

Workforce/ volunteer capability



Strategic direction

Build and maintain a skilled, fit and experienced firefighting force to deliver an increased planned burning program, meet rising response needs and provide support to volunteers.

The ability of Victoria's bushfire management agencies to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from bushfires is wholly dependent on having a sufficient number and distribution of fit, skilled, trained and experienced personnel readily available.

The NEO

DSE is responsible for managing bushfires on public land, which is currently delivered through the Networked Emergency Organisation (NEO) partnership model.

The NEO partners, Parks Victoria (PV), Department of Primary Industry (DPI), Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD), Melbourne Water (MW) and VicForests, reflects the evolution of responsibility from the Forest Commission to DSE and the break-

up of former Departments through machinery of government changes.

The current model utilises a core of full-time bushfire management staff supported by over 2,500 others across government (staff, CBD and regional, whose roles are not primarily fire related but who regularly undertake fire response and planned burning roles during the fire season), plus up to 700 seasonal Project Firefighters.

The contribution of the NEO partners is vital, as they provide many of the skilled and experienced firefighters.

CFA

CFA relies on an integrated workforce of 58,000 volunteers (of whom up to one third are operational firefighters) supported by paid firefighters and other staff.

CFA has broad emergency management responsibilities. The demand for all CFA services is increasing in line with community growth, needs and expectations and a changing community risk profile.

A paradigm shift

The Victorian Bushfire Inquiry (2003) concluded that bushfire management is a 365 day operation and is no longer considered a seasonal activity.

Any increase in planned burning and community engagement will require increases in planning and operational resources across NEO and CFA.

Risks to communities and firefighters have reached unprecedented levels driven by climate variability, changed settlement patterns and increased fire activity.

Figure 11: NEO personnel available for bushfire response by DSE region

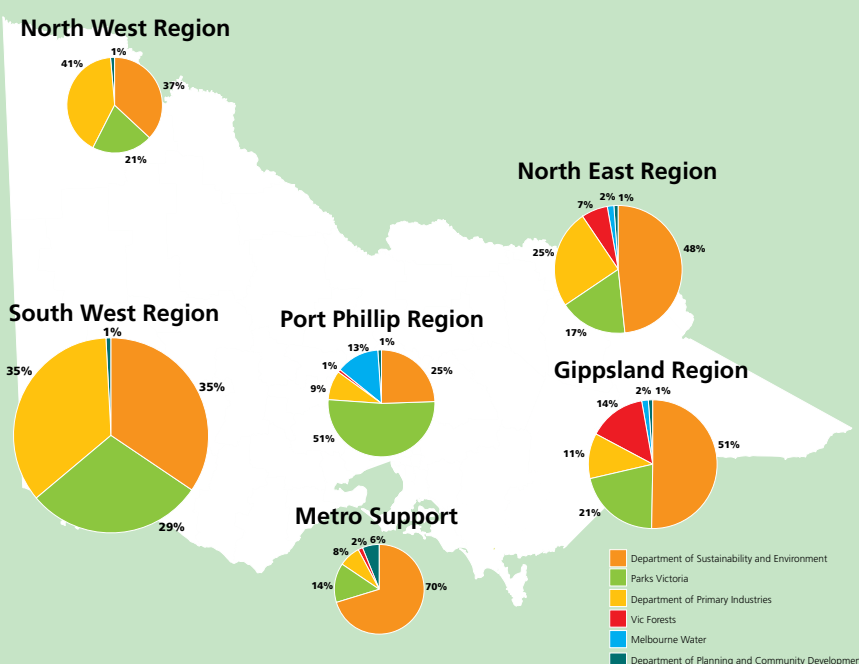
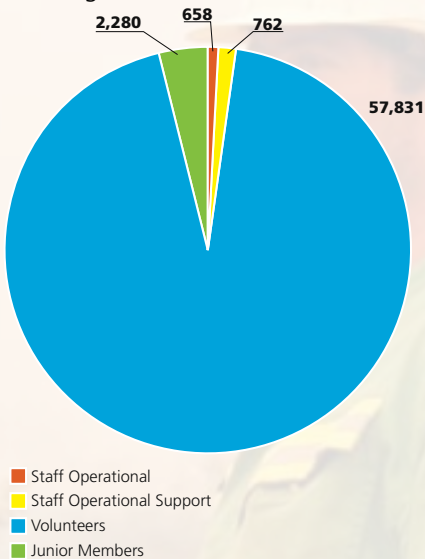




Figure 12: CFA workforce



Challenges and limitations common to both agencies

Managing risk to ensure firefighter health and well-being, in particular physical and psychological fatigue, are a significant challenge for bushfire agencies. The constant, recurring demand to cycle between response and prevention places further pressure on our workforces.

To deliver prevention, preparedness, response, recovery and ecosystem services requires a sustainable workforce that is appropriately distributed throughout the state with adequate skills, experience and training, supported by adequate equipment and infrastructure.

Ongoing workforce and volunteer management, including succession planning, growth and talent management is vital. The profile of experience, especially for on-ground operational managers, if not proactively recruited, will leave bushfire agencies exposed in the near future (see figures 13 and 14).

Volunteers are generally less likely to be available for non-emergency

deployments such as planned burns and also find it difficult to commit to campaign fires.

The “tree change/sea change” trend has changed some rural communities. They are not as experienced in fire or as self-reliant as previous communities. These communities have different expectations of the emergency services that should be provided.

Competitive workplace

The changing face of the Australian workforce poses numerous challenges for bushfire agencies. Including:

- Different workplace expectations of generations; and
- Intense competition for skilled and experienced staff requires agencies to be more attractive.

Australia’s labour markets are tight and highly competitive for skilled labour. The ageing workforce and changing nature of employee behaviours and expectations create challenges for all employers to attract and retain staff. Public sector employers often have added difficulties in meeting these challenges with less flexible recruitment practices, having



Figure 13: Age profile incident controllers

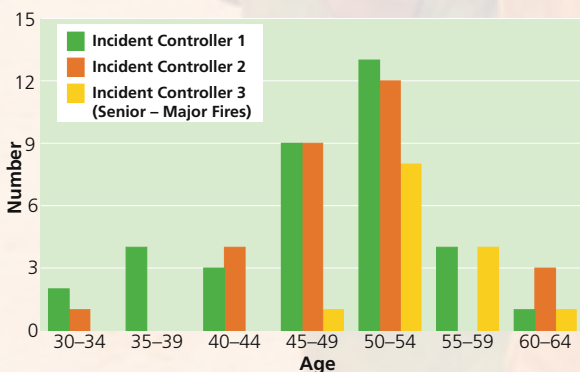
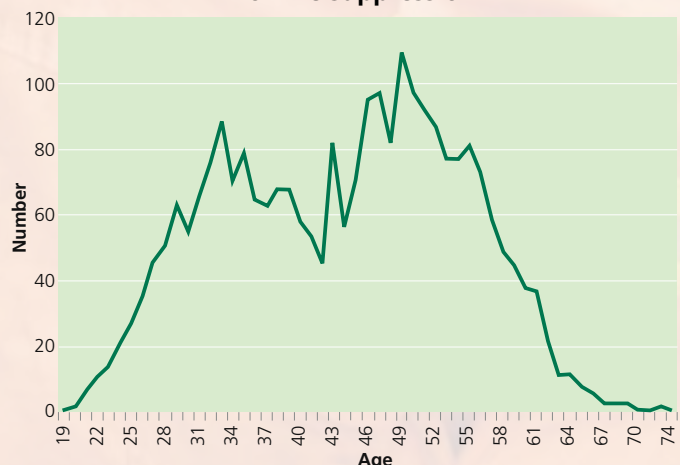


Figure 14: Age distribution of NEO staff available for fire suppression





to compete on price in a volatile labour market and the legacy of superannuation schemes that can drive early retirement.

Challenges for NEO

Prolonged campaign efforts and the move to a 365 day a year business focus significantly impacts on NEO agencies' abilities to meet their organisational responsibilities, placing pressure on the partnership model.

It is becoming increasingly evident that further fragmentation of DSE or NEO partners will increase complexity and limit the ability to meet the rising challenges of bushfire management.

Challenges for CFA

CFA's capacity to respond to bushfires in support of DSE is stretched by the increasingly broad and diverse range of emergencies which compete for local CFA resources.

Retaining volunteers, with increased commitments for response and training, creates additional complexity for the CFA.

Building partnerships with employers is required to ensure that the volunteer workforce continues to be able to participate in response activities, in particular campaign fires.

Declining and changing rural populations in some parts of Victoria are having an impact on the viability of some rural CFA brigades.

Future directions – Core capability

Building the experience profile

Investment in training and development opportunities is required to ensure bushfire agencies have enough skilled and experienced on-ground and incident managers. This includes supporting accelerated training and learning programs, such as additional interstate and overseas secondments.

Designing attractive incentive programs to retain and attract firefighters to undertake both senior on-ground and incident management roles is an important tool in maintaining experience capability.

Scholarship programs, such as graduate programs, will be used to obtain specific skill sets and assist with succession planning.

Streamlined training

Having properly trained and accredited firefighters is the most critical element of achieving firefighter safety.

It is important that training programs incorporate the latest information and are delivered in an efficient manner. Future training packages will involve a shift to a modular approach and increase the use of existing and new internal and external training providers.

As well as training, it is important to provide increased opportunities for skills enhancement and maintenance.

Attracting and retaining staff and volunteers

A key aspect of maintaining and building bushfire management capacity is the ability of land and fire management agencies to attract and retain personnel.

Desirable place to work

In the current labour market, land and fire management agencies must be competitive to attract and retain staff. Aside from pay and conditions, other options available include providing exciting career pathways through progression planning and personal development opportunities. Enticing reward and recognition strategies will also create incentives to attract and retain the right staff.

Organisational culture and leadership are also factors in attracting and retaining staff.

Building capacity

Building the experience and capability of current staff is insufficient to deliver significant changes to land and fire management objectives or reduce fatigue issues.

To successfully deliver an increased planned burning program, greater community engagement, improved monitoring and evaluation while maintaining and enhancing response capacity requires a significant investment in staff.



This includes employing more permanent firefighters and skilled staff as well as investing in equipment and infrastructure to enable and support a larger, more mobile workforce.

Support for volunteers will also need to be increased to maintain the viability and sustainability of CFA volunteer brigades.

Building an identity

Establishing a branding for all partners involved in bushfire management will help to provide a sense of belonging and true partnership. This will assist to strengthen the NEO partnerships for the next 3-5 years and provide better opportunities to remove disincentives for current partners to participate in fire management.

Future directions – Surge capacity

Firefighting agencies require significant resources to safely manage longer fire seasons, with prolonged campaign efforts while retaining capacity to still deliver land and fire management responsibilities.

More firefighters

The current NEO partnership concept requires strengthening and broadening to incorporate a Whole of Government commitment to bushfires. It has potential to expand to an all hazard approach to emergency management. There is also the opportunity for the participation of large corporations under a “Good Corporate Citizenship” program.

Responsive workforce

A more flexible workforce that can be deployed around the State and is driven by risk assessment and work demands while supported by appropriate technology.

Health and wellbeing

Firefighter safety is the number one priority of any fire management activity. This requires attention on and off the fire line.

Successful delivery of land and fire management programs, including response, requires a better understanding of the capacity and availability of staff and volunteers.

Appropriate reward and recognition programs for contribution to bushfire management for all volunteers, paid staff and their families will help maintain morale and continued involvement.

Fit for work

Managing firefighter health and safety is as important before and after as it is during an event. Investment and support of programs that proactively maintain health, fitness and well-being including annual “fit for work” initiatives and provision of ongoing stress management. These will help to maintain healthy and motivated staff and volunteers.

Fatigue: spreading the load

Managing firefighter fatigue, both on-ground and in incident management roles is a major challenge. During times of prolonged or campaign response, the effect of accumulated fatigue (physical and mental) is significant. Historically, the effects of accumulated fatigue have been compounded after an event with staff and volunteers expected to return to normal work.

Proactive measures to support business continuity and manage staff return to work are needed to reduce the backlog of work to be overcome when returning to normal duties.

The addition of extra resources will help to alleviate the fatigue issue by spreading the workload and not relying on the same workforce to deliver land, fire and emergency management activities.

