victoria (AV) was praised as an excellent model as it offered a clear, consistent program with known timings for refresher training.

Firefighters should also be consulted on training centre design to ensure that the areas for operational training can accommodate simulating operations.

Firefighters also stressed the importance of exercises, including joint exercises with the fire services and other emergency management organisations.

As noted earlier, DELWP's planned burning program offers an excellent opportunity for training in understanding and managing bushfire and grassfire. The government should consider options for incorporating DELWP into plans for shared training and utilisation of resources.

Leadership training

The increasing demands on firefighters have also placed increasing demands on their leaders at the operational level. Leadership is a skill separate to technical skills. As the fire services need to undergo significant cultural change, local leaders need to be given the skills to help lead the change and manage behaviour that does not reflect the organisation's values. Leadership training should be offered at all levels, with a special focus on Station Officers, Senior Station Officers, Commanders, Operations Officers, Operations Managers, Captains and Lieutenants.

²⁸ Clause 99.8 of the CFA UFU Operational Staff Enterprise Agreement 2010 sets out the maximum number of nights and weekends that instructors may work in any 8-week period.

²⁹ CFA Fire and Emergency Management Training Strategy 2013–2018, p.12.

Recommendation 4:

The Review recommends that:

- a. the MFB develop a comprehensive training strategy with the guidance of the Chief Officer
- b. the fire services' training strategies and accompanying training programs be informed by consultation with paid and volunteer firefighters
- c. the training strategies be informed by consultation between the fire services to ensure there is alignment across the fire services to the extent possible and that opportunities for joint training and sharing of training resources are maximised
- d. the fire services investigate flexible training delivery models in different locations, including a broader use of paid instructors, volunteer trainers and assessors, and third party providers
- e. the training strategies and programs be communicated across the organisations so that training priorities and pathways are well understood.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority D relating to a sector training framework that delivers a highly diverse and technically competent workforce.

Culture

The culture of an organisation has a significant impact on the effectiveness of its operations and the role it plays in the community. Firefighters face the most daunting of circumstances and assist the community in their greatest need. Above all else, they need to be respected for their skills and experience, their commitment and their courage. They respect and seek to meet the community's expectations of them. Respect should therefore be the foundation of the culture within the fire services.

Getting it done

The fire services have an incredibly strong culture of getting the job done. They overcome challenges and work around issues to respond immediately to calls. At an incident, firefighters bring all of their skills, experience and training to the fore, working together to provide the best possible response, time and time again.

Relationship between volunteer and paid firefighters

Firefighting is a team effort, with firefighters relying absolutely on one another. Competence, trust and relationships are key components of safety and success.

The Review heard different accounts of the relationship between volunteer and paid firefighters, whether the latter were from the CFA or MFB. The majority reported that on the fireground, or at other incidents, the relationship was very good, with everyone working together to do what was needed to get the job done. Some commented on how each needed and benefited from the other, exchanging expertise and local knowledge.

However, there were also reports of poor behaviour, with some people making a point of insulting or ignoring the other, which then sometimes resulted in crews

refusing to work together or seek assistance from one another when this was required. The Review also heard of instances where former volunteer firefighters were pressured to cease volunteering once they became paid firefighters. This was seen as an intrusion into what employees did in their private time and ironic that the fire services would be an employer that did not support volunteer firefighting. Strained relationships between volunteer and paid firefighters do not produce the best outcome for the community and have a demoralising effect on those offended or excluded.

Despite being similar services, CFA and MFB have very different cultures which are strongly entrenched in their organisations. CFA brigades are created from their communities and often become the fabric of their communities, particularly in rural areas. CFA volunteers may wear a number of hats in their local area and be leaders on a range of issues. Though part of the organisation, CFA brigades also have a sense of independence and autonomy. This can sometimes create tension with the organisation.

MFB firefighters join the organisation. They are assigned to a particular station, which may not be in the community where they live, and form very strong connections with their brigade and platoon. They have a fierce commitment to protecting the communities they serve but are generally not "of" the community in the same way as CFA brigades.

These differences in culture can result in very different approaches to community engagement.

Integrated brigades

There were mixed views on the success of CFA's integration model. Some reported that integration had strengthened the brigade by improving the response to the community and allowing an exchange of information and skills between paid and volunteer firefighters.



For brigades where integration had been relatively successful, both paid and volunteer firefighters commented that the brigade could not deliver its services without the other and there was a clear commitment to making it work.

For brigades where integration is not functioning as effectively as it could, some of the challenges seem to arise from personality issues, condescending leadership, the attitude of some paid firefighters towards volunteers or the frustration of some volunteers at how the brigade is now managed and volunteers directed. Further tensions arise when volunteers have not been consulted on the move to integration, do not agree there is a need for integration, have not been given the opportunity to propose other options, or feel pushed aside in their own brigades. The VFBV 2014 Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey found that volunteers at integrated brigades are less satisfied with the way they are supported, utilised and respected than those in volunteer-only brigades.³⁰

Elements of successful integration, from a cultural perspective, seem to be:

- integration is at the request of the volunteers and when the brigade is still strong
- honesty about the likely impact of integration on the brigade and the ongoing role of volunteers – not pretending that nothing will change
- careful planning and strong engagement with the volunteers well in advance of the proposed integration to discuss the impact and their needs
- strong, consultative and respectful leadership.

The CFA should work with its most successful integrated brigades to develop a model for integration. The model should cover the process for initiating integration, including consultation with the volunteer brigade and a discussion of the triggers for integration and how they could be met. It should detail a planning and implementation process, with the strong input of volunteers and the early engagement of the integration officer. And it should outline mechanisms for providing ongoing support to the brigade.

It is essential that CFA carefully select and invest in the leadership of integrated brigades to create a positive

and mutually supportive dynamic. It is also important that senior management closely oversee the integration period and respond quickly when problems arise.

It is the role of the organisational leadership to create unity within its ranks. The Review heard constant references to the differences between paid and volunteer firefighters and very little language that promoted a common approach. This is a barrier to successful integration within the CFA and to interoperability within the fire services more broadly.

Recommendation 5:

The Review recommends that the CFA develop a leading practice model for integrating brigades, drawing on the successful processes adopted to date. The model should cover the initiation and planning of integration, implementation, and continued support. The leaders of integrated brigades should be selected for leadership, management and technical skills and provided with ongoing high-level assistance.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority D relating to a sophisticated workforce management approach to build and sustain the sector.

Bullying

The Review heard descriptions of a bullying culture in both CFA and MFB, at all levels of the organisation. The Review did not receive sufficient information to comment on the prevalence of such a culture but heard that many of those who experience bullying prefer to suffer in silence than make a claim.

The Review also heard consistent stories of claims regarding poor or bullying behaviour being badly managed. In some instances, this was due to a lack of skills or lack of interest on the part of the responsible manager. In others, it was due to a lack of authority of the responsible manager, irrespective of how willing, to take any real, positive steps towards resolution. And in others, it was a case of the matter being handed up the line with no one taking any responsibility to address the issue or maintain communication with the complainant.

³⁰ VFBV, 2014 Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey, p.29.

The failure to address such claims professionally, expeditiously, and with care and concern, has led to some individuals feeling locked for years in a grievance with the organisation without any resolution. This has a consequent impact on their health and well-being, often combined with a sense of being treated like a perpetrator rather than a victim. This situation is exacerbated for volunteers who, not being employees, have more limited avenues to seek redress.

The failure to address poor behaviour also sends a message that such behaviour is tolerated or, even worse, considered acceptable.

Brigade leaders and their immediate supervisors especially need to be supported in addressing instances of bullying and setting the standards for expected behaviours, and have a clear set of tools for doing so. If matters cannot be handled locally, there needs to be a clear alternative avenue. Many members of the fire services proudly described their brigades as being like a family where everyone looks out for one another. In such an environment, exclusion is much more powerfully felt.

Recommendation 6:

The Review recommends that brigade leaders and their immediate supervisors be provided with clear processes and tools to deal professionally, expeditiously and compassionately with instances of bullying and poor behaviour, and be supported in doing so. A clear, alternative mechanism should be established, and communicated to all members, for when matters cannot be handled locally.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority C relating to developing leadership that instils a positive workforce culture and promotes respect and cooperation.

Gender and diversity

Both CFA and MFB remain dominated by Anglo-Saxon men of a certain age. This is a similar profile to fire services in other states and countries. However, the numbers of operational women in Victoria's fire services are particularly low and both organisations lag behind the state's other emergency services in terms of women's participation. As at 30 June 2015, women made up only 3 per cent of paid firefighters and 15 per cent of volunteer firefighters in the CFA and only 4 per cent of firefighters in the MFB. There are no women in uniformed command roles and only a handful in executive leadership positions.

While the numbers tell a story, they do not offer explanations. The efforts by the fire services to attract and retain women in their operational ranks are clearly inadequate, inappropriately targeted or not being accorded sufficient priority.

The same could be said for efforts to attract and retain members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, who are notably absent from the fire services. It is a similar situation for members of indigenous communities.

Diversity includes race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and age. There is overwhelming evidence of the significant and positive contributions brought to an organisation by a diverse workforce.³¹ Diversity within the organisation enables it to respond better to the diverse community it serves. Increasing the diversity of perspective within the organisation will only enhance the level of innovation that is already being generated by brigades.

Creating a diverse organisation must be led from the top. There is also a particular role for brigade leaders to drive this change in terms of how they engage with their communities and the environment they create at the station.

There are a range of different models in both the public and private sectors for creating workplaces that encourage, support and welcome diversity. In emergency services, both DELWP and Victoria Police have recently introduced proactive diversity programs. Programs can be targeted to reach particular groups, such as youth or indigenous communities, or designed to address barriers to broader diversity.

³¹ McKinsey & Company Inc., 2007, *Women Matter: Gender diversity, a corporate performance driver*; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013, *Accelerating the advancement of women in leadership: Listening, Learning, Leading*, Male Champions of Change 2013.

The Review heard that it can be difficult for women in the fire services to raise certain issues, particularly regarding behaviour towards them, and that the reprisals for doing so were often worse than the original offence. The same was said for those who were being bullied or excluded.

Women and men in the fire services reported that women must work twice as hard to achieve the same level of acceptance as men. The Review also heard instances of sexual harassment and threatening behaviour. Other women indicated that they have not been targeted but that “you just had to keep your head down and get on with it.”

Addressing these issues, along with broader problems of bullying and harassment, is first and foremost a requirement of leadership. As retired Australian Army Chief, Lieutenant General David Morrison, is often quoted: “the standard you walk past is the standard you accept.”

It is important that the fire services offer everyone a safe place to work. The Review received enough information to indicate that there is a problem but was unable to explore this issue in any detail. The Review notes that the Australian Defence Force, the Australian Royal College of Surgeons and Victoria Police have made genuine and public commitments to understand and address harassment and discriminatory practices and behaviours towards women in their organisations, with the support of independent bodies.

The Review is also aware of work being launched in the emergency management sector, as a collective, to increase the participation of women in the sector and address the barriers to this occurring. The Review believes there is an opportunity for the fire services to advance this collective effort through making a genuine and public commitment to understanding and addressing harassment and discriminatory practices and behaviours in their organisations and launching a process for doing so.

Creating diversity needs to go beyond recruiting women or people from different cultural backgrounds and then simply tolerating their presence. The fire services need to look to how they can best engage with the changing demographic profiles in their communities and reflect those profiles in their own brigades. This is essential for the development and success of the brigade and the organisation as a

whole and requires a transparent and committed effort. The Review believes that consideration should be given to adopting diversity targets as part of initiatives to bring about change.

Recommendation 7:

The Review recommends that the fire services take the lead in advancing the sector’s collective effort to increase diversity in the sector, through making a genuine and public commitment to understanding and addressing harassment and discriminatory practices and behaviours in their organisations, and launching a process for doing so.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority C relating to developing leadership that instils a positive workforce culture and promotes respect and diversity.

Morale

In any workplace, morale plays a key role in determining organisational effectiveness, workplace productivity and all round success. The fire services are no different. In fact, the nature of the work demanded of emergency services workers dictates that morale plays an even more important role.

Poor morale, if left unchecked can result in reduced commitment, increased absences, increases in the number of errors, decreased productivity, decreased quality of work, apathy and increases in accidents or injuries.

The Review does not suggest that any or all of these have occurred but is merely identifying the consequences of poor morale.

Firefighters expressed an overwhelming view that the organisation must place its faith in the person on the ground. When they respond to an incident, firefighters need to know they have the full backing of their organisation – that they are trusted to make the right call in the heat of the moment and that their decisions will later be supported. Firefighters report that they do not currently feel that they have that backing.

It is evident to the Review that there is a serious and fundamental disconnect between the senior management and operational firefighters. In the case of MFB, this has become an almost uncrossable chasm.

The Review heard many reasons as to why this has developed. These included:

- a lack of understanding on the part of the leadership as to the operational challenges
- the lack of consultation on decisions affecting firefighters or operations
- the lack of contact, particularly through site visits, between the senior leadership and operational members
- fear regarding repercussions for speaking up
- fear regarding how staff will treat and respond to management
- stories of incidents of physical damage to senior executives' property
- the unnecessary involvement of the UFU in organisational decisions
- management's belief that it is almost impossible to advance issues without them being bogged down in interminable processes.

These views are very strongly held and the fire services seem stuck in a destructive and debilitating mindset of "us" and "them". Almost all language reflects a "win or lose" mentality or a deeply felt animosity and there is no sense of pulling together towards a common goal.

There will always be a proportion of staff who verbalise their dissatisfaction from time to time. However, to have the negativity and dissatisfaction so widespread and felt so consistently by old and new employees alike indicates to the Review that the situation has reached an unacceptable level.

One firefighter quipped: "The difference between paid and volunteer firefighters is that paid firefighters are paid to be treated badly, volunteers are treated badly for nothing."

Firefighters told of instances where it appeared that people in senior operational roles did not have a full understanding or knowledge of current operational procedures utilised by the brigades or the challenges faced by them. This was a source of immense frustration and feeling that the executive did not really care what happened on the ground.

For the executive, there seems to be a crisis of responsibility and accountability. Senior management reported that responsibility for decision-making is unclear and spread across various bodies, including the boards, government, EMV, and the industrial consultation mechanisms. There was a sense that the UFU blocks everything, making it difficult for the organisation to carry out its statutory functions, and that matters are taken out of the executives' hands. Consultation processes seem to stagnate or drag out inexorably. There is no clear ownership or accountability for decisions.

There is now a set of assumptions about how matters are managed. The default approach seems to be "crash or crash through" and the default response is to say no and take action in support of the right to do so.

Industrial disputes

Whatever the motivations for them, it is undeniable that the industrial disputes during the term of the previous government, particularly the CFA Recruits Case³² and the MFB Termination Case³³, have had a profoundly damaging effect on morale, with many commenting that morale is at its lowest in decades in both organisations. It seems that many paid firefighters experienced the litigation as a personal attack on their pay and conditions, creating anxiety, uncertainty, anger, frustration and a strong sense of betrayal by their own organisation.

Many firefighters were further offended by what they viewed as a management-prompted negative media campaign against them, portraying them as greedy or lazy. This hit particularly hard against the backdrop of the dangers they regularly face and the disturbing and tragic scenes they encounter.

Communications from the senior leadership during this period were naïve, insufficient and inadequate to engage with their firefighters, explain the organisation's position and alleviate members' concerns.

From media reports at the time and information received by the Review, it is clear that the previous

³² United Firefighters' Union of Australia v Country Fire Authority (VID 440 of 2012) at first instance, United Firefighters' Union of Australia v Country Fire Authority (VID 84 of 2014) on appeal – Federal Court of Australia case relating to the recruitment of 342 professional firefighters under the CFA UFU Operational Staff Enterprise Agreement 2010.

³³ Metropolitan Fire & Emergency Services Board v United Firefighters' Union of Australia, Fair Work Commission, (AG2014/5212) – Application by MFB for termination of the MFB UFU Assistant Chief Fire Officers Agreement 2010 and MFB UFU Operational Staff Agreement 2010.

government deployed a deliberately ideological attack against the UFU and effectively encouraged CFA and MFB to go to industrial war with their respective workforces.

The aggressive approach then taken by the MFB to industrial relations was demonstrated by a number of ill-conceived decisions. These included:

- leasing a locked-down, dedicated space – described by firefighters as the “pit” or “bunker” – for the litigation team
- engaging security guards to accompany that team and senior management in a very public procession to the Fair Work Commission hearings, implying that firefighters might resort to violence
- spending millions of dollars on an unnecessary litigation process.

While acknowledging that the UFU has regularly used referral of matters to the Fair Work Commission as an industrial tactic, the decision by the then government to launch costly, lengthy and legally aggressive cases, across both CFA and MFB, was clearly inflammatory and designed to portray firefighters in a poor light.

This situation has only been exacerbated by the protracted negotiations for the next set of enterprise agreements. The Review received information on particular clauses of the enterprise agreements that were seen as limiting the organisations’ ability to manage its staff and resources. They were presented as matters that should normally be able to be resolved through the negotiation process. However, due to the breakdown in relations, they are unable to be appropriately discussed.

There is no doubt that there is blame on all sides. However, for the MFB in particular, the industrial context has resulted in a fundamental collapse in trust and goodwill and eroded the capacity of the existing management team to turn the organisation around.

It is abundantly clear that the workforce has had enough of this negative environment and simply wants to work in a safe, harmonious and supportive workplace where its efforts are acknowledged and there is clear and fair accountability.

Significant change is required and a new chapter should be launched.

A culture of respect

The common thread for all of the above is the need for a culture of respect and inclusion, across all levels of the fire services.

An organisation’s leadership is responsible for its culture and morale. The leadership must establish and live the desired culture. It is therefore imperative that the leadership of the fire services, as a matter of priority, take active steps to recreate an environment of trust and respect in their organisations. Given the current climate, this is likely to take repeated and sustained effort, even with a new leadership approach.

The leadership must begin a new dialogue with the operational membership that is focused on their day-to-day challenges and concerns and does not have negotiations on the enterprise agreements as the point of contact. Issues should be discussed and a genuine effort made to resolve them. This effort should then be communicated to the members.

The organisational leadership also needs to draw a line in the adversarial relationship with the UFU and launch a new constructive and collaborative dialogue with it.

It is important that the UFU also shows leadership in the cultural shift and shares responsibility for creating an environment for genuine consultation. This includes offering reasons for different views and seeking to find alternative solutions to issues that are raised and not always holding fast to a single position. Whilst not suggesting that the UFU relinquish its right to refer matters to the FWC, doing so should be seen as a genuine last resort and avoided where at all possible.

In the past, the UFU has stridently discouraged its members from engaging in management initiatives. The UFU should now actively support its members to seek or respond to positive engagement by the fire services’ senior management.

If matters form part of legitimate industrial negotiations, they must be discussed on a far stronger set of foundational relationships.

In the past, VFBV has also had a contentious relationship with the CFA. Both organisations have made some successful efforts to improve their collaboration in recent years and these are further encouraged. VFBV must also move away from an “us” and “them” mentality on behalf of volunteers and engage constructively and openly with the CFA and government. The VFBV is also urged to support positive engagement by the CFA’s senior management with its volunteers.



It is possible for leaders to emerge at different levels of the organisation in support of change. All such leaders in the fire services should be identified, assisted and encouraged by the senior leadership.

Trust relies on individual behaviour of the highest standard. When an environment for genuine collaborative engagement has been restored, it is suggested that the fire services develop a common understanding of acceptable behaviour for their organisations and the consequences when those expectations are not met.

Despite its findings on the extremely poor morale in the fire services, the Review does not believe that service delivery has been compromised. The “getting on with the job” attitude and commitment to community means that these issues are left behind at the station and there is full focus on responding to an incident. But culture does have an impact on operations. The Review believes that with positive collaborative leadership across the fire services, service delivery could be significantly improved. Good could go to great.

Recommendation 8:

The Review recommends that committed and sustained effort be made by the senior leadership of the fire services to reset its relationship with firefighters and their representative bodies, through adopting a genuine, collaborative and consultative approach in place of the adversarial, win/lose dialogue. The immediate focus must be on restoring a cohesive work culture and addressing firefighter operational and safety concerns.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority C relating to developing leadership that instils a positive workforce culture and promotes respect and cooperation.

Recognition

A culture of respect includes recognising and acknowledging efforts, achievements and successes, both large and small. The Review heard the same example on many occasions of all-staff messages acknowledging the service, even if relatively short-term, of corporate staff on their departure from the organisation, but with no similar messages sent to acknowledge significant service milestones of operational staff. This had the effect of widening

the divide between corporate and operational staff. The Review suggests that the fire services give consideration to meaningful formal and informal practices for acknowledging service and success.

Some sectors of the Victorian community are unaware that CFA's fire services are predominantly delivered by volunteers. CFA rightly places a heavy emphasis on getting this message out so that volunteers are recognised and valued for their extraordinary contribution to their communities. This sometimes has the effect of excluding the contribution of CFA's paid firefighters from the picture. CFA needs to give consideration to its promotional material to ensure the effort of paid firefighters is not lost in the messaging.

The Review also heard that the contribution of DELWP firefighters in multi-agency efforts is often obscured by references to, and images of, CFA and MFB firefighters only. Where there has been a joint response, the fire services should ensure that their media materials reflect the contributions of all involved.

Although CFA's corporate language is very much centred on the importance of volunteers and the pivotal role they play in the organisation, this is not always the experience of the volunteers themselves. The Review heard examples of volunteer knowledge, experience, input or concerns being disregarded, volunteers being under-utilised or their time being wasted, and arbitrary decisions or changes being imposed on volunteers without consultation, and sometimes without explanation. Both formal and informal mechanisms must be better utilised to engage respectfully with volunteers.

Firefighters Registration Board

In an effort to be formally recognised for their skills, firefighters have sought the establishment of a Firefighters Registration Board. There are a number of different models for industry registration boards, which vary in scope from simply setting standards to also covering training requirements and managing disciplinary processes.

In general, registration boards have been established for professions where malpractice by an individual creates a risk for members of the public, such as builders, tax advisers, doctors, pharmacists, and nurses. Operationally, firefighters respond as a crew so the same considerations do not strictly apply.

Nonetheless, the Review can see some merit in the establishment of a Firefighters Registration Board. Most significantly, the Registration Board would provide recognition for the skills and experience gained by the state's firefighters.

The Review is not proposing any particular model for adoption. Instead, it recommends that the following elements be included in any model that is developed for the fire services.

The Review proposes that the Registration Board establish a range of contemporary standards to attain and maintain registration as a firefighter. The Board could establish an entry-level registration, recognising capability as a firefighter, as well as higher-level certifications, for attaining higher levels of expertise. This is similar to the model the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC) has adopted for Registered Incident Controllers and Certified Incident Controllers under its Emergency Management Professionalisation Scheme. Accreditation processes should also be developed for specialist roles.

All firefighters would be able to seek registration with the Registration Board, irrespective of the organisation with which they have gained their firefighting skills and irrespective of whether they are paid or volunteer. For example, in addition to members of the fire services, registration would be open to firefighters from DELWP and other jurisdictions.

For existing CFA and MFB firefighters, registration could be on an opt-in basis rather than compulsory. The Registration Board should establish a transparent process for assessing current skills and recognising prior learning and experience. Following the establishment of the Registration Board, new recruits should automatically receive entry-level registration on successful completion of their course.

Registration with the Board should qualify a firefighter to join the CFA or MFB at the commensurate operational rank, without needing to first complete a recruit course. Provision for this would need to be included in the current or future enterprise agreements, following further consultation. A short transitional training program should be developed to provide lateral entry firefighters with the requisite knowledge of any of CFA or MFB's standard operating

procedures that are not part of the standardised procedures developed for the fire services overall.

The Registration Board could also be charged with outlining a training program to attain and maintain the requisite skills to achieve and retain accreditation, as well as advance in recognised expertise. The training program could comprise both group and individual training activities, with assessments to be based on individual effort.

The Registration Board could also be required to develop and deliver the relevant training curriculum. This should be based on the Public Safety Training Package, which specifies the relevant nationally-endorsed competency standards, assessment guidelines, and qualifications to perform effectively in the emergency management, fire and emergency services. The Registration Board should also seek the advice of the Chief Officers on the content of the training program and curriculum.

The establishment of the Registration Board as a registered training organisation, if advanced, would need to enhance rather than diminish access to training, and include appropriate flexible delivery options for volunteer firefighters.

CFA and MFB currently provide different programs for recruits, specialist and leadership training. This continues to separate the organisations and prevent the community from receiving standardised levels of service. The standards established by the Registration Board and the related training program should be common for the fire services and support interoperability between them. The current work of the Interoperability Committee should inform this process.

In addition to establishing a clear process for gaining registration as a firefighter, the Registration Board should establish a transparent process for deregistration if skills are not maintained to a required level. Ideally this would involve opportunities to rectify any skills gaps, with commensurate limitations on turning out, before deregistration occurs.

The Review does not recommend that the Registration Board play a role in reviewing conduct and disciplinary processes. This should continue to be managed by the agencies and existing processes, including referral to the Fair Work Commission.

In other professions, certification by a Registration Board allows practitioners to operate in other states and territories as well as their own. The government may wish to consider the option of Victoria initiating the establishment of a national Firefighters Registration Board rather than establishing its own body. This could potentially be advanced through the work that AFAC is doing on the Emergency Management Professionalisation Scheme. Alternatively, the government could establish a state body whilst pursuing a national model.

Recommendation 9:

The Review recommends that the Victorian government consider leading a national process for establishing a Firefighters Registration Board that:

- a. defines the competencies required to be registered as a firefighter at different operational levels or with particular specialist skills
- b. assesses whether applicants, irrespective of their organisational background, have the necessary skills, experience and qualifications, including through recognition of prior learning, to be registered at a nominated level of competency
- c. enables lateral entry into a fire service at a particular rank through formal recognition of competence at the commensurate level
- d. develops a training curriculum for attaining and maintaining skills to achieve and retain registration at the relevant level
- e. administers a process for deregistration where appropriate.

Health and Wellbeing

Both fire services have made the safety of their members a key organisational priority and talk about a focus on safety as an essential element of their operations and culture.³⁴ Firefighter safety is enhanced through protective clothing, equipment and operating procedures. Firefighter health and wellbeing is also an important element of firefighter safety.

A holistic program

The operating environment for firefighters has changed dramatically over recent decades. In addition to the inherent dangers of firefighting and some rescue operations, they also increasingly face threats from violent or drug-affected members of the community. The Review heard stories of personal attacks against firefighters when they had limited options to defend themselves and fellow crew members.

In some such instances, there seemed to be limited support and understanding from the organisation of the impact and consequences for the individual firefighters concerned as they dealt with the effects of those incidents. Where there are health implications, such as exposure to blood, firefighters should be given immediate medical attention to address potential risks. The fire services may wish to introduce optional, preventative immunisation for those working in higher-risk areas, in addition to the immunisations offered to members of certain specialist teams.

The Review is aware that the fire services each have in place a number of programs to support the health and wellbeing of their members, both physically and psychologically. These include voluntary health assessments, health monitoring, fitness and nutrition programs, access to medical services, injury prevention and management, rehabilitation and return to work programs, access to physical fitness training, access to gym equipment during working hours, expert information and advice, and various online tools.

Services also include peer support, employee/volunteer assistance programs, access to pastoral care, training on identifying and managing occupational stress, and referrals to internal and external support services.

³⁴ One of CFA's five strategic priorities is ensuring their people are "safe, respected, capable, engaged and share a common purpose" (see CFA Strategy 2013–2018: *Towards Resilience*). One of MFB's five strategic themes is "Always Safe" (see MFB Corporate Plan 2015–2018: *A world class fire and emergency service*).

The Review believes there should be an ongoing, supportive, holistic approach to health and well-being, with both physical fitness and wellness components included in the overall program. This would help build and maintain the resilience of firefighters to the demands of the role, from the moment they join to the moment they leave the service.

Fitness for duty

The issue of fitness for duty was regularly raised with the Review. Clearly fitness is an important component of a firefighter's ability to respond effectively during an incident. A lack of fitness for duty creates a risk for the individual firefighter and other members of the crew. It is inconsistent for the significant attention that is paid to physical ability at the time of recruitment to then drop away. Concern for a firefighter's safety, health and fitness should be a constant feature of the firefighter's operational career, paid and volunteer, from the moment of joining the service.

"Fitness for duty" seems to have become a negative proposition, i.e. a test that will be used to move someone on. As a clear part of the health and wellbeing program, the fire services should introduce an ongoing fitness program that applies from the moment of recruitment and is based on supporting firefighters to maintain their levels of fitness. The program should be non-threatening and non-punitive and include steps to mitigate against known risks to firefighter fitness. A positive ongoing program with high uptake will eliminate any negative assumptions associated with participation.

Psychological fitness for duty is also important. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a feature of emergency services workforces across the globe. The fire services must ensure that their existing programs are sufficiently robust to provide appropriate levels of support. The Review notes that the government has committed to a two-year trial that will provide firefighters suffering from PTSD with access to one-on-one counselling by specialists at Post Trauma Victoria.³⁵

Support post-operations

For those firefighters who are no longer fit for duty because of illness or injury or some other reason, a program needs to be put in place to help identify next steps, either within or outside the fire services. In the MFB, firefighters who can no longer undertake operational duties form part of the Operational Support Group. The CFA is considering the creation of a similar group for its paid firefighters. One submission suggested that a single group be formed for firefighters from both agencies so as to coordinate efforts to support them.

The Review is aware of efforts to place members of the Operational Support Group into non-operational roles within the organisation. This would allow the organisation to continue to benefit from firefighter experience gained through years of service. However, it may not always represent the best option for the individual concerned due to everyone's unique perspective on what constitutes meaningful service. Nor can the fire services commit to supporting all formerly operational firefighters until their retirement, irrespective of the numbers involved.

An appropriate program, based on consultation with operational members and the UFU, would acknowledge and respect the service provided, assist firefighters to identify future internal or external paid options, and support a dignified transition through skills development and other forms of assistance.

Recommendation 10:

The Review recommends that the fire services introduce an ongoing, holistic health and wellbeing program that includes fitness and wellness components, applies from the moment of recruitment, and is based on supporting firefighters to maintain their levels of fitness for duty.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority D relating to developing a workforce that has the skills, expertise and support to confidently and safely undertake their role.

³⁵ 2015–16 Victorian State Budget, *Budget Paper 3: Service Delivery*.

Senior leadership support

Firefighters are sometimes exposed to scenes of horrific death and destruction which are not easily erased. They do not always win the fight to save someone's life despite their best endeavours and feel this very keenly. This sadness is exacerbated by frustration when a loss occurs because they do not have the right equipment to respond to the situation, or operating procedures prevent them from stepping in to help, even when they are trained to do so, until they receive a particular instruction or another agency arrives.

From the firefighter perspective, there seems to be a marked absence of concern and lack of understanding from the senior leadership as to what they face on a regular basis. Any negative commentary compounds the sense that this aspect of their work is overlooked and its lasting effects ignored, and causes low morale to plunge further.

Along with a culture of respect, the fire services need to establish a culture of care and concern. The Review believes it is essential that senior management identify regular opportunities, formal and informal, to touch base with and listen to the views and concerns of operational members. The Review heard an example where district staff never drop into the station, even though it is on a neighbouring block to district headquarters. A practice of regular, or even occasional, visits to fire stations by senior staff must be done with openness and genuine interest. In the current climate, if such visits are not undertaken in this spirit, there is a risk they will simply be ignored as tokenistic.

Debriefs

While debriefs occur at station level, there does not seem to be any follow-up contact from senior management when more extreme incidents occur. For example, the Review heard that senior management did make any contact with a crew after it was threatened by an axe-wielding man, despite the seriousness of the incident.

A different example of seemingly skewed priorities relates to a brigade's response to a factory fire from a paddock at the back of the site, the only point from which the aerial appliance could gain the necessary access and where it eventually became bogged. The bones of the building were saved but the subsequent comments from senior management focussed on the costs of towing the bogged appliance from the field.

Debriefs need to be consistent and focus first on the safety, health and wellbeing of the firefighters. Where necessary, debriefs should be facilitated. When issues are identified, they should be followed-up, with the firefighters advised as to the steps being taken and their progress.

Recommendation 11:

The Review recommends that the fire services' senior management identify regular opportunities, formal and informal, to touch base with and genuinely listen to the views and concerns of operational members, particularly through station visits.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority C relating to leaders who embody respect and cooperation and champion these values across the organisation.

A culture of innovation

The Review identified a largely untapped culture of innovation in the fire services. The Review heard several instances of workarounds being introduced at the local level to address problems that either could not or had not been taken up by the organisation. In some instances, the preferred option remained for the issue to be addressed in line with regular organisational processes, with the workaround seen as a temporary measure. But in other instances, brigades generated innovative ideas to improve appliances, equipment and service delivery.

The Review understands that organisations need mechanisms to review and understand proposals before endorsing them. MFB advises that there are a number of ways that staff can raise new ideas, including with its Operations Improvement Team. CFA advises that it is currently exploring a system for receiving and managing ideas and innovations. The Review encourages both CFA and MFB to establish a simple system for receiving and responding to new ideas. Feedback is an important element as it encourages further innovation.

When reviewing suggestions, the fire services should make a distinction between those initiatives that might have widespread application, and therefore certain budgetary implications if adopted, and those that are context specific. The system should include the method for sharing ideas across the organisation and

reporting on progress of the implementation of those ideas that are adopted.

The Review is aware that, given the size of the CFA, introducing a small change to clothing, equipment, facilities or appliances can have a significant cost impact. However, if a local solution to a local problem works and does not compromise safety, it should not be rejected simply because it is not scalable to the rest of the organisation. A local solution to a local problem can remain just that. For example, the Lara brigade introduced a new communications procedure, complementary to CFA processes and funded by the brigade, which led to more efficient and certain turnouts.

All levels of the organisation must be ready to support innovation. Strong histories and traditions should not mean remaining stuck in the past. Where blocks occur, more senior management must be ready to resolve any issues. The Review understands the importance of ensuring compliance with standard operating procedures but this should not be at the expense of new possibilities. Where any safety or procedural compliance concerns are satisfied, new initiatives that can improve service delivery should be encouraged and supported.

In the CFA, short-term employment contracts at district level have led to a high turnover of staff which has affected support for brigades and resulted in initiatives not being pursued and brigades not being motivated to push them forward. The Review understands that the CFA has recently addressed most of its short-tenure roles.

Encouraging innovation shows respect for the knowledge and experience of operational members and their understanding of how services can be improved. It also contributes to brigades, as part of their communities, enhancing resilience and fostering solutions that are relevant to their unique circumstances.

Recommendation 12:

The Review recommends that the fire services establish a simple system for receiving and responding to proposed innovations from the membership and sharing them across the organisation. Where any safety and procedural compliance concerns are satisfied, new initiatives that can improve service delivery should be encouraged and supported at all levels of the organisation.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority C relating to developing leadership that instils a positive workforce culture and promotes innovation.

Management

There is no one-size-fits-all structure for emergency services organisations. Each is unique and the structure must support its particular context and operating environment. As part of the emergency management sector, Victoria's fire services must be focused on strengthening capability and improving service to the community through greater interoperability, cooperation and coordination within the emergency management sector.

However, their governance arrangements and governing legislation hail from an earlier era and support a rigid organisational focus rather than a sector-wide one. The fire services require a contemporary governance model to enable a cohesive approach, with their sector partners, to emergency management.

An operational leader

The structure of Victoria's fire services differs markedly from the models adopted in other states, with each organisation headed by a CEO rather than a Chief Officer, Commissioner or equivalent. Prior to this structure being introduced, each organisation was headed by a Chief (Fire) Officer. In Victoria, the Chief Officers now report to the CEOs.

The separate CEO and Chief Officer roles potentially create confusion. They offer different entry points into the organisation and potentially create a point of failure in decisions made pre- or post-critical incidents. The Review considers that this structure has contributed to the disconnect between the senior management and frontline operations and the uncertainty that has generated such poor morale in recent decades. The structure has raised doubts about the authority of the Chief Officer to make operational decisions and not have them overruled by the CEO or revised through the input of other non-operational executives.

The success of the current model relies, to some extent, on the personalities and goodwill of the people in the roles, and even where goodwill exists, differences in approach can still arise.

The desire to be led by someone with operational experience was repeatedly raised with the Review during visits to brigades and in submissions. This was often accompanied by a comment that such a person should ideally come up through the operational ranks. The Review also repeatedly heard that Deputy Chief Officer roles should be filled by people with operational firefighting experience.

The Review considers that there are distinct advantages to the fire services being led by an operational head. It gives a clear focus on operations as the core of the business and a clear authority to direct resources where they are most needed based on assessments of risk. This authority still needs to be exercised in accordance with legislation and appropriate procedural checks and balances, such as those relating to workplace health and safety. But the model of the Chief in charge provides greater agility in decision-making, a clearer line of accountability and responsibility, and is more likely to inspire confidence and loyalty in the operational membership.

The Review recommends that the fire services be restructured to reinstate the role of Chief Officer as the head of the organisation. The Chief Officer would be supported by an executive of which one member would be responsible for managing corporate services.

The Review further recommends that the Chief Officer, and his or her deputies, have operational firefighting experience.



A transitional arrangement

In addition to the key structural changes, the Review is proposing significant cultural and operational changes. It is also making important recommendations regarding financial and resource management. These will place significant pressure on the heads of the organisations.

Therefore, if its recommendations are adopted, the Review suggests that the role of CEO remain in place for a transitional period to focus on driving the necessary changes, including regarding financial and resource management and establishing the common investment and procurement strategy. The Chief Officer can then focus on operational needs and developing and implementing the new service delivery models.

The Review notes that a new CEO and new Chief Officer have recently been appointed to the CFA and are yet to take up their roles. It acknowledges that, out of respect to those people, the transitional period for the CFA may run for a number of years. The Review assumes that the new incumbents will be mindful of the issues raised in this report and will take the necessary steps to establish the new direction for the organisation.

Embedding significant cultural change requires sustained focus and commitment. The Review recommends that the fire services engage independent people, with operational experience and recognised expertise in organisational culture, to help build a values-based leadership culture within both organisations. These people should not have any operational or corporate responsibilities. They should be fully supported by the leadership groups and given access to all levels of the organisations to engage in programs to enhance leadership, positive culture and respect. Their work should support and contribute to enhancing the authority and respect for the leadership group.

Recommendation 13:

The Review recommends that:

- a. the fire services be restructured to reinstate the role of Chief Officer as the head of the organisation. The Chief Officer would be supported by an executive of which one member would be responsible for managing corporate services
- b. the Chief Officer, and his or her deputies, have operational firefighting experience
- c. as a transitional arrangement, the role of CEO remain in place to oversee a number of the key reforms, with the Chief Officer focusing on key operational changes and needs
- d. as a further transitional arrangement, the fire services engage independent experts, with operational experience and recognised expertise in organisational culture, to support the leadership groups in effecting cultural change by engaging in programs to enhance leadership, positive culture and respect.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority C relating to leadership instilling a positive workforce culture and Priority E relating to defining emergency management roles and responsibilities.

A single board

CFA and MFB are each governed by a board of nine and seven members respectively.

The CFA has historically had a representative board with members nominated by the insurance sector, local government and the different volunteer firefighter associations. It only moved towards being a skills-based board in 2014, maintaining four members selected from panels nominated by the VFBV. In 1965, the role of Chair was made full-time. It was later recast as an Executive Chair until 2001, after which the role of CEO was created and the role of Chair became part-time.³⁶

MFB also historically had a representative board, comprising representatives appointed by the government, insurance companies and municipal councils. In 1969, the Board was restructured with the appointment of a full-time Chair and transitioned to being a skills-based board.³⁷ The chair later reverted to being a part-time role.

In considering the most appropriate structure for Victoria's fire services, the Review considered the models adopted in other Australian jurisdictions. These are summarised in Appendix 2. South Australia and Tasmania are the only other Australian states that retain boards as part of the governance structures for their fire services. Other jurisdictions offer variations on a model where the fire services report to a Commissioner, as the head of a statutory entity or government department, or directly to the relevant Minister.

A number of people suggested to the Review that the fire services should report directly to the EMC. This may be worthy of consideration in future but, for a number of reasons, the Review does not recommend that Victoria adopt this model now.

A key reason is that the fire services require a significant cultural shift, as well as some important structural and operational reforms. EMV's role is to lead emergency management in Victoria by working with communities, government, agencies and

business to strengthen their capacity to withstand, plan for, respond to and recover from emergencies. It does this through maximising the ability of the emergency management sector to work together and achieve joined up outcomes that are community focused.

EMV is already driving a comprehensive reform program across the sector and is itself, only in the relatively early stages of establishment. EMV, as currently configured, could not give the required focused attention to significant reforms in the fire services without there being some impact on the broader reform program it is leading.

The Review recommends that a single board be established as the governing body for both CFA and MFB, replacing the existing boards. The single board would have responsibility for:

- providing effective governance of the fire services
- developing and overseeing the strategic direction of the fire services
- harmonising the fire services and removing duplication and inefficiency between them
- increasing standardised capability and interoperability between the fire services
- increasing interoperability between the fire services and the emergency management sector and contributing to the all-hazards-all-agencies approach
- strengthening volunteerism
- developing and overseeing a common investment and procurement strategy for the fire services that aligns with a broader sector approach.

A single board would ensure that the appropriate mechanisms are in place for the fire services to work as one with the emergency management sector in line with the sector's vision. The single board should help bring an end to siloed decision-making by the CFA and MFB. The single board may direct the common provision of services to both organisations to reduce duplication and achieve cost efficiencies. The board would not engage in operational decisions.

³⁶ Murray, R and White, K, 1995, *State of Fire: a History of Volunteer Fire Fighting and the Country Fire Authority in Victoria*, North Melbourne, Australia, pp.309–11, 318; CFA Annual Report 2002–03.

³⁷ Wilde, Sally, 1991, *Life Under The Bells: A History of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Melbourne 1891–1991*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne; MFB Act, s.9.

The Review considers that amalgamating the fire services should not be contemplated as it would exacerbate the current difficulties rather than support their resolution. Instead it recommends that both agencies, supported by government, the unions and VFBV, commit to implementing the necessary reforms and focus on establishing a highly collaborative model of working together.

Under a single board, the responsibilities of the CFA and MFB would remain similar to their current responsibilities but with a greater focus on working together. They would include:

- developing and maintaining the necessary capability to deliver fire, rescue, incident management and other specialist services
- planning for and delivering services in line with operating procedures and as directed by the EMC
- engaging with the community, industry, government and partner agencies to prevent and prepare for emergencies, manage risk and enhance community resilience
- contributing to a whole of sector approach to emergency management and improved interoperability, integration and coordination
- reducing duplication and inefficiency in the resourcing and delivery of fire services to the state.

The CFA would also be responsible for developing policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers.

In recommending a single board, the Review is not making any judgments about the effectiveness and contributions of the existing boards and they should be thanked for their service. The Review could not identify any value brought to their respective organisations by the existing boards that could not be as effectively delivered by a single board. A single board could offer additional benefits to the fire services that the two disparate boards could not, such as a true alignment of strategy, supported by common investment and overarching decision-making. Reducing the costs of maintaining two boards is also an advantage.

The Review recommends that the single board have seven members, comprising:

- four members, including the Chair, appointed by the Minister for Emergency Services having regard to any of the following:
 - knowledge of, or experience in, commercial, financial, technical, operational or legal matters
 - knowledge of, or experience in, local government matters
 - expertise in fire services, emergency management, land management or any other field relevant to the performance of the fire services
- the EMC
- a member, who is or has been a paid firefighter, appointed by the Minister from a panel nominated by the UFU
- a member, who is or has been a volunteer firefighter, appointed by the Minister from a panel nominated by the VFBV.

In line with the government's commitment to achieving gender equality on paid government boards,³⁸ no less than 50 per cent of the board's members should be women.

The Chief Officers of both CFA and MFB would be accountable to the Board and participate in all its meetings. For the transitional period that each agency continues to be headed by a CEO, the CEOs would be accountable to the Board and participate in all its meetings, accompanied by the Chief Officers.

The Review proposes that the single board be called the Fire and Emergency Services Board or the Fire and Rescue Board. This is to reflect that modern fire services provide a much broader range of emergency response than putting out fires, such as road accident rescue, various forms of specialist rescue and emergency medical response.

VICSES is also an emergency services organisation and provides some of the same or similar services as the fire services, notably road accident and specialist rescue. Although beyond the scope of the Review, if the recommendation of a single board is accepted, the government may wish to bring VICSES under

³⁸ Premier of Victoria, 28 March 2015, *Balanced Boards Make Better Decisions*, www.premier.vic.gov.au.

the governance of the single board, in place of its existing board. Calling the single board the Fire and Emergency Services Board or the Fire and Rescue Board would pave the way for this expansion at an appropriate time.

Recommendation 14:

The Review recommends that a single board be established as the governing body for the CFA and MFB, replacing the existing boards.

The seven-person board appointed by the Minister would include members with commercial, legal, local government or emergency management experience, a current or former paid firefighter selected from a UFU-nominated panel, a current or former volunteer firefighter selected from a VFBV-nominated panel, and the EMC.

The board's responsibilities would include overseeing the strategic direction of the fire services, expanding their standardised capability, increasing the interoperability between them and with the broader emergency management sector, and strengthening volunteerism. The Board would also oversee a common investment and procurement strategy.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority E relating to streamlined and contemporary arrangements to better integrate the management of emergencies.

A single Act

If a single board is adopted, the governance arrangements should be outlined in a single Act rather than reflected in two separate pieces of legislation. Both the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (CFA Act) and the *Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958* (MFB Act) date back to 1958 and each is a consolidation of earlier legislative provisions. Both Acts have since become a patchwork of further amendments. Neither Act clearly and cohesively outlines the organisation's functions and responsibilities and the accountability for their delivery.

Previous reviews have recommended that the fire services legislation be reviewed.³⁹ This Review echoes those statements and recommends that the CFA Act and the MFB Act be replaced with a single contemporary piece of legislation.

In addition to outlining the fire services responsibilities and accountabilities, the single Act should facilitate improved interoperability between them and with the emergency management sector more broadly. The legislative review should also remove any ambiguity between the responsibilities of the EMC and the fire services.

If, in future, the government determines that VICSES should also be governed by the single board, then it may be appropriate for VICSES also to be covered by the recommended single Act. The Review recommends that the single Act be named and crafted in a manner to allow for this possibility.

Recommendation 15:

The Review recommends that the fire services legislation be reviewed and replaced with a single contemporary Act that facilitates improved interoperability between the fire services and with the broader emergency management sector. The legislative review should also consider and remove any ambiguity between the responsibilities of the EMC and the fire services.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority E relating to streamlined and contemporary legislation.

³⁹ For example, Recommendation 60 of the Review of the 2010–11 Flood Warnings & Response and Recommendation 1 of the 2011 Report of Inquiry into the Effect of Arrangements made by the Country Fire Authority on its Volunteers.

Resourcing

A state-wide perspective

The resources of the fire services are state resources, with the exception of some CFA brigade assets that have been purchased with brigade and community funds. The needs of the state should be considered as a whole, with stations built, and appliances and equipment purchased and allocated, accordingly. There should be clarity around a single state infrastructure plan and a single state equipment plan for the fire services.

The selection and allocation of resources should be guided by considerations such as:

- protecting the primacy of life, including firefighter safety
- fitness for purpose, informed by operational input
- current and future risk to the community
- flexibility to move resources should needs and priorities change
- the needs of other agencies performing similar relevant activity
- the resources of other agencies in similar locations.

As part of its responsibilities to oversee common investment and procurement, the single board would help realise cost benefits and maximise opportunities for standardisation and interoperability.

The provision of fire services needs to be seen not only through the lens of a single financial year or four-year forward estimates but in the context of a continuum of high-quality service delivery.

Funding

The fire services are funded annually through the government's consolidated revenue. Four-year estimates are prepared but funding is only guaranteed year-on-year when the annual Appropriation Bill is passed.⁴⁰ The government has a statutory obligation to contribute, from the Consolidated Fund, 22.5 per cent and 12.5 per cent of CFA and MFB's respective annual expenditure. The balance is funded through the Fire Services Property Levy,⁴¹ all of which goes to the fire services.⁴²

Additional initiatives are funded through separate funding bids to government. Brigades also individually fundraise and receive grants through the government's Victorian Emergency Services Equipment Program.

Funding is provided separately to each organisation, with no requirements for joint initiatives or sharing of resources. This has resulted in duplication and financial and administrative inefficiencies. The establishment of the single board would help redress this.

The Review is advised that some of the financial information provided by the fire services to government for reporting or planning purposes is inconsistent and, at times, difficult to verify. The information received by the Review indicates that there are potentially serious issues with financial, project and resource management, particularly in the CFA.

The Review was repeatedly advised that the increase in the size of CFA regions, changes to district boundaries and the increase in the demands on district resources has had a significant impact on training, brigade support and managing appliances. It does not seem that these problems are being appropriately addressed at a state level, although changes have recently been introduced regarding the management of training.

⁴⁰ *Constitution Act 1975*, s. 65.

⁴¹ *MFB Act*, s. 37(1); *CFA Act*, s.76(1).

⁴² *Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012*, ss.41 and 50.



Without a proper understanding of how resources are being used and where there are gaps and inefficiencies, it is difficult to determine the fire services' resourcing requirements. This includes understanding the level of corporate resources required to support operations effectively. The Review recommends that a comprehensive audit be undertaken of the fire services' financial, project and resource management. Irrespective of their current state, it is good practice for large organisations with considerable resources to apply rigour and periodically assess the health of their systems.

Recommendation 16:

The Review recommends that a comprehensive audit be undertaken of the fire services' financial, project and resource management.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority G relating to an emergency management service model that is relevant, effective and efficient and underpinned by value-for-money investments in interoperable systems, assets and services.

Workforce

Most important for firefighters is that their capability is recognised, utilised and developed. Firefighters should be fully engaged to meet their potential and enhance their contribution to community resilience. To achieve this, firefighters must have equipment that is safe and fit for purpose and be appropriately trained. The experience firefighters gain and the training they receive on different appliances has an impact on the opportunities they are offered and therefore on their career progression. This needs to be considered in terms of where firefighters are stationed and their own wishes regarding career and development pathways.

The Review did not take a detailed look at workforce planning across the fire services but received information and submissions on the following matters.

Gap in operational profile

The impact of the Kennett government's decision in the early 1990s, that resulted in an eight-year freeze on firefighter recruitment, is still being felt by the fire services today.⁴³ In addition to the budgetary and resource pressure generated by the current recruitment catch-up, the freeze is reflected in a gap in the profile of brigades. This has also had a profound effect on the culture of the fire services and will be felt through a loss of institutional knowledge as older members of the workforce retire, leaving a hole behind them.⁴⁴

MFB station management

The current MFB structure does not provide for any continuity in the management of individual stations. The officer in charge of one shift hands over responsibility to the next shift. This potentially creates inconsistencies in the approach to service delivery, safety, training, station maintenance, and the overarching station culture. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer is the first position to have an overview of a station but is responsible for all stations in a region and is not necessarily involved in day-to-day station issues unless they escalate. The Review recommends that a position at Commander or Senior Station Officer level, preferably Commander, be made accountable for the overall performance of an individual fire station.

Brigade leadership

The CFA and MFB have different approaches to brigade leadership. For paid firefighters, senior ranks are attained based on time served and training for the role. For volunteer brigades, captains are elected by brigade members from members who have a minimum of two-year's service as an officer of a brigade and have the minimum competencies specified by the Chief Officer as requirements for that office.

While brigades generally elect highly experienced members to the role, sometimes votes are won on popularity. This creates a certain dynamic in brigades and is a weakness in a model that has a lot of strengths. Both leadership and technical skills are essential. Succession planning is also important. The model should be given further consideration, with any change in the process strengthening the emphasis on leadership competencies.

⁴³ The Review is advised there was no recruitment to MFB from 1991 to 1998. CFA had some recruitment in 1993, 1995 and 1998, with the few recruitment courses limited in numbers and duration.

⁴⁴ 48 per cent of MFB's firefighters are over 50 years old.

Specialist operations

CFA and MFB both provide, but separately manage, the delivery of a number of specialist services, including responding to hazardous material incidents, reviewing and inspecting dangerous goods storage and handling, providing specialist rescue and undertaking fire investigations. The Review recommends that a single management structure be established for these operations to optimise the use of resources, achieve interoperability and provide consistency for staff and the community. As VICSES also provides a number of these services, it should be consulted on, and potentially involved in, the new management arrangements.

Recommendation 17:

The Review recommends that:

- a. the fire services invest in their mid-level operational leadership, strengthening its capacity to lead brigades and manage stations
- b. in the MFB, a position at Commander or Senior Station Officer level be made accountable for overall performance of a fire station
- c. in the CFA, the process for selecting brigade captains be reviewed to better ensure that persons with the right combination of leadership and technical skills are chosen to undertake the role
- d. a single management structure be established for specialist operations.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority D relating to a sophisticated workforce management approach.

Attracting and retaining volunteers

Volunteers are and will remain essential to the delivery of the state's fire services. In addition to day-to-day response, the surge capacity provided by Victoria's volunteers is the envy of many other jurisdictions, within Australia and abroad. Volunteers bring local knowledge, guiding the most effective response. Their role in their communities is also a key aspect of community resilience.

Being an emergency services volunteer requires a sustained commitment to being trained and

capable of responding to an incident at any time. This distinguishes emergency services volunteers from other volunteers who can opt in and opt out and choose when, how and where they are willing to provide support. The social, economic and technological environment is changing, as are the ways in which communities develop and connect, and the volunteer model must evolve and transform to match these changes. Social media is an important tool for brigades, many of whom have established Facebook pages, to reach out to communities, provide information and attract volunteers.

The fire services must be responsive to new trends and opportunities to ensure emergency management volunteerism remains vibrant and strong. CFA should predict where growth will occur and provide targeted support to build volunteer capacity in those areas. Operations Officers at integrated brigades can play a role in this process. Continuing to build capacity for peak load days is key to effectively serving the community and is a responsibility for both the government and the fire services.

The CFA must be able to capture volunteer interest when it is offered. The Review heard stories of keen and capable potential volunteers losing interest when there were significant delays in their ability to access minimum skills training or utilise their new skills through participating in turnouts.

Monitoring and evaluating the investment in volunteers would help identify what has been effective and valuable to volunteers and to what areas resources could be more appropriately directed. This would also enable better planning to support active volunteerism into the future. The CFA and government may wish to consider undertaking an exercise similar to that of the Western Australian Auditor-General to assess whether the CFA is effectively recruiting, preparing and supporting fire and emergency services volunteers.⁴⁵

Support for volunteer brigades

The dedication of volunteers to their community is beyond question. They sacrifice time with family and friends to attain and maintain skills and are ready at a moment's notice to step into harm's way. Volunteer brigade membership also involves a range of other activities to support the ongoing existence and viability

⁴⁵ Western Australian Auditor General, August 2015, *Support and Preparedness of Fire and Emergency Services Volunteers*.

of the brigade and meet regulatory compliance obligations. Volunteers frequently raise the need for greater support to meet some of these administrative burdens.

There has been some debate over how this support can best be provided. The Review heard praise for the former Community Support Facilitator model in terms of the support provided to brigades to manage their community engagement activities.

The CFA has since employed Brigade Administrative Support Officers (BASOs) and received support from the previous government to employ 64 Volunteer Support Officers (VSOs). BASOs assist with administrative requirements, the recruitment of volunteer members and fundraising activities, as required by the Brigade Management Team. VSOs focus on volunteer recruitment, development, recognition and retention activities, such as the development of strategic employer partnerships, the review and implementation of systems and processes, and state-wide event management. Neither BASOs nor VSOs are required to have operational firefighting experience. The UFU has stated that all volunteer brigade support roles should be provided by operational firefighters for safety and quality assurance reasons.

The Review acknowledges the importance of the role played by BASOs and VSOs. Brigades need a variety of support ranging from very basic administrative assistance, such as managing correspondence and deliveries, to recruitment and brigade planning activities. Submissions state that BASOs are spread too thin to fully meet brigade needs. This becomes even more difficult when BASOs are drawn into district-level projects, further reducing their availability. This leaves volunteers still performing a range of paperwork, which is a further impost on their time.

The Review believes there are advantages to operational firefighters being engaged to provide administrative support to volunteer brigades. Operational firefighters could also support community engagement activities, adding to the information delivered. The Review recommends that administrative and other support be provided by operational firefighters at the Leading Firefighter or Station Officer rank. For the model to be successful, it would need to be clear that the paid firefighter is there in a support role to meet the needs identified by the brigade leadership.

The brigade would remain a volunteer brigade and preserve its leadership and command structures. However, the brigade would also be in a position to take advantage of the paid firefighter's operational experience, for example in terms of assistance with drills and turnouts. The model would also benefit the paid firefighters through early exposure to and understanding of the culture of volunteer brigades and their connection to community. It would also increase awareness of the role and capability of volunteers, as well as provide an opportunity to learn from volunteer experience.

The Review is not advocating that the current BASO model be immediately terminated and replaced with the operational firefighter model. BASOs are already in place and it is important for brigades that there is a continuity of support and the relationships that have already been built.

Recommendation 18:

The Review recommends that a model be developed for firefighters at the rank of Leading Firefighter or Station Officer to be deployed to provide administrative, technical, community engagement and, when required, operational support to volunteer brigades.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority E relating to volunteers having the skills, expertise and support to confidently and safely undertake their role.

Stations

The key issues raised regarding stations were their location, size and maintenance.

Growth in some towns means that stations may no longer be ideally located. The lack of availability of appropriate land may limit options for relocating stations to new areas. The Review heard examples of station location being based on land affordability rather than best positioning. The Review acknowledges that the fire services need to strike a balance between the two but appropriate location should be the overriding consideration.

The Review saw and heard of a number of stations where the station's capacity to house firefighters and appliances is at its limits or has been outgrown. For example, at Bendigo fire station, current facilities, including lockers, dormitories and washrooms, are all at capacity and there is no room to accommodate



the pending arrival of two new recruits and no room to extend the building to meet these needs. There is also no room for all of the station's appliances to be stored undercover, leaving very expensive appliances exposed to the elements, reducing their useful life cycle and increasing the need for maintenance.

Bendigo Fire Brigade, like some other brigades, had to reconfigure and extend its motor bay in order to accommodate the height and length of new appliances. Even with these adjustments, appliances remain parked too closely together, creating a safety risk for firefighters when turning out.

Station strategy

The frustration this creates is compounded by the uncertainty as to when these issues will be addressed, either through relocating or upgrading the station. Firefighters did not seem to be aware of a longer-term asset strategy or program that prioritises the competing needs of different brigades. They are not aware of how current station builds or improvements fit into a larger service delivery strategy and therefore question instances of stations being built or refurbished when the service need is not as apparent to them.

This may partly be a problem of communication. However, the fire services are also constrained in making long-term plans by short-term budget cycles. Such plans, when established, should be supported by both sides of politics.

The Review believes it is important for the fire services to be able to lay out a long-range plan, for example a 30-year plan, for station builds and a shorter, say 10-year, rolling plan for station maintenance. These plans should be communicated to the membership so that everyone understands the priorities and how and when they will be addressed.

The station build plan must be aligned to current and future service delivery models and needs. It will therefore require some flexibility in line with agreed parameters, based on optimum service to the community. The plan will also require review at certain intervals. If needs become urgent, the plan could be brought forward but should not be constantly adjusted. Similar principles apply to the station maintenance plan.

Joint approach to the gMa

In the gMa, the needs of both organisations should be considered jointly as part of an overarching understanding of likely development, demographic changes and changing risk. The fire services should establish a dedicated project team, that is able to call in relevant expertise, to develop and review infrastructure plans. The plans should benefit from consultation with firefighters, as should individual station design.

Station design

Station design must also take into account current and long-term future needs. This includes potential increases in firefighter numbers and requisite additional facilities for men and women. Station design must also accommodate potential increases in appliance numbers and size.

In the past, the design of some stations has supported segregation rather than integration, with separate mess rooms for paid firefighters and volunteers or separate mess rooms for officers and firefighters. Because of pressures on space, some brigades have utilised the rooms differently, with everyone sharing a single mess. Division within the brigade should not be a feature of future station design.

As state assets, fire stations should accommodate other emergency services organisations, wherever possible. The Review recommends that infrastructure strategies and plans be developed in consultation with other emergency services organisations, particularly AV, DELWP and VICSES.

Appliances

As with stations, firefighters seem to have little awareness of a vehicle procurement and replacement strategy and so become frustrated and concerned about safety when left with old or outdated appliances for unknown periods. The Review regularly heard stories of brigades being given older vehicles as temporary measures and still having them five or six years later. Even where the replacement time was short, for example while another appliance was being serviced, the age of replacement vehicles could still cause problems as some crew members might not be trained on the appliance, or it might not accommodate necessary equipment, or have desired safety features, such as air bags or ABS brakes.

Even where resources are stretched, firefighter safety must remain a priority.

An appliance strategy

The Review recommends that the fire services establish a clear strategy for vehicle replacement, rotation and maintenance, again supported by a sufficiently long-range plan, for example 10 years, detailing how this will be done. Both the strategy and plan should be communicated across the organisation. If the need arises, the plan could be brought forward but not regularly adjusted. Volunteers should also have regard to the strategy and plan when purchasing brigade-owned vehicles.

The strategy must address current and future risks and match vehicles to local need, including local terrain. It should also address replacement appliances for when regular appliances are being serviced or repaired and ensure that they are of a sufficient standard to be easily included in operations and meet safety needs. Where possible, replacements should be like-for-like.

Appliance design

The Interoperability Committee is already considering a common heavy pumper specification. The Review understands the Committee will also develop common specifications for other appliances.

Firefighters should always be consulted on vehicle and design decisions. Ballarat City Fire Brigade was recently provided with a new rescue trailer to carry all of its specialist rescue equipment. However, being a trailer, it can only safely travel at the speed limit and not at the increased speeds necessary for a Code 1 response.

Conversely, input from paid and volunteer firefighters has led to improvements, among others, in the design of the CFA Medium Pumper for the stowage of small items related to internal fire attack equipment and in the design of the water monitor on the CFA Medium Tanker. Input from MFB firefighters has led to improvements, such as the adoption of new station appliance bay turnout doors and revised lights and sirens on command vehicles.

Other agencies, particularly DELWP and VICSES, should also be consulted in relation to the design of appliances and vehicles that might also suit their purposes.

Appliance maintenance

The Review heard several accounts of unacceptable delays for vehicle repairs and servicing. In one instance, an appliance was sent for servicing in April and in September had still not been returned. This should not be tolerated. The Review did not have the opportunity to investigate the cause of the problem but one clearly exists. The Review recommends that a schedule for regular servicing be developed and the maintenance process examined and modified to address delays. This could be included as part of the overall audit of resource allocation and management recommended above.

Equipment

The Review did not consider the equipment used by firefighters in any detail. As with station and appliance design, it heard stories of where a failure to obtain operational input into design decisions led to purchases of equipment that were not fit for purpose or safe to use. The work of the Interoperability Committee should redress this issue.

Recommendation 19:

The Review recommends that the fire services establish transparent and sufficiently long-range strategies and plans, based on consultation with firefighters, regarding:

- a. a program of station builds and replacements
- b. a program of station maintenance
- c. a program of vehicle replacement
- d. a program of vehicle servicing

The plans should also be discussed with other emergency management organisations so as to align and support broader sector needs to the extent possible.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority G relating to developing and implementing an investment plan that identifies shared procurement and co-location opportunities and future investment requirements across all asset types and capital infrastructure.

Technology

The Review did not investigate the use of technology in the fire services. However, it heard examples of where greater use of technology could enhance firefighter response and safety.

Radio communications

CFA, MFB and DELWP utilise separate radio networks, hindering interoperability and increasing inefficiency. Although they have distributed portable radios to one another to allow fireground communication, there are not enough to go around to meet normal operating procedures. This creates risks for crew safety and is unacceptable in today's operating environment.

Different radio procedures also create a burden for the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) call-takers as they must use different protocols for dispatching CFA and MFB. This is particularly nonsensical when the agencies are jointly responding.

Mobile Data Terminals

Firefighters frequently raised the need for mobile data terminals (MDTs) to receive more timely and accurate data regarding the incidents to which they are responding and access GPS navigation. Firefighters currently rely on personal Smartphone apps or paper maps for directions. MFB has trialled the use of MDTs but not yet adopted them due to funding issues. Their introduction to both services would also reduce demands on ESTA call-takers and voice-based response arrangements.

The Review is aware of measures being taken as part of Victoria's Emergency Management Operational Communications Program, which sets out a vision of one, integrated, statewide, multi-agency network, enabling full interoperability between all agencies.

Vehicle tracking

Firefighters also supported the introduction of vehicle tracking for safety reasons but expressed concerns about it being used for other reasons. This is reflective of the current climate. There needs to be improved consultation and communication, in a better environment, regarding how and when and for what purpose vehicle tracking will be utilised.

Business Systems

CFA and MFB have different approaches to business planning, procurement, maintenance, performance reporting, financial monitoring, human resources, fleet and infrastructure. Therefore, each agency uses different measurement and monitoring processes, resulting in data collection and collation inconsistencies. The differences in business systems and measures mean that, although the organisations provide the same service delivery outcomes, they are unable to provide consistent, comparative, cost data analysis and performance information in relation to overall service delivery.

The Review understands that, in the past, different IT projects in CFA have been progressed in isolation to each other. Information regarding rostering, training, endorsements and turnouts is not shared across systems and is sometimes slow to update. This has resulted in duplication of information and relevant information not being readily available to members or to understand brigade capability and plan and manage incident response.

The Review is advised that CFA is in the process of introducing new systems to address these issues, enabling the transfer of data and improving member access to the organisation's systems and information, through a single point of entry member portal. In recognition of volunteer time being a valuable resource, time was nominated as a key design driver regarding connectivity and functionality and volunteers have been involved in the portal's design. Consultation with operational members should be a feature of all future design processes. CFA acknowledges that while a start has been made, work is still required to improve systems, access and information flows. In addition to the limited in-house integration of systems, the CFA has operated in a silo when introducing and updating its systems, with no coordination with MFB or the broader emergency management sector.

The Review understands that, in general, in the MFB, information is shared across systems, although some gaps remain. For example, training records do not link with human resources systems. This is partly complicated by training records being maintained on a platoon rather than an individual basis.

In line with its Information Technology Strategy, before updating or replacing applications that are due for renewal, MFB consults with other emergency management agencies to determine if the relevant systems they are using might be of benefit to MFB or if those agencies would also like to use the system being contemplated by MFB. MFB is encouraged to move beyond an ad hoc approach and develop, with the sector, a more cohesive view of information technology requirements.

The Review recommends that the fire services align their core business systems and planning, monitoring and reporting processes, integrating and sharing systems and services wherever possible. This opportunity should also be used to modernise their business intelligence systems to better understand their individual and joint organisational capability and capacity and where changes are needed to improve interoperability and service delivery. Both should consider the information-sharing needs of the broader sector in any system design and implementation.

Recommendation 20:

The Review recommends that the CFA and MFB align or share their core business systems and processes wherever possible and modernise their business intelligence systems to better understand their individual and joint organisational capability and capacity.

This recommendation aligns with SAP Priority H relating to enhancing systems and platforms to deliver integrated services.

Prevention and mitigation

Through their advocacy and expert advice on fire safety, the fire services have introduced initiatives that have enhanced community safety and significantly reduced death and damage resulting from fires. The introduction of compulsory smoke alarms in residential dwellings is one example of their positive influence, as is the current push to have mandatory sprinklers on balconies of high-rise buildings.

Statistics show that call attendance for structural fires is declining⁴⁶ which is largely attributable to improved protective measures and community education. The fire services should continue to lead in identifying initiatives to enhance community safety. This should include ongoing investment in technologies for early fire detection and early aggressive attack.

As pressures on the emergency management sector increase, a more comprehensive review of the model for resourcing it will be required. The SAP emphasises the goal of empowering community leadership and developing shared responsibility and self-reliance in prevention, planning, response, relief and recovery activities to ultimately strengthen resilience.⁴⁷ A greater focus on prevention activities by the fire services, with their sector partners, will help influence the nature of future risks. As risks change, service delivery models will also need to adapt and expand to work more closely with the community.

⁴⁶ There has been an eight per cent decrease in 2014–15 from 2013–14 in the number of fires per 100,000 population, see MFB Annual Report 2014–15, p.19.

⁴⁷ SAP, Priority A.

Conclusion

Although important, merely changing the structure and introducing new systems will not bring about the real change that is needed in Victoria's fire services. The organisational leadership must step up and create a new culture of trust and respect, actively supported by its key stakeholders and government.

The fire services must be genuinely centred around operations – firefighting, rescue services, structural fire safety, hazardous materials incident response, emergency medical response, community engagement – with all elements of the organisation supporting those endeavours.

Service delivery models in a particular location must be designed to match the needs of that location and meet the community's expectation. Service delivery models must support the community contributing to its own safety. Appliances, equipment, training, systems and procedures should be standardised to the extent possible to allow CFA and MFB to operate together seamlessly, and in the greater metropolitan area, interchangeably.

Firefighters, men and women, paid and volunteer, should be provided with the training they need to meet operational requirements and develop in their roles. And most importantly, firefighters should be heard and their ideas sought on how best to get the job done.

Victoria's fire services were once regarded as the best in the world. Due to some of the difficulties outlined above, they cannot confidently make the same claim today.

However, the passion, courage, competence and commitment of the state's firefighters, on which the services have been built, remain outstanding. The Review believes that the implementation of its recommendations, with a focus on operations and service to the community, will see Victoria's fire services regain their reputation as global leaders.

Appendix 1: Recommendations of the Fire Services Review

Recommendation 1:

The Review recommends that the Fire Service Agencies Interoperability Committee:

- a. continue its work to standardise appliances, equipment, training, systems and operating procedures for the fire services as appropriate, as well as develop a common rank structure for paid firefighters
- b. following a transitional period of bilateral consultation between the EMC and the VFBV, be expanded to include a VFBV representative
- c. extend participation to other sector organisations, where relevant, to ensure broader alignment across the sector and enhance efficiencies and cost savings.

Recommendation 2:

The Review recommends that:

- a. the fire services introduce new service delivery models to better meet community needs in a given location, including joint operations in the gMa, day staffing, and hub and spoke integration.
The fire services should consult with both volunteer and paid firefighters and their representative bodies on the most appropriate model to adopt in a given area, with the ultimate decision to be made by the Chief Officers
- b. the CFA and DELWP continue to identify opportunities to strengthen their organisational bonds through joint initiatives
- c. the government review the provisions in the *Forests Act 1958* that limit, based on distance, the ability of DELWP and its partner organisations to support a sector-wide approach to responding to emergencies
- d. the fire services introduce a broader scope of working arrangements, including job-sharing and part-time options, for persons returning from parental leave.

Recommendation 3:

The Review recommends that the *Emergency Management Act 2013* be reviewed to:

- a. enable the EMC to deliver a comprehensive set of standards to support integration and interoperability within the emergency management sector
- b. eliminate any barriers, or the potential for workarounds, to the fire services, and other agencies, implementing the EMC's standards.

Recommendation 4:

The Review recommends that:

- a. the MFB develop a comprehensive training strategy with the guidance of the Chief Officer
- b. the fire services' training strategies and accompanying training programs be informed by consultation with paid and volunteer firefighters
- c. the training strategies be informed by consultation between the fire services to ensure there is alignment across the fire services to the extent possible and that opportunities for joint training and sharing of training resources are maximised
- d. the fire services investigate flexible training delivery models in different locations, including a broader use of paid instructors, volunteer trainers and assessors, and third party providers
- e. the training strategies and programs be communicated across the organisations so that training priorities and pathways are well understood.

Recommendation 5:

The Review recommends that the CFA develop a leading practice model for integrating brigades, drawing on the successful processes adopted to date. The model should cover the initiation and planning of integration, implementation, and continued support. The leaders of integrated brigades should be selected for leadership, management and technical skills and provided with ongoing high-level assistance.

Recommendation 6:

The Review recommends that brigade leaders and their immediate supervisors be provided with clear processes and tools to deal professionally, expeditiously and compassionately with instances of bullying and poor behaviour, and be supported in doing so. A clear, alternative mechanism should be established, and communicated to all members, for when matters cannot be handled locally.

Recommendation 7:

The Review recommends that the fire services take the lead in advancing the sector's collective effort to increase diversity in the sector, through making a genuine and public commitment to understanding and addressing harassment and discriminatory practices and behaviours in their organisations, and launching a process for doing so.

Recommendation 8:

The Review recommends that committed and sustained effort be made by the senior leadership of the fire services to reset its relationship with firefighters and their representative bodies, through adopting a genuine, collaborative and consultative approach in place of the adversarial, win/lose dialogue. The immediate focus must be on restoring a cohesive work culture and addressing firefighter operational and safety concerns.

Recommendation 9:

The Review recommends that the Victorian government consider leading a national process for establishing a Firefighters Registration Board that:

- a. defines the competencies required to be registered as a firefighter at different operational levels or with particular specialist skills
- b. assesses whether applicants, irrespective of their organisational background, have the necessary skills, experience and qualifications, including through recognition of prior learning, to be registered at a nominated level of competency
- c. enables lateral entry into a fire service at a particular rank through formal recognition of competence at the commensurate level
- d. develops a training curriculum for attaining and maintaining skills to achieve and retain registration at the relevant level
- e. administers a process for deregistration where appropriate.

Recommendation 10:

The Review recommends that the fire services introduce an ongoing, holistic health and wellbeing program that includes fitness and wellness components, applies from the moment of recruitment, and is based on supporting firefighters to maintain their levels of fitness for duty.

Recommendation 11:

The Review recommends that the fire services' senior management identify regular opportunities, formal and informal, to touch base with and genuinely listen to the views and concerns of operational members, particularly through station visits.

Recommendation 12:

The Review recommends that the fire services establish a simple system for receiving and responding to proposed innovations from the membership and sharing them across the organisation. Where any safety and procedural compliance concerns are satisfied, new initiatives that can improve service delivery should be encouraged and supported at all levels of the organisation.

Recommendation 13:

The Review recommends that:

- a. the fire services be restructured to reinstate the role of Chief Officer as the head of the organisation. The Chief Officer would be supported by an executive of which one member would be responsible for managing corporate services
- b. the Chief Officer, and his or her deputies, have operational firefighting experience
- c. as a transitional arrangement, the role of CEO remain in place to oversee a number of the key reforms, with the Chief Officer focusing on key operational changes and needs
- d. as a further transitional arrangement, the fire services engage independent experts, with operational experience and recognised expertise in organisational culture, to support the leadership groups in effecting cultural change by engaging in programs to enhance leadership, positive culture and respect.

Recommendation 14:

The Review recommends that a single board be established as the governing body for the CFA and MFB, replacing the existing boards.

The seven-person board appointed by the Minister would include members with commercial, legal, local government or emergency management experience, a current or former paid firefighter selected from a UFU-nominated panel, a current or former volunteer firefighter selected from a VFBV-nominated panel, and the EMC.

The board's responsibilities would include overseeing the strategic direction of the fire services, expanding their standardised capability, increasing the interoperability between them and with the broader emergency management sector, and strengthening volunteerism. The Board would also oversee a common investment and procurement strategy.

Recommendation 15:

The Review recommends that the fire services legislation be reviewed and replaced with a single contemporary Act that facilitates improved interoperability between the fire services and with the broader emergency management sector. The legislative review should also consider and remove any ambiguity between the responsibilities of the EMC and the fire services.

Recommendation 16:

The Review recommends that a comprehensive audit be undertaken of the fire services' financial, project and resource management.

Recommendation 17:

The Review recommends that:

- a. the fire services invest in their mid-level operational leadership, strengthening its capacity to lead brigades and manage stations
- b. in the MFB, a position at Commander or Senior Station Officer level be made accountable for overall performance of a fire station
- c. in the CFA, the process for selecting brigade captains be reviewed to better ensure that persons with the right combination of leadership and technical skills are chosen to undertake the role
- d. a single management structure be established for specialist operations.

Recommendation 18:

The Review recommends that a model be developed for firefighters at the rank of Leading Firefighter or Station Officer to be deployed to provide administrative, technical, community engagement and, when required, operational support to volunteer brigades.

Recommendation 19:

The Review recommends that the fire services establish transparent and sufficiently long-range strategies and plans, based on consultation with firefighters, regarding:

- a. a program of station builds and replacements
- b. a program of station maintenance
- c. a program of vehicle replacement
- d. a program of vehicle servicing

The plans should also be discussed with other emergency management organisations so as to align and support broader sector needs to the extent possible.

Recommendation 20:

The Review recommends that the CFA and MFB align or share their core business systems and processes wherever possible and modernise their business intelligence systems to better understand their individual and joint organisational capability and capacity.

Appendix 2: Comparative table of the governance arrangements for fire services in Australian jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Service	Led by	Reporting to	Nature of service	Board oversight of services
ACT	ACT Fire & Rescue	Chief Officers	Commissioner of Emergency Services Agency	Branches of government agency	No Board
	ACT Rural Fire Service				
NSW	Fire and Rescue NSW	Commissioners	Minister for Police and Emergency Services	Statutory authorities	No Board
	NSW Rural Fire Service				
NT	Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service	Chief Fire Officer/Director	Commissioner of Police/Chief Executive Officer	Part of government tri-service	No Board
QLD	Queensland Fire and Emergency Services	Commissioner	Minister for the Police, Fire and Emergency Services	Operational unit of government department	No Board
SA	Country Fire Service	Chief Officers	Minister for Emergency Services and Board of the South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM)	Statutory authorities	9-member SAFECOM Board
	Metropolitan Fire Service				
TAS	Tasmania Fire Service	Chief Officer	Minister for Police and Emergency Management	Statutory authority	7-member governance group of State Fire Commission of which the Chief Officer is the Chair and CEO
VIC	Country Fire Authority	Chief Executive Officers	Respective Boards	Statutory authorities	9-member CFA Board
	Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board				7-member MFB Board
WA	Department of Fire and Emergency Services	Commissioner	Minister for Emergency Services	Government department	No Board

