



Fire Services Review

**Emergency Management Victoria
Submission**

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Working in conjunction
with Communities,
Government, Agencies
and Business.

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Executive Summary

The Fire Services Review has been authorised to 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).

This submission provides Emergency Management Victoria’s (EMV) commentary on the resourcing, operations, management and culture of the fire services. It also outlines a set of initiatives to enhance the current service delivery model with the aim of helping to deliver **“a sustainable and efficient emergency management system that reduces the likelihood, effect and consequences of emergencies”** and meeting Victoria’s vision of **“safer and more resilient communities”**.¹

The CFA and MFB essentially provide the same services, including response to all types of fires, guidance on structural fire safety and community education, response to rescue including specialist rescue, hazardous materials incidents and medical response. CFA is concurrently a major rural fire service, providing extensive fire coverage on private and public land across Victoria.

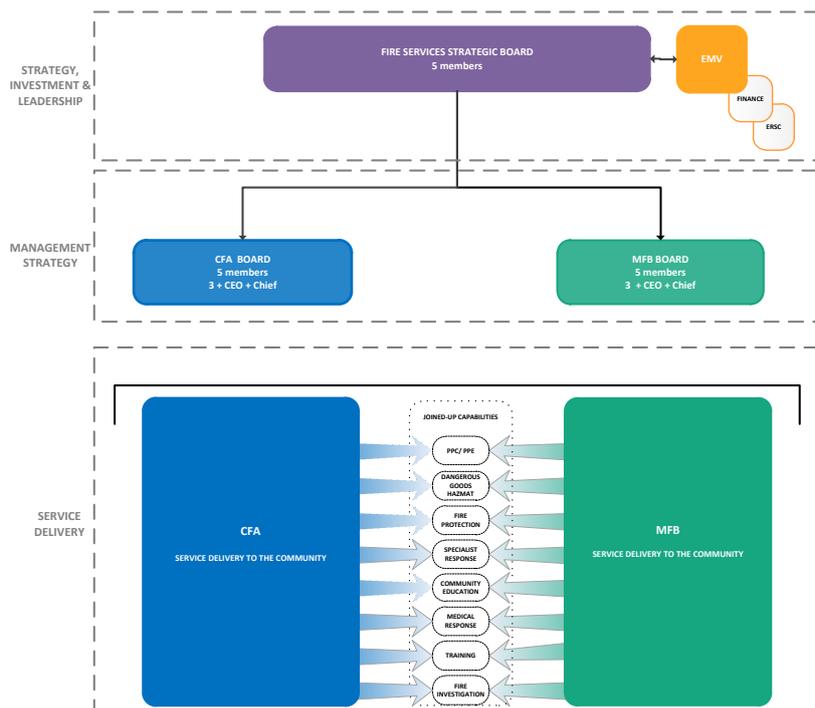
Over recent years, the alignment of service delivery through interoperability reform, underpinned by legislation and fire service funding reform, has been actively pursued.

Interoperability and alignment of paid firefighters’ and senior officers’ roles, responsibilities, structures and operating systems will need to be addressed in order to effect change. These initiatives alone will provide a single approach to service delivery and critical in the greater Metropolitan area (gMa).

The next logical step is to align the services more broadly, including alignment of business systems, financial and procurement processes and adaptation to the changing needs of Victoria.

While there is no political imperative to amalgamate CFA and MFB, there is an urgent need to improve the way in which they work together in a strategic and systemic way. This will extend to provincial, regional and rural areas of Victoria and ensure both fire services are focused on the state of Victoria as a whole.

A modernised fire services model



¹ Emergency Management Victoria (n.d.) *Vision, Goal, Role and Values of Emergency Management Victoria*, Melbourne.

Introduction

Victoria is fortunate to have two world-class fire services that deliver comprehensive coverage across urban, suburban, peri-urban and regional environments.

While the distinction between Victoria's metropolitan and country fire services was once clear, that is no longer the case. As the agencies have grown and expanded their operations over the years, the complexity of both has increased as the physical and social dimensions of Victoria have shifted.

CFA and MFB are both "urban" fire services employing firefighters and providing the same services including response to all types of fires, providing guidance on structural fire safety and community education, response to rescue including specialist rescue, hazardous materials incidents and medical response. CFA is concurrently a major rural fire service, providing extensive fire coverage on private and public land across Victoria.

Each service covers approximately half of the urban fire risk across the state.

A key difference is that, in addition to paid firefighters and operational staff, the vast majority of the CFA's firefighting is provided by volunteers.

While Melbourne's Metropolitan Fire District has not altered markedly in more than a century, the metropolis itself has sprawled out in all directions. More than half of Melbourne's metropolitan area continues to fall within the "country area of Victoria" in terms of the fire legislation.² In order to meet this changing need, the CFA volunteer system has long been supplemented with paid firefighters providing an integrated service delivery model in the outer metropolitan Melbourne area and provincial cities.

Metropolitan centres, such as Dandenong, Boronia, Craigieburn, Sunbury, Caroline Springs, Melton, Hoppers Crossing and Point Cook, operate an integrated fire service model with both paid and volunteer firefighters. This arrangement has worked effectively for decades. Similarly, integrated stations operate in regional and provincial cities including Geelong, Bendigo, Ballarat, Warrnambool, Shepparton, Wodonga, Mildura and Traralgon among others.

While CFA remains a volunteer-based organisation supported by paid firefighters, officers and non-uniform staff, since the 1950s MFB has been a full-time employed urban fire service.

There are other differences and challenges between CFA and MFB. These should not be underestimated in terms of organisational dynamics, capability and culture. Importantly, however, volunteers will continue to provide significant fire service delivery across Victoria into the future, particularly in those areas where the provision of a paid service is impractical or uneconomic.

The mechanisms in place for consultation and discussion between the agencies and their paid and volunteer workforces are currently not aligned. The mechanisms entwined in the employment arrangements have been debated over recent years. These have become complex and blur the responsibility, accountability and management of the services. Consultation is critical in a modern workforce, but not to the point where it erodes accountability and decision-making.

Over recent years, the alignment of service delivery through "interoperability" reform, underpinned by legislation and fire service funding reform has been actively pursued.

Interoperability and alignment of paid firefighter, officers' roles, responsibilities, structures and operating systems need to be addressed immediately. These initiatives alone will provide a single approach to service delivery and critical in the greater Metropolitan area (gMa).

² *Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958, Sch.2*

True interoperability means resources and personnel can operate effectively between organisations without barriers and or prescriptive protocols. Critical to success is unified governance, standard operating procedures, compatible technologies, training and exercising and the increased use of common capabilities. This is fundamental to good, cost effective public safety outcomes.

The next logical step is to align the services more broadly. There is no political imperative to amalgamate CFA and MFB, but there is an urgent need for them to improve “working as one”. This will extend to provincial, regional and rural areas of Victoria and ensure both fire services are focused on the state of Victoria as a whole.

One common theme not fully embraced to date across the two fire services is diversity. This includes race, nationality, gender and age. Statistics clearly show a lack of diversity in both CFA and MFB. There are currently no women in uniformed command roles and only a handful in executive leadership positions. Multiple strategies will be required to address this issue, including modernised employment arrangements and a volunteer strategic statement.

Whatever the differences between the two services, there are far more similarities. The community itself is blind to the badges on trucks and the uniforms of the firefighters. What Victorians see, need and demand is a competent fire service no matter where they live.

The future model of fire-rescue services in Victoria must include volunteer and paid personnel, men and women, who are trained and competent to work as one to provide the highest level of service possible to the Victorian community.

We must build upon the services to improve and meet the challenges of population growth, climate change, urbanisation, globalisation, along with diverse community expectations and participation.



Craig Lapsley
Emergency Management Commissioner

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Key Initiatives for Fire Services Reform

The future model of fire-rescue services in Victoria must reflect community need, current and future challenges (environmental, social and economic) and the integrated nature of our emergency management workforce, which comprises both volunteer and paid personnel.

The following initiatives acknowledge exceptional work already undertaken by the fire services and the need for improvement in governance, administration and service delivery.

- ***Consolidated Fire and Emergency Services Legislation***
- ***Fire Services Strategic Board – a single board to set strategy and investment***
- ***Restructured CFA and MFB Boards***
- ***Integrated operational service delivery across Victoria***
- ***Aligned operational staffing structure***
- ***Alignment of operational training***
- ***Alignment of all fire service equipment***
- ***Special Operations – a single approach***
- ***Enhanced business systems to support integrated service delivery and improved outcomes***
- ***Embedding gender, diversity and inclusion into fire service recruitment***
- ***A flexible and effective paid and volunteer workforce.***

Values and Vision across Victoria's Emergency Management Sector³

Shared Vision

"Safer and more resilient communities"

Shared Goal

"A sustainable and efficient emergency management system that reduces the likelihood, effect and consequences of emergencies"

"We work as one"

Values these initiatives are guided by:

Leadership – We show personal drive and inspire others to achieve shared goals as leaders of emergency management in Victoria

To achieve this we:

- treat people fairly, and with respect
- value and engage the abilities, knowledge, skills and achievements of our colleagues and partners

Accountability – We work to clear objectives in a transparent manner

To achieve this we:

- are personally accountable for our actions and results
- actively commit to engaging and involving others in decisions that affect them
- seek to attain the best use of public resources in achieving our objectives

Integration – We recognise the importance of building effective and cooperative relationships with our emergency management colleagues

To achieve this we:

- actively promote and strengthen capability, collaboration, interoperability and community connection as core building blocks of emergency management reform

Agility – We respond quickly and effectively to dynamic situations and changing demands

To achieve this we:

- are open to opportunity, and are solutions-oriented, innovative and flexible in our response to the challenges and complexity of our environment.

Behaviours driven / embedded:

- **Respect others**
- **Work as one**
- **Focus on the community**
- **Listen and communicate**
- **Acknowledge the good and focus on opportunity.**

³ Emergency Management Victoria (n.d.) *Vision, Goal, Role and Values of Emergency Management Victoria*, Melbourne.

The future of Victoria's fire services

Over the next decade in Victoria, there will be greater generational, social, economic and environmental change than over the past half century. The emergency management sector as a whole needs to look at both past lessons and future development to form a comprehensive understanding of the impacts that these changes will have on local communities, government, the environment, and in particular how the fire services embrace and adapt to meet both changing conditions and expectations.

The Climate Council of Australia report, *Be Prepared: Climate Change and the Victorian Bushfire Threat*⁴ highlights the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirmation of a 95 per cent likelihood that climate change will increase the number of days with very high and extreme fire weather in southern Australia.

Victoria is accordingly set to experience higher than average temperatures, more days above 35 degrees, reduced rainfall, and an increased number of droughts and extreme weather events, including more frequent bushfires and storm activity⁵. In recent history, Victoria has sustained around 50 per cent of the economic damage from bushfires despite covering only three per cent of Australia's land area.⁶

Although it is the second smallest state, Victoria accounts for roughly one quarter of Australia's population⁷. As the fastest-growing city in Australia, Melbourne's population will increase significantly over the coming decades. This increase in population is driven by immigration and the availability of employment (75 per cent of Victorian jobs are based in Melbourne), tertiary education, recreation and entertainment. ⁸ Housing affordability will attract settlement into peri-urban landscapes and bring cultural and socio-economic diversity. Similarly, 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'.

Simultaneously with these changes to the community, economy and environment, the emergency management sector is undergoing organisational and functional redevelopment, at local, regional and state levels. There is a renewed emergency management strategic intent for Victoria, which focussed on the 'community' as the centre of all activities and 'primacy of life' as the single most important priority.

The impact of changes in climate, population growth, urbanisation and community expectation will directly affect Victoria's vulnerability to disasters. These changes pose challenges to the adaptive capacity and capability of the community, industries, governments and the emergency management sector. Fire services staff and volunteers are already experiencing a notable impact.⁹ Together these changes will ultimately transform the relationships the fire services will have with the built and natural environments over the next 5-10 years.¹⁰ It is the interaction of these changes that will influence the preparedness and resilience of Victorians into the future.

⁴Climate Council of Australia (2014), *Be Prepared: Climate Change and the Victorian Bushfire Threat*, Potts Point. <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/be-prepared-climate-change-and-the-victorian-bushfire-threat>

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

⁶ Climate Council (2014), *Be Prepared*.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics - sourced <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0> (26 August 2015)

⁸ Foster H., Whittaker J., Towers B. & Handmer J. (2013), 'Metropolitan Melbourne in 2021: changes and implications for the emergency management sector', *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 28(4): 9-14

⁹ EMV (2015) *the Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2015-2018*, Melbourne, p.11.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics - sourced <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0> (26 August 2015)

Increasing urban development, whether in the metropolitan Melbourne corridors or the surrounds of provincial centres, poses specific challenges in service delivery. It also begs the questions of what will be the fire service model, who will be the urban fire service volunteers of the future, what role will they perform and in what service delivery context?

This paper proposes a number of strategic initiatives to assist achieve better outcomes for Victoria through both the service delivery and governance of the fire services.

A modern governance model

The current governance arrangements of the fire services in Victoria are underpinned by a legislative framework that dates to the 19th century. The arrangements still reflect, in many regards, the social, cultural and technological settings of that bygone era.

Curiously, however, the *Fire Brigades Act 1890* achieved a similar administrative outcome to that required 125 years later to deliver systemic efficiencies. That Act established two boards, founded on geographic rather than organisational imperatives. It set out a simple division of service delivery between a consolidated metropolitan Melbourne brigade and brigades in rural cities and towns.

An iterative process over the next 45 years piled legislative instruments on top of each other: the *Fire Brigades Act 1928*, the *Bushfire Brigades Act 1933*, the *Fire Brigades Act 1937*. The uncoordinated evolution of “bush fire brigades” after World War I added another layer of complexity that the 1890 legislation had not contemplated. This division between volunteer bush and town brigades in rural Victoria precedes the CFA. The *Country Fire Authority Act 1944* reset the paradigm by establishing a new statutory authority that exercised control over all brigades – both town and bush – in country Victoria, dividing them into “urban” and “rural” fire brigades.

The last major overhaul of the legislation in relation to fire brigades in Victoria was the consolidation of legislation in Victoria in 1958. The *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* and the *Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958* have been subject to substantial amendment in the intervening 57 years. The current version of the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (as at 1 August 2015) lists 138 substantive amendments over that period. The *Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958* (as at 1 July 2015) lists 75 substantive amendments over same time.

As a result, the fire services legislation suffers from the deficiencies of similar significant public general acts, such as the *Crimes Act 1958*, that have a “Swiss cheese” appearance, are written in language that largely predates the plain English reforms of the 1980s and have become increasingly difficult to navigate in a practical sense.

The dual fire services legislation creates a parallel set of common administrative and operating conditions, largely determined by geography and entity. The provisions of the *Emergency Management Act 2013* have now replaced many of the overarching considerations, notably in terms of control arrangements. The governance arrangements set out in the Acts for the two fire services reflect a different era, in which many public utilities and services (e.g. water, electricity, gas) were operated as statutory authorities.

In late 2012, the then Fire Services Commissioner (FSC) examined the regulatory environment of the fire services.

The FSC identified an institutionalised siloed approach to emergency services as a fundamental problem with the current arrangements. While much has been achieved in the intervening two years through the passage of the *Emergency Management Act 2013* and the creation of Emergency Management Victoria, the underpinning legislative and regulatory frameworks remain a key inhibitor to efficient and effective fire and emergency services into the future.

A fundamental problem remains the inability to develop coherent state-wide governance, strategy and operational arrangements, exacerbated by population growth and climate change. Regulation no longer means “delegated legislation” or a series of rules to maximise micro-control. Rather it means a whole range of systems, methods and tools that can be used to impact behaviour.

As far as the fire services are concerned, the current regulatory arrangements inhibit the level of integration and co-ordination that has become necessary in a rapidly expanding and increasingly complex Victoria. That is not to suggest that the existing services should necessarily merge or even that the traditional boundaries must be altered.

However, a commonsense appraisal of a situation in which two similar services cannot function in a seamless and cohesive manner across boundaries that no longer define different landscapes inevitably leads to the need for change at least to the arrangements under which those services operate.

Major changes in the Victorian environment continue to challenge the three principal Victorian fire services (MFB, CFA and DELWP). These include:

- Climate change
- Population change – with increases in urban areas
- Technological evolution
- Growing intersection between suburban and regional Victoria
- New risks and hazards, such as flash flooding, transport and infrastructure failure.

The Victorian community has changed in another sense also. It demands public sector efficiencies that the current administrative and service delivery models are not designed to achieve. Fiscal constraints on government together with increased community expectations and competing service demands are additional factors.

There is an opportunity to provide the structures for stepped change in the delivery of better fire service outcomes for Victorians. Central to this is acceptance of the idea that the regulation of the fire services has two distinct arms: governance and operational service delivery.¹¹ The primary function of the fire agencies is service delivery, whether that is in response, prevention or community engagement. Governance is not a core function and nor should it be.

Both MFB and CFA are established as statutory authorities. They have parallel structures that involve a part-time board, a chief executive of the organisation and a chief officer responsible for firefighting operations. Each entity concurrently maintains a separate business model, financial governance, procurement, policy development, legal functions, separate staffing and so forth.

This parallel development has continued despite the growing similarities between the services the two fire agencies provide in an urban context. While MFB’s operating environment has remained relatively static – bound by the geographic boundary between metropolitan Melbourne and country Victoria largely outlined in 1890 – the CFA has grown into a more complex organisation as its area of operations has become increasingly urbanised.

In effect, CFA has grown into an integrated urban fire service with a significant rural branch. CFA responds to 50 per cent of all structure fires in Victoria. It blends both paid and volunteer firefighters into its workforce. To do so has involved a more progressive and flexible organisational model than the MFB’s area of operations has to date permitted.

¹¹ For the purposes of this discussion, it is necessary to excise the firefighting arm of DELWP from the discussion. DELWP firefighting falls within the remit as a land management and is restricted to public land.

Initiative: Consolidated Fire and Emergency Services Legislation

The existing governance model provides that the State Crisis and Resilience Council (SCRC) sets the strategic direction for agencies and organisations with roles to play in emergency management, identifying Emergency Management Victoria as a key driver of the implementation of the transformation program.

The *Emergency Management Act 2013* is a foundational document for sector change and provides the authorising environment for the coordination, control, consequence, communication and recovery from major emergencies vested in the EMC.

The need for a 21st century review of the administrative structures under which the sector operates is clear. The most significant step that must be taken in this regard is the development of a single piece of legislation that consolidates emergency management and the fire and emergency services. This would provide a structure for the two fire services – in the absence of amalgamation – to operate in a cohesive manner with a common set of objectives and without the needless duplication inherent in two legislative instruments which have essentially the same purpose.

Such significant legislative reform is complex and time consuming, based on the experience of the similar recent reforms to the *Crimes Act 1958*. However, without such fundamental strategic reform, substantive structural overhaul of the fire services will be difficult to achieve.

Initiative: Fire Services Strategic Board – a single board to set strategy and investment

The establishment of Emergency Management Victoria in 2014 signalled a significant shift in both the strategic and practical approaches that government in Victoria is taking to the management of emergencies.

In particular, the dimensions of investment and statewide strategic planning now extend beyond the boundaries of individual emergency services. Emergency management now extends well beyond preparedness and response into relief, recovery and consequence management. The individual fire and emergency services in Victoria have not been expected to develop expertise in these areas and nor should they be in a holistic sense.

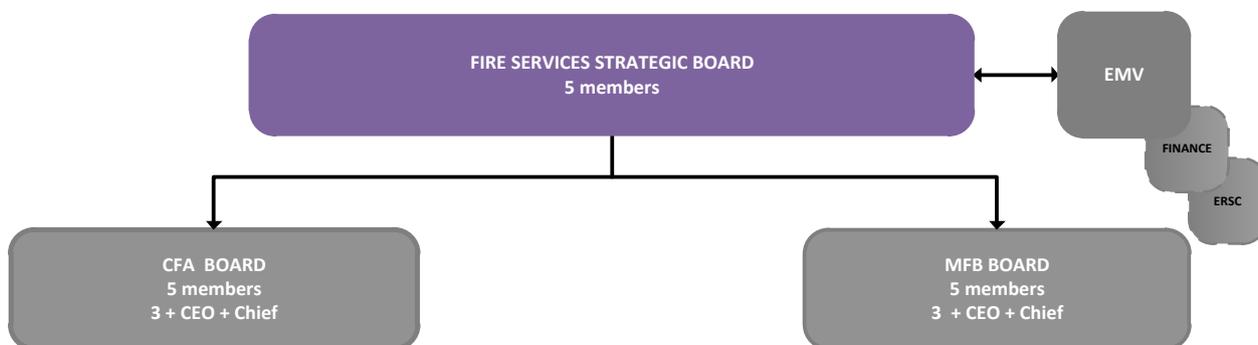
The strategic allocation by the State of budget and resources in emergency management is analogous to many other arms of government. The dislocated and duplicated nature of the current arrangements mitigate against both financial and administrative efficiencies. In the aftermath of the 2009 Victorian bushfires, a significant injection of funds was made to agencies to apply without the advantage of an overarching plan.

Key areas of interest for the strategic board would be to set the strategic direction and investment. The board would be in a stronger position to influence broader state-level considerations such as the fire and emergency dimensions of land use planning, growth planning, urbanisation and sector input.

In order to achieve better governance while retaining the current organisational identities and independence, it is proposed that a five-member strategic board be established to oversee both fire services. The board would comprise:

- Independent member (Chair)
- CFA Chairperson
- MFB Chairperson
- Chief Executive EMV
- Emergency Management Commissioner.

A key function of the board would be to provide government oversight of strategic and, in particular, financial direction for the fire services. The board would also have ultimate oversight of the functional integration of a range of activities in the service delivery model outlined below. The direction of operational service delivery would remain the responsibility of the services.



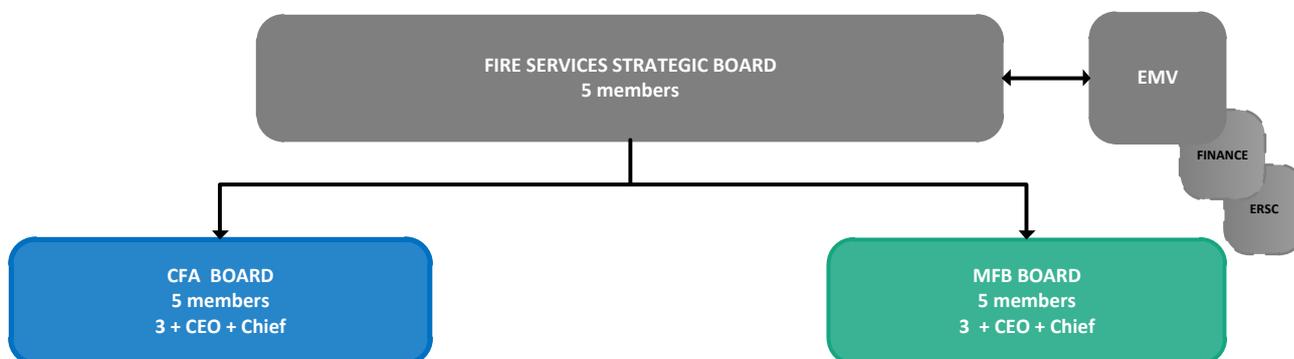
Initiative: Restructured CFA and MFB Boards

Under legislation, both CFA and MFB maintain separate boards. The CFA board comprises nine members. The MFB board comprises seven members.

While the Government has placed greater emphasis in recent years on the appointment of skills-based directors, both remain closely aligned to their representative origins, with members drawn from the insurance, local government, forestry sectors – and in the case of CFA with a significant emphasis on volunteer representatives.

Under the proposed governance arrangements, the role of the agency boards would be refocused upon the delivery of the strategic direction set by the combined strategic board. The size of the agency boards would be reduced to five members each, comprising:

- Chief Executive Officer
- Chief Officer
- 3 other members (including Board chair).



A revised service delivery model

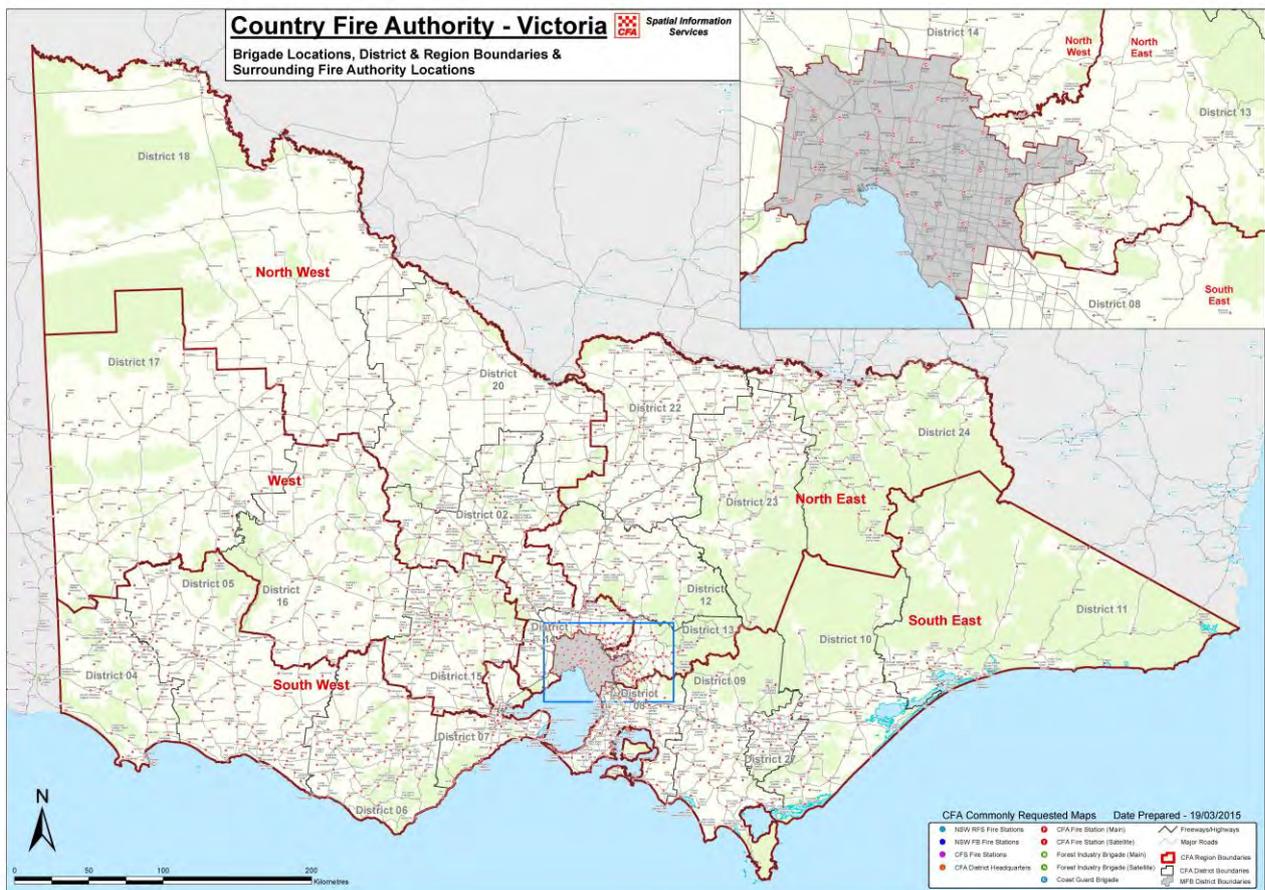
Fire services across the world are increasingly looking to interoperability as a key principle and measure of success.

The Emergency Management Commissioner has broad legislative responsibility under the *Emergency Management Act 2013* for the delivery of services by the fire and emergency services, the control of major fires and emergencies, ensuring that warnings are issued in relation to fire and the development of operational standards and incident management operational procedures, among other responsibilities.

Both the MFB and CFA respond to a broad range of fires and incidents on a daily basis, including in homes, commercial buildings and industrial facilities. In addition to structural fires, both are also responsible for responding to a range other emergencies, including bushfires, hazardous material incidents, road accidents, rescue operations and providing support to Victoria’s other emergency services.

The community should be provided with compelling reasons and evidence that demonstrate that the fire services have put aside boundaries and are primarily focused on the best way serve the Victorian community.¹²

The current border between the MFB and CFA is not obvious to the community, and the community expect transparent service delivery. Community expectations, community safety outcomes, government expectations and media scrutiny are all aspects that drive fire services to demonstrate effectiveness, efficiency and public value. As the emergency management sector continues to transform, it is becoming increasingly important for the fire services to meet these expectations and demands in an integrated and cooperative manner.



¹² Fire Services Commissioner (2011), *Building New Foundations*, Melbourne, 15.

People, trucks, equipment, training, procedures and protocols are all components of a service system in which there are differences today between CFA and MFB. It is unreasonable to expect that agencies can simply be told to cooperate in order to achieve a cooperative outcome.¹³

To attain integration the barriers that prevent agencies from working seamlessly together must be removed. This means a significant cultural realignment at all levels of both agencies and, importantly, between the industrial and membership bodies.

Recent sector wide collaborative analysis has identified that [across the sector and hence the fire agencies] there is limited visibility of the agencies' respective capability and capacity, along with inconsistent description and use of language. The *Emergency Management Capability Blueprint 2015-2025*¹⁴ identifies limited alignment of systems of work, unsustainable systems and processes to support the integration, implementation and delivery of capability for the future. Further, due to the differences in organisational delivery and priorities, there is a mix of engagement activities across community, business and government, and under developed community, business and government partnerships.

The *Capability Blueprint* outlines a future state, centred upon shared understanding through integrated systems and processes, in which scalable systems and processes exist to improve availability and accessibility of capability across the sector. Key features of the desired future state include:

- The sector understands its capability and capacity requirements and identified gaps
- Standardised language
- Shared understanding through integrated systems and processes
- The sector has defined capabilities that manage existing and future risk
- Emergency management investment against the State's risk profile is maximised
- Community, business and government capability and capacity are optimised before, during and after an emergency
- Community, business and government understand their current capability and capacity and future requirements before, during and after an emergency.

A number of initiatives are critical in order to address current service delivery gaps and future challenges, including population change (within metropolitan Melbourne and surrounds, and provincial and regional Victoria), climate change, urbanisation, globalisation and inter-generational change.

Initiative: Integrated operational service delivery across Victoria

The strategic vision of focussing on the 'community' as the centre of all activities and 'primacy of life' as the single most important priority are common denominators, forming an ethos and shared values across the fire services.

A traditional view of Melbourne places the Central Business District (CBD) at the hub of activity. The CBD currently swells by about 693,000 people during office hours on top of a resident population of 94,700.¹⁵ While it remains a significant focus of government, business, retail, financial and recreational activity, the CBD has arguably declined in significance as more and more Melburnians transact their everyday lives without entering the precinct on a regular basis.

¹³ Thomas, K., Bergethon, P. and Reimer, M. (2010). 'Interoperability for first responders and emergency management; Definition, need and the path forward', *World Medical & Health Policy*: Vol. 2: No. 3, Article 15.

¹⁴ Emergency Management Victoria (2015) *Victorian Emergency Management Capability Blueprint 2015-2025*, Melbourne.

¹⁵ Foster H., Whittaker J., Towers B. & Handmer J. (2013), 'Metropolitan Melbourne in 2021: changes and implications for the emergency management sector', *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 28(4): 9-14

Surrounding the CBD is the greater Metropolitan area (gMa) with a resident population of 4.25 million people¹⁶, covering 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.¹⁷ This geographic area is served by both MFB and CFA, with many examples of the same service delivery need being provided differently by the two services. The gMa extends beyond the central areas of the city into expanding urban growth corridors that abut grasslands, bushland, coastal plains, flood plains and/or industrial landscapes.

Across these locations, CFA has 114 brigades, of which 22 are integrated stations, providing both paid and volunteer based firefighting response. The need for enhanced service delivery in growth areas within the greater metropolitan area has driven the integration of brigades, providing both paid staff and volunteer services to the community, with an integration across delivery models within CFA to allow for phased response and surge capacity. MFB has 47 stations across these locations – providing fully-staffed operational response.

Fire service delivery is currently based upon the boundaries defined by the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD), the genesis of which can be found in the *Fire Brigades Act 1890*. While the boundary has been altered several times in the intervening 125 years, it remains fundamentally based upon a 10-mile radius from the centre of Melbourne (determined as the General Post Office).¹⁸

While the Government has expressed no intention to alter fire service boundaries, the need for service delivery to transcend them is paramount. MFB and CFA firefighters and senior leadership from both agencies already work together every day, and increasingly MFB, CFA and other agencies work together in regional and rural Victoria during large-scale emergencies.

The current pressures on response in the gMa mean that the need for a flexible model allowing for paid firefighters from both services to move freely across agency boundaries and working across agencies *in partnership with volunteers* is increasingly apparent.

Evolving and broadening the principles of integration in the gMa and more broadly must address the current and emerging needs of Victorian communities. Done effectively, with consultation and commitment, this will enable the workforce of volunteers and paid staff from MFB and CFA, from other agencies and from local resources, to look to the future with confidence, strength of conviction and optimism.

Such a shift does not mean that each agency cannot continue to specialise in meeting the requirements of the communities and they serve. It means that they can connect, communicate, integrate and work together on the ground in practicable ways. This is not an entirely new approach. For example, both agencies are already moving to use the same Breathing Apparatus and other equipment items. This demonstrates the efficiencies and alignment that can be achieved in the day-to-day delivery of fire services across the state.

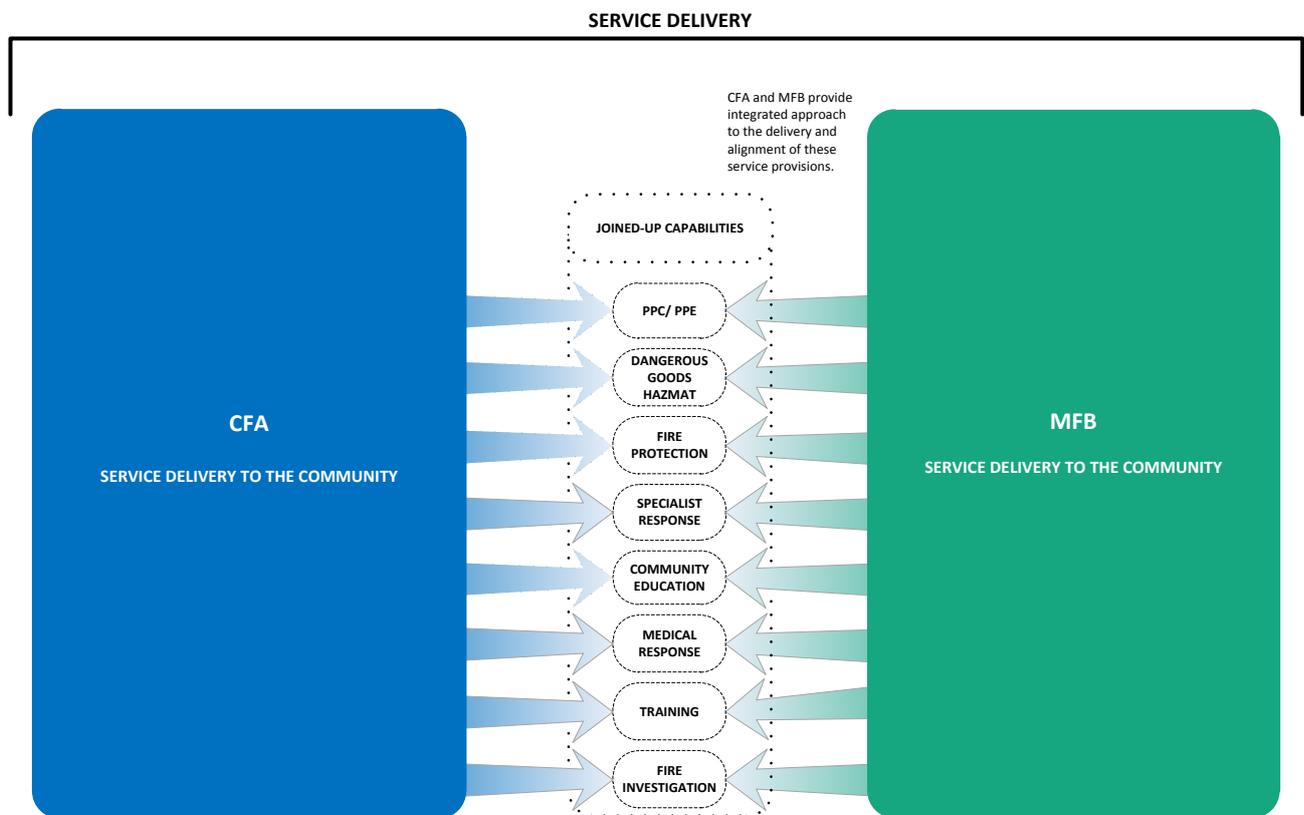
The challenge now is to broaden the cooperative approach to the integration of a range of common services.

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 3218.0 Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2015, www.abs.gov.au

¹⁷ <http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au/living-in-victoria/melbourne-and-regional-victoria/melbourne>

¹⁸ Fire Brigades Act 1890, s.3, First Schedule. Interestingly, the GPO itself no longer exists as an entity.

EMV proposes the following model of joined up investment, resource allocation, acquisition and maintenance:



This model will extend to the metropolitan, provincial, regional and rural areas of Victoria. Interoperability means resources are the same and can move between organisations without barriers and without prescriptive protocols. This is fundamental to good public safety outcomes that are cost effective.

The CFA integrated fire brigade model has proven successful in providing a tiered workforce approach from first response to surge capacity. However, the integrated fire brigade model will require careful management, monitoring and support to ensure it remains relevant and successful into the future.

Currently, many CFA volunteer fire brigades respond with paid firefighters in both CFA and MFB response areas. The CFA-MFB “border areas” involve daily interactions between CFA integrated, CFA volunteer and MFB brigades, through an integrated 000 Call Taking and Dispatch (CAD) system.

Interoperability, along with the alignment of firefighter and officer roles, responsibilities, structures and operating systems, is a critical issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of priority.

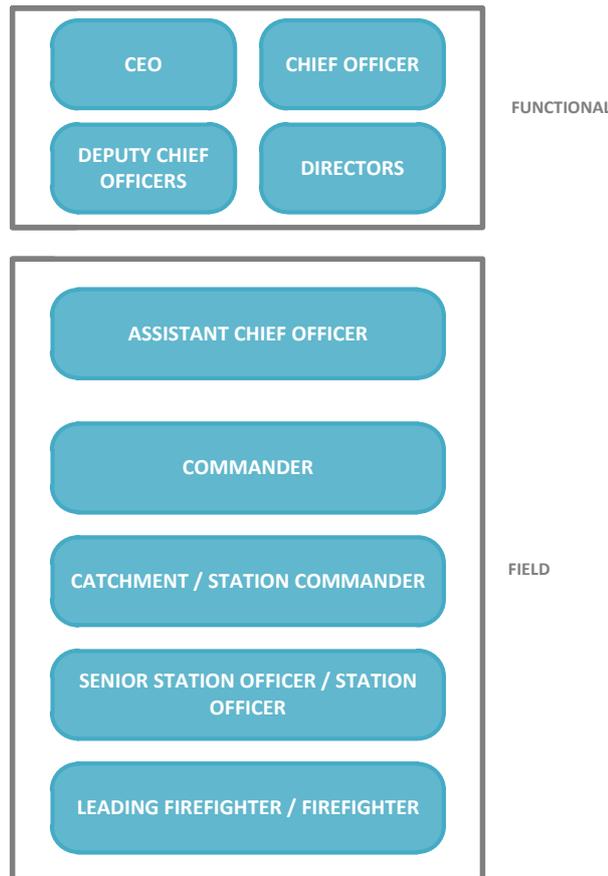
Ultimately, the most effective service delivery occurs when a range of people in a range of roles work together with the community, delivering the most effective programs, products and services to that community. Integrated teams, unified by a common purpose, must become the single service delivery principle used to reset systems, organisational design, culture and key relationships.

Initiative: Aligned operational staffing structure

To increase interoperability between the two fire services, the alignment of the paid firefighter structure will allow for greater support and streamlining of the service.

By taking the strongest elements from both organisations’ current structure, this revised 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. The alignment of the staffing structure will also provide a common hierarchy, mirrored management and consistency between paid staff on the fire ground.

Fire Service Operational Staff Alignment



Initiative: Alignment of operational training

The training and exercising provided to/by our fire services is fundamental to an integrated, seamless service delivery model.

Historically, the respective fire services have delivered different training models, which have evolved according to their respective history, culture, and roles. Volunteer and paid firefighters bring different frames of reference, experience and assumptions to their respective roles. This has helped perpetuate siloed training, specialisation and skills.

Different basic level courses are currently conducted by both fire agencies. Both MFB and CFA provide different recruit level training programs which continue to divide the organisations and prevent the community from receiving standardised levels of service. This practice is not isolated to recruit training, with the majority of leadership training course and specialist courses being run in isolation and without standards, competence and sector alignment.

All firefighters must be provided with accessible, quality training. This takes many forms, but a common theme is the need for flexible delivery given that many volunteers are employed across a range of industries and sectors, especially in rural areas. Initiatives such as web-based training, where this is appropriate, need to be available in order to reduce travelling time and ease the burden of costs incurred by firefighters. There must be training and career plans for volunteers that maximise their potential, increase transferable skills and offer a point of difference from other volunteer organisations vying for an increasingly finite resource.

The sector is already moving towards a more integrated training model: conducting joint activities and sharing resources and facilities and through various programs and materials currently co-delivered or co-attended (for example, bushfire aviation training, road rescue training, warnings and advice officer training, mapping officer training, leadership development, the Basic Wildfire Awareness National Short Course and bushfire investigator training).

With the introduction of Victorian Emergency Management Training Centres (VEMTC), the sector has commenced providing the physical mechanism for coordinated training to occur. However, this philosophy and practice needs to permeate further, directly influencing course curriculum and recruit training.

Integrated recruit training has been piloted with through the implementation of a single recruit course training model. Current and forecast budgetary constraints suggest further efficiencies will be necessary in this area and the sector must continue to remove duplication of effort and resourcing.

Initiative: Alignment of all fire service equipment

Separate equipment procurement processes and vehicle building programs over many years has ensured that the State's two fire services are not aligned in this respect. CFA and MFB still have different hose couplings on their respective vehicles, resulting in an inability to share water or pumps without using adaptors when attending the same scene.

It also demonstrates the lack of organisational awareness and acumen to consolidation and procurement of a range of equipment and services to maximise purchasing power resulting in significant savings that may be reinvested to improve performance across the services.

There are multiple opportunities for common equipment such as fire appliances, structural and bushfire firefighting protective clothing, radio equipment, helmets (for structure and bush firefighting), motor vehicles, IT equipment, detection analysis and monitoring equipment, encapsulated HAZMAT suits and protective clothing to not only provide standardised equitable access across the agencies to resources, assets, it enables purchasing power and cost efficiencies.

Initiative: Special Operations – a single approach

The revised service delivery model detailed above articulates the need for direct fire services enhancement across the agencies.

A single approach to special operations, such as HAZMAT, dangerous goods, specialist response (e.g. trench rescue) and fire investigation across the fire agencies, will enhance the capability and capacity of each agency to respond, and provide consistency to staff and the community.

A single management structure to lead and manage specialist response is critical for interoperability. This streamlining will enhance the cost efficiencies, removing the duplication of effort, resources and budget, erasing the annual competition for budget between the two fire agencies, for activities and services that are additional to core business, but a key service requirement as Victoria environment and industry changes.

Initiative: Enhanced business systems to support integrated service delivery and improved outcomes

The strategic allocation by the State of budget and resources in emergency management is analogous to many other arms of government.

However, the dislocated and duplicated nature of the current arrangements mitigate against financial and administrative efficiencies. In the aftermath of the 2009 Victorian bushfires, a significant injection funds was made to fire agencies to disburse without the advantage of an overarching strategic plan.

The fire agencies continue to be challenged in meeting some of the reporting and monitoring requirements of government regarding their business management and service delivery standards. The Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) reported that [response] agencies measures are not appropriate to measure overall emergency service performance, there is weakness in internal data controls and their current data collection systems are not reliable¹⁹.

This situation is not entirely of the fire agencies' making. For example, both fire agencies utilise the nationally controlled AIRS tool for recording structure fire data. However, the functionality of the tool is limited due to lack of contemporary measures (e.g. mobile phones as an object of origin). Compounding this data inaccuracy is the fact that agencies then use different classifications for internal service reporting (e.g. room of origin v. object of origin).

Due to the nature of systems and unaligned financial and project reporting processes within each agency, there are major data collection and collation inconsistencies, which in turn leads to different measurement and monitoring approaches being undertaken by both. This becomes problematic when agencies are required to report to a number of government mechanisms, including BP3, Expenditure Review Sub Committee (ERSC) (for funded initiatives), Report on Government Services (RoGs) and the Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2015-2018.

Each agency has varying asset and resource approaches to business planning, procurement, maintenance, reporting, financial monitoring, human resources, fleet and personnel management and infrastructure. The difference in measurement interpretations and business systems has resulted in the agencies, which provide the same service delivery outcomes, being unable to provide consistent, comparative, cost data analysis and performance measures in relation to overall service delivery.

The current performance measures are predominantly output focused and warrant further investigation, given the significant ongoing investments and operating expenditure disbursed in building and maintaining the current capacity and capability of the agencies. It would be timely to further examine the issues surrounding the current service delivery standards used (e.g. response times, etc.) to determine if they continue to provide the best approach to improved fire safety outcomes for Victoria.

It is crucial that CFA and MFB undertake a major realignment of their core business systems, business planning and continue to update/upgrade to meet their respective, corporate, legal and government needs. The services must work together to meet their respective obligations and government requirements, including alignment to the Victorian government procurement policy and *Victorian Industry Participation Policy Act 2003*, and integrate systems and services in support of a truly integrated and interoperable approach.

Opportunities exist to overhaul the business systems to allow for the organisations to modernise their data analytics, which would in turn provide each agency with a clear understanding of their

¹⁹ Victorian Auditor - Generals (2014), Emergency Response ICT Systems. Melbourne.

organisation capability and capacity drivers. This change in how the agencies utilise their business intelligence data, will lead to greater understanding of where the sector is going and how the agencies can meet this change.

Without addressing the issues and critical points of failure in the business systems and processes, infrastructure and planning, it will not be possible for true fire ground interoperability and integration to be realised.

A diverse workforce

Workforce diversity is a critical element of the fire services' future that requires particular attention. Victoria's communities can no longer be defined simply by geographical locations. Diverse cultures, religious affiliations, interests, and virtual and decentralised work arrangements are examples of emerging challenges to how the fire services engage with communities with highly varied capacities, needs and expectations.

The recently released *Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan (SAP) 2015-2018* identifies the need for the sector to consider diversification within the employee and volunteer workforce, diversity awareness in service design and innovative engagement approaches. Only then will the sector maintain connection with emerging changes in the Victorian community and be truly reflective of the community it serves.

Across Victoria, 26.2 per cent of residents were born overseas (drawn from more than 200 countries), 67.7 per cent follow 135 faiths and over 23.1 per cent speak a language other than English at home²⁰.

It is safe to say that the fire and emergency services and even the wider sector scarcely reflect this demographic profile. Within the fire agencies, the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) population is a notably absent.

But perhaps of more significance is the gender imbalance. Only 2 per cent of paid firefighters within CFA are women, alongside 16 per cent of volunteers. Within MFB, 4 per cent of trained firefighters are women.

To reflect the community they serve more appropriately, the fire agencies need to provide a workplace/organisational structure that encourages, fosters, motivates, embraces and supports diversity and gender equality. There are existing models for such an approach in both the public and private sectors. Victoria Police provides a positive example of a proactive diversity program within the emergency services.

Historically, firefighting roles – both paid and volunteer – have been the province of white males. Female volunteer firefighters were first recruited by CFA in the early 1980s. The first female firefighters were recruited into MFB in 1988. Even so, until now the cohort of firefighters has not included a high level of women or reflected diverse populations due to the stereotyped physical requirements and culture that surrounds these activities. However, as the community and non-traditional roles change, the agencies must adapt or be left behind.

A “quick fix” is not achievable to address this imbalance. Redressing it cannot be undertaken without consideration and deeper understanding of gender and diversity within the emergency management context.

²⁰ Victoria's Diverse population 2011 census_ Revised Edition August 2013 www.multicultural.vic.gov.au

A recent study of women leaders in the UK Fire and Rescue Service pointed to:

the difficulties faced when seeking recognition as a skilled woman in this context given the persistence of firefighter men as the occupational ideal type. Achieving recognition for both physical and non-physical skills remained an embodied, gendered and contested process and one that was not eased by promotion.²¹

At the governance level, the Victorian Government has made a commitment to ensuring that no less than 50 per cent of all future appointments to paid Government boards being women. This will need to be considered in conjunction with details around the skill set or expertise required to be a board member, the barriers to meeting this commitment, and whether an exemption should be sought and if so why.

Initiative: Embedding gender, diversity and inclusion into fire service recruitment

Leadership will be a critical factor in embedding a gender and diversity lens over the fire services and effect the greatest behavioural change. In the short term, the focus must be on

- Annual increases in the number of women in each agency
- Ensuring that agencies are appealing and supportive places for women to work
- Effecting diversity in both operational and non-operational roles
- Targeted recruitment campaigns
- Supported roles for volunteers and innovative ways to increase social cohesion and participation at a community level.

Future attention must to be paid to diversity targets within the paid model in order to create positive and enduring change within organisational culture.

An integrated workforce

Neither volunteering nor a fully paid fire service alone can deliver the future fire service needs of Victoria.

Integration, harmonisation and cohesion between volunteer and paid firefighters and other emergency service workers is critical. Integration in the fire services by function is as important as through organisational structures.

Moreover, integration is not just about the fire services or just about CFA staff and volunteers. It extends in an operational sense to non-volunteer agencies at any fire or incident where more than one agency is involved. This already happens on a daily basis across Victoria. It extends further into integrated emergency management, where paid and volunteer personnel do not simply work, but also lead as one.

The provision of paid fire and emergency services brings with it a range of challenges, not in the least the extent to which the State can match community expectations.

Initiative: A flexible and effective paid and volunteer workforce

Volunteering provides Victorians with an opportunity to connect to their communities and to create a sense of belonging and safety. Within rural, regional and some suburban communities, it is

²¹ Woodfield, R. (2015), Gender and the achievement of skilled status in the workplace: the case of women leaders in the UK Fire and Rescue Service, *Work Employment & Society*, 22 May <http://wes.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/05/22/0950017015573693.abstract>

common for generations of families to volunteer with an organisation, with some volunteering for multiple agencies.

However, the landscape of volunteering is undergoing significant change. This is a process of transformation rather than of decline. The future landscape of emergency service volunteering is one populated by a much wider and more diverse range of players than in the past. The generations we must look to are looking for a different type of volunteerism and volunteer experience than previous generations.

Emergency service volunteering is fundamentally different to many other volunteer roles where participation is characterised by the element of free choice and will. The demands of emergency services roles mean that these volunteers have an obligation to respond urgently and effectively, maintain a level of training and competency, and being willing make personal sacrifices in order to work in often arduous and dangerous environments. This difference is important when considering how best to integrate volunteering into any new governance arrangements for Victoria's fire services.

Volunteering will remain critical to the delivery of community services throughout Victoria. When volunteers provide their time and resources, not only do they help to deliver services and contribute to the community, they enable these services to be delivered more cost effectively and more comprehensively than if delivered entirely by a paid workforce.

Understanding the impacts of urbanisation across the emergency management sector, takes many forms, and while significant work has been undertaken on urban risk profiles, critical infrastructure and associated vulnerabilities, there is limited acknowledgement and awareness of the impact urbanisation plays on the emergency services workforce.

Some research suggests that urban communities are substantially more "heterogeneous, complex and engage in sophisticated methods of interactions" than their rural counterparts. City communities by definition are locations where there can be hundreds, if not thousands of coexisting disparate communities that overlap and interact continuously²².

Urban communities are increasingly more likely than rural communities to be based on extensive social networks that are independent of each other (more so with the prevalence of social networking extending the "friends" beyond the boundaries of a person's home city/geographic location).²³ The need for the services to understand what it is to be an urban volunteer and their drivers for volunteering is an integral step in enhancing volunteering in city-based locations.

The challenge for the future is to ensure that our emergency management workforce is connected by the common goals that binds it together rather than those things that differentiate individuals. Encouraging volunteerism to grow, even in the face of changing community norms and an ageing population, is a critical challenge in Victoria as it is in many other parts of the world. It is necessary to respond to changing trends and to embrace new opportunities, so that this aspect of emergency management remains vibrant and strong.

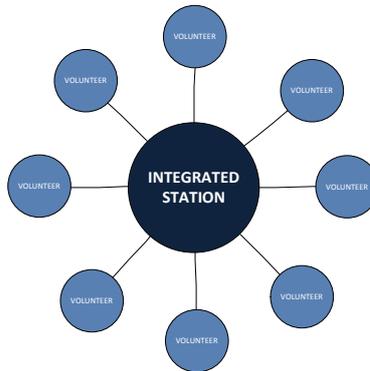
The conditions and arrangements prospective volunteers will be looking for will be more varied, flexible and modernised to take advantage of technology and innovation.

Sustainable emergency service volunteering is in part reliant on the maturity of leaders, organisational nurturing and flexible adaption of a broader integrated service model that we have known to date. A broader, more evolved model that is integrated at the frontline enables shared responsibility with the community, other agencies and local government.

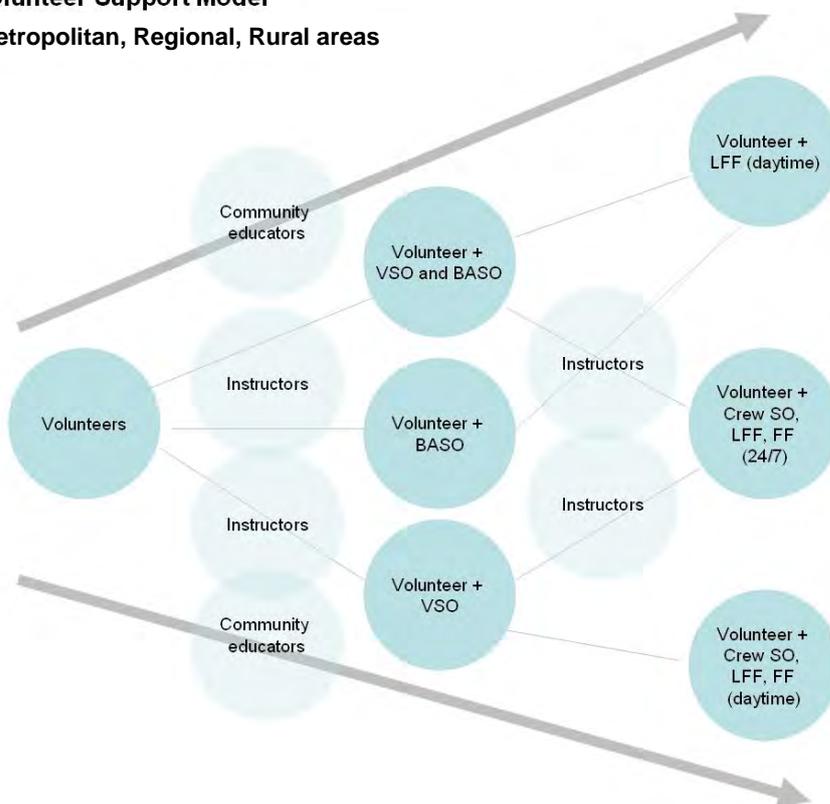
²² EMI, 2012, *Programmatic directions for the Red Cross and Red Crescent in building urban community resilience in the Asia Pacific Region*, report for the IFRC submitted by Earthquakes and Megacities Initiative, Inc.

²³ Taylor, N. (2014). *Urban Volunteering in Asia Pacific – A study of recruitment, engagement and retention* – International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The same purpose, principles and arrangements must apply whether the context is an outer metropolitan CFA or MFB fire brigade, a regional CFA brigade or one in a rural area. The illustrations below are examples of how an integrated paid and volunteer workforce could work together in a supportive manner.



Volunteer Support Model
Metropolitan, Regional, Rural areas



A practical model needs to be developed which better supports volunteers by allowing operational staff to:

- Provide competent response capability to emergency situations consistent with the training and experience in a firefighting position
- Under supervision assist, or within their competence, conduct training and education sessions for volunteers, staff and the community
- Perform minor maintenance on operational equipment and in other areas as agreed between the parties
- Undertake risk management duties within their competence as required
- Provide support to and establish and maintain an effective working relationship with volunteer personnel

- Carry out administrative duties
- Establish an effective customer service relationship with the community and industry
- Provide operational support as required
- Establish and maintain a level of competence appropriate to their own position.

Measuring and evaluating the support given to volunteers by the agencies and government more broadly is one way of acknowledging both their value and place in the provision of fire and emergency services in Victoria. The Western Australian Auditor-General recently undertook such an exercise. Not surprising, perhaps, the audit concluded that “maintaining a sustainable volunteer workforce is a looming issue”. The report also pointed to the need for “improved processes for consulting with and engaging volunteers”.²⁴

At a high level, support to volunteers in Victoria needs to address the following:

- Training
- Consultation and decision making
- Integration
- Monitoring and evaluation of investment, planning evidence of change.

Increases in the overall workload upon volunteer brigades stem from external and internal sources. Community risk, numbers of callouts, training to maintain competency, delivery of community education and other fire safety work – all of these factors combine to create a workload that puts some brigades under stress.

What matters to volunteers most is the level and quality of support available rather than the number of staff. In some regional towns and areas, the traditional model of response has developed gaps that pose a genuine risk to the delivery of effective services. It is well recognised that in some areas, volunteers are working elsewhere during the day, economic pressures mean some employers find it more difficult to release employees for emergency response and daytime hours become a real stress for volunteer leaders responsible for ensuring appliances get out the door with a competent crew. The combination of general workload and response activity can be a heavy burden for volunteers to carry.

CFA’s current Volunteer Support Model provides administration and general support, training and community education support for volunteers. In some districts this works well, in others it is less effective due to industrial impediments and the availability of staff to deliver what is required when volunteers cannot attend. The most significant area of support that CFA cannot currently provide to volunteer brigades, is that of a paid firefighter who works during the day to support response, while performing other duties already contained in a position description of a paid firefighter.

While the three primary CFA roles that support volunteers are Operations Officer, Brigade Administrative Support Officer (BASO) and a Volunteer Support officer, all paid members have a role in supporting volunteers. For example, one of the key result areas in the position description of a Leading Firefighter is to “provide support to and establish and maintain an effective working relationship with volunteer personnel.”

The flexibility of the integrated brigade model should be extended to having a Leading Firefighter working daytime hours in regional towns and regional areas, as an additional step in the continuum of support. A revised model that better utilises permanent staff including BASOs, Leading Firefighters and senior operational staff is fundamental to the provision of an effective service to community that meets needs and maintains community trust.

²⁴ Western Australian Auditor General (2015), *Support and Preparedness of Fire and Emergency Services Volunteers*, Report 17, August. Perth.

This model also provides the additional benefit of promoting understanding by having Leading Firefighters work directly with volunteers at an early stage in their career development. Such an initiative will also help maintain, develop and grow staff and volunteer community connections. It also has two further critical benefits for a sustainable CFA.

The first is the most cost effective support where one role can support a brigade or catchment in all roles – response, training, community education, fire safety and general duties. The second is the value of getting the new generation of Leading Firefighters into the field, working closely with volunteers in their further promotion and development.

The implementation is critical to ensure that the role of additional CFA paid members is to support rather than manage volunteers, who are led and managed by other volunteers through brigades and Group management teams.

Attachment 1 Terms of Reference

Inquiries Act 2014

Review of the Fire Services

I, Jane Garrett MP, Minister for Emergency Services, with the approval of the Premier, appoint David O'Byrne under section 93(2) of the Inquiries Act 2014 to constitute a Formal Review to inquire into and report on the terms of reference specified in this instrument.

1. Terms of Reference

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.

2. Reporting Date

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

3. Authority to incur expenses and financial obligations

3.1 [Redacted from circulation version.]

4. Manner in which the inquiry of the Formal Review is to be conducted

4.1 The Formal Review may conduct its inquiry, subject to s. 99 of the Inquiries Act 2014, in the manner it considers appropriate, which may include:

- (a) obtaining written submissions from key stakeholders; (b) interviewing representatives from key stakeholders;
- (c) conducting research into fire services in other Australian or international fire services; and/or
- (d) conducting a literature search.

4.2 For the purposes of this clause, "key stakeholders" include, but is not limited to:

- (a) CFA;
- (b) MFB;
- (c) Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning;
- (d) Emergency Management Victoria;
- (e) United Firefighters Union of Australia Victorian Branch; (f) Community Public Sector Union;
- (g) Australian Workers Union;
- (h) Australian Services Union; and
- (i) Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

Jane Garrett MP
Minister for Emergency Services

Attachment 2 Victoria's Fire Services – history, tradition and culture

In Victoria, the history of fire prevention and suppression and the agencies built around those objectives largely mirror the social structures around them. In some respects, they have become deeply rooted in the past, beholden to traditions and practices that no longer meet the demands of a rapidly changing State.

While much has been written about the history of Victoria's fire services, there has been little serious study in Australia of the culture, structures and systems that define the fire agencies.

History and tradition

Organised firefighting in Melbourne dates to the 1840s. Firefighting was provided by volunteer brigades (the earliest formed in 1845) funded by insurance companies along a model similar to that in Britain. The first manual fire engine was owned and operated by the Launceston-based Cornwall Fire Insurance Company arrived in 1845. The first part-paid, part-time fire brigade, the Melbourne Fire Prevention Society, was organised in the same year, partially funded through public subscriptions. Police and military supplemented firefighting efforts.²⁵ A brigade, complete with manual engine, was formed at Geelong in 1849.²⁶

Organised firefighting in Victoria began in earnest with the gold rushes and the arrival in Victoria of American miners and others who had worked on the Californian goldfields. They brought with them the experience of volunteer fire brigades that dominated in urban areas of the United States.²⁷ This in turn influenced the rapid expansion of volunteer brigades in Melbourne, which began to spread into the suburbs as the city grew. In the 1880s, at least 50 such brigades were formed. It also led to the early establishment of fire brigades in provincial centres such as Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo.

An uneasy and at times fiercely competitive coalition of insurance, industry and volunteer brigades co-existed in metropolitan Victoria over the next half century. These were based on suburbs, industries (notably brewing and baking), common interest (temperance brigades) or occupation (the Victorian Railways brigade). It would be almost half a century before the metropolitan fire service would be consolidated into a single service.²⁸

The Metropolitan Fire Brigade was formed in 1891 – although part-paid firefighters remained a feature of the service until 1950.²⁹

In rural cities and towns, volunteer fire brigades grew through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Eventually these came under the control of a central board, while firefighting in more remote rural areas remained on an ad hoc basis.

Another half century would elapse before the formation of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in 1945, prompted by the disastrous bushfires of 1939 and spurred into existence by further serious fires across the state in 1944. The CFA was tasked with the prevention and suppression of fire on private land in country Victoria.

The CFA has since grown into a diverse organisation serving a large proportion of Melbourne's outer-suburbs, along with provincial centres and rural Victoria. It now comprises a combination of

²⁵ Wilde, S. (1991), *Life Under the Bells*, Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 4-8.

²⁶ Murray, R. and White, K. (1995), *State of Fire: A History of Volunteer Firefighting and the CFA in Victoria*, Fitzroy: Hargreen, 6

²⁷ Murray, R. and White, K. (1995), 25ff.

²⁸ Wilde, S. (1991), 8-27.

²⁹ Wilde, S. (1991), 152.

integrated brigades, in which full time paid firefighters and volunteers serve together, and wholly volunteer brigades at more than 1200 locations across the state.

Another outcome of the Royal Commission into the 1939 fires³⁰ headed by L.E.B. Stretton was the *Forests Act 1939*, which empowered the Forests Commission – later incorporated into the precursors of the Department of Environment, Lands Water and Planning (DELWP) – to take complete control of fire suppression and prevention on public land in Victoria. The DELWP Fire and Emergency Management branch subsequently evolved into a significant firefighting organisation in its own right.

Culture

The development of Victoria's fire services has at once been an organic process and a highly regulated one.

The passage of the *Fire Brigades Act 1890* – which established both the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and the Country Fire Brigades Board – marked the start of the new age of firefighting in Victoria. It established the structures that placed firefighting in Victoria on a centralised footing, further enhanced by the *Country Fire Authority Act 1944*, which established the CFA. The models and practice that flowed from this legislative basis entrenched the cultures that have predominated in Victoria's fire services for the past century or more.

In *Crucible of Fire*³¹, a study of urban firefighting in the United States, Bruce Hensler points to a number of challenges to the future of the fire services in that country. The parallels with Victoria (and the rest of Australia for that matter) are clear – and not surprising given a shared history. A key difference in the US is the far less centralised system, in which urban and suburban fire departments are based on municipal boundaries and in which volunteers dominated in 85 per cent of all departments.

While firefighters internalise the difference between their services, these largely remain obscure to the broader community, especially in urban areas.

The average person is unlikely to be able to discern the difference between a volunteer and a paid firefighter, especially in the performance of fighting a fire.³²

Working or volunteering as a firefighter in this country is generally very rewarding, resulting in a feeling doing something important and making a contribution to society. However, there is cause for concern for the volunteer fire service as it struggles to exist in a complex world while still maintaining those elements of its nature that have sustained it as a form of fire protection for over two hundred years.³³

As in the US, Victoria is on the cusp of a new era in firefighting. The traditions and models of the past – proud and much loved as they are – may not be the best guide to how the future should be. Tradition and past practice do not deliver efficiencies or safer outcomes for communities or the fire services themselves.

³⁰ *Report of the Royal Commission to inquire into the causes of and measures taken to prevent the bush fires of January, 1939 and to protect life and property and the measures to be taken to prevent bush fires in Victoria and to protect life and property in the event of future bush fires*, Melbourne: Government Printer, 1939.

³¹ Hensler, B. (2011) *Crucible of Fire: Nineteenth-Century Urban Fires and the Making of the Modern Fire Service*, Washington: Potomac Books.

³² Hensler, B. (2011), 17

³³ Hensler, B. (2011), 14.

In 2015, EMV places community at the centre of fire and emergency management. Historically, the fire services, insurers, government and even the community have placed the fire services at the centre.

When firefighters claim the service represents ‘250 years of tradition unimpeded by progress’ they are unknowingly referring to their collective tendency to retain cultural artefacts or traditions and practices from the past. Some of the traditions and practices are not rational, as they have no basis or need in the present.³⁴

There remains, in Victoria as in other Australian jurisdictions and the US, an explicit tension between paid and volunteer firefighters. The reality, however, is that Victoria cannot provide appropriate fire service coverage to its communities without volunteers in either urban or rural settings. There are around 2,750 full-time firefighters spread across the two Victorian fire services. CFA has approximately 38,300 operational volunteers.

The simple economics of a full-time fire service covering the entire state using the current service delivery model insisted upon by the firefighters’ industrial body is increasingly problematic. Moreover, the broader social and political consequences of dispensing with a volunteer-based service across much of Victoria would be significant and unpalatable to a broad cross-section of the community.

There are some fundamental challenges to the future of volunteer firefighting in Victoria, just as there are elsewhere. These challenges are as much external as they are internal to the fire services. At the forefront are social and demographic shifts over which the fire services themselves have little control but to which they must adjust in order to serve the community effectively.

Other tensions are beginning to affect the culture of the fire services. Victoria is growing in population and at the same time the population overall is ageing. Firefighting is physically demanding and benefits from a cohort of young adults to draw upon for as firefighters. The reality in many communities is that this simply no longer exists.

People are moving into areas where the risk of fire is growing, especially due to factors such as climate change. The phenomena of “sea change” and “tree change” are pushing populations into fire rich environments. Outer-urban or “interface” settlement is increasing as metropolitan Melbourne and a number of larger provincial cities, such as Ballarat and Bendigo, expand.

Many smaller rural towns are in decline as the traditional structure of agriculture changes and as people move to the cities and larger towns in search of employment. Their departure poses a challenge not just for local fire brigades, but a whole range of community groups.

The option of a fully professionalised service in Victoria is clearly unrealistic. Other options such as “retained” (paid part-time) firefighters used in other jurisdictions such as New South Wales, would need to be evaluated in terms of cost efficiency, social inclusion and sustainability to determine their effectiveness in delivering fire service coverage.

³⁴ Hensler, B. (2011), 71

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This document requires the following approval:

Name	Title	Organisation
Craig Lapsley	Emergency Management Commissioner	Emergency Management Victoria
Neil Robertson	Chief Executive	Emergency Management Victoria

Acronyms	Description
EMV	Emergency Management Victoria
CFA	Country Fire Authority
MFB	Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board