

[REDACTED] - Submission in relation to Fire Services Reform

About my history with CFA-

I have long standing ties to CFA. My father, following 35 years' involvement, is both a brigade and CFA Life Member and to this day continues this involvement albeit as a less active member due to ill health. I have grown up around this organisation and as soon as I was old enough, began my own involvement as a junior at the age of 11. Once I turned 17 years of age, I moved into the senior ranks. My 14 years as an operational volunteer included many as our brigade's 4th Lieutenant. I have now spent the last 16 years as a CFA career firefighter, and like a large percentage of CFA's career firefighters who began life as a volunteer, have devoted a significant part of my life to this organisation.

It must be said from the beginning, what I write here is not an attack on the volunteer members of this organisation, a number of who remain very good friends.

A changing environment for volunteer response-

In general, there has been a significant change in people's priorities as could be expected in a fast paced and developing society, as the pressures on work and our family life increase. These priorities reduce the amount of time a person can commit to an organisation like CFA. Employers are now less likely to allow their staff to leave work and attend fires and incidents as they have in the past. This was becoming evident even when I was still working in my previous employment and responding as a volunteer Lieutenant. Toward the latter period of time I was employed there it was becoming more difficult to be released to attend fire calls, and when it means lost production in a private and competitive industry, this is understandable.

It is for these reasons we can no longer be guaranteed the response of a fully volunteer crewed appliance in these busy areas. This is the reason we now respond more than 1 appliance out of Ballarat City to all reported structure fire calls to ensure an appropriate and safe number of personnel arrive on the fire/incident ground in an expedient manner (i.e. the much discussed and debated 7 on the fire ground). We have been doing this for approximately 2 years now. Here are just a few of the many examples where I have personally encountered response issues-

- Arriving at a fully involved house fire where it was still unknown if there were any persons unaccounted for with a crew of just 3 (Myself and 2 others), and the next arriving appliance on scene 8 mins later, which was a replacement following the failure of the primary brigade's initial response.
- Requesting a 4th Pumper appliance to a house fire in the Ballarat CBD due to extremely hot weather to allow for rotation of Breathing Apparatus (BA) wearers. I did this only to discover the crew of 5 included 4 in Wildfire PPC (not safe for structure fire attack) and the only BA qualified crew member sporting a full beard which prevents the wearing of BA.
- Responding on our second Pumper in support of our first Pumper to multiple reports of a structure fire with injuries when it became apparent an appliance from the primary brigade had not responded following 14mins passing.
- Many occasions where we will receive what we refer to as a "double header" or even a "triple header" which is being responded to 2 or 3 different emergency calls at the same time.

7 for safety-

This is the reason for our request of 7 career firefighters to be dispatched to fires in the larger outer metropolitan and provincial cities in areas that are covered by professional career firefighters. This does not apply to areas outside these centres, and will not prevent the first arriving crews from beginning firefighting operations be it career or volunteer. The minimum of 7 allows for the safe deployment of crews. As an example, when responded to a structure fire, tasking would be as follows-

- 1x SO/SSO as Incident Controller
- 2x BA wearers undertaking internal operations including search and rescue
- 2x BA wearers available outside in case of an issue with internal crews where a rescue is required
- 1x Driver/Pump operator
- 1x Auxiliary crew member i.e. pump operator's assistant (to obtain a water supply for the appliance), equipment "gofer" or to provide first aid to injured persons

None of the above means there is no longer a requirement for the volunteers to respond. And if an appropriate and sufficient response of volunteer crewed appliances occurs for support responses, it will allow either the cancellation or release of the subsequent responding professional crewed appliances.

The play on emotion-

Unfortunately, whenever we raise issues related to volunteer response and training standards we are automatically seen as “attacking volunteers” and their dedication to their community. This type of “emotional” rhetoric makes it very difficult to raise concerns about serious issues related to the quality of our emergency response capability. When one group of people play the “we all do it purely for the benefit of our communities and without remuneration” card, and the other is perceived as not having the same values or dedication because they have chosen to do it as a career, it makes it very challenging for any real change to be achieved.

There are differences between volunteer and career staff crewed appliances-

There is a constant amount of deceptiveness when it is stated that “we are all trained to the same standards”. Below are the minimum training requirements for a volunteer to be determined as being able to respond to fire and emergency calls as taken from CFA’s review of Minimum Skills. The Minimum Skills profile is CFA’s minimum level of training to be able to respond to calls, but is the absolute basic level of training. It does not include specialist structural firefighting skills.

- Respond safely to pager message
- Maintain personal safety – PPC/PPE, burn over drill, hydration, etc.
- Follow instructions – chain of command
- Work as part of a team – support team safety
- Identify, explain purpose, locate and stow small gear on primary vehicle/s
- Use basic small gear – hoses, branches, ladders, axes, hydrants
- Use radio – On/off, change channel, send basic radio message – leaving station, on scene, returning to station, back at station, mayday
- Read maps – locate position on map using 6 figure grid reference, provide 6 figure grid reference for current location + GPS as appropriate
- Supply water in / water out – basic pump operation, drafting, connect hoses and branches, deliver water
- Maintain basic situational awareness – hazard identification, basic risk management

These are the competencies gained as part of Minimum Skills training in CFA depending on the stream Required. They are generally obtainable over a few weekends of training-

All New Members			
<p>Profile: Induction</p> <p>Welcome to CFA delivered to all new members. This provides an overview of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organisation ▪ Safety first principles ▪ Member services ▪ Policies and procedures ▪ Volunteer Code of Conduct ▪ Volunteer Charter. 			
Emergency Response Streams			
Land Based Firefighting	Marine Response	Medical Response	
<p>Profile: Competencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PUAFIR201A: Prevent injuries ▪ PUAOHS002A: Maintain safety at an incident scene ▪ PUATEA001A: Work in a team ▪ PUAOPE002A: Operate communication systems and equipment 			
M I N I M U M S K I L L S	<p>Profile: Wildfire (Q0002)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PUAFIR204A: Respond to wildfire ▪ PUAFIR309A: Operate pumps ▪ END TANKER (G): Operate pump on a tanker. 	<p>Profile: Marine Response 1A</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PUAFIR202A: Respond to isolated/remote structure fire ▪ TDMMF701A: Observe safe working practices ▪ TDMMF1101A: Survive at sea in the event of vessel abandonment ▪ MROCP: Marine radio operators certificate of proficiency. 	<p>Profile: Emergency Medical Responder</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PUAEME002B: Manage injuries at an emergency ▪ HLTFA402B: Apply advanced first aid.

It is also important to understand that there are no minimum entry requirements for volunteer applicants to meet either fitness wise, or is there any psychometric testing to check their suitability for the role.

Beyond the minimum skills required that provide an individual member with the ability to respond to any emergency call, depending on the brigade's classification, the following skills pathways training is provided to members (firefighting stream shown only)-

Skills Pathways

Profile: Wildfire-low structure (Q0003)

- All wildfire plus
- **PUAFIR202A:** Respond to isolated/remote structure fire.

Profile: Wildfire structure (Q0004)

- All wildfire-low structure plus
- **PUAFIR207A:** Operate breathing apparatus (open circuit)
- **CFA076:** HAZMAT awareness
- **END ADV PUMP:** Advanced pumping operations.

Profile: Structure Wildfire (Q0005)

- All wildfire structure plus
- **PUAFIR206A:** Check installed fire safety systems
- **PUAFIR203A:** Respond to urban fire
- **PUAFIR308A:** Employ personal protection at a hazardous materials incident.

Each brigade profile has a minimum expected number of members they should maintain with these qualifications. It does not however mean that a member must have obtained all or any these competencies to be able to respond on appliance. When an appliance responds with a fully volunteer crew, there is no guarantee as to the numbers and makeup of the crew on board i.e. what their qualifications are above that of the Minimum Skills profile. There may be no one on board with any of these competencies, all on board who have all these competencies, or any mixture in between. In other words, there may or may not be anybody with the required skills.

It is important to note that some volunteers are highly trained and experienced and may go on to achieve competencies well beyond those as listed here. However, those volunteers are mostly in the minority.

This issue was further compounded when VFBV and CFA came to an agreement on a two-tiered Breathing Apparatus (BA) training and qualification. This was apparently agreed to due to the limited time a volunteer has to train and the level of training expected to obtain a full BA qualification. Effectively it is the difference between being able to affect a rescue of trapped persons in their home, or only being able to stand outside in smoke.

NOTE: The following 2 articles are in relation to this agreement and are taken directly from the VFBV website-

WEDNESDAY, 24 APRIL 2013 11:13

Breathing Apparatus Competency/Proficiency

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VFBV URGES NEW THINKING BY CFA

VFBV's State Training Committee is pursuing a sensible approach to a phased or pathway model of skills and experiences to allow members to train and acquire breathing apparatus use and endorsement, targeting building skills, proficiency and member confidence.

In some parts of the State, artificial limits or barriers exist for members to be accepted for training and endorsement as BA Operators due to local rules that require a member to demonstrate competence in wearing and completing Search & Rescue operations in hostile hot fire simulated assessments at CFA's Field Training Grounds.

VFBV's position is simple, the complete BA / S&R competence is desirable and would be mandatory for a member who is tasked to enter a structure and conduct search and rescue activities, particularly in the pursuit of protecting life and property. Our State Training Committee, supported by the State Operations Committee, is advocating for a common sense approach that would permit members to be introduced to BA along a skills acquisition and experience pathway.


Wearing BA as a modern day firefighter is no longer a specialist skill. VFBV argues that it is at the core of protection for members and capability of members to operate effectively in their fireground roles. The concept VFBV is promoting would see members introduced to the equipment at brigades and dedicated training exercises, mentored and coached through the introductory phase of care and donning of the equipment and then nurtured and encouraged to operate the equipment under supervision at fires and incidents in order to protect themselves from irrespirable atmospheres and smoke.

The ability to wear and operate BA at car fires, external structural fires, bin fires and of course grass & scrub and bushfires can only benefit the health and safety of the member and allow them to grow in confidence in the use of BA prior to any escalation of use in internal structural environments.

This would encourage members to wear and operate the equipment over a considerable introductory period under Brigade, Group and training instructor supervision until such time as they agree and are deemed ready to take up internal structural firefighter training.

Cost and opportunity barriers for brigades to nominate members to undergo familiarisation and assessments at CFA's Field Training Grounds, plus the relatively low success rate (not to mention the dent to members' confidence) could be mitigated by CFA adopting the approach VFBV is promoting.

A copy of the *BA Pathways – Phased Approach to Competency VFBV Decision Paper* is attached for download and brigade and member feedback.



MONDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2014 00:00

Phased BA Competency endorsed by Chief Officer

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After long delays, the Committee has been advised that the Chief Officer has now endorsed the proposal for phased Breathing Apparatus (BA) competencies.

This means that there will now be two levels of BA training & competency.

Level 1 will be for training on BA for external fire attack such as car fires, bin fires and haystacks.

Level 2 will incorporate search and rescue aspects and internal structural attack scenarios.

For more details, [click here to see the VFBV/CFA Joint Training Committee's latest 2 Minute Briefing.](#)

To receive the 2 Minute Briefing every quarter via email, with summaries of the latest issues from all of the Joint Committees, [click here.](#)



When I respond with a crew of 4 career firefighters on a primary appliance, no matter where I am working across the state, I know the training and qualifications of those members even without knowing them personally. All are fully trained in structural firefighting and BA Search and Rescue.

When I began my career as a professional firefighting recruit, although I had been a volunteer Lieutenant in a busy fully volunteer urban brigade, I quickly learnt about my lack of knowledge, significant skills gaps and the stringent performance expectations placed upon me.

Below are the Career Firefighter skills profiles and minimum standards to be met for each rank in CFA (**Note:** Recruit/Firefighter 1 skills learnt during a recruit training prior to deployment). Recruit training is undertaken over a 19 week period working 4 days on then 4 days off. Each level of progression requires 12 months before being eligible for the next. A Station Officer therefore (Fire Officer 1 modules) requires a minimum 5 years of service and 12 months as a Leading Firefighter.

Modules are obtained via a number of ways including state based training courses, distance education and self-paced learning, and career progression assessments. To obtain the rank of both Leading Firefighter and Station Officer, a candidate must go through a significant 3 week development training program followed by a week long rigorous assessment process.

Operational Staff Skills Profile – by Rank

Recruit / Firefighter 1	Firefighter Level 2	Firefighter Level 3	Qualified Firefighter	Leading Firefighter	Fire Officer 1	Fire Officer 2
Cert II in FF Ops – core 1.01 Health & Fitness 1.02 Preparation & Maintenance of Equipment, Appliances & Facilities 1.06 Occupational Hazards 1.07 Personal Protection 1 1.08 Occupational Stress 1.16 Casualty Assistance 1.22 Fire Agency Awareness 1 1.23 Work Team Communication 1.24 Writing Skills for Work Cert II in FF Ops – electives 1.04 Driving Vehicles 1 1.05 Alarms & Sprinklers 1.09 Map Reading 1 1.10 Building Structures 1 1.11 Fire Suppression 1 1.12A Wildfire Behaviour 1 1.12B Wildfire Suppression 1 1.13 Vehicle Rescue 1.14 Search & Rescue 1.15 Breathing Apparatus (Open Circuit) 1.17 Emergency Care (Certificate) 1.19 Communication Systems Cert III in FF Ops – core 2.02 Inspect & Test Equipment 2.05A Emergency Life Support Techniques 2.07 Occupational Hygiene 2.24 Fire Agency Awareness 2 Cert III in FF Ops – electives 2.03A Drive Vehicles on Road (Legislation) 2.05B Operate Life Support Equipment 2.06 Personal Protection 2 2.15A Salvage & Overhaul 2.15B Ventilation 2.16 Dangerous Substances 1 2.32 Fire Science – Intro B	Cert II in FF Ops – electives 1.20 Computer Skills 1.21 Workplace Communication Cert III in FF Ops – core 2.04 Operate Pumps 2.25 Present Information (Public Education) Cert III in FF Ops – electives 2.03 Operate Vehicles (A) 2.20 Specialist Appliances (I)	Cert III in FF Ops – electives 2.08 Detection & Suppression Systems 2.09 Building Evacuation Systems 2.12 Fire Behaviour (CFA) 2.21 Fire Prevention 1 2.28 Wildfire Behaviour 2 2.29 Wildfire Suppression 2 2.33 Map Reading 2 (CFA)	Cert III in FF Ops – electives 2.10 Mechanical Venting & Air Handling 2.11 Building Structures 2 (CFA) 2.13 Fire Suppression 2 2.22 Administration 1 2.30 Introductory Maths for the Fire Industry	Cert IV in FF Ops – core 3.01 Occupational Health & Safety 3.09 Workplace Trainer Category A 3.11 Public Speaking 3.15 Supervising Teams Cert IV in FF Ops – electives 3.04 Fireground Operations 3.05 Building Fire Safety 1 3.14 Leadership	Cert IV in FF Ops – core 3.10 Writing Workplace Documents 3.12 Dealing with Conflict 3.13 Negotiation Skills Cert IV in FF Ops – electives 3.07 Dangerous Substances 2 3.18 Wildfire Suppression 3 3.21 Introduction to Law 3.23 Wildfire Behaviour 3 3.24 Meetings Diploma in FF Mment – core 4.02 Pre-incident Planning 1 4.03 Operational Management 4.04 Incident Control System – Agency Specific 4.07 Fire Prevention 2 4.11 Communication 1 4.16 Leadership & Team Management Diploma in FF Mment – electives 4.10 Administration 2 4.15 Public Relations A	Diploma in FF Mment – core 4.12 Interviews Diploma in FF Mment – electives 4.08 Building Fire Safety 2 4.17 Introduction to Budgeting 4.18 Human Resources Management 1 4.20 Fire Law Adv Dip in FF Mment – core 5.04 Incident Management Skills 5.09 Team Performance Adv Dip in FF Mment – electives 5.07 Communication 2
FF1 ASSESSMENT			LFF ASSESSMENT	FO1 ASSESSMENT		OO ASSESSMENT

It is important to note that there are no actual prerequisite qualifications for a brigade member to nominate for and be elected into a volunteer officer's position i.e. a brigade Lieutenant other than Minimum Skills.

Most of my friends and family who remain as volunteers understand and accept these differences as it is not their career. They are dedicated to their community and want to go about their work as volunteers without the need for accolades or rewards.

An Officer's decision at Ballarat City-

We have suffered significant issues over the years with the need to "Cross Crew" appliances. Cross Crewing raises many issues for the Duty Officer at Ballarat City. Cross Crewing is where on duty staff are required to "Jump" across appliances depending on which appliance is required. **It does not** refer to volunteers riding alongside career staff on the same appliances as has previously been asserted by some parties. Ballarat City usually has the following 8 appliances/vehicles running out of our station-

1. **2x Heavy Pumpers**
2. **1x Heavy Tanker**
3. **1x Ladder Platform**
4. **1x Hazmat** (with new Heavy Hazmat yet to yet to be commissioned)
5. **1x BA Support appliance** (Over 30 years old with no planned replacement)
6. **1x Ground Observer Response Vehicle** (also used as our specialist rescue transport vehicle)
7. **1x Ballarat City FCV** (Hilux ute funded by and usually responded by the Ballarat City Volunteers)

When we receive a page requiring an emergency response, it then becomes the Duty Officer's responsibility to determine which of these appliances we are likely to require on scene based on the limited information we have been provided on the fire/incident in a short pager message. We must then determine to which appliance/s the minimum 9 on duty firefighters should be allocated. All this needs to occur within about 70-80 seconds taking into account our 90 second response time requirement day and night. If we then arrive on scene and determine we require one of those appliances that are left behind, we need to recall off duty staff to come in and respond them, just hoping someone is available. The only appliance that our volunteers are incremented (trained) to operate other than the FCV is Ballarat City Tanker (currently only 2 members are qualified to drive and operate our Tanker).

Not keeping pace with a growing and changing society and the need for change –

Following concerns being raised about the lack of training, equipment and transportation thereof for a trench rescue response, a previous Chief Officer of CFA saw fit to remove Ballarat City fire brigade from being able to provide the service to the west of the state rather than work to fix the issues. The loss of response capability from Ballarat City means the gap now has to be filled by the response of the MFB and other brigades from farther afield. This area extends right through to the South Australian boarder.

In the 1970s and 80s, Greater Ballarat was covered by the volunteers of the now Eureka Group of fire brigades, and 7 professional firefighters on duty split between Ballarat City and Ballarat (East) Fire Stations. These were 2 staff at Ballarat and 5 staff at Ballarat City.

The Greater Ballarat has since seen significant growth in both population (100,000+) and an ever expanding urban sprawl. This has resulted in a marked increase in operational activity (Ballarat City responds to approximately 1,700+ emergency call outs annually) and, along with community expectations, an increase in the type and complexity of services provided. Unfortunately, the fire service to our community has not continued to develop along with it. In fact, until more recent years it had actually been downgraded. In the 1990s Ballarat (East) fire station reverted to a volunteer only response capability, and through attrition, minimum staffing levels were reduced to the 5 only at Ballarat City.

In contrast, the population, operational activity and required skills and knowledge have increased greatly. Add to this the reduced capacity of volunteer response and greater distances to the urban rural interface, means **we regularly fail to meet any of the expected service delivery standards.**

We have only recently increased our minimum staffing levels to 9 on duty in the last month. Ballarat City fire station currently remains the only professional career firefighter staffed station in the Ballarat district. In the near future a new fire station is expected to open in the rapidly growing western suburbs of Ballarat. This brigade will be known as Lucas.

Benefits and the value of change-

While I and so many of my professional colleagues have a strong connection to CFA as an organisation, we can see the long overdue requirement for change. There will be many benefits to these proposed changes. We have already made significant inroads to interoperability, however there are still many improvements to be made. Some of the recent changes currently being implemented include-

- State-wide interagency implementation of new Breathing Apparatus sets
- A new fully integrated recruit training program for professional firefighters (Joint MFB & CFA)
- Joint agency Pumper development (MFB/CFA)
- Alignment of career paths and Ranks between agencies (MFB/CFA)

To bring both groups of professional firefighters under the one umbrella just makes sense. The ability to move personnel and appliances between metro and outer metro areas will create greater flexibility. Common appliances, procedures and communications should be the aim. An example for this would be for move-ups and cross boarder operations between CFA integrated and MFB stations. Currently it is a challenge when this is required that creates problems because of communication and procedural differences.

The creation of the Fire District Review Panel will ensure that we maintain the progressiveness required of modern emergency service organisations and allow them to develop along with the communities we protect. Gone should be the days of the turf wars. A brigade's role of protecting their own patch no matter what the circumstances may be seen as admirable, but when the community's needs and expectations begin to exceed the ability for the organisation to meet those challenges, the community's needs must take precedence. It must be the job of the Fire District Review Panel to ensure this happens. The Emergency Services Infrastructure Authority will ensure appropriate resourcing and infrastructure is in place for the specific agency to be able to provide these essential services.

Many of the volunteer members of CFA spread widely throughout our rural areas are likely to never come in contact with station based career staff, and are unlikely to notice any change in how they do things now. They will continue with their wonderful work in protecting their local communities. However, our organisation has failed to keep pace with our rapidly developing society in both the outer metropolitan area and our larger provincial cities. Now is the time to have a close look at how we ensure an appropriate response to these areas in the future and it has taken a government with the strength and foresight to do so. This will no doubt be a difficult and challenging process as it may naturally remove the reliance on volunteers in some areas.

In closing-

I have been deeply saddened and distressed by the division that has been created due to a significant level of misinformation and provocative reporting in the media. I love my job and do not, nor have I ever set out to belittle our volunteer counterparts. It is not a career that one heads into without a significant level of community spirit however I no longer feel proud to be seen in public in my work uniform due to repeatedly being perceived as a thug unionist. I hope that one day this will change and I will again feel proud to say I am a firefighter.

Kindest regards,

