

Submission to Fire Services Review

by David Reid

I am a volunteer member of the CFA. I am making this submission as an individual and it represents my own views and opinions.

I would like to address two points in the terms of reference.

(a) an assessment of the resourcing requirements necessary to ensure Victoria is appropriately equipped and fire ready

The fire services in Victoria face significant and ongoing pressures to their budget. Fleet maintenance and replacement obviously makes up a large part of the budget. These costs are largely inflexible: all brigades require appropriate firefighting vehicles as their most basic and most expensive piece of equipment.

At present there doesn't seem to be a clear plan for year on year replacement of vehicles approaching the end of their working life. Brigades with vehicles approaching the end of their life often have no clear idea when their vehicle will be replaced. Older vehicles lack many safety features that are present on newer vehicles. They also have higher maintenance costs and are more likely to spend time off-line for repairs. For these reasons brigades are keen to have their vehicles replaced as soon as possible.

There is a need for a clear and transparent process for the allocation of new or replacement vehicles. Currently funding for new vehicles seems to be announced in accordance with electoral cycles rather than as part of a long term planning process with a clearly defined ongoing budget.

(h) the best mechanism to provide support for volunteer fire brigades and to ensure their viability in providing emergency services

The greatest threat facing CFA's future as a volunteer-based emergency service is demographic change and in particular the age profile of volunteer members. Clearly the most important priority in addressing this problem is recruiting and retaining more young members.

There needs to be a recognition that younger people may come to the CFA with different goals and expectations to older and long serving members. I suggest that one way more young people could be attracted to the organisation is a clearer pathway for training and leadership development. A clear training syllabus should be developed that would lead to the award of certificates under the National Qualifications Framework. Also consideration should be given to changing the way brigades select and elect their leaders. The age profile of the leadership team could be lowered by measures such as term limits and setting aside some leadership positions for younger members.