

**FIRE SERVICES REVIEW 2015 - CFA DISTRICT 9 VFBV THOUGHTS**  
**Robert Auchterlonie (District 9 VFBV State Councillor)**

**Terms of reference**

**(A) RESOURCING REQUIREMENTS**

**TRAINING**

1.Improve CFAs response to training needs of Brigades and Groups.

2.Better utilising of Volunteer Trainers/assessors.

These people, who are present in all Districts around the state, are a greatly under utilised resource.

The problem is lack of organising, resourcing and support for these people.

A Solution. - Formation of Volunteer Training panels in each District. These would provide skills maintenance, training, resourcing and organising/utilising of Volunteer trainers/assessors.

These panels would need to be adequately resourced and supported by staff trainers, District Training Coordinators and Regional Training Coordinators.

**Equipment**

**FIRE TRUCKS**

With the recognition that climate change will cause more bad fire years, there is an expectation that we will need to provide Strike Teams more often from each District to these fires.

This is a very important form of surge support which we are very good at delivering.

The problem is that it is taking the primary fire fighting unit out of its community.

Each Strike team takes 5 Brigades' Fire trucks away from their communities.

The problem here is that response to fires into communities where their Fire truck is away on Strike teams, is slower because of the distance which needs to be travelled by neighbouring Brigades.

On bad Fire days, speed to fires is crucial to extinguishing them before they get too big to be extinguished.

We need to provide more Fire trucks to each District, so that most Strike Teams are made up from these extra tankers.

Example.- In february 2014, there were some large fires in East Gippsland. On the day when the fire started in the Hazelwood Open Cut mine, District 9 had 2 Strike teams in East Gippsland. That means 10 Brigades didn't have fire trucks in their stations on a very bad fire day.

Conclusion - This is a recognition that Climate change is going to create more fires. The CFA needs to have more fire Trucks in their Fire Stations to meet the wider demands that this will create.

## **FIRE TRUCK REPLACEMENT**

Need to have a rolling 5 year funding commitment for the replacement of old Fire Fighting Vehicles.

There are hundreds of Fire trucks nearing 30 years of age. And only replacing 70 to 80 each year is insufficient to replace these vehicles before they go over 30 years of age.

Then in 10 years time, unless something is done, there will be hundreds of Fire trucks getting close to 40 years of age.

A rolling funding commitment from Government would allow the CFA to plan better. Negotiate with suppliers better. Which may have cost benefits. It would also allow suppliers to plan better. Which would be good for employment.

## **FIRE TRUCKS - AGE**

To have a commitment to to have a 20 year life on all fire fighting trucks.

## **STANDARDISE EQUIPMENT**

Major effort be made to standardise hose fittings on all existing tanker/pumpers. At the moment there are quite a few different hose connections on Fire fighting vehicles, with an insufficient number of adapters on all vehicles.

This can cause real headaches on the fireground when vehicles cannot hook in to each other, because they have different hose connections, and insufficient adaptors to allow this to happen.

The CFA knows this problem exists, but it is a funding issue to fix.

## **B. - SUPPORTING STAFF**

There are no paid fire fighters in District 9, so we can only address Operational Officers, and ancillary staff.

1. there needs to adequate office space for all staff.
2. There needs to be adequate numbers of staff.
3. Training needs to adequate, and on going.
4. Mental Health support needs to be easy to access, sufficient and confidential, for all staff AND their families.
5. When a major fire sweeps through an area, particularly if it is for a prolonged period, maybe even with loss of life. District staff should be replaced to give them adequate time to recover, from what is usually a very stressful time.
6. Specialist resources available to Districts to deal with HR issues in Brigades. Operational Officers need to be supervising the provision of HR support to Brigades , and not delivering it themselves.
7. CFA needs to communicate better with all staff, so that issues and needs can be addressed sooner.

## C. INTEROPERABILITY BETWEEN CFA AND MFB

CFA and MFB organise opportunities to come to rural locations around Victoria to meet and join in with training exercises with local brigades/Groups, as a way of familiarising themselves on how things are done in areas outside of Melbourne and Geelong. This would be an excellent two way learning activities. The locals would see some great equipment, and gain knowledge contact.

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## D. INTEROPERABILITY ACROSS FIRE SERVICES

All agencies need to be properly trained, experienced and equipped for public and private land incidents that they might encounter.

### TRAINING

Training needs to be integrated, inter-operable and concentric understanding.

Learning systems need to be employed across all agencies and must deliver a cohesive message as part of a structured system.

Harmonised training across all agencies provides an opportunity to understand, influence and manage ongoing transformation of emergency response and management. Continuous development of capacity should be integral to all fire services and their members.

We need to have a learning system which employs a mix of face to face, electronic and practical training which both transforms and builds capacity in our members.

In subjects such as AIIMs, Fire Weather, Incident Management, First Aid, and others, providing one course across many agencies, where appropriate, would reduce initial and ongoing costs, which would lead to better availability of courses and more resources for better availability of agency specific training.

Better inter agency courses would mean a bigger pool of trainers being available. Trainers from all agencies would be able to provide courses to multi agency courses.

### E LEARNING

Greater use of e learning should reduce costs and make training more accessible.

It also makes the training available faster, as members do not have to wait for the normal calendar face to face training to come around.

### SHARED VISION

One source of Emergency Management wide training gives greater control and more nimble response to change, providing more direct and timely leader's intent and

concentric messaging.

Delivered in a holistic EM sense, this shared vision links individual and collective learnings with the strategic objectives of Government as a whole better

Change would also be accepted better when delivered as part of EM wide training as members would have a better understanding of EM wide intent.

#### E. MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES AND WORK PRACTICES

CFA management structure and work practices must provide the flexibility needed to adequately support Volunteer Brigades in providing services to their communities. Over 90% of Victoria is covered by Volunteer only Brigades.

#### F. ENHANCING WORKPLACES

The best way to improve workplace respect, cultural change and cooperation is through better communications.

Communications, of course, is a two way process. Staff and Volunteers need to be able to discuss issues with the CFA in a mutually respectful way.

There are 4 points of access for the workforce to communicate with the CFA.

1. Via their District operational staff either direct, or via Brigade/Group meeting, and via their representatives at District Planning Committee meetings.
2. Via the VFVBV, which has many contact points with many areas of the CFA.
3. UFU, provides representation for the small number of paid Firefighters in Victoria.
4. Both Volunteers and Career Firefighters can communicate via their chain of command.

Volunteer Code of conduct and the Volunteer Charter(now in the CFA act) outline a very good, respectful and cooperative way to work together.

But there are a number of examples where the CFA didn't consult with its Volunteer/paid workforce. Eg, the formation of the new District 27. And the introduction of the current pagers.

Both of these major changes have caused great anger, frustration and damage to morale.

We need a strong commitment from the CFA for timely consultations before ,during and after the introduction of change.

At the moment it is inconsistent. Done well at times, and very poorly at other times.

#### H. SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEER

The current structure works well.

Operation Officers, supported by BASOs, and Volunteer Support Officers working

with Brigades.

The Volunteer Fire Brigades of Victoria, provides a very valuable role in representing Volunteer Firefighters in communicating issues, advocating and discussing solutions with the CFA, EMV and Government, and others.

Problems - Adequate numbers of Operational staff able to support Volunteers

ISSUE - There seems to be a shortage of staff who want to be Operations Officers.

Possible solutions.

1. Increase pay rates to Operation Officers, so it is a more attractive position, and thereby easier to attract people to it.
2. Allow tier 2 recruiting to Operation Officer positions, Which would enable high calibre Volunteers to progress to these roles.

Problem - HR issues in Volunteer brigades

(EG Work place bullying, conflict, harassment or discrimination)

Solution - employment of specialist people with necessary skills to deal with these issues. (Operations Officers are firefighters, and do not have the skills to adequately resolve these issues.)

Problem - Brigade Leadership

Issue - Brigade leadership requires many skills, people management, financial management, knowledge of CFA policies and processes.

Solution - A Brigade Leadership Qualification, which all Brigade leaders would need to have . Probably need to have a 2 year period after appointment to gain it.