



EXTERNAL REVIEW OF CULTURE AND ISSUES MANAGEMENT TO SUPPORT COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY OF THE FUTURE

April 2022



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The original artwork in our Acknowledgement of Country was produced by

Emma Walke.

Emma is a Bundjalung Aboriginal woman from northern NSW.

This Review Team has had the privilege to learn about the extraordinary work of the Country Fire Authority (CFA), the dedication of its more than 55,000 members (of which more than 54,000 are volunteers and more than 1300 are staff/secondees) and the generosity and commitment of so many who freely give their time to ensure the safety of others. During the Review, we were privy to concerning disclosures relating to bullying, harassment and discrimination across the organisation. However, we were also heartened and reassured by the commitment of the leadership group at CFA to reconciling and acknowledging the wrongs of the past and investing in a bright future that seeks to build on initiatives that are already under way and celebrate the successes of this formidable organisation.

We take this opportunity to thank all members of CFA for the assistance we have received during the Review. The Executive Leadership Team through the Chief Executive Officer, Natalie McDonald and the Chief Officer, Jason Heffernan, ensured that we had regular communication and that we had ready access to the resources necessary to complete this review. The Review included a significant desktop review and extensive stakeholder engagement across Victoria. This was supported by several people across the organisation at state, regional and district level and in particular, we thank Tracey May, John Hussey and Kylee Bates, for their extensive support.

During our stakeholder engagement, many CFA staff at all levels of the agency, and many Assistant Chief Fire Officers (ACFOs) and Commanders were generous in their time and their feedback.

We thank all those CFA members, both past and present, who spoke to members of the Review Team between September 2021 and March 2022. Hundreds of CFA members freely gave us their time and organisational knowledge. They reflected on the positive aspects of CFA – the unitary purpose of protecting those around them, the opportunities to expand their skills and the sense of camaraderie. Members also came forward and showed enormous courage to trust us with disclosures relating to bullying, harassment, discrimination and more broadly behaviour that should not be tolerated. All of these conversations were crucial to support us to develop our understanding of the challenges being faced by CFA.

Finally, there were other organisations that are part of the framework that form our emergency services, including Fire Rescue Victoria and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria – we also thank them for their time and input into this report.

Authors: Dr Helen Szoke AO, Allen + Clarke Consulting

Issued to: Country Fire Authority

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- CFA Wellbeing Support Line: Phone: 1800 959 232 (free call)
- CFA Member Assistance Program/ Peer Support Program/ Chaplaincy Support Program: Phone: 1800 959 232 (follow the prompts to reach the appropriate support service)
- Member Wellbeing Advisors: Phone: 1800 959 232, wellbeing@cfa.vic.gov.au
- 1800RESPECT (National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling, Information and Support Service), open 24/7, free service Phone: 1800 737 732, website: www.1800respect.org.au
- Men's Referral Service (for men concerned about their own behaviour), open 24/7 free, live web chat options Phone: 1300 766 491, website: <https://ntv.org.au/get-help/>
- The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) or the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) to make a formal complaint about unlawful discrimination, sexual harassment or victimisation and/or anonymously find out more about your rights and legal options. Contact for VEOHRC: Phone: 1300 292 153, email: enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au; Contact for AHRC: Phone: 1300 369 711, email: infoservice@humanrights.gov.au
- Lifeline provides 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services Phone: 13 11 14, website: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>
- Sexual Assault Crisis Line (crisis response phonenumber for people who have experienced sexual violence), after-hours telephone crisis counselling support, information, advocacy and referral to anyone living in Victoria. Phone: 1800 806 292 (free call), website: <https://www.sacl.com.au>

MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD REVIEWER AND PROJECT SPONSOR

29 April 2022

Mr Greg Wilson
Chair, CFA Board

Ms Natalie MacDonald
CEO, CFA

Mr Jason Heffernan
Chief Officer, CFA

Dear Mr Wilson, Ms MacDonald and Mr Heffernan,

We are pleased to submit this report of the Independent Review into Culture and Issues Management to support CFA of the future. We take this opportunity to thank CFA for entrusting this important work to us.

We note that CFA has sought this external independent Review in addition to a number of streams of internal work that have been initiated since the establishment of CFA as a volunteer agency under the Fire Services Reform, July 2020. This Review is thus conducted within the context of a new agency in law, and a continued history that brings both opportunities and challenges.

The Report which outlines our recommendations, seeks to build on the internal reform work which has been undertaken in the past 18 months, and identify ways to meet the current Vision, Mission and Values of CFA as outlined in the Strategic Framework 2020-2030.

There are many who have contributed generously to the Review and we acknowledge their support and thank them.

Yours sincerely



Dr Helen Szoke AO
Lead Reviewer



Paul Houliston
Managing Partner, Allen + Clarke

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 1 July 2020, new legislation came into effect which made Country Fire Authority (CFA) a volunteer firefighting service. It followed eight significant reviews of fire-fighting services since the tragedy of the 2009 fires in Victoria, and the Royal Commission established following those fires.

Fire Services Statement May 2017

Volunteers are, and will remain, vital to our response. It's why, under these changes, Country Fire Authority (CFA) will revert to a volunteer firefighter organisation. CFA will continue to serve the same communities and be enshrined under law.

The Hon James Merlino MP Minister for Emergency Services

In addition to legislative changes that reinforced the importance of volunteers and their role in CFA, it resulted in paid fire fighters being transferred from CFA and incorporated as part of the newly formed Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), and a plan for how to manage the transition of 35 integrated brigades, where historically CFA operated jointly with the then Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB). These structural and legislative changes, whilst part of an overall Government plan to modernise fire services, are significant changes for CFA, and are still being bedded down and understood.

This Review was initiated by CFA in this context, with a view to building on the important history of CFA, meeting the challenges of the transition pathway of the Fire Services Reform, and the opportunities to build for the future.

It is important to recognise the history of CFA, to inform the strengths of how to build for the future. CFA was formed from the tragedy of the 1939 fires, following a Royal Commission. It builds on the history of localised fire services dating back to the nineteenth century. CFA is now one of the largest volunteer organisations in the world.

There are enduring features of CFA which define its core – more than 54,000 volunteers across the State, 1212 local Brigades, over 1300 staff/secondes who support the large volunteer membership, and a significant proportion of these staff also volunteer in their local communities. CFA provides a continuous response to fire and emergency incidents, working with other emergency management services across Victoria. The Brigades are local – they know their community, they know their landscape, they know their partners in other emergency services – so they know how to manage a response and make the judgement calls to ensure that their mission can be met – to keep the community safe.

This Review has been initiated as we re-emerge as a State from two years of disruption from the impacts of COVID-19, which have affected communities across Victoria and how CFA has been able to keep connected with its members. The Review also recognises that Victoria, as with other parts of Australia, will face more extremes of weather patterns that may herald fiercer fires, and more demand as we cope with a changing environment. We can be certain that CFA will face continuous change to successfully respond to demands in the future.

This Review acknowledges that there is still a process of recognition for the harm that some members have experienced in CFA of the past. We have included the voices of those people who shared their experience of behaviour which is bullying, harassing or discriminatory and which has made them feel unsafe and unwanted. We have heard of the tensions in some local Brigades, where disputes may be long running and challenging to resolve, and cases where early intervention may have resolved issues at the community level much earlier.

We have heard of the perceived shortcomings of CFA as a government agency supporting volunteers and the negative impact of the churn of leadership in the last decade, the lack of consistent leadership at a district and regional level and the impact of the most recent Fire Services Reform, which many CFA members feel have devalued their contribution, notwithstanding decades of experience accumulated in voluntarily fighting fires and responding to other emergencies. The initiatives implemented by the current leadership since July 2020 seek to remedy these matters, are still being understood by members.

Conversely, we have also heard the strengths of what keeps CFA going. That it is an organisation with a strong recognition across Victoria, that not only delivers services to the community, but which offers opportunities. There is a recognition of the strong leadership demonstrated by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Chief Officer (CO) in initiating a strategy of improvement since the 1 July 2020 reforms were put in place, and cautious and growing recognition of the improvements that are being made.

This Review proposes establishing a plan for organisational change – a plan that builds on recent reform initiatives and proposes some steppingstones to build on their strengths. Volunteers are at the heart of CFA and this plan recognises their ongoing contributions, identifies ways they can continue to be supported in their roles, proposes how they can broaden the base of volunteers into the future and makes clear the leadership capabilities that are needed and should be supported at the local level – not just to fight fires but to build teams and to empower new volunteers to join, to stay and to contribute.

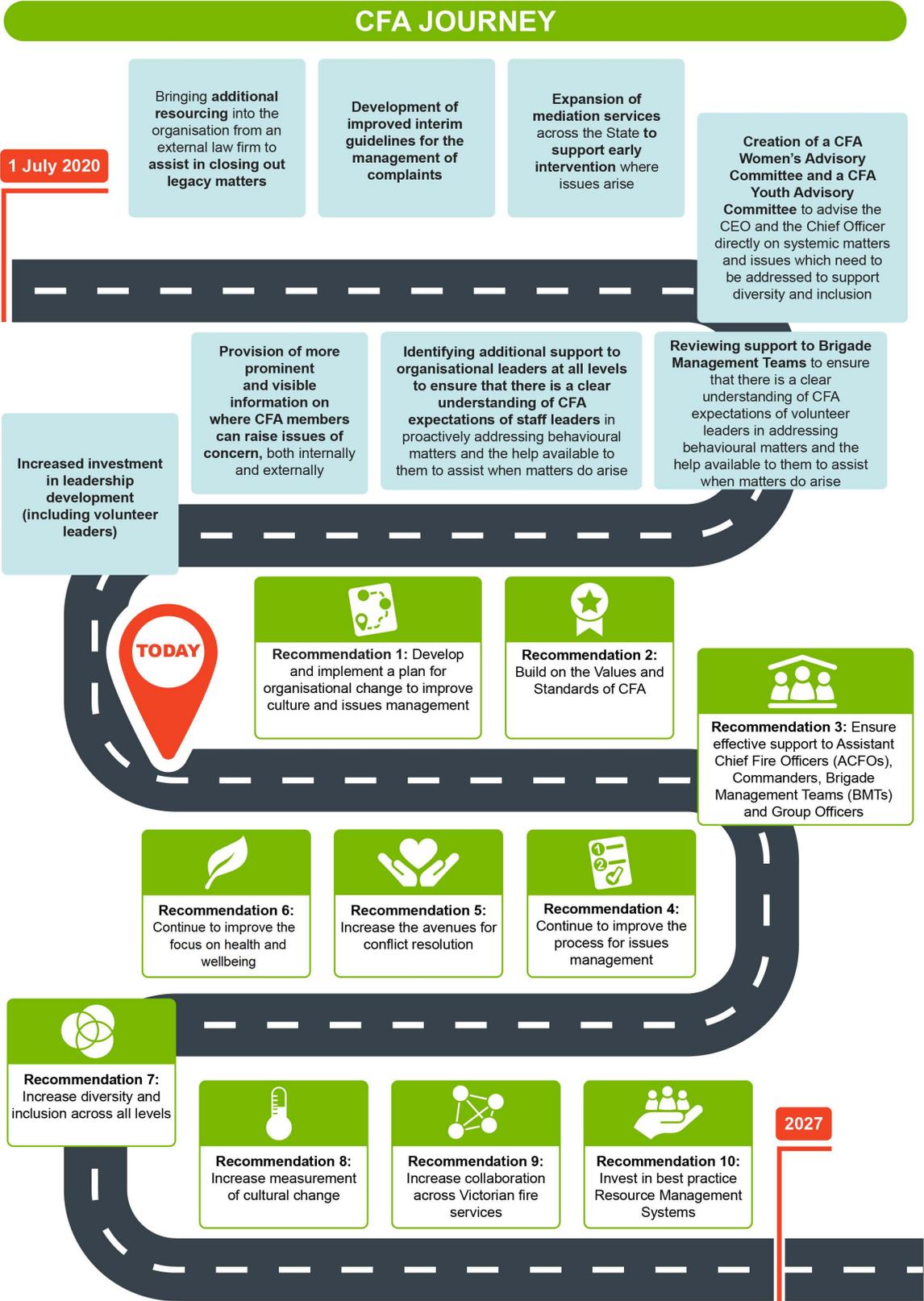
The Review recognises that culture is led from the top, nurtured at the middle and supported by all. The current secondment arrangements from FRV must be bedded down to ensure that Assistant Chief Fire Officers (ACFOs) and Commanders feel welcome as part of the CFA community during their secondment time, notwithstanding their formal employment arrangements, and are as invested and supportive of building the volunteer Brigades as is the rest of CFA. Leadership is also needed at a governance level, with the Board playing a crucial role to not only provide good oversight and governance, but to also be visible champions of the work of CFA.

Consistency, clear communication, accountability and transparency have been constant themes and the recommendations in this report speak to the need to unite the CFA community in understanding their purpose and the outcomes that are sought. The work that has already been done to meet the vision and purpose of CFA needs to continue to be shared and developed with the membership. This includes the recent reforms to current complaints and grievance processes, and how to develop better responses in the future.

This Review does not seek to diminish the challenges of CFA. Our brief was to have an eye to the future – CFA is a resource that no government could replace and as our climate changes, it becomes even more critical to have well supported highly functioning and localised groups of community champions across the State. We have approached our task in this spirit, and hope that each volunteer, each staff member, each secondee and each community member will see what their role is, as well as the collective responsibility of CFA to build a strong, safe and resilient organisation into the future.

This diagram summarises both the internal reforms that have been initiated since 1 July 2020 and the recommendations of this Report. Its purpose is to demonstrate that this Review builds on existing internal reforms and proposes how these can be extended to respond to the findings of this Review.

Figure 1: CFA Journey



1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Review has been asked to support CFA to make improvements in the following areas:

1. the way it establishes and manages the behavioural and cultural expectations of its members and staff
2. the way it supports its leaders and leadership teams to set expectations and to manage issues when they arise
3. the way it manages grievances, complaints and issues and the escalation paths and options for matters that cannot be resolved
4. its overall organisational culture to support diversity, productivity and innovation.

This Review provides 10 recommendations to make improvements for the future.

The way CFA establishes and manages the behavioural and cultural expectations of its members and staff



Recommendation 1: Develop and implement a plan for organisational change to improve culture and issues management

Develop, communicate and implement a 5-year action plan (the Plan) for organisational change to improve culture and issues management which builds on positive initiatives already underway, embeds the recommendations of this Review, provides a 5-year timeline for implementation, including consideration of independent monitoring

Since Fire Services Reform was implemented on 1 July 2020, CFA has sought to develop changes that support volunteers and to respond to the expectations that resulted from the reform. This work has been done against a legacy of many changes over the past decade and significant churn in key leadership positions within CFA leading up to Fire Services Reform. This has eroded trust and led to inconsistency in how expectations are developed and established around behaviour and culture, notwithstanding the significant internal reforms already developed by the current Chief Executive Officer and the Chief Officer. This recommendation proposes a pathway for the next phase of reform.

The Plan should incorporate the following features:

- a) a public recognition of past harms to members of CFA
- b) a clearly communicated 5-year implementation process for the Plan, that incorporates accountability measures that are transparent to members of CFA including consideration of independent monitoring at key milestones
- c) a commitment to reporting against progress of the Plan, alongside the requirements of the Fire Services Implementation Monitor, which includes the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework to support consistent, regular and systematic communication about progress against the recommendations of the Review.



Recommendation 2: Build on the Values and Standards of the CFA

Build on the Values of CFA as set out in the organisation's Strategic Framework, the Behavioural Standards and the Volunteer Charter, and support adherence to these values in all aspects of the engagement and work of the members of CFA.

To support the Plan outlined in Recommendation 1, the work that has been done to develop the Behavioural Standards and to confirm the intent of the Volunteer Charter, further work must be done to communicate, set and apply the behaviours that will embed and support a positive culture in CFA.

This will require:

- a) ensuring that recruitment, induction and transfer documentation and processes reflect CFA values and the Behavioural Standards, are understood and used to inform decision making processes at all levels
- b) ensuring position descriptions for Brigade Management Teams (BMTs) and leaders at the Group Officer level support the values and behaviours and recognise the importance of diversity and inclusion
- c) working with Districts to ensure that the Volunteer Charter is embedded in organisational practice and Commanders, ACFOs and Group Officers are supported to understand their responsibility in this area and to address localised challenges and opportunities
- d) enhancing and expanding training opportunities to support best practice across the organisation
- e) working with ACFOs and Commanders to set clear priorities in their roles to support the implementation of the plan for organisational change (outlined in Recommendation 1) and the role of all members of CFA
- f) incorporating into the current review of the recognition scheme for volunteer members of CFA, a process which is consistently applied to all members, and which enables nominations by local communities, includes assessment input by volunteer CFA members, and which builds local and less formal recognition processes at the community level
- g) increasing leadership of Board members in endorsing the values and standards of CFA including ensuring alignment with the values and standards of CFA on selection as well as alignment with the Victorian Government Guidelines on diversity and inclusion in recruitment and appointment processes including application of the Victorian Government's Board skills and diversity matrix template¹
- h) developing formalised and regular engagement opportunities at senior levels of CFA with the VFBV to ensure mutual understanding of the work of CFA and transparency and communication about how this engagement is incorporated by the management of CFA.

¹ Victorian Government. (2022). *Diversity on Victorian Government Boards: Guidelines on diversity and inclusion in recruitment and appointment processes*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/diversity-victorian-government-board-guidelines>

The way CFA supports its leaders and leadership teams to set expectations and to manage issues when they arise



Recommendation 3: Ensure effective support to Assistant Chief Fire Officers (ACFOs), Commanders, Brigade Management Teams (BMTs) and Group Officers

The relationship of ACFOs and Commanders with Group Officers and Brigade Management Teams (BMTs) should be reviewed to ensure that they are effectively supported, not only in their operational duties, but also in their key roles of recruiting new members, ensuring understanding and application of values and the behavioural standards, and localised conflict resolution.

Volunteerism is at the heart of CFA, where highly trained and effective responses to emergencies are executed daily across Victoria. This needs to be supported in a consistent and enduring way to ensure the best and safest outcomes for the Victorian Community and for members of CFA. A key resource to supporting this function are the staff at ACFO and Commander level. Notwithstanding the changes to employment status of this group of seconded staff, they should be supported to provide the critical middle management expertise to achieve the strategic objectives of CFA.

This will require:

- a) the development of Volunteer Consultative Committees at the District levels which reflects the diversity of the community, and which is used as the avenue for engagement from Brigades to CFA Headquarters
- b) ensuring that ACFOs and Commanders are welcomed, inducted and supported in their roles within CFA, to support the values, ethos of volunteerism and to understand how to develop a volunteer friendly culture within CFA
- c) reviewing the current regional and district support to BMTs and Group Officers, to ensure that their needs are being addressed and that they are able to work with their communities effectively
- d) the addition of training, particularly for BMT members, Group Officers and District and Regional members, which incorporates a focus on the development of leadership attributes, managing teams, conflict resolution, and difficult conversations
- e) ensuring that access to training is equitable, and where members have not been able to access training, they are able to seek a review of the decision
- f) assessing the applicability and effectiveness of the current performance development plans for employed members to ensure they include sufficient accountability against the values of CFA and the organisation's commitment to support volunteers.

The way CFA manages grievances, complaints and issues and the escalation paths and options for matters that cannot be resolved



Recommendation 4: Continue to improve the process for issues management

Processes for issues management should build on the work of Right Environment Initiatives to continue to bring transparency, timeliness and effectiveness in dispute resolution to all levels of the agency

This Review has reinforced the challenges around dealing with conflict, grievances, bullying, discrimination and harassment within CFA. This area of practice has been exacerbated by the inability to finalise the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) review,² a lack of trust in systems and processes, the challenge of dealing with complaints which escalate to vexatious and the backlog of matters that needed to be addressed. Much work has been done to deal with the legacy of complaints from the past and to increase transparency of the process in the future. The work that has already been achieved by the Right Environment initiatives need to be shared more broadly with CFA members to build confidence in the future of complaint handling and dispute resolution and to prevent harm to participants in the process.

This will require:

- a) continuing to build the transparency and accountability of complaints, through reporting of numbers, timeliness of process and final outcomes. This reporting should be published in aggregate for members, with appropriate protections for confidentiality, including anonymised case studies to build the understanding of breaches and consequences
- b) developing support for local resolution of conflict, through training and organisational support at the BMT, Group Officer, ACFO and Commander level, to prevent the unnecessary escalation of complaints, and to address vexatious complaints where appropriate
- c) ensuring that Human Resources Business Partners (HRBPs), ACFOs and Commanders are clear about their responsibilities and accountabilities in dealing with complaints in a timely manner, and are provided with training and support to fulfil their role
- d) continuing to apply a specific framework to address the current backlog of complaints, in order to bring these matters to culmination ensuring that members can access information about the clearing of the backlog of complaints and the outcomes achieved
- e) developing a framework for decision-making and any interventions relating to addressing vexatious complaints
- f) building an engagement strategy to ensure that members are aware of the processes, procedures and protections in place (including changes made as a result of this Review).

² The 2016 Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission Review into the programs and practices of CFA and the MFB was not released pursuant to: *United Firefighters' Union v VEOHRC & Anor* [2017] VSC 773 (15 December 2017).



Recommendation 5: Increase the avenues for conflict resolution

Additional avenues for conflict resolution and surfacing of behaviours that have harmed people should be implemented.

Formal complaints handling processes on their own cannot deal with all of the issues that may bring harm to members of CFA. Other ways to address conflict and disputes should continue to be explored by CFA.

This should include:

- a) mechanisms for identifying issues including:
 - (i) instituting appropriate, best practice anonymous complaints avenues to increase channels for making a disclosure and to also inform CFA about adverse behaviour as it occurs
 - (ii) ensuring regular organisational climate surveys are undertaken and include all members of CFA to collect data on those adverse behaviours which are not formally reported, and then to report back on action that will be taken in response to the surveys.
- b) mechanisms for more effectively and flexibly dealing with unresolved complaints including:
 - (i) focusing on local resolution by piloting new models of local resolution panels, with clear operational guidance to ensure consistency with CFA regulations, comprised of volunteers and independent expertise (where required) to address issues that may be mediated to resolution at the local level
 - (ii) as part of the scheduled 2024 review of the Regulations, ensuring alignment with changes arising from this Review and the Right Environment initiatives. To ensure that the Regulations are modernised to apply processes in a timely and flexible manner particularly in the areas of definitions, penalties, how procedural fairness is protected and how a 'human-centred' complaints process can continue to be built within CFA.



Recommendation 6: Continue to improve the focus on health and wellbeing

CFA should ensure that its Health and Wellbeing Strategy is comprehensive, accessible to all members, regularly audited and that data is used to inform changes, training and operational responses.

Harm is done to individuals and communities because of conflict, bullying or harassment at community levels. We also know that for many CFA members who are first responders, there are the traumatic impacts of that response. CFA must ensure that its health and wellbeing systems including support, are comprehensive, accessible and regularly checked to ensure they are working well.

This should include:

- a) further development of the peer support program to ensure that it is consistently available to all members for operational and non-operational advice and support
- b) an annual audit of all support services that impact on the member experience to ensure member feedback on efficacy and effectiveness and use of those services, and publish this with a response to any changes that will be made following the audit
- c) collecting information from Brigades on post incident debrief and whether members have sought help from the health and wellbeing service and if there are barriers to accessing this service and if so, address these barriers.



Recommendation 7: Increase diversity and inclusion across all levels

CFA must align and extend its current initiatives to develop diversity and inclusion in its membership, to expand the volunteer base of CFA and ensure contemporary and current perspectives guide the work for CFA into the future.

A key challenge for CFA is to recruit, retain and create a safe environment for all its members, and for CFA to fulfil the vision that communities are prepared for and safer from emergencies.³ This challenge is exacerbated by the impact of climate change and severe weather events, the changing demographics of Victoria, and changing attitudes to volunteering. CFA is well placed to build on the strength of its history, the decades of commitment to local community protection and the confidence and recognition of the brand of CFA.

This should include:

- a) bringing a strategic approach to its diversity and inclusion programs, that is consistently understood across Victoria. The approach needs to clearly identify where the requirements and accountabilities for the success lie and include clear outcomes that are built into reporting, performance development plans and inform training and engagement
- b) encouraging districts to develop localised approaches to support diversity and inclusion, including mechanisms such as diversity and inclusion sub-groups, local community engagement and awareness activities with schools and other emergency services, investment in youth and common understandings of the safety requirements for young people, including compliance with Child Safety Standards such as Working with Children Checks
- c) encouraging diversity at the leadership level, with clear targets relating to diversity and inclusion for professional, technical and administrative (PTA) staff and suggested approaches for BMT and Group Officers which highlight and celebrate success and positive outcomes
- d) ensuring that the principles of the Gender Equality Action Plan are incorporated and underpin the Diversity and Inclusion Plan.

³ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-30*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>



Recommendation 8: Increase measurement of cultural change

There should be regular audits of Brigades to identify structural, system and intangible barriers to improving culture and to identifying supports to make the necessary changes.

The BMTs are the local face of CFA and a critical link to communities across Victoria. They should be supported in their endeavours but also be clear about their accountability overall.

This should include:

- a) consideration of the physical facilities and how these are conducive to and welcoming of diverse communities
- b) reports of issues that have been successfully managed locally and outcomes achieved
- c) identification of adherence to recruitment and induction processes
- d) training outcomes and any issues arising.



Recommendation 9: Increase collaboration across Victorian fire services

Prioritise the strengthening of collaboration and partnerships between the Victorian firefighting organisations, their leaders and members.

CFA continues to work with other fire services and wider Victorian emergency services (within the broader framework of Emergency Management Victoria) to ensure the Victorian community is safe. Its own cultural and productivity journey is interdependent with these services, and collaboration and partnership should continue to be fostered and engendered.

This should include exploration of:

- a) joint training opportunities for all CFA members with FRV and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFM Vic)
- b) joint community engagement strategies particularly in regional Victoria where FFM Vic or FRV operations work alongside CFA
- c) continued dialogue with FRV with a focus on support for secondees within CFA, in relation to induction, understanding and fostering a volunteer ethos to ensure the ongoing growth and success of CFA volunteers consistent with Section 2A of the *Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958*
- d) work with other fire services to ensure high standards of training and knowledge about training that encompasses safety in operational settings.



Recommendation 10: Invest in best practice Resource Management Systems

To support the implementation of this Review, CFA should invest in best practice Resource Management Systems that enhance Human Resource Management and support prevention of bullying, harassment and discrimination across CFA.

Successful implementation of the recommendations from this Review will require modernisation of CFA’s current human resource systems that support data collection, case management, analysis, reporting and decision-making. In addition, improvements in systems will help with the administrative burden that is experienced at ACFO, Commander and BMT management level, thus ensuring that these critical positions can focus on the important work of building the people capacity and capability of CFA members. CFA Strategy and Outcomes Framework for 2020-2030 notes the importance of systems and processes in ensuring a great place to volunteer and work. The framework commits to protect “the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of our people by strengthening our processes, systems and tools to identify and manage workplace hazards”.⁴

This includes:

- a) reviewing current Resource Management Systems, and putting in place new tools and systems that support best practice people management
- b) seeking investment from the Government to scope, build and implement a suitable technology platform to support best practice people management.

⁴ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-30*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>

This figure provides a summary overview of the 10 recommendations made by this Review.

Figure 2: Summary of recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

The way CFA establishes and manages the behavioural and cultural expectations of its members and staff



Recommendation 1: Develop and implement a plan for organisational change to improve culture and issues management

Develop, communicate and implement a 5-year action plan (the Plan) for organisational change to improve culture and issues management which builds on positive initiatives already underway, embeds the recommendations of this Review, provides a 5-year timeline for implementation, including consideration of independent monitoring



Recommendation 2: Build on the Values and Standards of CFA

Build on the Values of CFA as set out in the organisation’s Strategic Framework, the Behavioural Standards and the Volunteer Charter, and support adherence to these values in all aspects of the engagement and work of the members of CFA.

The way CFA supports its leaders and leadership teams to set expectations and to manage issues when they arise



Recommendation 3: Ensure effective support to Assistant Chief Fire Officers (ACFOs), Commanders, Brigade Management Teams (BMTs) and Group Officers

The relationship of ACFOs and Commanders with Group Officers and Brigade Management Teams (BMTs) should be reviewed to ensure that they are effectively supported, not only in their operational duties, but also in their key roles of recruiting new members, ensuring understanding and application of values and the behavioural standards, and localised conflict resolution.

The way CFA manages grievances, complaints and issues and the escalation paths and options for matters that cannot be resolved



Recommendation 4: Continue to improve the process for issues management

Processes for issues management should build on the work of Right Environment Initiatives to continue to bring transparency, timeliness and effectiveness in dispute resolution to all levels of the agency

CFA’s overall organisational culture to support diversity, productivity and innovation



Recommendation 5: Increase the avenues for conflict resolution

Additional avenues for conflict resolution and surfacing of behaviours that have harmed people should be implemented.



Recommendation 6: Continue to improve the focus on health and wellbeing

CFA should ensure that its Health and Wellbeing Strategy is comprehensive, accessible to all members, regularly audited and that data is used to inform changes, training and operational responses.



Recommendation 7: Increase diversity and inclusion across all levels

CFA must align and extend its current initiatives to develop diversity and inclusion in its membership, to expand the volunteer base of CFA and ensure contemporary and current perspectives guide the work for CFA into the future.



Recommendation 8: Increase measurement of cultural change

There should be regular audits of Brigades to identify structural, system and intangible barriers to improving culture and to identifying supports to make the necessary changes.



Recommendation 9: Increase collaboration across Victorian fire services

Prioritise the strengthening of collaboration and partnerships between the Victorian firefighting organisations, their leaders and members.



Recommendation 10: Invest in best practice Resource Management Systems

To support the implementation of this Review, CFA should invest in best practice Resource Management Systems that enhance Human Resource Management and support prevention of bullying, harassment and discrimination across CFA.

How to read this report

This Report draws evidence from a number of sources (see [Appendix 3: Methodology](#)):

- a desktop review of over 250 documents including existing prevalence data, policies, review of internal reforms developed by the CEO and CO, procedures, reviews, reports, guidance documents and legislation
- consultative processes with members and key stakeholders including stakeholder consultation with 33 stakeholders in Phase two of the Review (Round one); 199 stakeholders in Phase three of the Review (Round two) and 252 stakeholders in Phase four of the Review (Round three).
- a review of six comparator organisations.

Data and broader information included in this Report reflect the circumstances that existed at the time at which it was collected, and the time at which this report has been prepared.

The voices of stakeholders are included in this report. Stakeholders include CFA volunteers, staff, secondees and others who participated in interviews during the course of the Review. The consultations during phases 3 and 4 involved a self-selected sample of stakeholders who had both positive and negative comments and experiences with CFA. It was not the Review brief to investigate, corroborate nor act on any of the matters raised with the Review Team. Necessary supports or information about CFA processes to raise complaints was provided at each of the stakeholder meetings.

The structure of the Report

The report commences by providing a broad contextual understanding of the environment within which this Review has taken place, [Section 1](#) includes the recommendations from the Review. The Review has made 10 recommendations to support CFA to improve its culture and the way that it manages issues. To assist implementation, these recommendations are framed around CFA's broader organisational work plan to support cultural change. [Section 2](#) provides an outline of the Review and the way in which it was undertaken. [Section 3](#) outlines the organisational context, composition and structure of CFA, and the work of CFA within the broader framing of the emergency services sector. [Section 4](#) outlines CFA's journey in relation to reform and change management. The main sections of the report are then structured around four key themes: Current Culture ([Section 5](#)); Leadership ([Section 6](#)); Systems and Processes for Issues Management ([Section 7](#)); and Prevention of Harassment, Discrimination and Bullying ([Section 8](#)). Each theme ends with concluding comments.

Relevant terms used throughout the Report are set out in the [Glossary](#). Terms of note include 'members', or 'CFA members', which are used interchangeably throughout the report to refer to any CFA volunteer, staff member or secondee.

Data used in this report has been selected based on its relevance to the themes of this Review. While the Review has focused on incorporating the most recent data available, some figures, such as membership numbers which regularly fluctuate, may have changed since data has been published. A bibliography of references used in this report can be found at [Appendix 2: Bibliography](#) and a detailed discussion of the methodology can be found at [Appendix 3: Methodology](#). Within the document, we have provided hyperlinks to allow rapid navigation to other sections. This full Review Report is supported by a Summary Review Report which can be found at www.cfa.vic.gov.au.

2. ABOUT THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW

Victoria is one of the most fire-prone regions in the world. In recent years, Victorians have seen the sacrifices made by Country Fire Authority (CFA) members who have come together as communities and fought and endured extreme fire conditions. CFA has deep roots in the Victorian community fighting fires for over 78 years. However, in recent years, it has experienced significant change and upheaval including major fires, Royal Commissions, political and legislative changes, new organisational and leadership arrangements as well as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) unpublished Review into sexual harassment and victimisation. On 1 July 2020, Victoria saw the biggest change in fire services in 70 years with the introduction of Fire Services Reform which saw CFA restored to a community-based, volunteer firefighter organisation.

In September 2021, CFA engaged an independent Review Team from *Allen + Clarke* which includes Dr Helen Szoke AO as Lead Reviewer, to undertake an independent review of culture and issues management to support the CFA of the future (the Review). This Review was undertaken in the context of a 10-year reform agenda for fire services in Victoria, a global pandemic, and the constant threat of climate change and its impact on Victorian fire services.

The Review has sought to ensure that CFA:

- has a robust and effective approach to issues management across a complex volunteer-based organisation
- sets and embeds behavioural and cultural expectations at all levels of the organisation
- efficiently and effectively manages issues when they do arise and supports members and leaders to work these issues through.

The Review considered structural and systemic issues and improvements for CFA. It was not tasked with reviewing other fire service organisations, the recent Fire Services Reform or investigating individual reports of misconduct.

The Review is independent of other reviews. It is the first external review undertaken at CFA since Fire Services Reform. It is forward looking.

The Review builds on the range of initiatives that have been implemented by CFA in recent years which seek to support positive change. Central to this change is CFA's Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-2030 (the Strategy and Outcomes Framework) which commits CFA to embracing change and supporting its members through transition.

The four goals outlined in the Strategy and Outcomes Framework include putting the community at the centre of everything CFA does; providing programs and services that make a positive difference; providing a great place to volunteer and work and being a progressive emergency service.

The four goals outlined in this figure are a central component of CFA’s Strategy and Outcomes Framework, which seeks to support the implementation of Fire Services Reform.

Figure 3: CFA strategic goals⁵



The Review also focuses on CFA’s core strengths of fire safety, professional standards for firefighting, community connectedness and volunteering. To support the CFA of the future, it highlights the importance of a positive and supportive culture, focused on increasing diversity, flexibility and inclusiveness.

⁵ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-30*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y> pg. 10.

This Review sits alongside recent CFA initiatives to support positive change that have been and are being implemented.

Figure 4: CFA initiatives to support positive change

 CFA INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT POSITIVE CHANGE				
The development of an Inclusion and Fairness Framework and an Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2021-2025 and the development of an Allies of Inclusion Network		The creation of a CFA Women's Advisory Committee and a CFA Youth Advisory Committee to advise the CEO and the Chief Officer directly on systemic matters and issues which need to be addressed to support diversity and inclusion		A review of support to Brigade Management Teams to ensure that there is a clear understanding of CFA expectations for volunteer leaders in addressing behavioural matters and the help available to them to assist when matters arise
Expansion of mediation services across the State to support early intervention of issues		The development of interim behavioural standards and improved interim guidelines for the management of complaints		A Disability Action Plan (which is in the process of being updated) and Disability confidence training
Provision of more prominent and visible information on where CFA members can raise issues of concern, both internally and externally		Introduction of Family Violence resources including paid leave, family violence contact officers, training and resources for people affected by family violence and their managers ¹		Delivery of tailored programs to multicultural groups through local brigades; and work to educate CFA members on understanding different faiths ²
CFA Pride, a support network for CFA's LGBTIQ+ firefighters which received the 2017 Volunteering Victoria State Award for Inclusion ³		An increase of investment in leadership development (including volunteer leaders)		Aboriginal Engagement Guidelines and a Koori Engagement Action Plan (which is in the process of being updated)
An independent review of training at the CFA ⁴		Availability of wellbeing education and training		A case tracking system for complaints, guidelines to promote a trauma-informed approach to the participation of children in the hearing process and the engagement of Kooyoora to focus on child related complaint processes
Identification of additional support to organisational leaders at all levels to ensure that there is a clear understanding of CFA expectations for staff leaders in proactively addressing behavioural matters and the help available to them to assist when matters arise		Regional and district training and leadership programs aimed at supporting women, including an annual event for women to learn burn off skills, and a Women's Challenge camp, which includes leadership development and physical activity ⁵		A Diversity and Inclusion data collection process; an Inclusion and Fairness business rule to provide guidance in relation to enabling inclusive, safe and equitable work practices, Inclusion Advisory Councils and the appointment of Inclusion and Fairness Coordinators across the regions as well as regional and state Inclusion and Fairness Councils.
Improved communication through monthly staff and monthly volunteer webinars	Focus on closing legacy complaints cases	Investments in improved induction processes	Expansion of mediation services across the state to support early intervention where issues arise	Increased investment in leadership development (including volunteer leaders)
Reviewing support to Brigade Management Teams to ensure that there is a clear understanding of CFA expectations of volunteer leaders in addressing behavioural matters and the help available to assist when matters do arise		Identification of additional support to organisational leaders at all levels to ensure that there is a clear understanding of CFA expectations of staff leaders in proactively addressing behavioural matters and the help available to them to assist when matters do arise		Provision of more prominent and visible information on where CFA members can raise issues of concern, both internally and externally

¹ Male Champions of Change. *Fire & Emergency Impact Report 2018-2019*. P.9. Retrieved from: <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Fire-Emergency-Impact-Report-2019.pdf>

² CFA annual Report 2016-17, P.37

³ CFA annual Report 17-18, P.21

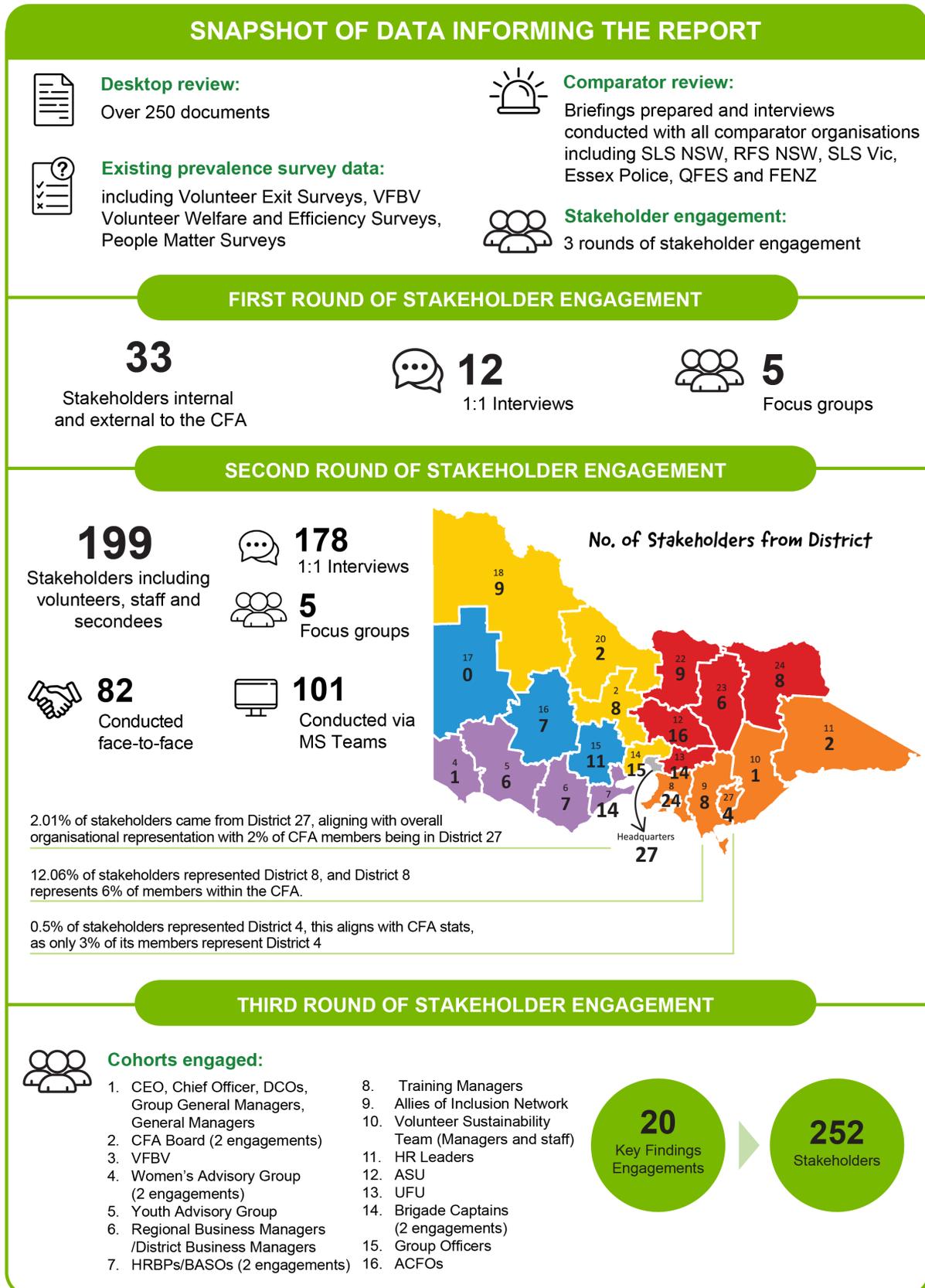
⁴ Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report Quarter 4 (Sept 21)

⁵ Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report Quarter 4 (Sept 21)

2.1. Key sources of information

Figure 5 provides a snapshot of key information sources used to inform the Review.

Figure 5: Snapshot of data informing the Review



The various sources of information used to inform the Review include:

- stakeholder engagement
- existing prevalence survey data relating to bullying, harassment and discrimination
- a desktop review of over 250 current policies and procedures
- a review of comparator organisations, as described in [Appendix 3](#) and [Appendix 5](#).

2.1.1 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement is drawn on throughout this report and was a key component of this Review. The Review Team travelled to 30 locations and visited each Region, meeting with members from almost every District. An indication of the spread of stakeholders engaged during stakeholder engagement is provided in [Figure 6](#).

Consultation involved a self-selected sample of stakeholders who had both positive and negative experiences at CFA. CFA has been on a journey and has seen significant change since 1 July 2020. During the course of stakeholder interviews, it was not always apparent whether stakeholders were drawing on experiences prior to, or since, Fire Services Reform. The purpose of engagement was to listen to people and their experiences of CFA. The process was trauma-informed and victim-centred. The Review Team did not investigate the responses provided during interviews. The Review Team has reflected some of the voices of those spoken to during interviews in this Report. The quotes used in this report are intended to illustrate, elevate and respect the voices of the stakeholders consulted during the course of the Review. These views do not necessarily represent the views of the Review Team. The quotes used in this report are not intended to exhaustively capture the views of stakeholders. Quotes have been de-identified to maintain stakeholder confidentiality.

2.1.2 Prevalence data

Existing prevalence data was an important source of information in the desktop review and are drawn on throughout this report. CFA members currently participate in a range of surveys relating to the culture of the organisation. Three of the key surveys are:

- The Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) Volunteer Welfare & Efficiency survey takes an annual snapshot of volunteer opinion and welfare. It monitors short-and long-term trends, and the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at improving CFA volunteer engagement and wellbeing. The survey asks 33 questions on issues chosen by CFA volunteers. The first survey was conducted in 2012, with most recent available data from the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey where 2,693 CFA volunteers took part. The survey measures CFA volunteer attitudes of the importance of seven themes and volunteer attitudes on the performance of each theme. The gap between how closely performance meets the expectation of importance is referred to as the Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Level (VoIWEL) outcome. A VoIWEL outcome of 2.5 or more is indicative of a significant issue needing to be addressed, while a gap of less than 1.5 indicates volunteer expectations are closer to being met.
- CFA Volunteer Exit Survey is an online survey provided to volunteers who have left CFA, or changed CFA Brigades, and provided an opportunity to give feedback on their volunteer experience. All information is treated in the strictest of confidence. Information received is consolidated and used to capture key trends, not single out individual responses. 153 individual surveys informed the 1 January 2021 – 30 June 2021 Volunteer Exit Survey Data.

- The People Matter Survey is an annual employee opinion survey conducted by the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC) designed to measure and build positive and ethical workplaces in public sector organisations. CFA employees from professional, technical and administrative staff (PTA), District Mechanical Officers (DMO), Tower Overseers (TO) and Executive groups are able to take part. The survey measures how employees feel about CFA and gathers information on a broad range of issues that affect employees' working life. 577 CFA staff took part in the 2021 People Matter Survey (50% of applicable staff). The Survey also conducts a comparison with responses from similar organisations. CFA responses are compared with the following organisations: Ambulance Victoria; Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority; Victoria Police – Sworn and PSOs; Victoria State Emergency Service; Victorian Public Sector Commission.

These existing surveys provide an indication of CFA member experiences and perspectives of CFA. The Review did not conduct a survey to inform this work as; existing surveys could be drawn on to gather data on member experiences over several years, stakeholders expressed fatigue at taking part in surveys, stakeholder interviews were considered to be an approach that was more victim-centred and trauma-informed and stakeholder interviews were able to capture more in-depth analysis.

2.1.3 Desktop review

A desktop review of documents was undertaken to inform the Review. The full list of documents reviewed can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

Documents were analysed against the following themes in line with the Scope of Work:

- current CFA culture, including as informed by organisational activities, communications and policies that seek to enhance diversity, and prevent harassment, discrimination and bullying
- the role of CFA leadership in embedding behavioural and cultural expectations and creating an inclusive organisation
- CFA's current systems and processes for managing issues relating to diversity, harassment, discrimination and bullying
- CFA's current systems and processes for preventing harassment, discrimination and bullying.

Reviewing current CFA documents helped the Review Team establish an understanding of the environment CFA operates in, including what tools, processes and advice are in place to support culture and prevent bullying, harassment and discrimination. Findings from the desktop review have been drawn on in this final report.

2.1.4 Comparator review

Many Australian and overseas fire and emergency management organisations are also seeking to improve workforce diversity and manage issues. In order to develop meaningful recommendations to support the CFA of the future, the Review Team sought to understand how other organisations are undertaking this work and their approaches to associated challenges. For this purpose, the Review Team identified six other organisations who:

- draw on a sizeable volunteer workforce
- function under a command and control structure

- have a large geographic span
- have expressed a public commitment to improving organisational approaches to diversity, bullying, harassment or discrimination.

An organisation's selection as a comparator does not indicate they have completed their cultural reform journey or that their internal structures are directly comparable to CFA, but rather that they provided the Review Team with an opportunity to obtain insight into effective initiatives and learnings on associated challenges.

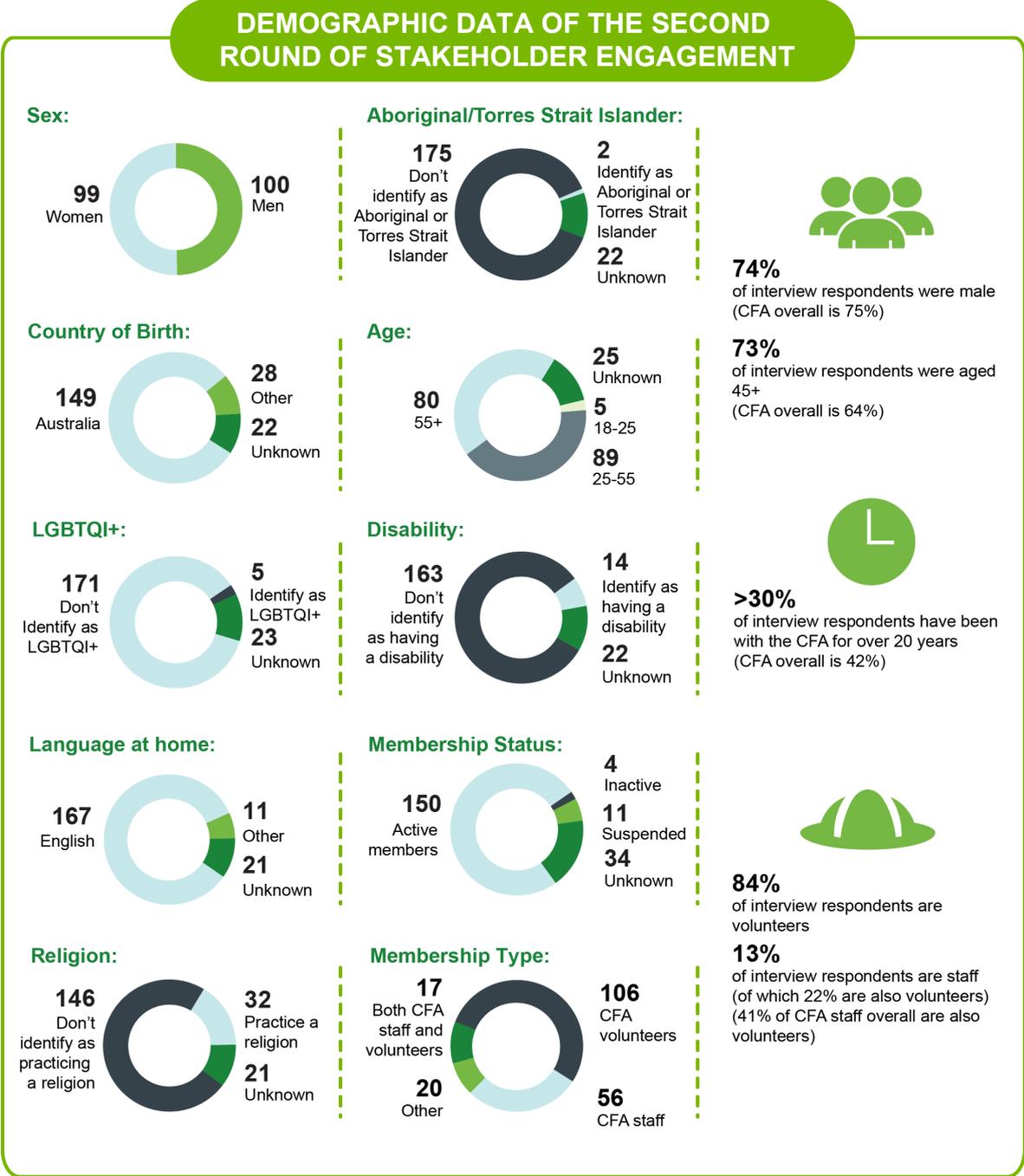
Independently of CFA, the Review Team identified four Australian and two international comparator organisations: Surf Life Saving New South Wales (SLSNSW); New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS); Life Saving Victoria (LSV); Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES); Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ); and Essex Police. For each comparator organisation, members of the Review Team undertook a desktop review of publicly available information and met with organisational representatives, either in-person or virtually.

In addition to the six comparator organisations selected for the Review, the Review Team also drew on research from other organisations including for example NSW SES and the Australian Defence Force.

A detailed discussion of the methodology can be found in [Appendix 3](#).

This figure indicates the demographic data of stakeholders spoken to in the second round of stakeholder engagement.

Figure 6: Demographic data of the Second Round of stakeholder engagement



This figure includes a word cloud of some of the key terms heard during interviews with members in the second round of stakeholder consultation.

Figure 7: Word Cloud from Second Round of Stakeholder Consultation



This word cloud is drawn from interviews conducted during the second round of stakeholder engagement. To support analysis, the Review Team coded interviews from the second round of stakeholder engagement into key themes.

The content of the word cloud at [Figure 7](#) represents the 40 most common words mentioned by stakeholders within these key themes, excluding words fewer than 3 letters, Review Team questions, and other less significant or meaningful words like conjunctions or prepositions. This provides some insight into areas that are of most interest to the stakeholders involved in these interviews.

3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This section provides background and context to CFA. It gives a brief overview of the organisation, the broader emergency sector in which it operates, its monitoring and reporting environment, and recent organisational reforms.

3.1. Organisational context and composition

CFA is a statutory authority appointed under the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958 (Vic)* (CFA Act 1958) and supported by the *Country Fire Authority Regulations 2014 (Vic)* (CFA Regulations 2014).

The objective of CFA is to contribute to a whole of sector approach to emergency management; promote a culture within the emergency management sector of community focus, interoperability and public value; and to support the effective and sustainable recruitment, development and retention of volunteers and members.⁶ CFA must, in performing its functions and exercising its powers, collaborate and consult with Emergency Management Victoria (EMV).⁷ Further, in performing its functions, CFA has a responsibility to encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers and must have regard to the commitment and principles set out in the Volunteer Charter.⁸

The first volunteer Brigades in Victoria were established in the mid-1800s, with the modern CFA established in 1945 after a Royal Commission into the 1939 Black Friday fires. Since its inception 78 years ago, CFA has cemented itself as Victoria's largest volunteer workforce.⁹

CFA has faced numerous devastating events including the 1983 Ash Wednesday Fires where 180 fires burned across Victoria and led to the death of 47 people,¹⁰ and the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires which led to the loss of 173 lives and extensive damage to land and possessions.¹¹ In recent years, the organisation has withstood periods of significant organisational reform. Most notably, on 1 July 2020, CFA was at the centre of the biggest reform in Victorian fire services in more than 70 years. These reforms saw CFA restored to a community-based, volunteer firefighter organisation. [Figure 8](#) below depicts important events that have occurred between 2017 – 2022.

⁶ *Country Fire Authority Act 1958 (Vic)*, s 6B.

⁷ *Country Fire Authority Act 1958 (Vic)*, s 6C.

⁸ *Country Fire Authority Act 1958 (Vic)*, s 6H, s 6I.

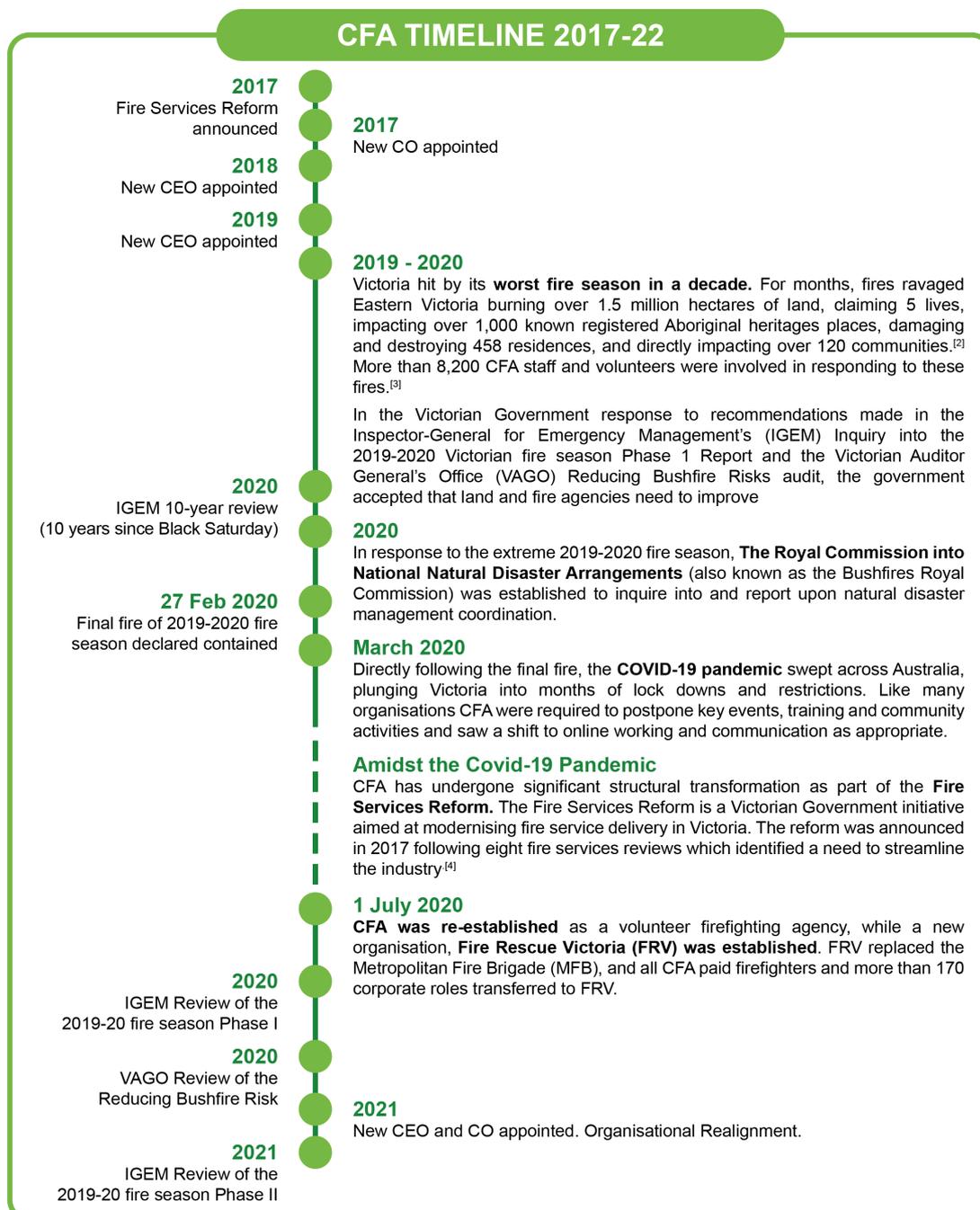
⁹ CFA. (2021). *Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-mission/annual-report>

¹⁰ CFA. (2022). *About Ash Wednesday*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/major-fires/about-ash-wednesday>

¹¹ CFA. (2021). *About Black Saturday*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/major-fires/about-black-saturday>

This timeline provides an overview of key milestones at CFA between 2017-2022 to highlight the extent of reform and change that has taken place during this time.

Figure 8: CFA Timeline 2017-2022



This timeline is to demonstrate recent change but these changes are built on significant reviews into fire services including: 1983 Report of the Bushfire Review Committee, 1984 Bushfires and the Australian Environment, 1992 Fire protection – Special Report No. 16, 1998 Investigation and inquests into a wildfire and the deaths of five firefighters at Linton (Coroners Court Victoria), 2003 Fire prevention and preparedness, 2003 Inquiry into the 2002-2003 Victorian bushfires, 2003 Ministerial taskforce on bushfire recovery 2002-03 fires, 2004 National inquiry on bushfire mitigation and management 2014, 2005 Examination of prescribed burning practices, 2006 Fire season debrief outcomes report 2005/06, 2006 Ministerial taskforce on bushfire recovery – 2005/06 fires, 2007 Operational reviews of major fires in Victoria 2006/07, 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, 2011 Jones Inquiry, 2013 Harrierville Inquest and response, 2014 Managing Emergency Services Volunteers, 2014 Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry, 2015 Independent Investigation of the Lancefield-Cobaw Fire, 2020 Delivering Bushfire Reform, 2020 Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

^[1] CFA. (2021) Annual Report 2020-21. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-mission/annual-report>

^[2] Victoria Government (2021) 2019-20 Eastern Victorian bushfires. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/2019-20-eastern-victorian-bushfires>

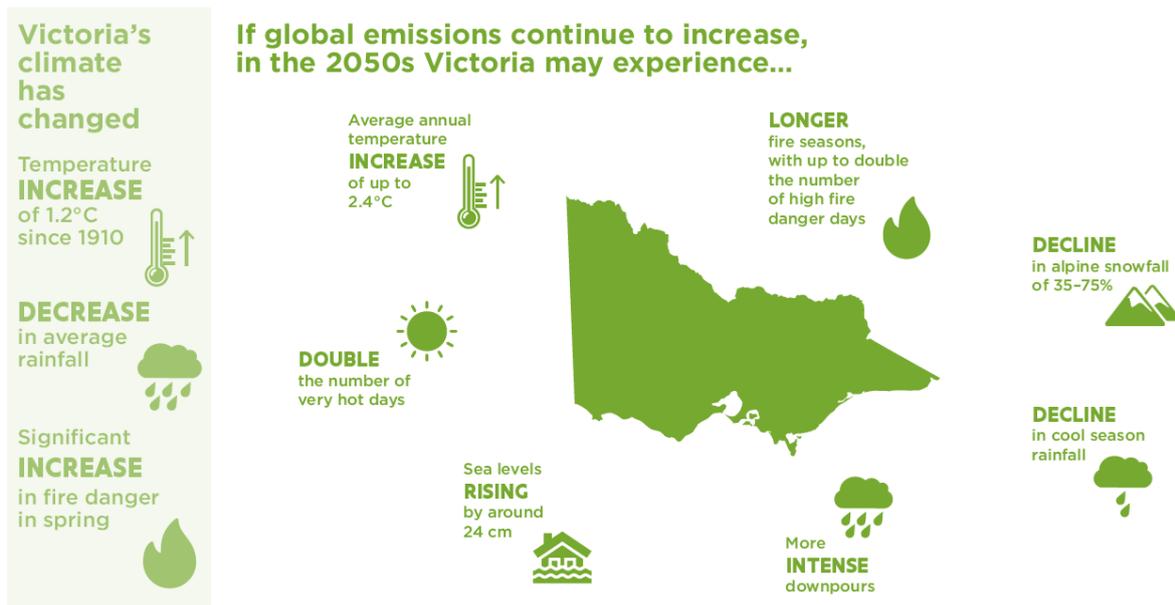
^[3] CFA. (2020) Annual Report 2019-20. Retrieved from https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/520/CFA_AR_20_web.pdf.aspx pg. 6

^[4] Victoria Government. (2021). Fire Services Reform. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/fire-services-reform>

In addition to these organisational challenges, CFA has also grappled with the increasing impact of climate change on its organisation. The report from the Bushfires Royal Commission warned that extreme weather has become more frequent and intense because of climate change. The impact of climate change is echoed in Victoria, as illustrated by [Figure 9](#) below.

This image, developed by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning highlights the impact of climate projections on Victoria including longer fire seasons with up to double the number of high fire danger days.

Figure 9: Climate projections for Victoria¹²



Under high emissions, compared to 1986-2005. Updated from Victoria's Climate Science Report 2019

With further climatic changes over the next 20 to 30 years, fires are expected to be more common and severe and traditional fire models and techniques will be less effective.¹³ CFA reflected on this in its Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-2030 where it said “the increased risk of devastating bushfires driven by climate factors is testing CFA’s response capability. We need to be smarter about how we manage the risk of bushfires in our environment”.¹⁴

These significant organisational, environmental and geopolitical impacts are key determinants to CFA’s organisational culture and wellbeing.

¹² Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. (2021). *Victoria's Changing Climate*. Source: © State of Victoria (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning) State of Victoria. Retrieved from: <https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/victorias-changing-climate>

¹³ Commonwealth. (2020). *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements - Report*. Retrieved from: <https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-11/Royal%20Commission%20into%20National%20Natural%20Disaster%20Arrangements%20-%20Report%20%20%5Baccessible%5D.pdf> . pg. 22.

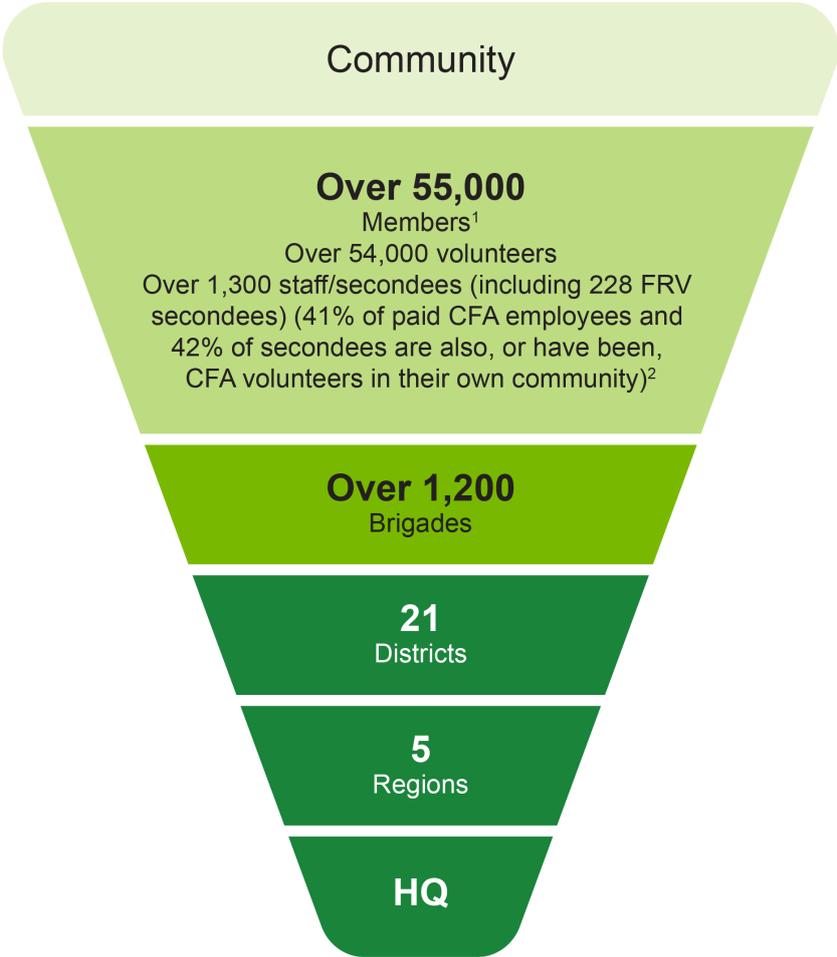
¹⁴ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-30*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y> .pg. 8

3.2. Current structure

The structure of CFA has been subject to significant changes since Fire Services Reform on 1 July 2020. Currently, CFA’s State headquarters supports five Regions, made up of 21 Districts and 1,212 fire Brigades.¹⁵ CFA is one of the world’s largest volunteer-based emergency service organisations with over 55,000 members, of which over 54,000 are volunteers and over 1,300 are staff/secondees.¹⁶ Volunteers work in Brigades across peri-urban, regional and rural Victoria and along Victoria’s coastline.

This figure outlines the flow of CFA’s organisational structure, demonstrating the way in which CFA works towards supporting its community.

Figure 10: Flow of CFA’s organisational structure



¹ Headcount numbers from: CFA. (2021) Annual Report 2020 – 21. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-mission/annual-report>
² Volunteers including non-active and/or non operational volunteers. This statistic draws on internal data provided by the CFA Business Intelligence Team (March 2022)

¹⁵ CFA. (2021). *CFA at a Glance – CFA’s Workforce and Resource Numbers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/cfa-at-a-glance> Figures as of 31 December 2021.

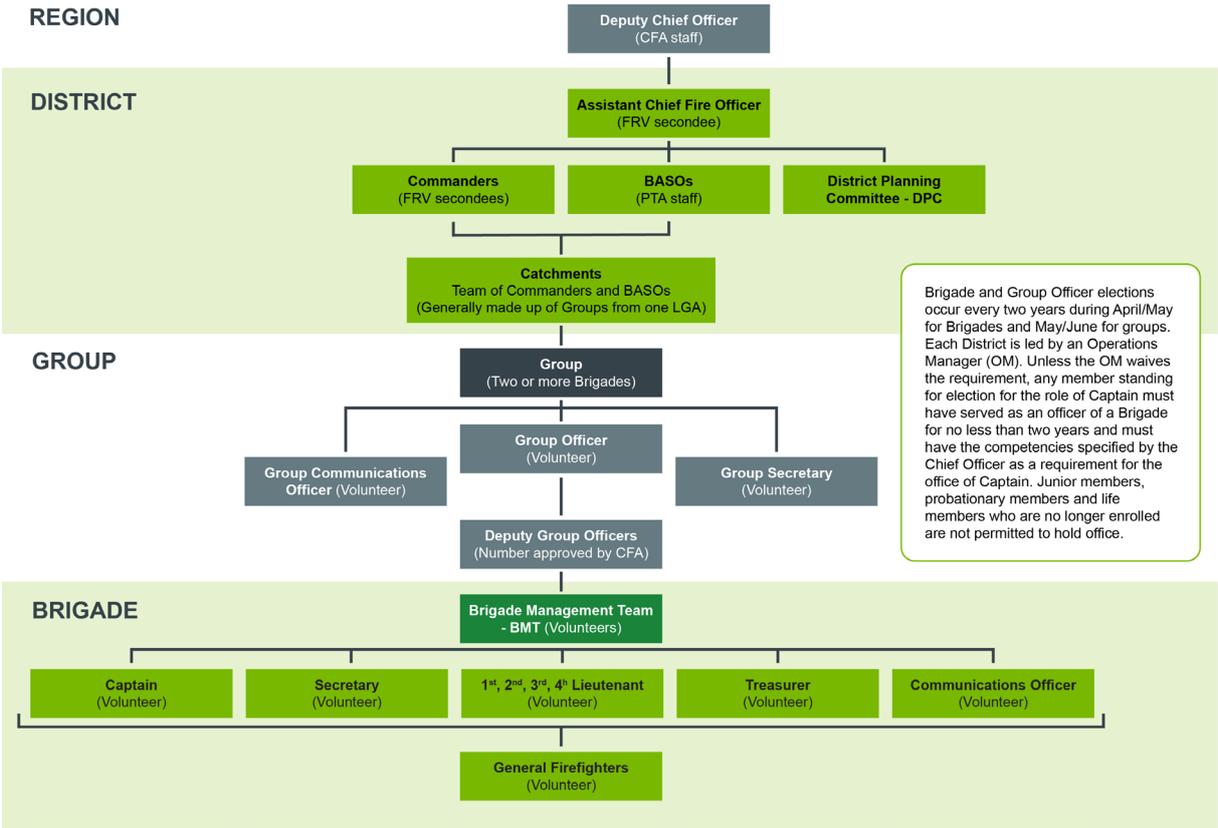
¹⁶ CFA. (2021). *Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-mission/annual-report>. p.24.

CFA volunteers may be operational (firefighters), non-operational (support volunteers) or junior volunteers. Volunteers undertake a range of tasks including firefighting, road rescue, emergency medical response, fundraising, community education as well as providing support to other emergency services organisations.

As a statutory authority CFA is governed by a Board, has a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Officer (CO). CFA is subject to the general direction and control of the Minister for Emergency Services in its performance of its functions and the exercise of its powers.¹⁷ This portfolio is currently held by the Attorney-General. The Department of Justice and Community Safety formally monitors CFA through government-set key performance indicators (KPIs).¹⁸

The chain of command is central to CFA’s organisational structure and culture. This figure provides an illustration of the way in which the chain of command functions within CFA.

Figure 11: CFA chain of command



Since July 2020, integrated Brigades¹⁹ have been superseded by 34 co-located Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and CFA Brigades. Co-located Brigades house a CFA volunteer Brigade alongside a FRV career team. These stations sometimes have one roofline with two separate parts – one for CFA; and one for FRV, or in some circumstances they share facilities. However, they differ from the previously integrated Brigades in that they are physically co-located but not

¹⁷ Country Fire Authority Act 1958 (Vic), s 6A(1).

¹⁸ CFA. (2019) Annual Report 2018-19. Retrieved from: cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/520/CFA_Annual%20Report_2019.pdf.aspx, pg. 26.

¹⁹ Historically, integrated brigades (which have now ceased to exist, but formerly consisted of co-located paid and volunteer firefighters) would be created where CFA identified a need for extra support. Over time, additional firefighters were added as career firefighters, with the intention of supporting a volunteer brigade by providing full time capacity at a fire station.

integrated in their functions. This is a significant reform which is still being bedded down and the impacts of which are still being understood.

3.3. Victorian emergency services sector

CFA forms part of the Victorian emergency management sector and works with its partner agencies to fulfil its mission, to protect lives and property.

The State Emergency Management Plan (authorised by the *Emergency Management Act 2013* (Vic)) specifies the roles and responsibilities of agencies in relation to emergency management.²⁰ It provides for an integrated, coordinated and comprehensive approach to response and recovery from emergencies.

There are a number of arrangements that exist within the State regarding responsibilities for fire prevention on different types of land. [Table 1](#) describes three of the key fire agencies in Victoria and their responsibilities. It is important to note that all fire agencies work in partnership with other state agencies such as State Emergency Services (SES), Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), Victoria Police (VicPol), Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) and others.

This table provides an overview of the roles; areas of operation and interaction between Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFM Vic), CFA and FRV.

Table 1: Roles and responsibilities of Victorian fire management organisations

	Forest Fire Management Victoria	Country Fire Authority	Fire Rescue Victoria
Role	Reduce the risk and impact of bushfire on Victoria’s parks, forests and other public land	Reduce the occurrence and impacts of fire and other emergencies in country areas	Respond to fires, complex rescues, road crashes, emergency medical calls and hazardous chemical spills
Area of operation	State forests, national parks and Protected Public Land (section 61B, <i>Forests Act 1958</i> (Vic))	Land in the country area of Victoria (being land which lies outside FRV fire Districts, but does not include any forest, national park or protected public land) (section 6(1), <i>CFA Act</i>) A map of CFA Brigades, Districts and Regional boundaries can be accessed here .	Land in FRV fire Districts (section 7, <i>FRV Act</i>) A map of FRV stations and Districts can be accessed here .
Agency interaction	FFMVic includes staff from DELWP, Parks Victoria, VicForests and Melbourne Water. It works with CFA and FRV, other emergency	Both CFA and FRV work alongside FFMVic, including during emergencies. CFA and FRV are legislatively required to establish processes to ensure they:	

²⁰ Emergency Management Victoria (2021) *Victorian State Emergency Management Plan*. Retrieved from: <https://files.emv.vic.gov.au/2021-10/Victorian%20State%20Emergency%20Management%20Plan%20%28SEMP%29%20-%20Interactive%20and%20functional%20PDF%20document%20-%20October%202021.PDF>

	<p>services and communities across Victoria to deliver the best local approaches to public land management in Victoria.</p> <p>The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Fire Rescue Victoria have formally signed an agreement for fire prevention and suppression activities which allows personnel from DELWP, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, and VicForests to carry out certain fire suppression activities in the FRV Fire District, when they operate as part of FFMVic, and in the circumstances which are set out in the agreement.</p> <p>CFA and FFMVic's response work crosses over when there are bushfires that enter rural or farmland or private land.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote collaboration and coordination between fire services agencies to best meet the safety needs of the community • recognise the importance of maintaining capacity to respond to peaks in demand for fire services within fire services agencies • recognise and value the contribution of volunteer Brigades • recognise that both volunteer firefighters and career firefighters are vital to delivering safe and sustainable fire services • maintain the ability of fire services agencies to respond to critical incidents, to prevent and suppress fires and to protect life and property. <p>Consistent with the terms of a secondment agreement between CFA and FRV, there are approximately 220 FRV staff seconded to CFA to provide volunteer Brigades with operational and management support.</p> <p>34 CFA Brigades are co-located with FRV stations.</p>
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For further context on the Victorian emergency services sector, it is helpful to compare to other States and Territories.

The Australian Government Productivity Commission provides data on emergency service organisations for fire and other events. A wide range of data is captured including Australian Government funding to State and Territory governments and individuals, fire injuries, major sources of State and Territory emergency service organisations' revenue, and fire service organisations human resources.

[Table 2](#) provides an overview of State and Territory volunteer human resources in Australian fire service organisations in 2020-2021.²¹

²¹ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2022). *Annual Report on Government Services (RoGS), Part D, Section 9, Emergency service for fire and other events*. Retrieved from: [pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/emergency-management/emergency-services/rogs-2022-partd-section9-emergency-services-data-tables.xlsx](https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/emergency-management/emergency-services/rogs-2022-partd-section9-emergency-services-data-tables.xlsx)

Table 2: Fire service organisations volunteer human resources ²²

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
Volunteer Firefighters ²³	73 430	29 633	12 796	12 040	10 682	4 011	1 277	290	144 159
Volunteer Support staff ²⁴	8 336	24 508	17 471	2 496	2 895	915	–	–	56 621
Total volunteer staff	81 766	54 141	30 267	14 536	13 577	4 926	1 277	290	200 780
Volunteers per 100 000 people ²⁵	1000.5	812.7	582.6	544.4	766.7	909.7	296.0	117.6	781.4

Victoria has the second highest number of volunteer firefighters in fire service organisations in Australia (29,633), but by far the highest number of volunteer support staff (24,508). The total volunteer staff in Victorian fire service organisations make up 27% of Australia’s total volunteer staff, indicating the importance of Victoria’s volunteer fire service members.

²² Australian Government Productivity Commission (2022). *Annual Report on Government Services (RoGS), Part D, Section 9, Emergency service for fire and other events*. Retrieved from: [pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/emergency-management/emergency-services/rogs-2022-partd-section9-emergency-services-data-tables.xlsx](https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/emergency-management/emergency-services/rogs-2022-partd-section9-emergency-services-data-tables.xlsx)

²³ Volunteer firefighters are defined as: ‘All personnel engaged on an unpaid casual basis by the emergency service organisation who deliver or manage a firefighting service directly to the community and who are formally trained and qualified to undertake firefighting duties, but do not receive remuneration other than reimbursement of ‘out of pocket expenses’’. See Australian Government Productivity Commission (2022). *Annual Report on Government Services (RoGS), Part D, Section 9, Emergency services for fire and other events interpretative material*, 9.23. Retrieved from: <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/emergency-management/emergency-services/rogs-2022-partd-section9-emergency-services-interpretative-material.pdf>

²⁴ Volunteer support staff are defined as: ‘All personnel engaged on an unpaid casual basis that are not remunerated and are principally involved in the provision of support services. For fire service organisations, this includes any staff whose immediate client is the firefighter. These can be people in operational support roles provided they do not receive payment for their services other than reimbursement of ‘out of pocket expenses’’. See Australian Government Productivity Commission (2022). *Annual Report on Government Services (RoGS), Part D, Section 9, Emergency services for fire and other events interpretative material*, 9.23. Retrieved from: <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/emergency-management/emergency-services/rogs-2022-partd-section9-emergency-services-interpretative-material.pdf>

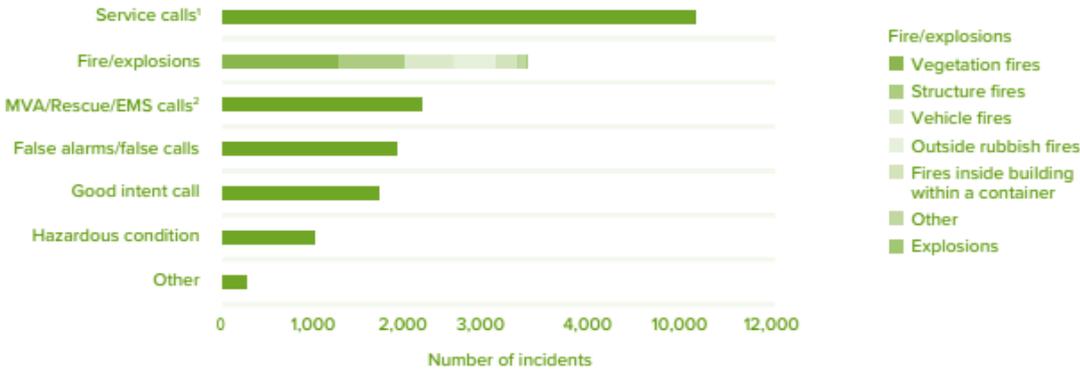
²⁵ Rates are derived using the 31 December Estimated Resident Population (ERP) of the relevant financial year.

CFA plays a critical and central role to the Victorian emergency services sector. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual Report recorded incidents for the 2020-21 season as shown in [Figure 12](#) (noting that there was significantly less fire activity than in the 2019-20 season).²⁶ Figure 12 provides an overview of CFA incidents for the 2020-21 fire season, including the incident response by type.

Figure 12: CFA Incidents for the 2020-21 Season²⁷

2020-21 total incidents

Figure 2: 2020-21 incident response by type



²⁶ CFA. (2021). *Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-mission/annual-report>. p.24.

²⁷ CFA. (2021). *Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-mission/annual-report>. p.24.

3.4. Industrial unions, representative bodies and agreements

A number of industrial unions and representative bodies are involved with CFA due to its diverse membership arrangements. Members are also subject to different working arrangements depending on their membership type. Key representative bodies and their relevant agreements for CFA volunteers, CFA staff and staff seconded to CFA are listed in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Membership types, representative bodies, relevant agreements and legislation

Membership type	Representative body	Sample of relevant agreements and legislation
CFA volunteer	The Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) represents CFA volunteers and Brigades. ²⁸ The VFBV advocates on behalf of volunteers, drives policy development and is involved in the management of issues.	<p>CFA volunteers are guided by the Volunteer Charter²⁹ and CFA Volunteer Code of Conduct.</p> <p>The CFA Volunteer Charter is an agreed commitment by the State of Victoria, CFA and VFBV on behalf of CFA volunteers to each other. It sets out the principles that will apply to the management of these relationships, including ensuring the State of Victoria and CFA will commit to consultation with volunteers about all matters which might reasonably be expected to affect volunteers. It also recognises the importance and value of volunteer contribution in the organisation. The Volunteer Charter is enshrined in the <i>CFA Act 1958</i>.</p> <p>The CFA Volunteer Code of Conduct establishes the behaviours that are expected of CFA volunteers and outlines the principles that guide these behaviours.</p>
CFA staff	<p>CFA professional, technical and administrative staff are eligible to join the Australian Services Union (ASU), United Firefighters Union of Australia (UFU) or Professionals Australia.</p> <p>CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers are eligible to join the ASU or UFU.</p>	<p>CFA professional, technical and administrative staff are covered by the <i>CFA Professional, Technical and Administrative Agreement 2020</i>³⁰ (PTA Agreement) and District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers are covered by the <i>CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018</i>³¹ (DMO/TO Agreement).</p> <p>The PTA Agreement and the DMO/TO Agreement currently provide 7 classification levels (see Glossary).</p>

²⁸ VFBV. (2016). *Our Role*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vfbv.com.au/index.php/about/vfbv/ourrole>

²⁹ *Country Fire Authority Act 1958*, s6H.

³⁰ *CFA Professional, Technical and Administrative Agreement 2020*. (Entered into operation 24 June 2021). Retrieved from CFA.

³¹ *CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018*. (Entered into operation 26 February 2019). Retrieved from CFA.

Membership type	Representative body	Sample of relevant agreements and legislation
Seconded operational staff	All firefighters and officers employed professionally throughout the State of Victoria are eligible to join the United Firefighters Union of Australia (UFU). ³²	<p>As members of the Victorian public sector, CFA employees are subject to the Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees 2015.</p> <p>Seconded operational staff are officers or other staff of FRV, made available to CFA for secondment under the Secondment Agreement³³ between CFA and FRV.</p> <p>Seconded operational staff are covered by the <i>Fire Rescue Victoria Operational Employees Interim Enterprise Agreement 2020</i>.³⁴ CFA is not a party to that agreement.</p>
CFA career firefighters	CFA's career firefighters transferred to FRV on 1 July 2020.	<p>At the time of transfer, the <i>Country Fire Authority/United Firefighters' Union of Australia Operational Staff Enterprise Agreement 2010</i> covered CFA career firefighters. The Agreement passed its nominal expiry date on 30 September 2013 and has not been replaced. It continues to operate. However, the terms and conditions of employment of former CFA career firefighters were determined by a non-registered instrument the "Operational Staff Employment, Conditions and Entitlements Policy", which gave effect to the terms of a proposed 2016 Operational Agreement which had been intended to replace the 2010 Operational Agreement.</p> <p>The above instruments transferred to FRV on 1 July 2020 and formed part of the <i>Fire Rescue Victoria Operational Employees Interim Enterprise Agreement 2020</i>.</p>

³² United Firefighters Union (n.d.) *Eligibility*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ufuvic.asn.au/membership/eligibility/>

³³ *Secondment Agreement*. (Entered into operation 31 October 2020). Retrieved from CFA.

³⁴ *Fire Rescue Victoria Operational Employees Interim Enterprise Agreement 2020*. Retrieved from CFA.

3.5. CFA strategic planning and reporting

Under the *Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019* (Vic), CFA and FRV are required to prepare and publish outcomes frameworks and quarterly updates.³⁵

The CFA Strategy and Outcomes Framework outlines the commitment to support and empower volunteers to deliver high quality services to the community to manage fire risks and create resilient communities. It also represents the strategic direction of CFA under the new fire services model, restoring CFA as a volunteer and community focussed organisation. The CFA Outcomes Framework (Year One) is part of the CFA Strategy and Outcomes Framework.³⁶ The Outcomes Framework (Year Two)³⁷ has further developed the indicators and their alignment with Fire Service Reform outcomes.

The Fire Services Implementation Monitor (FSIM) independently assesses and reviews the progress of Victoria's Fire Services Reforms. Every quarter, the Office of the FSIM conducts the quarterly report on the progress of CFA and FRV against their respective outcomes-based fire service performance indicators. The most recent report was the 2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report.³⁸

³⁵ *Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019*, (Vic) s 140.

³⁶ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-2030*. Retrieved from: [cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y](https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y)

³⁷ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-2030*. Retrieved from: [cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y](https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y)

³⁸ FSIM. (2022) *2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%202_0.pdf

4. CHANGE AND REFORM AT CFA

In recent years, CFA has withstood significant change including reviews, and leadership change which have contributed to organisational instability. These changes have had significant impacts on the culture of CFA. The Fire Services Reforms introduced on 1 July 2020 are the most recent. This review is the first external review commissioned by CFA since the Fire Services Reform. This review builds on work that has been done to consolidate the internal changes implemented since Fire Services Reform, to continue to prepare for the CFA of the future.

4.1. Fire Services Reform

In 2017, the Victorian Government released the Fire Services Statement which mapped out a vision for achieving a modern fire service and a guide to achieving it.³⁹ On 1 July 2020, Fire Services reform was implemented which saw CFA enshrined in law as a community-centred, volunteer firefighter agency, as well as the establishment of the new FRV.⁴⁰ These reforms are still in their developmental phases but are having a significant impact on organisational culture at CFA.

Under these reforms, CFA is a fully volunteer firefighting service, but the organisation may employ paid staff in the role of CO, CEO and be supported where necessary by other paid staff (such as, and including, executives, deputy chief officers and other professional, administrative and mechanical staff such as those employed under the PTA and the District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers agreements) or enter into a secondment agreement within the meaning of section 25C(10) of the *Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958 (Vic)* (FRV Act). Consistent with the terms of a broader Service Level Agreement,⁴¹ CFA and FRV entered into a Secondment Agreement on 31 October 2020.

This secondment agreement acknowledges that CFA requires additional resources and support and represents the agreed basis on which FRV officers or employees are made available to CFA.⁴² It requires CFA and FRV to ensure no reduction to the operational and management support provided to CFA and its volunteers. The agreement requires the Fire Rescue Commissioner to consult with the CO in relation to appointments and the CO may review proposed appointments. The Service Level Agreement reflects five classifications of FRV secondees to CFA comprising a total of 223 positions: Assistant Chief Fire Officers (45); Commanders (96); Instructors (53); Practical Area Drill Supervisors (8); and Practical Area Drill Operators (21).

³⁹ See <https://www.vic.gov.au/fire-services-reform>

⁴⁰ Section 6F of the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958 (Vic)* recognises CFA as a volunteer-based organisation. It states that CFA is “a fully volunteer fire fighting service under the command and control of a paid Chief Officer and supported where necessary by other paid staff. The Parliament recognises that this does not preclude the Authority from employing paid staff in the role of Chief Officer, Deputy Chief Officer and Chief Executive Officer or from entering into a secondment agreement (within the meaning of section 25C(10) of the *Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958 (Vic)*).” Section 25C(10) of the *Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958 (Vic)* states that “secondment agreement means an agreement between the Fire Rescue Commissioner and the Chief Officer of the Country Fire Authority under which one or more officers or employees of Fire Rescue Victoria are made available to the Country Fire Authority, whether on a full-time, part-time or other basis”.

⁴¹ *Overarching Operational Services Agreement*. (Entered into operation 30 June 2020). Retrieved from CFA.

⁴² *Secondment Agreement*. (Entered into operation 31 October 2020). Retrieved from CFA.

These arrangements result in a unique make up of membership across CFA including over 54,000 volunteers, over 1,300 staff/secondees (including 228 staff seconded from FRV).⁴³ 41% of paid CFA employees and 42% of secondees are also, or have been, CFA volunteers in their own community.⁴⁴ During the Fire Services Reform, all paid CFA firefighters and more than 170 corporate roles transferred to FRV. The Review Team understands that the majority of current secondees were CFA employees prior to the Fire Services Reform.⁴⁵ This is important to note in reflecting on the secondees' understanding of organisational history and culture and to understand the implications for the future of this arrangement.

While secondees remain solely in the employment of FRV at all times, the Secondment Agreement confirms that the CO has the order and control of all secondees made available to CFA.⁴⁶ It also reflects agreement between the parties that all secondees will implement command and control arrangements at the direction of the CO. Under this model, the CO may appoint Deputy Chief Officers but not the next key layers of operational leadership, as these members are employed and chosen by the FRV Commissioner.⁴⁷ Instead, the reforms intend that FRV and CFA undertake a joint selection process to decide on suitable officers or employees for secondment. The CO then has the final approval about whether an officer or employee is suitable for secondment. If the CO is not satisfied that suitable officers or employees can be made available, the CO may request FRV to conduct a further external equitable, fair and transparent selection process, in consultation with the CO.⁴⁸ While secondees report to the CO at CFA, performance management issues remain the responsibility of FRV.

Stakeholder responses to organisational arrangements

These arrangements, which are still relatively recent, were commented on during the stakeholder interviews. The disconnect between the way secondees are managed and the work they do was noted by one secondee who said: "I'm paid by FRV, I'm disciplined by FRV but on a day-to-day basis I have nothing to do with FRV."⁴⁹ Another stakeholder described the arrangement as creating "silos" as the secondee needs to consider their responsibilities to FRV, rather than broader responsibilities to CFA, Brigade and community.⁵⁰

Many stakeholders interviewed noted the challenges associated with the complexity of the FRV/CFA arrangement associated with the Fire Services Reform. They reflected on the cultural impact of Fire Services Reform and the challenges arising as a result of reform. Comments included: "The whole FRV/ CFA turf war is painful..."⁵¹; "Juggling lots of unions that are involved with the fire service has always been a challenge for the organisation you have

⁴³ CFA. (2021). *Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-mission/annual-report>. p.24.

⁴⁴ This number includes volunteers who are non-active and/or non operational volunteers. This statistic draws on internal data provided by the CFA Business Intelligence Team (March 2022).

⁴⁵ CFA & Review Team Communication (16 February 2022).

⁴⁶ Secondment Agreement. (Entered into operation 31 October 2020), cl.7. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴⁷ Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council's Fire Services Bill Select Committee. (2017). *Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 Final Report*. Retrieved from: https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/Fire_Services_Bill/final_report/FSBSC_58-02_Text_WEB.pdf pg.29 .

⁴⁸ Explanatory memorandum, *Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019 (Vic)*. pg.23.

⁴⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

different groups in the organisation with different needs. Trying to balance all those needs and that political area is very difficult.”⁵²

Many members interviewed by the Review Team expressed their view that different roles within CFA were treated and valued differently, and there was a perception by those interviewed that this created a barrier to organisational cohesion. A key finding of the Review is that members have a unity of purpose when they are responding to a call out. However, there was a perception that even during call outs or incidents when members generally come together to fight a common cause, there were instances of inequity in treatment. One stakeholder described it as an “us versus them mentality”.⁵³

One example given by a stakeholder related to the types of food provided at the fire ground: “paid firefighters will come to assist and be given different food ... There’s a clear difference in the quality of the food provided. These differences are blatant, and others have seen them too.”⁵⁴ Another stakeholder thought that volunteers were treated like an ‘expendable commodity’ by operational middle management.⁵⁵

Many stakeholders expressed strong views about the divisiveness created through having different uniforms in the workplace and many noted their refusal to wear the FRV uniform, with one stakeholder referring to this as a ‘silent protest’. Another explained that CFA “uniform is very symbolic, the volunteers take great pride in it. It’s important to value tradition and experience, and new innovation. When people see someone in that role walk in wearing the FRV uniform, it’s a slap in the face for them”.⁵⁶

One stakeholder described that: “The uniform makes a huge difference. It’s such a cultural thing. It’s like you’re in the army and you’re being run by the navy...”⁵⁷ With another stakeholder making the analogy that, “it’s like Coles getting staff from Woolworths...”⁵⁸

Another stakeholder described the divisiveness in the following way: “There is a view, that for your opinion to matter in this organisation, you gotta [sic] be wearing a blue shirt, or you need to have someone who is wearing a blue shirt to give it the thumbs up ... we employ some smart people who are really qualified... but if you move through an operational stream my value is more important. So they [PTA staff] get let down a lot and are undervalued and so do our volunteers.”⁵⁹

The recent UFU campaign, including the television advertisement,⁶⁰ which refers to ‘professional firefighters’, was also negatively received by many stakeholders, with some noting that it made firefighters who had put their lives at risk to support their communities feel devalued.⁶¹ Adopting the terminology of ‘professional’ for paid firefighters can be seen to imply that those who volunteer as firefighters are in some way unprofessional or below standard. A preferred terminology that was put forward by some members was ‘career firefighters’ or paid firefighters, and ‘volunteer firefighters’ for those that are not.

⁵² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁰ See <https://campaignedge.com.au/work/ufu-ready-for-anything/>

⁶¹ FRV. (2021) *FRV Training*. Retrieved from: <https://frvfirefighters.com.au/frv-training/>

The inaugural FSIM Annual Report 2020-21 noted various effects of the Fire Services Reform, including the negative impact on staff and volunteer engagement and morale across CFA and FRV, particularly through vacancies, secondment arrangements, and interim agreements.⁶² The Review Team heard similar views about the secondment arrangement from stakeholders, specifically that it encouraged FRV staff to take up secondments at CFA to increase their chance for promotion. Where this occurs, members described the high turnover of staff as difficult because, “you don’t get to build up a rapport with anyone because they are gone too quickly.”⁶³

A number of challenges were also noted with co-located Brigades. Some volunteers shared experiences of access to Brigades being restricted, which limits the sense of ownership and inclusion that members generally feel towards their own Brigades. As the September 2020 VFBV Quarterly Supplement noted, “existing relationships between staff and volunteers help to mitigate tension between CFA and FRV, but where these don’t exist, or where there is further pressure, there is the potential for a ‘wedge’ to be driven between them.”⁶⁴

Some stakeholders recognised the Fire Services Reform as an opportunity to move forward, noting that: “The positive about reform is it’s an opportunity for our organisation to come together. It’s about people understanding what our role is, which is to protect our communities through our front-line people. Without that we can’t do our jobs. Everything we do should grow our asset, our volunteers, so they can do their jobs.”⁶⁵ Another stakeholder described that it reflects, “[Volunteers] are the custodians of the organisation.”⁶⁶

Comments such as these demonstrate both the challenges to achieving organisational cohesion in an organisation with a complex make up of members, and the opportunities and willingness of members to work towards achieving it.

Learnings from other organisations

When organisations publish ongoing information about reform, it allows members to see what changes are happening, how different strategies or initiatives are connected and the degree of progress on organisational commitments.

In 2019, Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) released its first Volunteerism Strategy and subsequently released 6-monthly progress reports which showcase key pieces of work and future areas of focus against the Strategy.⁶⁷

Consistent with this approach, FENZ also provide regular status reporting on implementation of the Positive Workplace Culture programme, which commenced following an independent review into FENZ’s workplace policies, procedures and practices to address bullying and harassment (known as

⁶² FSIM. (2021) *Fire Services Implementation Monitor Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/fire-services-implementation-monitor-annual-report-2020-21/>. Also note that the Hon. Niall Blair acknowledged this at CFA All Staff Presentation on 21 October 2021, by advising that vacancies is one of the top three outstanding issues for the implementation. CFA. CFA All Staff Session 21 October 2021. Retrieved from: <https://youtu.be/hlSoXimnb1c>

⁶³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁴ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement September 2021*. Retrieved from: https://www.vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202109-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_September2021-web.pdf. pg.6

⁶⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁷ Fire and Emergency New Zealand (2022). *Volunteerism Strategy six-month reports*. Retrieved from <https://portal.fireandemergency.nz/volunteers/volunteerism-strategy-six-month-reports/>

the Positive Workplace Culture Review). These reports identify what the organisation set out to achieve, what has been done and what is happening next.⁶⁸

4.2. Turnover in leadership at CFA

CFA has been subject to significant leadership change and churn in recent years. In 2016, the CFA Board was replaced by the Victorian Government. In the 10-year period (2012 – 2022) the CEO position has been held by eight different people and the CO position held by four different people.

In the 5 years to February 2022, CFA has experienced a total of 44 executive departures due either to contract ending, redundancy, resignation or retirement.⁶⁹ These departures occurred across a range of functions, including the CEO and CO offices. Of the 44 departures, 19 (43%) had less than 5 years tenure at departure, and a further 12 (27%) less than 1 year tenure at departure.

The turnover in leadership and its impact on the culture of CFA was reflected during stakeholder engagement, with one stakeholder noting, “We have obviously had a huge turnover in leadership and I don't think that it has helped.”⁷⁰

Other stakeholders reflected on the challenges that revolving leadership presents with one noting, “So leadership as I'm sure everyone else has told you, is forever changing and is not stable so it's very hard to get anything that sticks because, rightly so, a new person comes in with a new way of thinking and they want to make it work the way that they want to make it work, but then there's not longevity in any of the roles, and above that then we can't implement anything that lasts longer than 12 months.”⁷¹ While another noted, “You can't get substantive positions filled permanently. So there is a huge turnover of staff. We have it too with our commanders, you know heaps of vacancies. There is either rapid turnover or a lot of vacancies with commanders.”⁷²

There has been some stability in leadership shown since Fire Services Reform was implemented with Natalie MacDonald holding the CEO role since February 2021 and Jason Heffernan holding the CO role since November 2020.

4.3. Reviews relating to CFA

Several reviews have been undertaken in recent years, some of which relate specifically to CFA, and others to the broader sector. The Reviews undertaken between 2015-2020 are outlined in [Figure 13](#) below. Many of the reviews undertaken in recent years were prior to Fire Services Reform and include important recommendations which have contributed to informing

⁶⁸ Fire and Emergency New Zealand (2022). *Positive Workplace Culture – Our six monthly progress*. Retrieved from <https://portal.fireandemergency.nz/projects-and-programmes/positive-workplace-culture/our-six-monthly-progress/>

⁶⁹ Advice received from CFA. Note: ‘executive’ refers to any person on an executive contract and does not distinguish between pre and post Fire Services Reform personnel, but rather is based on the payroll classifications of ‘contract ending, redundancy, resignation or retirement’.

⁷⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

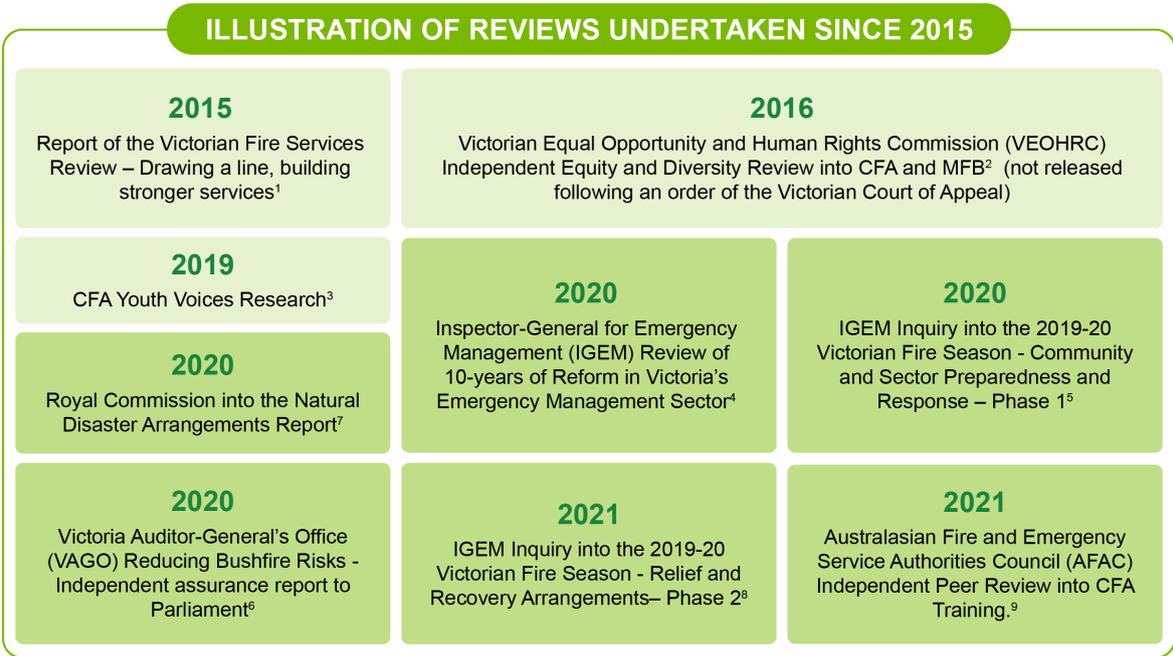
⁷¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

CFA following Fire Services Reform.⁷³ The extent of these Reviews demonstrates the constant changing environment in which CFA operates and the need to align future directions.

This figure provides an illustration of the range of reviews undertaken since 2015 that have had an impact on CFA.

Figure 13: Reviews undertaken in 2015-2020



¹ O'Byrne, D., (2015) Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review, Drawing a line, building stronger services. Retrieved from CFA.
² United Firefighters' Union v VEOHRC & Anor [2017] VSC 773 (15 December 2017)
³ CFA. (2019). Youth Voices Research final report. Retrieved from CFA.
⁴ IGEM. (2020). Review of 1- years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector. Retrieved from: <https://files.igem.vic.gov.au/2021-03/Review%20of%2010%20years%20of%20reform%20in%20Victorias%20emergency%20management%20sector.pdf>
⁵ IGEM. (2020). Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season. Retrieved from: https://files.igem.vic.gov.au/2021-03/Inquiry%20into%202019%20%20Victorian%20Fire-%20Season_Summary%20Report_Phase%201.pdf
⁶ VAGO. (2020). Reducing Bushfire Risks. Retrieved from: https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-10/20201014-Reducing-Bushfire-report_0.pdf
⁷ Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. (2020). Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report. Retrieved from: <https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-11/Royal%20Commission%20into%20National%20Natural%20Disaster%20Arrangements%20-%20Report%20-%20%205Baccessible%5D.pdf>
⁸ IGEM. (2021). Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season. Retrieved from: <https://files.igem.vic.gov.au/2021-10/Inquiry%20into%20the%202019-20-%20Victorian-%20Fire%20Season%20-%20Phase%202%20report%20%28low%20resolution%29.pdf>
⁹ AFAC. (2021). AFAC Independent Peer Review into CFA Training. Retrieved from CFA.

The 2015 Victorian Fire Services Review was conducted by Mr David O’Byrne who was appointed by the then Minister for Emergency Services. The Review inquired into the resourcing, operations, management and culture of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and CFA.

The 2016 VEOHRC Review into workplace behaviour, reviewed the lack of gender diversity in the fire services and existing support services for staff who have been bullied or harassed (VEOHRC Review). The VEOHRC Review report was not released, as the Victorian Court of Appeal upheld a challenge to its legality and made orders restraining its publication.⁷⁴ As a result, CFA was not formally advised nor able to implement any of the findings. The Review Team was not provided with the VEOHRC Review report. However, the circumstances surrounding the VEOHRC Review were raised in consultations and the legacy of the circumstances surrounding that Review and the VEOHRC Review report was noted by

⁷³ These reviews in turn draw on a long history of reviews undertaken.
⁷⁴ *United Firefighters' Union v VEOHRC & Anor* [2017] VSC 773 (15 December 2017).

stakeholders, with one stakeholder commenting: “The VEOHRC report, the fact that a lot of people put a lot of truth out [sic] and to see it not accepted, to not see it respected has damaged the culture.”⁷⁵ Another stakeholder described that they felt: “The VEOHRC report is shameful, so many people saw that as providing some relief, people have survived horrible treatment, and their voices were going to be heard, and they were going to have some agency.”⁷⁶

Reports commissioned by CFA since 2016 have found that there was a culture of fear, bullying and impunity at CFA and have also made recommendations for change. There have been references made to silos in both policy and organisational terms for different types of complaints, resulting in front line managers, volunteers and staff who wanted to make complaints being expected to correctly classify and define their issue.⁷⁷

In 2019, the Youth Voices Research report was published. The research was undertaken by the North West Region Youth Voices research team and examined the question: ‘How can CFA better engage with young people to attract, retain, support and train them on their journey through CFA?’ The report made 11 recommendations which aim at increasing engagement and retention of young members.

In 2021, the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) reviewed CFA’s training requirements as a fully volunteer firefighting agency. The review made 14 recommendations which aim to make constructive suggestions for evolving and building upon current training practices in CFA. CFA has adopted all recommendations made and the Review Team understands that CFA is in the process of implementing them.

There have also been sector wide reviews with recommendations that apply to CFA. The 2020 Inspector-General for Emergency Management Victoria (IGEM) 10-year review was a review of emergency management reforms and their effectiveness in supporting safer and more resilient Victorians. The review focused on five key themes including: governance; capability and capacity; community engagement and preparedness; rebuilding and recovery and safety and resilience.⁷⁸

The 2020 Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season undertaken by IGEM examined Victoria’s preparedness, response, relief and recovery in relation to the 2019-20 fire season. The Phase One report related to community and sector preparedness and response and was released on 31 July 2020. The Phase Two report related to relief and recovery arrangements and was released on 30 July 2021.⁷⁹

The 2020 Victorian Auditor-General’s Office (VAGO) Review into Reducing Bushfire Risk recognised the importance of well-designed, efficiently deployed and continuously monitored and improved strategies to reduce and manage bushfire risks. It examined planned burn targets; risk reduction strategies; land-use planning systems in supporting risk reduction and the Powerline Bushfire Safety Program. It went on to make 17 recommendations, all of which were accepted.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁷ Confidential reports commissioned by CFA.

⁷⁸ IGEM. (2019). *Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria’s emergency management sector*. Retrieved from: <https://www.igem.vic.gov.au/publications/publications/review-of-10-years-of-reform-in-victorias-emergency-management-sector>

⁷⁹ See: IGEM. (2021) *Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season, Phase 2*. Retrieved from <https://www.igem.vic.gov.au/index.php/fire-season-inquiry/inquiry-reports>

⁸⁰ See: VAGO (2020) *Reducing Bushfire Risks*. Retrieved from <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/reducing-bushfire-risks?section>

The 2020 Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements was chaired by Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin AC (Retd) and tabled in Parliament on 30 October 2020. The Royal Commission considered coordination, preparedness for, response to and recovery from disasters. It also looked at improving resilience and adapting to climate change and the mitigation of natural disasters.⁸¹

Following these reviews, and Fire Services Reform, CFA has been working towards embedding new practices and procedures. Many initiatives are already underway, and there is broad acknowledgment across the leadership at CFA that there is more work to be done.

⁸¹ See: Commonwealth. (2020). Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. Retrieved from: <https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/about>

5. CURRENT CULTURE

5.1. What is culture and why is positive organisational culture important?

The culture of an organisation can be described as the shared values and standards that shape the behaviours and mindsets of those within the organisation.⁸² It may also be thought of as what people do when no-one is watching.⁸³

There are significant benefits to having a positive workplace culture: a safe and respectful workplace culture influences an organisation's ability to attract and retain the best people, drive organisational performance and manage significant reputational and legal risks.⁸⁴ Negative organisational culture can drive harmful or inappropriate behaviour, while positive organisational culture will discourage such behaviour.⁸⁵

A positive workplace culture for CFA would be one where its organisational values and standards are embedded as routine practice for all members. To enhance alignment with its values, the culture should reflect the diversity of the community it serves, valuing difference and supporting continuous improvement and sustainability. Transparency, consistency and accountability should be at the centre of organisational culture in order for members to feel safe and respected.

5.2. Defining CFA's current culture

In the following sections, we describe the current culture within CFA – as identified during the course of the Review, through assessment of CFA documents and as described by CFA members. The Review Team recognises that the organisational composition and therefore the culture of CFA has been significantly impacted by Fire Services Reform. This section seeks to reflect on the culture of CFA post Fire Services Reform. This section includes many of the voices of the people who shared their views during the course of the Review. When looking at culture it is important to have the voices of people directly involved, notwithstanding that these interviews were only one source of information for this Review.

During stakeholder engagement interviews, members were invited to reflect on their own experiences and perspectives of CFA culture. Some drew on decades of volunteering experience, while those who joined more recently reflected on their experiences to date. Given the nature of the engagement to inform this Review, it was, at times, challenging to discern whether stakeholders were describing the culture of the organisation prior to, or following, Fire Services Reform. The Review Team has sought to recognise the range of experiences reflected by members throughout the course of the Review in seeking to understand the current culture at CFA and to identify areas for improvements.

⁸² Commonwealth. (2018). Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry. *Final Report, Volume 1*. p. 334, citing CBA Prudential Inquiry, Final Report, 81. Retrieved from: <https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2019-fsrc-final-report>

⁸³ Commonwealth. (2018). Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry. *Final Report, Volume 1*. p. 334, citing G30, Banking Conduct and Culture: A Call for Sustained and Comprehensive Reform, July 2015, 17. Retrieved from: <https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2019-fsrc-final-report>

⁸⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2021). *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces*. Retrieved from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/set-standard-2021>

⁸⁵ Commonwealth. (2018). Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry. *Final Report, Volume 1*, p. 334. Retrieved from: <https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2019-fsrc-final-report>

5.2.1 From the community for the community

As a large, state-wide volunteer organisation in the emergency services sector, CFA's culture is influenced by many factors including the culture of volunteering, its organisational cohesion, its interaction with other Victorian fire services, and the recent Fire Services Reform. It is an organisation that is deeply embedded in community - providing a service from the community for the community.

As a volunteer-based organisation, the ethos of volunteerism, enshrined in the Volunteer Charter, is the organisation's central driving force. The community is central to the organisation and members' commitment. People join CFA to give back to their community, to build strength and resilience in the community, and to be involved in the community. In so doing, many sacrifice their lives in fighting fires that are threatening people and properties in their local areas. This level of sacrifice and commitment is unique for a volunteer-based organisation and is a key driving force for the culture of the organisation.

As the CFA Strategy and Outcomes Framework notes: For many rural and regional areas around Victoria, CFA is synonymous with the community. For larger regional cities and those in the outer Melbourne suburbs, CFA is a part of the community. Making sure the community is prepared for and safe from fire requires community-centred decision-making.⁸⁶

Camaraderie and personal development were also clearly central to the culture of CFA. Stakeholders noted the enjoyment and opportunities for personal development that a volunteer role at CFA afforded with one saying, "A number of young recruits see it as an opportunity to gain new skills whether that be personally or professionally."⁸⁷

Other stakeholders enjoyed giving back to the community with one saying, "Most people are motivated by the fact that they find themselves in a stage of their life where they are still able to make contributions and to derive satisfaction from making such a contribution."⁸⁸ While another stakeholder described CFA as being "the carriage that enables us to give back to the community."⁸⁹

Many stakeholders also reflected on the sense of community: "It doesn't matter [*where you are from*], you have that common brand and if you see each other on the fireground and then you see each other on the competition track or wherever, you have that same commonality, you are part of that same family".⁹⁰

One stakeholder described the camaraderie as, "There is sort of a mateship thing... you have to look after each others' backs. You have got to be there for each other. There is a real bond. Once you join the Brigade, there is a bond I think that you carry with you. We can take this bond and go anywhere in Victoria or NSW... there is a sense of serving I think, but it is a good sense of serving, we are not doing it for dollars, but for the love of the thing, as well as for the love of our communities."⁹¹

While another described that, "There is a magnetism with comrades at a local level...the camaraderie is one thing that keeps you there. To know that when you're out there running a job, you get the right outcome for your community, it's a lovely thing. The subset under this is

⁸⁶ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-30*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>. pg. 11.

⁸⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁸⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁸⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁹⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁹¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

developing young girls and guys through CFA as well so you can impart your knowledge onto them.”⁹²

Stakeholders also reflected on how rewarding they found contributing to CFA. One stakeholder said that, “I have found volunteering for the CFA very rewarding, and the whole community, it’s a great community, so it is a great community to be a part of.”⁹³ While another said that, “In regard to volunteer culture ... it’s a beautiful thing. It’s a wonderful thing to work with like-minded volunteers, with the passion and commitment they bring to the day-to-day stuff.”⁹⁴

The Review Team heard that for many members, family tradition was a central part of their association with CFA. Tradition, and being part of the ‘CFA family’, were cited as strong motivations for members. Many members also said that they had been part of CFA for significant periods of time.

The culture at CFA is defined by the unique characteristics of its operations within a volunteer environment. The Review Team also heard from some members that being part of a volunteer workforce made up of community members meant that the workplace was not always respected, with some members feeling there were not the behavioural expectations that would apply in other workplaces.

This was seen as being a function of the way volunteers viewed their roles and obligations, as well as the way they were viewed by others. As one member put it, “We need to get away from the word volunteer being seen as a cheap form of work... We need to say that the word volunteer means something. Or forget the cultural change.”⁹⁵ Another said that it needed to be understood that, “Even in a volunteer cohort, there’s only two times to volunteer: You volunteer to join and you volunteer to leave. Everything in the middle is policy, standing orders and if you don’t like that on your bike.”⁹⁶

Such comments suggest that volunteers may not have a consistent understanding of their roles and responsibilities, including their responsibilities to others in the workplace.

5.2.2 Unity of purpose on the fireground

Stakeholders generally commented that members are united by a sense of common purpose when fighting fires, for example, “Fire calls. It is the most amazing logistical effort to see it all come together when there is a major campaign. The unity of purpose helps, and people mix who don’t usually mix. What we are there for – unity of purpose – works very well.”⁹⁷

Another reflected on the Black Saturday fires saying, “At times like Black Saturday, it is an awesome organisation to be a part of. We come together like no other. We band together, we work all hours, we sleep on wooden floors.”⁹⁸

While many stakeholders referred to a strong and clear common purpose for members on the fireground, challenges in maintaining a common purpose when off the fireground were noted by many stakeholders. It is critical for organisational cohesion to maintain the common purpose across the organisation when members are not in a high-pressure environment and fighting fires on the fire ground. This is particularly important given that CFA volunteers undertake a

⁹² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁹³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁹⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁹⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁹⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁹⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁹⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

range of tasks beyond fighting fires, including road rescues, emergency medical response, fundraising and community education and engagement.⁹⁹

A common view heard by the Review Team from stakeholders, was that while a clear message may be sent at an organisational level this may not translate into action across the organisation.

5.3. 1212 Brigades, 1212 cultures

Due to the devolved nature of CFA, the Review Team heard that geography and local culture are significant determinants of the culture experienced by CFA members. The Review Team heard on several occasions that there is a different culture in each of the 1,212¹⁰⁰ Brigades across the State. The variety and diversity in Brigades' outlook, initiatives and demographic makeup was apparent.

5.3.1 Commitment to local Brigades

Many stakeholders identified the local aspect of Brigades as their key strength: members of the Brigade know their community, their landscape, and their partners in other emergency services. Local knowledge and connection to the local community embeds Brigades in their local communities; Brigades draw members of the local community and focus on enhancing opportunities for their local communities. Community is integral to CFA. This was reflected by numerous stakeholders with one describing, "CFA is community focussed and all about relationships."¹⁰¹

Other stakeholders reflected on the importance of local engagement saying, "What does it take to make CFA a great place to work and volunteer? How do we bring our goals to life on the ground... It's about increasing participation at a local level to meet your local needs."¹⁰²

Local variation can influence the extent of organisational cohesion and unity of purpose that members experience. Many stakeholders referred to their local commitment, rather than their commitment to CFA as an organisation: "it is our commitment to our community that comes first, not CFA as such."¹⁰³ A number of stakeholders also commented on the tendency for members to think of themselves as part of their Brigade, but not necessarily as being part of CFA. One member also noted that, "I think it would be unfair to judge CFA with one culture, I think we have so many sub-cultures..."¹⁰⁴

Some stakeholders cited the risks associated with a Brigade-by-Brigade approach, noting that, "it gives you a freedom, but that can be used as an excuse as well;"¹⁰⁵ and "if families run Brigades, we don't stand a chance in making changes."¹⁰⁶ While others praised the regional network of Brigades and engagement with communities at the local level, "I just love to work

⁹⁹ CFA. (2022). *Volunteer with CFA*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/volunteers-careers/volunteer-with-cfa>

¹⁰⁰ CFA. (2021). *CFA at a Glance*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/cfa-at-a-glance> Figures as of 31 December 2021.

¹⁰¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁰² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁰³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁰⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁰⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁰⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

with catchment teams and staff within CFA who are passionate about the volunteers, that is awesome.¹⁰⁷

Many stakeholders interviewed by the Review Team noted that the differences between Brigades meant that alongside organisational cohesion there needed to be a degree of flexibility in the way different Brigades were treated. For example, “Perhaps we need different rules based on Brigades’ locations and what they do.”¹⁰⁸

Members also noted the operational differences involved in fighting urban and rural fires: “Bush firefighting is like guerrilla firefighting cause a fire can pop up anywhere and so you’re always on the move.”¹⁰⁹ Motivations for joining CFA also vary depending on local factors. In one stakeholder’s words: “There are a lot of people involved with CFA as hobby. The further out you get from a District, it goes from being fun to being a necessity. It’s about survival.”¹¹⁰

Some stakeholders referred to the variation within the organisation and lack of organisational unity by referring to the ‘silos’, ‘cliques’, ‘islands’ or ‘subcultures’ within the organisation. One stakeholder commented “You’ve heard of 1200 CFAs because every one Brigade runs their own show.”¹¹¹ Others noted: “You go 10km down the road there is another Brigade and they do it completely different [sic]”,¹¹² “It comes down to the local leadership in the community and the Brigade as well;”¹¹³ “Brigades are a reflection of the community. You need to look at the community itself.”¹¹⁴

Other stakeholders commented on the different cultures created describing that: “It is very Brigade based in terms of whether it is toxic or healthy;”¹¹⁵ “Brigades are institutions within themselves.”¹¹⁶

Whilst affiliation with local communities is core to the recruitment of volunteers and to the sustainability of the organisation, consistency and connection from Brigade level through to headquarters is also needed for supporting cultural change across the organisation. In order for organisational change to be effective it cannot rely merely on relationships and good will; organisational structures and communication must ensure that change is embraced by the whole organisation.

The Review Team heard about the tension with local Brigades being responsive to their local communities and other local factors while also ensuring consistency and fairness across the organisation. Local variation can influence the extent of organisational cohesion and unity of purpose that members experience.

¹⁰⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁰⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹¹⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹¹⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹¹¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹¹² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹¹³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹¹⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹¹⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹¹⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

Learnings from other organisations – promoting greater local affiliation

Some emergency services have promoted and encouraged greater affiliation at the local level. For example, the Surf Life Saving NSW Brand Centre has been established as an online platform which enables local clubs and branches to create customisable recruitment and promotional resources. This supports organisational consistency while also allowing clubs to tailor recruitment approaches to their specific needs and styles.¹¹⁷

5.4. Communication in CFA

Effective communication from leaders, in terms of both the quality of the message and how it is shared, is critical to ensuring members embrace change and shift existing mindsets.¹¹⁸ The Strategy and Outcomes Framework emphasises the importance of being able to adapt to a changing environment: “Being a progressive emergency service means we embrace change and innovation to continuously improve our service delivery and corporate performance.”¹¹⁹ However, there are significant barriers to communication within CFA, which need to be addressed.

5.4.1 Communication channels at CFA

Effective communication is a key to positive cultural change, but is also challenging in a dispersed volunteer organisation. This was a strong feature of the Review Team’s consultations and many stakeholders commented on the importance of two-way communication channels and following through on matters discussed with members. There have been some positive initiatives undertaken by CFA, including the all staff and volunteer member forums that are held at CFA on a monthly basis. The forums provide updates and an opportunity for people to ask questions of the CEO and CO. Other people can vote for questions they want answered. Recent staff forums have focused on CFA’s cultural journey (including this Review); Return to Work arrangements; the fire season; the Chief Health Officer’s announcement of mandatory vaccination requirements for CFA members, the People Matter survey, the Interim Behavioural Standards and recent CFA investments into staff training facilities and training opportunities for members.

When asked about the staff and volunteer member forums, stakeholders responded positively saying, “[i]n my 30-year career we’ve never had an opportunity for a volunteer to ask the Chief and CEO a question on any topic.”¹²⁰

The 2021 Communications Survey Results¹²¹ also revealed some positive statistics about communication channels.

¹¹⁷ Surf Life Saving New South Wales. (2020). *Surf Life Saving Platforms Overview*. Retrieved from <https://www.surflifesaving.com.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/Surf-Life-Saving-Platforms-Overview-August-2020.pdf>

¹¹⁸ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2015). *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/static/c6047d1e6cb4d96861b32cd9295691cd/Resource-Independent_Review_Victoria_Police-Phase_1-2015.pdf

¹¹⁹ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-2030*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>. pg.16.

¹²⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹²¹ CFA. (2021) *Communications and Stakeholder Relations Overview*. Provided by CFA on 28th February 2022. CFA has issued communications surveys in 2021, 2019, 2016, 2014 and 2009 to seek feedback from members on their awareness and experiences of various communication channels. In 2021, 1056 members completed the survey (down from 1908 people in



71% of survey participants agreed (either somewhat or definitely) that they can access a variety of CFA communication channels to get the information they need.



Higher rates of survey participants also reported feeling informed about the issues that affect them in their daily CFA activities than in 2019.

However, many members reported experiencing deficiencies in communication channels, describing them as a “huge barrier”¹²², “appalling”¹²³ or “totally broken”¹²⁴. Stakeholders also commented on the broken communication channels between Headquarters (HQ) and Districts with one saying: “We hear nothing from the Deputy Chief Officer, we get very little communication or leadership from him. There’s a gap between this District and Burwood.”¹²⁵

The Review Team heard these deficiencies can result in distorted messaging, insufficient communication (where the communication is stopped by a gatekeeper), excessive communication (where the same email or information is forwarded on by multiple senders), members being advised to adhere to convoluted communication protocols (instead of approaching the relevant person directly), and feedback going into a ‘black hole’ (where no response is given).

Some members suggested innovative ways to disseminate information including infographics or short video clips. Members also indicated they are using Facebook pages and social media posts as more effective ways than email to communicate with Brigades. Indeed, the Review Team heard that there are 14,000 volunteers who do not have an email address registered with CFA.¹²⁶ The 2021 Communications Survey Results¹²⁷ also revealed that awareness of CFA social media channels was low, with only 24% of the survey participants indicating that the channels either met or exceeded their needs.

Many members who spoke to the Review Team also emphasised the importance of in-person communication, with a regionally based member noting that online communication does not suit many farmers. One stakeholder emphasised that, “Its face-to-face communication. Its putting feet under kitchen tables... [t]hey want someone to either go and have a cup of tea or pick up the phone and talk to them. That’s how we work in communities out there.”¹²⁸

2019). Of the respondents, 74% were male and more than 73% were aged 45 years and older. Volunteers accounted for 84% of respondents and staff were 13% (of which 22% were also volunteers).

¹²² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹²³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹²⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹²⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹²⁶ Advice received from CFA, February 2022.

¹²⁷ CFA. (2021) *Communications and Stakeholder Relations Overview*. Provided by CFA on 28th February 2022. CFA has issued communications surveys in 2021, 2019, 2016, 2014 and 2009 to seek feedback from members (volunteer and staff) on their awareness and experiences of various communication channels. In 2021, 1056 members completed the survey (down from 1908 people in 2019). Of the respondents, 74% were male (CFA has 76%) and more than 73% were aged 45 years and older (CFA has 64%). Volunteers accounted for 84% of respondents and staff were 13% (of which 22% were also volunteers).

¹²⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

Learnings from other organisations

New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) has developed the One NSW RFS Communication and Engagement Strategy¹²⁹. This strategy provides an example of an organisational framework which promotes focused and coordinated communications.

The Strategy identifies features of ‘good’ communication to foster a culture where people are valued and recognised, highlighting the following factors for designing communications:

- Geographic spread of volunteers and staff across NSW
- RFS internal and external stakeholders are generationally, culturally and linguistically diverse
- RFS members have different communication preferences
- All RFS members are responsible for communicating and engaging within the organisation and must ensure information filters up and down
- RFS terminology is highly specialised and members need to be aware of their audience.

5.4.2 The impact of a command and control environment on communication

Transparent and open communication within CFA is further complicated by the command and control environment within which it operates. Fire brigades across Victoria have always been centred around military organisation and discipline¹³⁰ and since 1945, CFA operations have been formalised around a militarised chain-of-command.¹³¹ This military style of governance remains and can be seen with the naming associated with Brigades. As with other emergency services, CFA functions under ‘command and control’. Command and control involves taking charge, establishing intent and providing leadership for the response and resolution of an incident which is beyond the span of an individual’s control.

The importance of command and control on the fireground was widely acknowledged by stakeholders, but many members noted that in settings off the fireground it had negative effects on the way people felt, and the way they were communicated with. Members noted that, “Rank is everything.”¹³² While other stakeholders felt that, “The level you are in the structure determines your worth, and the value of your input.”¹³³

Stakeholders also reflected that a more consultative management style would have been more appropriate. One member interviewed said that, “Strategic leadership and fireground leadership don’t necessarily overlap.”¹³⁴ While another commented that, “Command and control become the default leadership style, which doesn’t stand you in good stead when you’re in a more consultative environment or you’re managing non-operational people.”¹³⁵ Members

¹²⁹ NSW RFS (n.d.) *Communication and Engagement Strategy*. Retrieved from <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/resources/publications/corporate-governance-and-planning>

¹³⁰ Tyler, M, Carson, L, Reynolds, B. (2019). *Are fire services ‘extremely gendered’ organizations? Examining the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Australia*. Gender Work Organisation pg. 1304-1323. Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.12393>. pg. 1304.

¹³¹ Tyler, M, Carson, L, Reynolds, B. (2019). *Are fire services ‘extremely gendered’ organizations? Examining the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Australia*. Gender Work Organisation pg. 1304-1323. Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.12393>. pg. 1310.

¹³² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹³³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement)

¹³⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹³⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

noted that this can restrict communication, “This whole chain of command thing is very stifling, and they use it to get what they want. There’s not a great communication flow.”¹³⁶

One stakeholder also described that command and control structure can create uncertainty for members, “There’s a pervasive culture of fear... I see that... I see it in my team and their unwillingness to come forward and express views because they don’t feel safe to do so. Their fear about expressing their views when they do. Their disappointment and expectation when they do express views and they’re not acted upon... there’s no platform to dissent.”¹³⁷

Some members noted that practices such as referring to people by their position title and failing to acknowledge the presence of members who held lower ranks at meetings or jobs, served to reinforce the hierarchical structure of the organisation. Another stakeholder noted that, “When young people join CFA, they are confronted with the command-and-control structure, and it’s awful. You are told what to do, and there is no conversation.”¹³⁸

5.5. Working with other Victorian fire services

As noted in [Section 3.3](#), there are currently complex arrangements within the State regarding responsibilities for emergency management and fire prevention, depending on who owns the land or where it is located. Strong relationships between CFA and other agencies are necessary to ensuring that a robust and collaborative approach is taken to fire management in Victoria. The Strategy and Outcomes Framework notes that being a progressive emergency service requires collaboration with Fire Rescue Victoria and other service delivery partners, which will lead to better community outcomes. It also involves working with EMV and other government departments and agencies to support government objectives and emergency management reform.¹³⁹ Interagency interaction is a crucial part of CFA now and into the future, both for the benefit of the community and for the organisation’s internal culture.

This is reflected in the Strategy and Outcomes Framework which includes the following two specific outcomes:¹⁴⁰

- we collaborate with FRV and other service delivery partners to promote interoperability and build stronger relationships that lead to better community outcomes
- we work with EMV and other government departments and agencies to support government objectives and emergency management reform.

[Table 1](#) in Section 3.3 outlines the relationship between core Victorian fire service agencies Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) (including Parks Victoria staff), CFA and FRV who have statutory responsibilities for fire suppression within Victoria. While they are not specifically Victorian fire service organisations, section 43 of *CFA Act 1958* also places a statutory responsibility on ‘every municipal council and public authority to take all practical steps (including burning) to prevent the occurrence of fires on, and minimise the danger of the spread of fires on and from – any land vested in it or under its control or management; and any road under its care and management’.

¹³⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹³⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹³⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹³⁹ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-30*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>, pg. 17.

¹⁴⁰ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-30*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>, pg. 17.

FFMVic and CFA carry out fire operations to reduce the risk of fires to communities and the environment. Operations include planned burning, mowing, creating fuel breaks and maintaining infrastructure (for example fire dams) on public and private land. One example of collaborative strategic planning is the Joint Fuel Management Program. The Joint Fuel Management Program is a state-wide program that manages fuel on public and private land and commits FFMVic and CFA to work as one sector sharing resources, vehicles and other equipment in fire management.¹⁴¹ The program establishes CFA and FFMVic planned burns and other fuel management activities for 2021-2022 to 2023-2024.

During the Review, at least one stakeholder indicated that they would like to see more collaboration between CFA and FFMVic to support Cultural burns. They indicated that they are unable to do slow burnings as they don't have any traditional owners in their fire Brigade: "...We are missing out on heaps there".¹⁴² As part of the Joint Fuel Management Program, Traditional Owners have nominated and will carry out approximately 95 Cultural burns in 2021 - 2022 with the support of FFMVic and CFA. The program is a step toward implementing Safer Together,¹⁴³ a Victorian State Government approach to fire management that is more effective in reducing fire risk and is driven by local knowledge and experience.

5.6. Prevalence of bullying, harassment, discrimination and violence

Issues regarding workplace misconduct such as harassment, discrimination and bullying at CFA have been recorded in a number of different surveys, a snapshot of which are provided in [Figure 14](#) and [Figure 15](#). Further overview is provided within the subsections below.

The Review Team adopted a trauma-informed approach to interviews and did not ask stakeholders directly about their experiences of bullying, harassment, discrimination and workplace violence although some stakeholders chose to share their experiences with the Review Team.

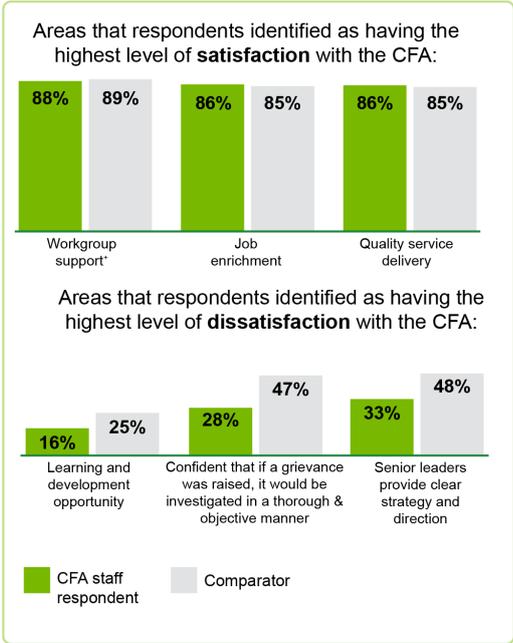
¹⁴¹ Forest Fire Management Victoria. (2022). *Joint Fuel management Program*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/bushfire-fuel-and-risk-management/joint-fuel-management-program>

¹⁴² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁴³ Victorian Government (2015) *Safer Together – a new approach to reducing the risk of bushfire in Victoria*. Retrieved from: https://www.safertogether.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/215318/DELWP_SaferTogether_FINAL_17Nov15.pdf

Figure 14: Snapshot of prevalence survey data relating to CFA staff

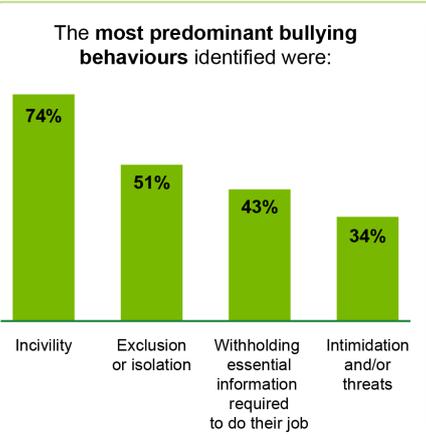
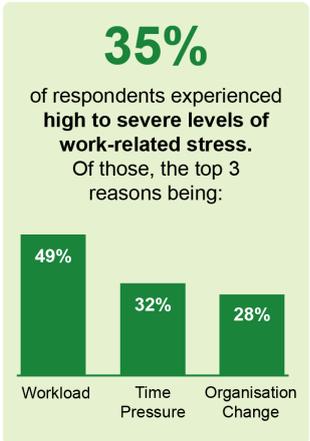
SAMPLE OF DATA RELATING TO HARASSMENT AND BULLYING AT CFA (2021 PEOPLE MATTERS SURVEY)*^



4 in 5 respondents said that their manager works effectively with people from diverse backgrounds

1 in 5 respondents reported they intended to leave the CFA with more than half (52%) stating the reason for leaving was a **lack of confidence** in Senior Leadership

41% of respondents agreed that senior leaders support staff to work in an environment of change



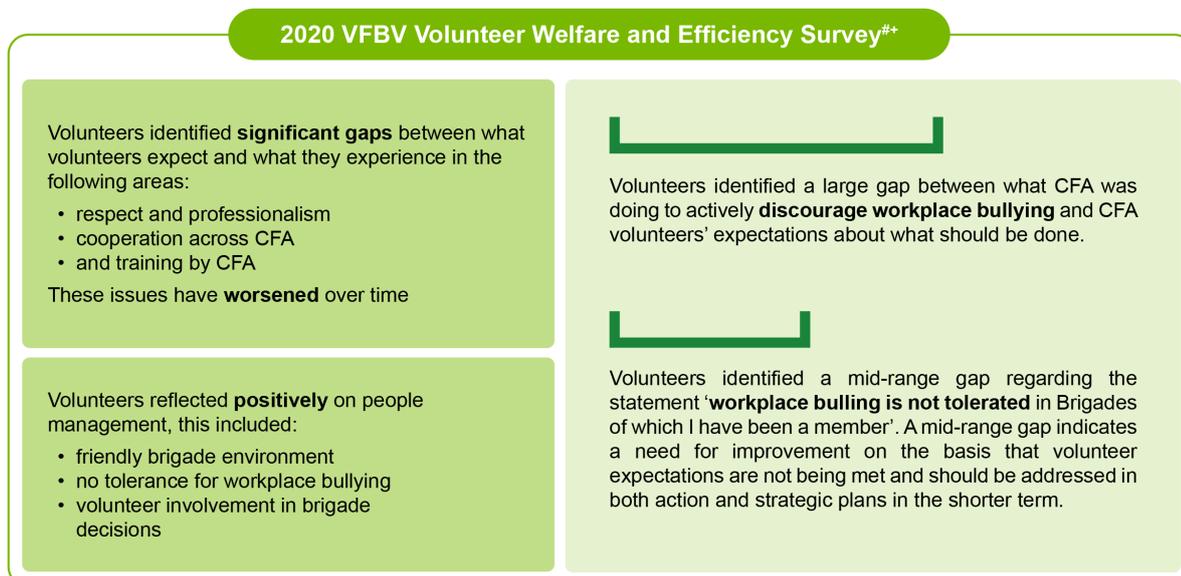
* Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021) CFA 2021 people matter survey report. Retrieved from CFA. The People Matter Survey is an annual employee opinion survey run by the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPS) for public sector organisations. Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA's 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers. The comparator group was: Ambulance Victoria; Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; Emergency Services; Telecommunications Authority; Victoria Police; Victoria Police - Sworn and PSOs; Victoria State Emergency Service; Victorian Public Sector Commission.

^ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021) CFA 2021 People Matter Survey Report. Retrieved from CFA. The People Matter Survey is an annual employee opinion survey run by the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPS) for public sector organisations. Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA's 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers. The comparator group included: Ambulance Victoria; Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; Emergency Services; Telecommunications Authority; Victoria Police; Victoria Police - Sworn and PSOs; Victoria State Emergency Service; Victorian Public Sector Commission.

+ Workgroup support captures two questions from the People Matter Survey. 1) I am able to work effectively with others outside my immediate workgroup. 2) I am able to work effectively with others in my workgroup.

Figure 15: Snapshot of CFA prevalence survey data relating to CFA volunteers

SNAPSHOT OF PREVALENCE SURVEYS RELATING TO HARASSMENT AND BULLYING AT CFA



[^] CFA. (2021) Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 January 2021 – 30 June 2021. Retrieved from CFA. The Volunteer Exit Survey is an online survey for those moving brigades or taking a break from CFA. All information is treated in the strictest of confidence. Information received is consolidated and used to capture key trends, not single or individual responses. 153 eligible volunteers completed the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 January 2021 – 30 June 2021, which was conducted following the fire services reform.

^{*}CFA. (2021) Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 January 2021 – 30 June 2021. Retrieved from CFA. The Volunteer Exit Survey is an online survey for those moving brigades or taking a break from CFA. 153 eligible volunteers completed the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 January 2021 – 30 June 2021, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

[#] VFBV. (2020) 2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey Results. Retrieved from: <https://www.vfbv.com.au/#> The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is conducted annually to capture and communicate issues as volunteers see them. 2693 volunteers participated in the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey, which was conducted shortly after the Fire

Services Reforms came into effect. CFA's 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

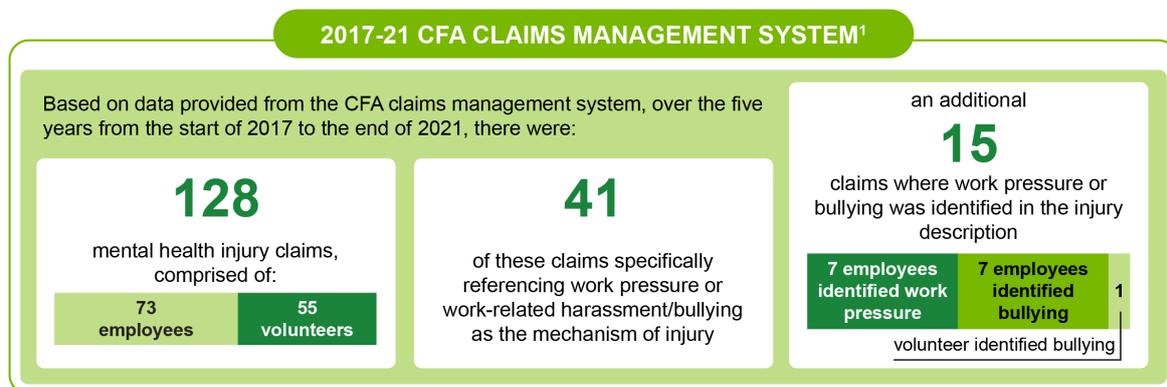
^{**}VFBV. (2020) 2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey Results. Retrieved from: <https://www.vfbv.com.au/#> The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is conducted annually to capture and communicate issues as volunteers see them. 2693 volunteers participated in the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey, which was conducted shortly after the Fire Services Reforms came into effect. CFA's 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

5.6.1 Bullying

Figures 14 and 15 above outline data relating to harassment and bullying at CFA since the Fire Services Reform and show some trend data. These data are informing current improvements within CFA and have also informed the recommendations arising from this Review.

[Figure 16](#) outlines data relating to claims made through CFA’s Claims Management System both before and after Fire Services Reform.

Figure 16: 2017 - 21 CFA Claims Management System



¹ Data received from CFA Claims Management System from the start of 2017 to end of 2021.

Bullying behaviour was also described by stakeholders as part of this Review. Members told the Review Team that, “If there was anything I could change in CFA are the straight-out bullying tactics. They isolate you. They tried to do it to me”.¹⁴⁴ While another felt that, “They isolate you. They withhold resources if you complain”.¹⁴⁵

One member described that they felt, “The culture is really good at gaslighting, why do you want to be a part of CFA? Because you want to be a firefighter. People respect that, it’s a noble profession. It fills you with an immense sense of pride that you are helping people and it is compelling and it makes you want to be a part of it... This is the same with volunteers and our PTA staff. Because it is so enchanting, you want to stay, and you know if you complain, you are seen as a problem, and then CFA might be taken away from you...people will put up with a lot in the 30% of their time where they are bullied, abused, or denigrated, it’s the 70% of their time that they love this organisation that they will stay for ... People’s threshold for this behaviour may even grow over time because the abuses become entrenched and are even amplified.”¹⁴⁶

Another stakeholder reflected on their experiences of leadership noting that, “Bullying and harassment in the workplace is prevalent especially from Supervisors/Managers/Executive Managers towards staff in the form of unfair practices, criticism, bad behaviour, derogatory language (remarks and actions that put a person down), back stabbing, divulging of personal information, intimidation, humiliation/embarrassment, repeated manipulation of recruitment/promotion of a job or development opportunities, interference in grievance processes, corruption, disrespect and bullying behaviours. These behaviours have led to

¹⁴⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁴⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁴⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

creation of a toxic culture where seemingly the only way to succeed is to emulate those above you.”¹⁴⁷

5.6.2 Harassment and sexual harassment

The 2015 Victorian Fire Services Review report raised concerns about the presence of discrimination and sexual harassment within the ranks of the MFB and CFA.¹⁴⁸ In 2017, the Age published an article entitled, ‘Sexual harassment, bullying, endemic for women in Country Fire Authority, says report’,¹⁴⁹ which highlighted a culture of fear, bullying and impunity with half of the respondents reporting that they had been bullied, and one-third harassed, including sexual harassment. These references both relate to the organisation prior to Fire Services Reform and prior to recent CFA initiatives such as Right Environment initiatives, which aim to create a safe, respectful and inclusive environment (discussed further below). However, harassment, including sexual harassment, workplace violence and aggression is continuing to be reported at CFA.

The 2021 People Matter Survey,¹⁵⁰ applying to staff members and conducted following the 2020 Fire Services Reform, reported that:



in 2021, 8% of respondents have experienced sexual harassment in the previous 12 months, which was 2% higher than the rate of sexual harassment reported by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey.¹⁵¹

The predominant sexual harassment behaviours reported in the 2021 People Matter Survey were: sexually suggestive comments or jokes, intrusive questions about private life and/or comments about physical appearance and inappropriate staring or leering that made them feel intimidated. Perpetrators were reported to be colleagues (57%), a more senior manager than their manager (20%) a volunteer (17%) or immediate manager (15%).

As a comparison with the rates of sexual harassment reported in People Matter surveys in previous years (which mostly relate to time periods prior to the Fire Services Reform):



in 2020,¹⁵² 8% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment in the past 12 months¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁴⁸ O’Byrne, D. (2015). *Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review, Drawing a line, building stronger services*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁴⁹ Mckenzie, N., & Baker, R. (2017). Sexual harassment, bullying, endemic for women in Country Fire Authority, says report. *The Age*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/sexual-harassment-bullying-endemic-for-women-in-country-fire-authority-says-report-20171016-gz1szo.html>

¹⁵⁰ The People Matter Survey is an annual employee opinion survey run by the Victorian Public Sector Commission for public sector organisations. Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

¹⁵¹ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021) *CFA 2021 People Matter Survey Report*. Retrieved from CFA. The comparator groups were: Ambulance Victoria; Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; Emergency Services; Telecommunications Authority; Victoria Police; Victoria Police - Sworn and PSOs; Victoria State Emergency Service; Victorian Public Sector Commission.

¹⁵² The 2020 People Matter survey was conducted in October 2020, shortly after the Fire Services Reform came into effect. 638 CFA employees (55% of applicable staff) completed the 2020 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

¹⁵³ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2020) *People Matter Survey Wellbeing Check*. Retrieved from CFA.



in 2019,¹⁵⁴ 14% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment in the past 12 months¹⁵⁵



in 2017¹⁵⁶ and 2018,¹⁵⁷ 17% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment in the last 12 months.¹⁵⁸

Stakeholders also raised their experiences and fear of sexual harassment during interviews, with one stakeholder saying, “I’ve had a lot of fantastic experiences, but I’ve also had a lot of hurt. I’ve been sexually harassed... so many inappropriate comments made by fellow workers and volunteers.”¹⁵⁹ Another described the culture of their Brigade as “awful, sexist, misogynistic, harassment, it’s a culture of very much double standards. Different rules for different people.”¹⁶⁰

Members noted the importance of bystander intervention and identifying when behaviour is problematic. One stakeholder provided an example where, “We actually had two Commanders there when ... a pretty sexist comment was passed...but nothing was done.”¹⁶¹ While another member reflected that, “If I have to make sure I have another person with me when I walk into a room due to fear of sexual harassment, then that is not a safe workplace.”¹⁶²

The relationship between sexual harassment and gender equality is discussed below in [Section 5.7.7](#). CFA’s approach to preventing sexual harassment and the elements of a safe reporting environment are discussed in [Section 7](#).

5.6.3 Violence, aggression, intimidation and abuse

The 2021 People Matter Survey,¹⁶³ applying to staff and conducted following the Fire Services Reform, found that:



in 2021, 10% of respondents reported that they had experienced workplace violence and/or aggression, which was 9% lower than the rate of violence and/or aggression reported by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁴ The 2019 People Matter survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48% of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

¹⁵⁵ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2020) *People Matter Survey Wellbeing Check*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁵⁶ The 2017 People Matter survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 570 CFA employees (23 % of applicable staff) completed the 2017 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2016-17 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2,507 staff members and 56,159 volunteers.

¹⁵⁷ The 2018 People Matter survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 664 CFA employees (56 % of applicable staff) completed the 2018 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2017-18 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2,672 staff members and 55,069 volunteers.

¹⁵⁸ CFA. (2018) *People Matter Survey CEO PowerPoint presentation*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁵⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁶⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁶¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁶² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁶³ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

¹⁶⁴ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021) *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

As a comparison with the rates of workplace violence and/or aggression reported in People Matter Surveys in previous years (which mostly relate to time periods prior to the Fire Services Reform):



in 2020,¹⁶⁵ 11% of respondents reported having experienced workplace violence or aggression in the past 12 months.¹⁶⁶



in 2019,¹⁶⁷ 9% of respondents reported having experienced workplace violence or aggression in the past 12 months.¹⁶⁸



the types of workplace violence/aggression experienced by respondents as reported in the 2021 People Matter Survey were predominantly intimidating behaviour and abusive language. Perpetrators identified were colleagues (35%), CFA Volunteer (32%), and immediate manager (23%).¹⁶⁹

Stakeholders also raised experiences of intimidation and abuse with the Review Team. One stakeholder provided an example where, “I have also had a senior person in uniform, abuse me and raise their voice.”¹⁷⁰ Another stakeholder said that, “People’s threshold for this behaviour may even grow over time because the abuses become entrenched and are even amplified.”¹⁷¹

5.6.4 Discrimination

The 2021 People Matter Survey,¹⁷² applying to staff and conducted following the 2020 Fire Services Reform, reported that:



in 2021, 9% of respondents have experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months which was 1% lower than the rate of discrimination reported by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey.¹⁷³

Attributes staff felt the discrimination was based on as reported in the 2021 People Matter Survey were age (32%); employment activity (32%); sex (26%); and industrial and/or political activity (24%).

As a comparison with the rates of discrimination reported in People Matter Surveys in previous years (which mostly relate to time periods prior to the Fire Services Reform and demonstrate a decrease in the percentage of respondents reporting discrimination since 2017):

¹⁶⁵ The 2020 People Matter Survey was conducted in October 2020, shortly after the Fire Services Reform came into place. 638 CFA employees (55% of applicable staff) completed the 2020 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

¹⁶⁶ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2020) *People Matter Survey Wellbeing Check*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁶⁷ The 2019 People Matter Survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48 % of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

¹⁶⁸ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021) *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁶⁹ CFA. (2021) *2021 People Matter Survey - CFA Overall Results PowerPoint presentation*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁷⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement)

¹⁷¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁷² Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

¹⁷³ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021) *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

 in 2019,¹⁷⁴ and 2020,¹⁷⁵ 13% of respondents reported having experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months.¹⁷⁶

 in 2018,¹⁷⁷ 19% of respondents reported having experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months.¹⁷⁸

 in 2017,¹⁷⁹ 23% of respondents reported having experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months.¹⁸⁰

Stakeholders also told the Review Team about discrimination that they had witnessed or experienced. One stakeholder said, “Things are bad and I mean bad. It’s to the stage where I want to have them up for discrimination in the courts.”¹⁸¹ Another simply said, “Bullying, harassment, and discrimination – you name the adjective, it’s there.”¹⁸²

Some stakeholders expressed fatigue with their experiences of discrimination with one saying, “It just became a point where it become so difficult. The bullying and discrimination was pretty hidden and I had to learn to co-exist.”¹⁸³ Others referred to the discrimination and inequity due to some people being treated differently/given preferential treatment over others.¹⁸⁴

5.7. Diversity and inclusion

Ensuring a sustainable volunteer workforce is challenging in the face of changing demographics in country areas, changing work demands, availability of volunteers during work hours, and declining volunteerism.¹⁸⁵

A strategy for replenishing and maintaining the volunteer workforce must be multifaceted and increasing the diversity of the volunteer workforce is a critical way to increase volunteer numbers (by increasing the overall pool from which volunteers are drawn). In order to retain a

¹⁷⁴ The 2019 People Matter Survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48 % of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

¹⁷⁵ The 2020 People Matter survey was conducted in October 2020, shortly after the Fire Services Reform came into place. 638 CFA employees (55% of applicable staff) completed the 2020 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

¹⁷⁶ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021) *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁷⁷ The 2018 People Matter Survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 664 CFA employees (56% of applicable staff) completed the 2018 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2017-18 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2,672 staff members and 55,069 volunteers.

¹⁷⁸ CFA. (2018) *People Matter Survey CEO PowerPoint presentation*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁷⁹ The 2017 People Matter Survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 570 CFA employees (23% of applicable staff) completed the 2017 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2016-17 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2,507 staff members and 56,159 volunteers.

¹⁸⁰ CFA. (2018) *People Matter Survey CEO PowerPoint presentation*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁸¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁸² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁸³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁸⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁸⁵ Socioeconomic changes in the nature of paid work, lifestyles and values, and the social impact of new technology have led to a decline in the ‘traditional’ model of formal, long-term, high-commitment volunteering with a single organisation that currently forms the foundation of emergency management volunteer models. McLennan, Dr. B., *et al* (2021). *Enabling Sustainable Emergency Volunteering Final project report*. Retrieved from: https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/managed/downloads/enabling_sustainable_emergency_volunteering_final_project_report.pdf. pg. 14.

more diverse group of volunteers, the organisation must offer a safe environment where volunteers can thrive and grow and want to stay.

On its website, CFA indicates that its inclusion and fairness focus: is based on a commitment to create a safe, respectful and inclusive workplace where volunteers and employees engage and interact with each other and the broader community in an equitable manner, regardless of background, ethnicity, culture, language, beliefs, gender, age, socio-economic status, level of ability, additional needs, family structure or lifestyle.¹⁸⁶

This is an area where further confidence to make changes at the local Brigade level must be understood as part of the implementation process arising from this Review.

One stakeholder noted the difficulty in recruiting volunteers in the outer smaller, farming areas, where the nature of farming is changing: “[m]ultiple farmers make up a Brigade – but with things being mechanised farms are bought up by larger conglomerates, so instead of a farmer with 15 workhands, these will be bought out, and these Brigades are dying out”.¹⁸⁷ While another stakeholder reflected on the progress that has been seen in the diversity and inclusion space noting, “Now there has been a real shift with the inclusion of females into the Brigade operational response and leadership roles and there is a significant acceptance now of people with different diversities, of cultural diversity and sexual orientation. It is becoming a lot more aligned to community. I won’t say the journey has finished, it has a long way to go, but there are positive signs.”¹⁸⁸

Further, as an organisation with the community at its core, diversity and inclusion makes good business sense for CFA. Workplaces that reflect the community they serve will understand their audience better, which leads to improved service delivery and a more inclusive community.¹⁸⁹

The Valuing Differences to Engage SES Operational Capability Report,¹⁹⁰ produced by the Australian and New Zealand National Council for Fire and Emergency Services, suggests identifying the specific categories and reasons why diversity and inclusion can benefit an organisation. This can assist in explaining and engaging with teams about why diversity matters, and what it offers to individuals, organisations and communities.¹⁹¹ As that report notes, teams that have diverse membership that reflect community demographics, are in a better position to understand the challenges faced by that community and more effectively engage with community members to strengthen resilience before, during and after emergency events.

5.7.1 Diversity challenges for CFA

While CFA has stated its commitment towards diversity and some progress has been made, CFA still lacks diversity in its membership. Many Brigades are concerned about how to build a

¹⁸⁶ CFA. (2021). *Inclusion and Fairness*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/inclusion-and-fairness>

¹⁸⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁸⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

¹⁸⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.) *Culture and Diversity*. Retrieved from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/human-resources/culture-and-diversity>. Accessed on 20 January 2022.

¹⁹⁰ AFAC. (2020) *Valuing differences to enhance SES operational capability*. Retrieved from: https://www.afac.com.au/docs/default-source/publications/afac_valuing-differences_endorsed_2020_11_04.pdf

¹⁹¹ AFAC. (2020) *Valuing differences to enhance SES operational capability*. Retrieved from: https://www.afac.com.au/docs/default-source/publications/afac_valuing-differences_endorsed_2020_11_04.pdf, pg. 8

diversified membership for the next generation of members.¹⁹² CFA's ability to connect with, attract and retain a diversity of members is a recognised challenge.¹⁹³



Women make up almost 60% of the permanent paid CFA workforce



Women make up only 23% of CFA's volunteer membership¹⁹⁴



At least 70% of CFA volunteers are over the age of 40¹⁹⁵



At least 60% of CFA employees are 45 or older.¹⁹⁶

Attracting younger volunteers is a priority for CFA, as noted in the CFA Volunteerism Strategy.¹⁹⁷ The Volunteerism Strategy also includes a commitment to increase cultural and ethnic diversity, particularly in outer metropolitan growth areas; diversify volunteer membership and build the next generation.

In order for Brigades to sustain a strong and diverse volunteer base, Brigade membership needs to be regularly analysed, reported on and discussed to identify how many active members Brigades have, what roles they fill and what gaps there are and to action any imbalances. The Brigade Support Request Form, the Brigade Viability Wheel, the Brigade Action Plan and the Succession Planning Framework and toolkit are documents that have been developed to support volunteer sustainability. The Review Team understands that the Brigade Health Questionnaire (a questionnaire designed to help the BMT) and the Brigade Health Check template, which ranks the results of the questionnaire and determines priority areas are not widely used at CFA.¹⁹⁸ The Review Team understands that there is also a project underway to review all of the tools and templates used across the Volunteer Sustainability Team in the regions to support consistency.

In terms of laying the foundations for greater diversity in the future, the FSIM Annual Report 2020-21 noted that, "Both CFA and FRV have put in place the strategic foundations to drive workforce diversity changes. As of 30 June 2021, CFA had completed a corporate realignment to reflect their preferred culture, focusing on performance and accountability, dealing with past cultural challenges, and building on the strong culture of connectivity embedded in communities."¹⁹⁹

However, the AFAC recently noted in its review into CFA training that, "it was quite apparent to us, from the cohorts that we met, that CFA culture is not particularly diverse. The volunteers

¹⁹² CFA. (2015) *Volunteerism Strategy 2015 - 2020*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁹³ CFA. (2015) *Volunteerism Strategy 2015 - 2020*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁹⁴ CFA. (2021). *CFA at a Glance*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/cfa-at-a-glance>. Figures as of 31 December 2021.

¹⁹⁵ FSIM. (2022). *2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%202_0.pdf pg. 27.

¹⁹⁶ CFA. (2021). *Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-mission/annual-report>. p.13.

¹⁹⁷ CFA. (2015) *Volunteerism Strategy 2015 - 2020*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁹⁸ CFA. (2020). *Brigade Health Check template*. Retrieved from CFA.

¹⁹⁹ FSIM. (2021) *Fire Services Implementation Monitor Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/fire-services-implementation-monitor-annual-report-2020-21/>. pg. 42.

we met were overwhelmingly white, male and of older age groups. The position was if anything more striking with paid staff.”²⁰⁰

The AFAC Review went on to note that “overall, our concern is less that training is a non-diverse element in an otherwise diverse organisation – it is that fundamentally CFA is not a diverse organisation and the training system reflects that.”²⁰¹

While the AFAC review report noted the differing views on the merits of diversity training in changing people’s attitudes, it drew attention to the more straightforward things that can be done, such as training that raises awareness of diversity issues and CFA’s diversity policies, values, and Code of Conduct. It also suggested ensuring that training materials support a culture of diversity and do not rely solely on illustrations of white males doing things.²⁰² Activities being undertaken by CFA, such as the socialisation of the Interim Behavioural Standards, align with these suggestions.

There are mixed views reported in surveys about whether CFA is sufficiently diverse and welcoming of diversity. For instance, in the 2021 CFA People Matter Survey (applying to staff and conducted following the 2020 Fire Services Reform).²⁰³

-  80% of respondents agreed that ‘My manager works effectively with people from diverse backgrounds’ (an increase from 2019, where this was 76%)²⁰⁴
-  46% agreed that there is a positive culture within my organisation in relation to employees who identify as LGBTIQ+
-  43% agreed that there is a positive culture within my organisation in relation to employees who are Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander
-  52% agreed that there is a positive culture within my organisation in relation to employees from varied cultural backgrounds
-  52% agreed that senior leaders actively support diversity and inclusion in the workplace (a marginal increase from 2019 where 56% of respondents agreed that senior leaders support diversity and inclusion)²⁰⁵
-  77% agreed that people in my workgroup actively support diversity and inclusion in the workplace²⁰⁶ (an increase of 4% from 2019).²⁰⁷

The 2020 VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey, which applies to volunteers and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform, found that survey respondents thought CFA

²⁰⁰ AFAC. (2021). *AFAC Independent Peer Review into CFA Training*. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁰¹ AFAC. (2021). *AFAC Independent Peer Review into CFA Training*. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁰² AFAC. (2021). *AFAC Independent Peer Review into CFA Training*. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁰³ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

²⁰⁴ CFA. (2019). *People Matter Survey PowerPoint presentation*. Retrieved from CFA. The 2019 People Matter survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48 % of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

²⁰⁵ At the time of the survey Senior Leadership was defined as the CEO, Chief Officer, Executive Directors, DCOs, ACOs and Executive Managers.

²⁰⁶ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021) *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA..

²⁰⁷ CFA. (2019). *People Matter Results PowerPoint presentation*. Retrieved from CFA.

was meeting expectations in terms of people from all cultural backgrounds, different religious, political and personal beliefs being made welcome at a Brigade.²⁰⁸

However, for those volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA, as captured in the Volunteer Exit Survey,²⁰⁹ there were lower levels of satisfaction:



January - June 2018 (pre Fire Services Reform),²¹⁰ there was a trend for a desire for increased diversity and inclusion in Brigades, with an emphasis on increasing younger members and female members²¹¹



July - December 2020 (post Fire Services Reform),²¹² only 49% of 136 respondents were satisfied with the level of diversity in their Brigade²¹³



January – June 2021 (post Fire Services Reform),²¹⁴ 56% of 153 respondents were satisfied with the level of diversity in their Brigade.

5.7.2 Recruitment initiatives to support diversity

Recruitment practices can make a significant contribution to enhancing the diversity of an organisation. Prior to the Fire Services Reform, the Victorian Auditor-General's Report into Managing Emergency Services Volunteers in 2014 found that CFA does "not adequately plan for sustainable and capable volunteer workforces and nor do they effectively manage volunteer recruitment."²¹⁵ It also found that recruitment was not guided by a coherent evidence-based strategy, but was ad hoc and managed at the local Brigade level.²¹⁶ The report noted that a comprehensive strategy was needed with consistent organisation-wide practices.²¹⁷ The findings, whilst five years old, are still relevant to the challenges for CFA today.

Stakeholders also drew attention to the need to further support recruitment to increase diversity within the organisation: "I don't think there is an unwillingness to be diverse, but it's more about how we empower people to help seek diversity as part of recruitment. There is an online resource being developed, but it's not widely communicated."²¹⁸ Another stakeholder commented: "Often when you talk about women in leadership positions, we hear that women aren't interested. But we don't have any tangible targets or processes to recruit, train, and support women. Including developing them as leaders to enable them to step up into roles.

²⁰⁸ VFBV. (2020). *2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey Results*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vfbv.com.au/#> The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is conducted annually to capture and communicate issues as volunteers see them. 2693 volunteers participated in the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey, which was conducted shortly after the Fire Services Reforms came into effect. CFA's 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

²⁰⁹ The Volunteer Exit Survey is an online survey for those moving brigades or taking a break from CFA.

²¹⁰ 153 of 1,372 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 January 2018 – 30 June 2018, which was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform.

²¹¹ CFA. (2018). *Volunteer Exit Survey Report, 1 January 2018- 30 June 2018*. Retrieved from CFA.

²¹² 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

²¹³ CFA. (2020). *Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1, 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA.

²¹⁴ 153 eligible volunteers completed the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 January 2021 – 30 June 2021, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

²¹⁵ Auditor General Victoria.. (2014). *Managing Emergency Services Volunteers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20140205-Emergency-Volunteers.pdf>. pg. 13.

²¹⁶ Auditor General Victoria.. (2014). *Managing Emergency Services Volunteers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20140205-Emergency-Volunteers.pdf> pg. 13.

²¹⁷ Auditor General Victoria. (2014). *Managing Emergency Services Volunteers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20140205-Emergency-Volunteers.pdf> pg. 17.

²¹⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

Women, but also people of colour and the rainbow community just don't get put forward for things."²¹⁹

Since the 2014 report, the Review Team understands that initiatives have been put in place to support more diverse recruitment. For example, CFA has established targets for female representation (discussed below at [Section 5.7.7](#)) and developed tools such as the template recruitment plan²²⁰ to help Brigades plan for their recruitment and identify target groups.

CFA has also introduced a Talent Acquisition Team to provide a centralised internal recruitment support service to hiring managers. Depending on the needs and experience of hiring managers, they provide support and guidance at key stages of the selection process.

Another significant development is the new volunteer hub which digitises the Expression of Interest and registration process for new members. This new hub aims to ensure consistency of process; and remove potential bias that may exist at the Expression of Interest process (for example, the hub does not collect gender data that a Brigade will see). Further, CFA has committed to delivering a Volunteer Engagement Plan which outlines its approach to engaging its diverse volunteer base, providing support and including volunteers in decision-making.²²¹

Learnings from other organisations

Essex Police has developed a specific volunteer recruitment scheme to attract, recruit, progress and retain a more diverse workforce. This has been supported by targeted social media and digital recruitment campaigns to boost the diversity of volunteer membership, referred to as #MyOtherLife. The development of #MyOtherLife has worked with staff networks such as the Minority Ethnic Support Association and the Women's Leadership & Development Forum to promote volunteer opportunities with a focus on youth, women, and people of colour.²²²

Essex Police has also developed the Positive Action Programme to attract and recruit individuals from under-represented groups. The Positive Action Programme consists of targeted marketing, outreach activities at places such as community groups and places of worship, pre-application workshops, pre-assessment workshops and a buddy scheme to provide positive action support to candidates.²²³

Surf Life Saving New South Wales' (SLSNSW) approach to recruitment focuses on community members, not just lifesavers thereby supporting a diversity of recruitment to a range of roles within the organisation. Their website launch page states:

"our club is your club – Surf Life Saving has a role for everyone. In the water, on the sand or at the surf club – whatever your skills and interests there's a place for you."²²⁴

²¹⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²²⁰ CFA. (2020) *Template Recruitment Plan*. Retrieved from CFA.

²²¹ FSIM. (2021) *Fire Services Implementation Monitor Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/fire-services-implementation-monitor-annual-report-2020-21/>. pg. 52.

²²² Essex Police. (2021). *Statutory Duty Information Report 2021*. Retrieved from: <https://www.essex.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/essex/about-us/equality-and-diversity/essex-police-statutory-duty-report-2021---final---290121.pdf>

²²³ Essex Police. (2021). *Statutory Duty Information Report 2021*.. Retrieved from: <https://www.essex.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/essex/about-us/equality-and-diversity/essex-police-statutory-duty-report-2021---final---290121.pdf>. pg. 5.

²²⁴ Surf Life Saving New South Wales. (2022). *Surf Life Saving New South Wales*. Retrieved from <https://www.surflifesaving.com.au/>

Learnings from other organisations

SLSNSW's Nippers program for children aged 5 to under 14 reflects this approach with the program providing an opportunity for children to enjoy the beach in a safe environment as well as welcome families to the organisation. The SLSNSW has produced an Information Pack to provide interested community members with information on the different options to get involved with the organisation.²²⁵

5.7.3 Workplace inclusion

An inclusive culture is central to a vibrant and sustainable workforce. An inclusive environment has been defined as one "that does not require anyone to hide who they are, to minimize their differences to protect themselves from insult or injury or coerce them to assimilate (which diminishes the uniqueness they bring)."²²⁶

An inclusive organisation is one where "the leadership, organisational structure, training, policies, and procedures remove barriers to full participation, while they protect and promote equal opportunity so everyone can succeed."²²⁷

The benefits of an inclusive workplace culture are widely reported. Workers in inclusive teams are seven times less likely to experience harassment and discrimination than those in non-inclusive teams.²²⁸ Inclusive workplaces promote a sense of psychological safety for employees.²²⁹ Importantly, the benefits of diversity are only realised in inclusive conditions.²³⁰

By way of contrast, any organisation that is a hostile environment for some of its members will incur costs beyond those directly affected; teamwork difficulties may arise with subsequent absenteeism and resignations, which can result in the need for increased recruitment, training, and potential litigation expenses.²³¹

Evidence from CFA survey data and stakeholder interviews suggest there is still some way to go for all employees to broadly consider themselves part of an inclusive organisation. The Review Team acknowledge that survey data is drawn from a small sample. Demographic data and stakeholder interview responses have therefore also been considered when reflecting on inclusion and representation at CFA.

²²⁵ Surf Life Saving New South Wales. (2022). *Get Involved Information Pack*. Retrieved from https://www.surflifesaving.com.au/sites/site.test/files/Get%20Involved_Website.pdf

²²⁶ Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs. (2020). *A Fire Service for All: Exploring Ways to Further Diversity and Inclusivity for Women in the Canadian Fire Industry*. Retrieved from: https://cdn.ymaws.com/cafc.ca/resource/resmgr/reports/updated_a_fire_service_for_a.pdf, pg. 7.

²²⁷ Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs. (2020). *A Fire Service for All: Exploring Ways to Further Diversity and Inclusivity for Women in the Canadian Fire Industry*. Retrieved from: https://cdn.ymaws.com/cafc.ca/resource/resmgr/reports/updated_a_fire_service_for_a.pdf, pg. 7.

²²⁸ Equal Opportunity Commission. (2021). *Review of Harassment in the South Australian Parliament Workplace*. Retrieved from: <https://www.eoc.sa.gov.au/documents/Report-Review-of-Harassment-SA-Parliament-Workplace.pdf>, pg. 42.

²²⁹ Equal Opportunity Commission. (2021). *Review of Harassment in the South Australian Parliament Workplace*. Retrieved from: <https://www.eoc.sa.gov.au/documents/Report-Review-of-Harassment-SA-Parliament-Workplace.pdf>, pg. 46.

²³⁰ Equal Opportunity Commission. (2021). *Review of Harassment in the South Australian Parliament Workplace*. Retrieved from: <https://www.eoc.sa.gov.au/documents/Report-Review-of-Harassment-SA-Parliament-Workplace.pdf>, pg. 45.

²³¹ Beatson, R., McLennan, J., (2005). Australia's women volunteer fire fighters: A literature review and research agenda. *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, 10, p 18-27. Retrieved from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284665788>, pg. 19

The 2021 People Matter Survey,²³² applying to staff and conducted following the 2020 Fire Services Reform, reported that only 36% of respondents agreed with the statement ‘There is a positive culture within my organisation in relation to employees with disability’; 55% of respondents agreed with the statement ‘there is a positive culture in my organisation in relation to employees of different age groups’ and 54% agreed with the statement ‘there is a positive culture in my organisation in relation to employees of different sexes/genders.’²³³ In its 2021 Progress Report, the Champions of Change reported that 48% of CFA employees felt that they have an inclusive employment experience.²³⁴ The demographic data of the participants in the Champions of Change survey is not known to the Review Team.

With regard to volunteers, the CFA Volunteer Exit Survey (July 2020 – December 2020),²³⁵ conducted following the Fire Services Reform, recorded that only 53% of 136 respondents were satisfied with the level of inclusion and fairness in their Brigade. The CFA Volunteer Exit Survey (January 2021- June 2021), also conducted following the Fire Services Reform, recorded an increase to 59% of the 153 respondents being satisfied with the level of inclusion and fairness in their Brigade.

While some members interviewed for this Review praised the level of inclusion within their Brigades, many stakeholders indicated a concern about the level of inclusion and diversity within CFA. For example, one noted, “It appears that they’d rather retain the homophobic, racist, misogynist person because that’s a number they can turn out to an emergency.”²³⁶

During stakeholder interviews, the Review Team also heard, “There are some real risks here, if we don’t start to change the culture in inclusion, diversity, the organisation is at a huge risk of falling flat on their face, if we aren’t already in this position.”²³⁷ One stakeholder noted that CFA need to go further, “Every CFA station needs to be a safe place, not a good enough place but a safe place.”²³⁸

The Review Team heard about many activities that were being undertaken to improve the level of diversity, and the good intentions of many, but also the challenges to achieving greater diversity in the organisation. One barrier identified was the level of bureaucracy, “The culture of CFA is a lumbering bureaucracy that creates many barriers to diversity and getting new members. Some barriers are there for good reason, but some are there that just block improvement.”²³⁹

Numerous stakeholders also noted the importance of action with one stakeholder saying that, “Whilst there are horrible things happening, there is amazing support and opportunities that exist. The push to get more diversity into CFA. We have to walk the walk, not just talk.”²⁴⁰ Another also said, “The managers talk about improvements but don’t walk the walk. There hasn’t been actions [sic]. [The] diversity action plan [has] been around for 5 years, the plan is

²³² Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

²³³ CFA. (2021). *2021 People Matter Survey - CFA Overall Results PowerPoint presentation*. Retrieved from CFA.

²³⁴ Champions of Change. (2022). *Fire and Emergency: Progress Report 2021*. Retrieved from: https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FE_2021-Progress-Report.pdf pg. 20.

²³⁵ 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

²³⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²³⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²³⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²³⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁴⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

there but not embedded in how we work. Put out media releases to tell community how good we are. Time and budget are the excuses used by managers to stop ideas/actions.”²⁴¹

One stakeholder talked about the importance of the organisation making tailored efforts to retain a diverse member base “there’s no attempt to cater for different age groups or different backgrounds...”²⁴²

Stakeholders noted that in order for diversity and inclusion initiatives to be successful they need to be meaningfully supported by leaders, integrated into performance measures and more broadly embedded into the business through a clear chain of communication and reporting. One stakeholder suggested that, “I think that for every leader in the organisation – diversity and inclusion should be a meaningful KPI for them. It shouldn’t be just a tick box. We do have good leaders and leaders who get it, but as an organisation, I am not sure we do.”²⁴³

This suggestion may be important given that stakeholders noted that the diversity of the Brigade may be dependent on a particular Brigade’s attitude: “If your Brigade leader is not supportive of diversity, then you will never increase the diversity of the Brigade.”²⁴⁴

Some stakeholders also noted the importance of bedding down diversity and inclusion initiatives. One stakeholder said that, “There’s been attempts and strategies around diversity and inclusion but they fall flat because they don’t form part of our business, they don’t get incorporated. We’re really not focused on it. It’s not part of our thinking – it’s an add-on/ tack-on.”²⁴⁵

Another stakeholder noted that in order to close the gap between HQ, Region, Districts and Brigades ‘each Region should have at least 2 members representing each characteristic on the Regional [Inclusion and Fairness] Councils.’²⁴⁶ This comment should be considered alongside existing mechanisms already in place, including the Allies of Inclusion Network.

Learnings from other organisations

SLSNSW and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) provide examples of the way in which inclusion of volunteers can be enhanced through organisational change and integrating volunteer experience and knowledge into the business.

In progressing organisational change, SLSNSW ask the following question ‘what do the members want/need?’ This question not only informs the nature of change – but also how it is achieved. SLSNSW programs and strategies are generally built from the ground up and volunteers are engaged in all development phases.²⁴⁷

As another example, QFES developed a Volunteerism Strategy following the results of the 2016 Volunteer Survey. This Strategy identifies that volunteers, volunteering and volunteerism are deeply embedded in QFES culture and ethos. It includes a guiding principle regarding the use of the life experience and knowledge of volunteers, expressing a commitment that QFES will foster an inclusive organisational environment which recognises the different skills, abilities and availability

²⁴¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁴² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁴³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁴⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁴⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁴⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁴⁷ SLSNSW & Review Team Communication (10 Nov 2021).

Learnings from other organisations

of its volunteers. The Strategy establishes a framework for the application of a “volunteer lens” across all QFES activities and seeks to incorporate the value of volunteers, volunteering, and volunteerism into all aspects of QFES business from the outset, rather than as an optional add-on.²⁴⁸

5.7.4 Initiatives to support inclusion

In recent years, CFA has established initiatives to support inclusion within the organisation. Following its most recent organisational realignment, it now has two Deputy Chief Officers who are women and two Group General Managers who are women. It also has a female CEO. Women now represent 39% of identified leadership roles in the organisation.²⁴⁹

It has appointed Regional and State Inclusion and Fairness Councils,²⁵⁰ which advise CFA Executive on strategic needs, goals and direction of CFA regarding inclusion and fairness. The State Council is made up of both volunteers and staff from a range of different backgrounds.²⁵¹

CFA has also recently established a Women’s Advisory Committee and a Youth Advisory Committee to advise the Executive on how to better support diversity and inclusion in the organisation.²⁵² The intention of these committees is to contribute to creating a CFA that is more representative and responsive to the needs of the Victorian community and a CFA that leverages diversity of thought, experience and perspective. Each Region has several representatives on each of the advisory committees.

In 2019, CFA developed a new Inclusion and Fairness business rule to provide guidance in relation to enabling inclusive, safe and equitable work practices, and integrating these across the broader organisation.²⁵³ CFA has also drafted an Inclusion and Fairness Framework,²⁵⁴ and draft Inclusion and Diversity Strategy.²⁵⁵

The purpose of the Inclusion and Fairness Framework is to provide all CFA members with the direction to identify and address systemic barriers to building a diverse and inclusive organisation broadly representative of the communities it serves. Actions arising from the Inclusion and Fairness Framework will be placed into the Culture Action Plan, which will drive outcomes in support of the framework’s objectives and goals through yearly business plans.

The draft Inclusion and Diversity Strategy reflects CFA’s commitment to provide a great place to work and volunteer; and respectful, safe and inclusive environments that leverage diversity

²⁴⁸ Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. (2021). *Volunteerism Strategy – Growing QFES together*. Retrieved from <https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/Volunteerism-Strategy.PDF>. pg. 4.

²⁴⁹ CFA. (2022). *Draft CFA Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025*. Retrieved from CFA. For the purpose of the Gender Equality Action Plan, leadership roles comprise all positions from CEO to PTA 6 and DMO 6 classifications. PTA classification level descriptors, a sample of position descriptions and HR delegations were used to determine this definition.

²⁵⁰ CFA. (2019). *Annual Report 2018-19*. Retrieved from: https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/520/CFA_Annual%20Report_2019.pdf.aspx. pg. 8.

²⁵¹ CFA. (2021). *Inclusion and Fairness*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/inclusion-and-fairness>

²⁵² CFA. (2021). *Our Values and Behaviours*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-values-and-behaviours>

²⁵³ CFA. (2020). *Annual Report 2019-20*. Retrieved from https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/520/CFA_AR_20_web.pdf.aspx. pg. 125.

²⁵⁴ CFA. (n.d.). *CFA Inclusion and Fairness Framework*. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁵⁵ CFA. (n.d.). *CFA Inclusion & Diversity Strategy 2021-2024*. Retrieved from CFA.

in all its forms. It reflects five strategic objectives, associated key initiatives and high level success factors. The strategic objectives are:

- build leadership, accountability and engagement
- foster respectful, safe and inclusive Brigades and workplaces that are free from bullying, harassment, discrimination, and victimisation
- support an inclusive capability uplift in all members from senior leaders to our newest volunteer
- reflect the community we serve in our Brigades and workplaces
- embed diversity, equity and inclusion principles into end-to-end talent management processes including recruitment, onboarding, selection and retention.

CFA has also introduced the Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025, which outlines the findings of its Gender Equality Audit and identifies actions taken to address barriers for employees. The Plan outlines the vision of CFA for gender equality including: achieving a level of organisation wide understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion that sets the foundation for a supporting environment for all genders; recognition across the membership that gender equality benefits everyone; and that members contribute to a respectful, safe and inclusive environment where all genders have access to equal opportunities and resources.²⁵⁶

Learnings from other organisations

QFES provides an example of a different inclusion governance framework: it has established an Allies of Inclusion program in support of the organisation's long-term strategy to build safe and inclusive workplaces. More than 100 self-nominated 'allies', including the entire QFES Leadership Team, act as a distributed network of local champions of change across the organisation. Allies of Inclusion forms part of QFES' cultural transformation journey which has a specific focus on ensuring actions and behaviours within the service are consistent with QFES's shared values of Respect, Integrity, Courage, Loyalty, and Trust. Staff sign up to be Allies of Inclusion providing local level leadership on equality and inclusion and are empowered to challenge language, attitudes or behaviour that are not consistent with the expected culture.²⁵⁷

5.7.5 Physical facilities and their role in supporting inclusion

In addition to a clear strategy, the physical design of workplaces can contribute to the inclusiveness experienced by people in the workplace. The lack of separate changing facilities and toilets at a number of CFA locations has previously been noted.²⁵⁸ Some stakeholders interviewed during the Review raised the importance of change room facilities and toilets in the Brigade and while working, with one saying, "We need to start building stations that look

²⁵⁶ CFA. (2022). *Draft CFA Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025*. Retrieved from CFA. For the purpose of the Gender Equality Action Plan, leadership roles comprise all positions from CEO to PTA 6 and DMO 6 classifications. PTA classification level descriptors, a sample of position descriptions and HR delegations were used to determine this definition.

²⁵⁷ Male Champions of Change. (2019). *Fire and Emergency Progress Report 2017-18*. Retrieved from <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/MCC-Fire-and-Emergency-Progress-Report-2018.pdf>, pg. 11.

²⁵⁸ Tyler, M, Carson, L, Reynolds, B. (2019). *Are fire services 'extremely gendered' organizations? Examining the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Australia*. Gender Work Organisation pg. 1304-1323. Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.12393>, pg. 1313.

to the future... CFA is a bit behind the time. If new stations all had this [toilets for transgender people], it would be good.”²⁵⁹

Another stakeholder noted that, “The toilets are a massive problem. At big fires, it can take a lot of time to go to the toilet.”²⁶⁰ While one member questioned, “How do we wee safely when you’re out on the fire ground? You know, we need she-pees in the fire tanker. It’s just an easy solution.”²⁶¹

Since 2017/2018 station design and construction have included separate facilities. For example, most recently, the Nagambie fire station officially opened housing a large Brigade meeting room and separate turn-out rooms and change facilities for men and women.²⁶² Other adaptations are also being seen to stations, with a prayer room included in the design for the Truganina Fire Station which will be constructed later this year.

Learnings from other organisations

Life Saving Victoria (LSV) has recently released a report regarding the physical design of life saving facilities of the future.²⁶³ Two of the five design principles support inclusive outcomes by requiring facilities to:

- sustain volunteer lifesaving – the report includes an expectation that infrastructure is efficiently designed to promote equitable and flexible usage by a range of users (including members who identify as LGBTIQ+, culturally and linguistically diverse members and members of all abilities) capable of sharing facilities
- provide a safe, inclusive and positive environment for all members – the report identifies that conscious processes and actions are essential, and these include ensuring facility design, particularly regarding site integration, layout, good passive surveillance, and separation of activity between the public and/or unsupervised visitors, children, and young people.

5.7.6 The importance of celebrating diversity and understanding intersectionality

Inclusion of those who identify as having a disability

CFA 2021 People Matter Survey,²⁶⁴ which relates to staff and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform, reported that only:



41% of respondents agreed that ‘disability is not a barrier to success in my organisation, which is 1% lower than the average agreement reported by respondents in the

²⁵⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁶⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁶¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁶² CFA. (2022). *New Nagambie Fire Station Officially opens*. Retrieved from: <https://news.cfa.vic.gov.au/news/new-nagambie-fire-station-officially-opens>

²⁶³ Life Saving Victoria. (2022). *Lifesaving Facility of the Future*. Retrieved from <https://lsv.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Life-Saving-Victoria-Facility-of-the-Future-2021.pdf>

²⁶⁴ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

comparator group used in the survey. It is 2% lower than the percentage of CFA staff who agreed with this statement in the 2019 People Matter survey (43%).²⁶⁵



36% of respondents agreed that 'There is a positive culture within my organisation in relation to employees with disability, which is 14% lower than the average agreement reported by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey.'²⁶⁶ This is also lower than the percentage of CFA staff who agreed with this statement in the 2019 People Matter survey (43%).²⁶⁷



74% of respondents agreed that 'my organisation uses inclusive and respectful images and language', which is 6% lower than the average agreement reported by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey.'²⁶⁸

Some initiatives have been implemented to support people who identify as having a disability at CFA. CFA's 2018-19 Annual Report noted that CFA is prioritising disability inclusion and that it had reviewed and updated policies and procedures to comply with accessibility standards. It also noted that it had employed an engagement officer to assist with developing disability inclusion strategies and is prioritising bringing all CFA buildings up to compliance standards, with the goal of becoming 80% compliant within the next eight years.²⁶⁹

The Matter of Respect program was launched in March 2019 and ran until September 2019. Approximately 500 CFA members participated in a training session. The Review Team understands that program delivery ceased amidst the early commencement of fire season and no further sessions were scheduled due to COVID-19, restrictions around face-to-face gatherings and subsequent changes to organisational priorities.²⁷⁰

Further, CFA established its first Disability Action Plan for July 2013 – June 2014.²⁷¹ The Review Team understands that the Action Plan is currently being updated.

CFA also provides the opportunity for members to attend Disability Confidence training. The training is intended to increase awareness of disability, build member confidence in using disability inclusive language, provide an understanding of the value of creating safe and inclusive behaviours and environments (including workplace adjustments) and provide practical guidance for interacting with people who identify as having a disability.²⁷²

There were varying views. One stakeholder noted that they had seen: "the most positive forms of behaviour to accommodate people with particular needs."²⁷³

Others noted that there needs to be an attitude change towards those with disabilities, "there's no attempt to understand the skills/background of the person, or find work they can do – they

²⁶⁵ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2019). *CFA 2019 People Matter Survey Report*. Retrieved from CFA. The 2019 People Matter Survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48% of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA's 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

²⁶⁶ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁶⁷ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2019). *CFA 2019 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁶⁸ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁶⁹ CFA. (2019). *Annual Report 2018-19*. Retrieved from: https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/520/CFA_Annual%20Report_2019.pdf.aspx, pg. 124.

²⁷⁰ CFA & Review Team Communication (2 February 2022).

²⁷¹ CFA. (2013). *CFA Disability Action Plan July 2013 - June 2014*. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁷² CFA. (2021). *Disability Confidence Training flyer*. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁷³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

just see the disability.”²⁷⁴ Other stakeholders who identified as having a disability reported bullying and harassment, with more than one stakeholder who identified as having a disability saying that they had left, or stopped associating with their Brigade due to the bullying.

Inclusion of those who identify as LGBTIQ+

CFA has conducted activities to enhance LGBTIQ+ inclusion and awareness. In its 2016-17 Annual Report, CFA noted the establishment of CFA Pride in 2015, a support network for CFA’s LGBTIQ+ firefighters. Its work received the 2017 Volunteering Victoria State Award for Inclusion.²⁷⁵

Online workshops open to all members were run in 2021 and were aimed at increasing LGBTIQ+ awareness and understanding of the role that allies can play in creating inclusive workplaces.²⁷⁶

Despite these inclusion initiatives, the CFA 2021 People Matter Survey,²⁷⁷ which relates to staff and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform, reported statistics of LGBTIQ+ inclusion lower than those reported by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey:



46% of respondents agreed that there is a positive culture within CFA in relation to employees who identify as LGBTIQ+, which is 25% lower than that reported by respondents in the comparator group. It is also lower than in 2019,²⁷⁸ when 53% of respondents agreed that there is a positive culture within CFA in relation to employees who identify as LGBTIQ+



54% of respondents agreed that sexual orientation is not a barrier to success in CFA, which is 10% lower than the average agreement reported by respondents in the comparator group.²⁷⁹

Volunteers interviewed indicated a mixed view as to whether CFA was inclusive of those identifying as LGBTIQ+, which appeared to depend on the particular Brigade they were a member of. One member reflected on their experience sharing that, “The Brigade I was in when I was raising my family was very welcoming of kids. But to be LGBTIQ or gender diverse [at that Brigade] is just not acceptable.”²⁸⁰ Similarly, another stakeholder said that, “The eye rolling and sniggering between the homophobic blue shirts in the room was quite out of hand.”²⁸¹ Some stakeholders however noted that, “Some have since made it known [that they identified as LGBTIQ+], but I think it’s been a more positive experience and a bit more accepting.”²⁸²

²⁷⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁷⁵ CFA. (2016) *Annual Report 2016-17*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/publications/reports-and-policies>. pg. 37.

²⁷⁶ CFA. (2021) *LGBTIQ+ Awareness and Allyship Workshop Flyer August 2021*. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁷⁷ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

²⁷⁸ The 2019 People Matter survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48% of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

²⁷⁹ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). CFA 2021 people matter survey report. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁸⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁸¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁸² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

Inclusion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

CFA has initiatives to enhance inclusion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, including:

- a cultural heritage advisor position, a role which involves “heritage management protection measures, oversight of planned burning activities (including Cultural burning), developing policy and engaging with CFA members about heritage issues”²⁸³
- practice notes to improve biodiversity and cultural heritage management, promote consistency across the State and help new staff understand the program²⁸⁴
- online Indigenous Inclusion training, and organised cultural immersion sessions²⁸⁵
- revision of the Koorie Inclusion Action Plan 2014-19. There are 20 action areas in the 2014-19 Action Plan. However, the Review Team has not been provided with any reporting that has been done against this plan
- CFA Aboriginal Engagement Guidelines (Aug 2018)²⁸⁶
- being a project partner of the Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy (launched in May 2019)
- review of state-wide programs such as the rehabilitation of an Aboriginal heritage site, practice notes to assist Vegetation Management Officers’ planning, a training package to help members understand cultural areas, and Joint Fuel Management Programs.²⁸⁷

There is also an all-indigenous CFA fire crew. In 2000, after a series of deliberately lit fires, a crew of indigenous women firefighters formed the Lake Tyers CFA Brigade. The crew have preserved cultural heritage and helped save lives and property for over two decades, most notably during the catastrophic fires on Black Saturday (2009) and throughout Black Summer (2019-20).²⁸⁸

In terms of how employees feel about the level of inclusion of those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, the CFA 2021 People Matter Survey, which relates to staff and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform,²⁸⁹ revealed that:



48% of respondents agreed that ‘being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander is not a barrier to success in my organisation’, which is 14% lower than the response reported by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey

²⁸³ CFA. (2019). *Annual Report 2018-19*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/publications/reports-and-policies>. pg. 27.

²⁸⁴ CFA. (2020). *Annual Report 2019-20*. Retrieved from https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/520/CFA_AR_20_web.pdf.aspx pg. 30.

²⁸⁵ CFA. (n.d.). *Connecting to country through cultural immersion*. Retrieved from: <https://news.cfa.vic.gov.au/news/connecting-to-country-through-cultural-immersion>

²⁸⁶ CFA. (2018). *Aboriginal Engagement Guidelines*. Retrieved from https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/533/2018_CFA_Aboriginal_Engagement_Guidelines_Aug_2018_80431.pdf.aspx

²⁸⁷ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement March 2021*. Retrieved from: https://www.vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202103-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_March2021.pdf

²⁸⁸ Australian Government. (2020) *The all-female firefighting crew protecting Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust*. Retrieved from: <https://www.indigenous.gov.au/news-and-media/stories/all-female-firefighting-crew-protecting-lake-tyers-aboriginal-trust>; La Trobe University. (2021) *Charmaine protects Aboriginal cultural heritage at Lake Tyers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/news/announcements/2021/charmaine-protects-aboriginal-cultural-heritage-at-lake-tyers>

²⁸⁹ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.



61% of respondents agreed that they felt culturally safe at work, which is 12% lower than that reported by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey²⁹⁰



43% of respondents agreed that there is a positive culture within my organisation in relation to employees who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander which is 23% lower than that reported by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey and 7% lower than in 2019.²⁹¹

These numbers suggest more work needs to be done to ensure a positive and inclusive culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in CFA.

Some stakeholders interviewed for this Review reported racism and exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with one saying, “I’ve seen colleagues from Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander backgrounds be exposed to behaviour that is inexcusable and wouldn’t be tolerated by other organisations.”²⁹²

Many members were enthusiastic about the prospect of being able to experience and learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Some stakeholders discussed the flying of the Aboriginal flag as a way to indicate a welcoming environment. Others said: “Would be great to have more indigenous communities involved. Cultural awareness on the fireground is a big thing;”²⁹³ “I would love to see some Aboriginal sisters and brothers join. But we flounder because it’s not connected to anything”²⁹⁴ and “We’ve had some cultural burning experiences that we’ve ran [sic]. It’s amazing when people start talking about this and connecting with the local indigenous peoples. It kind of naturally evolves. It starts to make a difference on the ground.”²⁹⁵

Learnings from other organisations

The [Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy 2020-2024](#) is the Australian Public Service Commission five-year workforce strategy that focusses on increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the public service.²⁹⁶

Under the former Strategy (2015 – 2018) the Commonwealth saw increases in the number of public sector employees who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, however this was largely at the lower classification levels with no clear promotion and leadership pathways.

The 2020-2024 Strategy seeks to build on this and sets stretch targets of:

- 3% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee representation for Senior Executive Service by 2024

²⁹⁰ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

²⁹¹ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). *CFA 2021 People Matter Survey report*. Retrieved from CFA. The 2019 People Matter survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48 % of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

²⁹² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁹³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁹⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁹⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁹⁶ Commonwealth (2020). *Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander – Workforce Strategy 2020 – 24*. Retrieved from: https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/commonwealth_aboriginal_and_torres_strait_islander_workforce_strategy_2020_-24_0.pdf

Learnings from other organisations

- 5% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee representation at APS 4 to APS 6 levels by 2022, and Executive Level 1 and Executive Level 2 levels by 2024

The Strategy notes that this will be achieved through targeted recruitment and a focus on developing employees within the public sector to enable promotion into more senior roles.

Inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse communities

The Review Team heard that while some Brigades were making concerted efforts to support inclusion of people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, CFA often failed to attract, retain, or welcome people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Stakeholders noted that the choice of food at a BBQ, the presence of alcohol at a Brigade, or the association that people may have with uniforms and hierarchies could be obstacles to inclusion. One stakeholder commented on the subtle ways that people may be made to feel unwelcome: “On the surface I think they would be [welcomed]...but they’d [sic] probably be an absence of political correctness...it would be subtle, not overt.”²⁹⁷

CFA’s 2021 People Matter Survey,²⁹⁸ which relates to staff and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform, reported that only 52% of respondents agreed that ‘there is a positive culture within my organisation in relation to employees from varied cultural backgrounds’ which is 20% lower than that reported by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey.²⁹⁹ The CFA 2019 People Matter Survey,³⁰⁰ conducted prior to the Fire Services Reforms coming into effect, reported that 56% of people agreed that cultural background is not a barrier to success in my organisation.³⁰¹

Inclusion of young people

The FSIM 2021-22 Quarter 1 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report³⁰² noted a number of different strategies being implemented to increase the number of younger volunteers at CFA:

- targeted work in locations experiencing rural decline and ageing
- understanding the changes in volunteerism with a key focus on how younger people like to volunteer
- making it easier for younger people to connect with CFA through such initiatives as flexible volunteering

²⁹⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

²⁹⁸ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

²⁹⁹ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

³⁰⁰ The 2019 People Matter survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48 % of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

³⁰¹ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2019). *CFA 2019 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

³⁰² The indicator is the percentage of volunteer members who are between the ages of 16 and 39. Fire Services Implementation Monitor. (2021). *2021-22 Quarter 1 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: <https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-12/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%201.pdf>

- establishing the Young Adults Advisory Committee (18-30 years old) to highlight and explore solutions to systemic issues needing to be addressed from a volunteer perspective to support inclusion and diversity.

The FSIM 2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report also noted that CFA was nearing release of the Volunteer Recruitment Hub Registration Module. The module will provide demographic insights of new and transferring members which will allow CFA to develop targeted recruitment strategies.³⁰³

While there are several programs CFA is implementing to support, engage and recruit younger members,³⁰⁴ the FSIM 2021-22 Quarters 1 and 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Reports found that CFA did not meet its baseline target to increase volunteers under 40 years old.³⁰⁵ The 2021 CFA Autumn Brigade News noted the accelerating decline (as compared to general membership) in 16- and 17-year-old membership since 2000. It reported that some young members left because they didn't feel valued or accepted or had negative experiences transitioning from Juniors and that some members had also been subjected to bullying and harassment.³⁰⁶ Another added challenge to youth engagement is a decline in rural population and membership.

When respondents to the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey,³⁰⁷ applying to volunteers and undertaken following the Fire Services Reforms came into effect, were asked to comment on whether 'my Brigade is successful in recruiting younger people as volunteers' and 'my Brigade is successful in retaining young people as volunteers', volunteers identified that this was a significant issue.³⁰⁸

The 2019 Youth Voices Research report,³⁰⁹ written prior to the Fire Services Reform, made a series of recommendations relating to the recruitment of youth into CFA. Noting the importance of having good mentors in the experience of volunteers, the report found that only 31% of young members had a mentor when they started.³¹⁰ The report recommended that CFA develop a practical coaching and mentoring framework that supports Brigades with new recruits.³¹¹ It also noted that young people value having rules and expectations clearly communicated to them, and recommended that induction information and guidelines be

³⁰³ FSIM. (2022) *2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%202_0.pdf p.8.

³⁰⁴ CFA. (2020). *CFA Brigade News Autumn Edition*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/publications/brigade-magazine>. pg. 78-79.

³⁰⁵ The indicator is the percentage of volunteer members who are between the ages of 16 and 39. FSIM. (2021) *2021-22 Quarter 1 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: <https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-12/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%201.pdf> and FSIM. (2022) *2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%202_0.pdf

³⁰⁶ CFA. (2021). *CFA Brigade News Autumn Edition*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/publications/brigade-magazine>. pg. 78-79.

³⁰⁷ 2693 volunteers participated in the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey, which was conducted shortly after the Fire Services Reform came into effect. CFA's 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

³⁰⁸ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement June 2021*. Retrieved from: http://vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202106-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_June2021-web.pdf. pg. 7.

³⁰⁹ CFA. (2019). *Youth Voices Research final report*. Retrieved from CFA.

³¹⁰ CFA. (2019). *Youth Voices Research final report*. Retrieved from CFA.

³¹¹ CFA. (2019). *Youth Voices Research final report*. Retrieved from CFA.

shared,³¹² and that a staged, experiential leadership program be investigated and piloted that addresses the learning needs of young people in CFA.³¹³

The 2019 Youth Voices Research Report also noted that a draft Youth Engagement Framework is currently in consultation phase. The intention of this Framework is to support CFA to make the most of their opportunities and strengths, and to engage in reflection that will enhance good practice in youth engagement. The Review Team is unaware of whether the Report's recommendations have been adopted and the status of this framework.

Stakeholders interviewed in this Review noted the exclusion and insufficient respect paid to young people. One stakeholder described that, "There's a lot of exclusion of young people to get on courses and to be taken seriously."³¹⁴ Another noted that, "We've got young people who are managers, but when people look at them, they just see the age."³¹⁵

Some members noted that this was due to longevity being valued in the organisation. One member explained that, "The older you are, the more you are respected. If you come in as a young person, you will automatically be less respected rather than an older person. It's a combination of both longevity and age. You hear a lot that the old guard knows best."³¹⁶

Stakeholders also noted the need to involve young people more and encourage their development within the organisation, with one saying, "I just feel that we are currently giving lip service to the current youth advisory team, but we really need to do something."³¹⁷

One way CFA is engaging with youth is through the State Championships.³¹⁸ The State Championships offer Junior Championships which see Junior members compete in practical fire tasks that firefighters undertake, such as hose and ladder races. The most recent 2022 competition saw 27 events take place over two days.³¹⁹ The State Championships provide an opportunity for the community to find out more about CFA, and promote teamwork, health and wellbeing of members.

Learnings from other organisations

NSW RFS have instituted a structured youth training program, where local Brigades partner with schools to deliver practical skills and an appreciation of emergency service volunteering.³²⁰ Increasingly, the Program is serving as a pathway to membership for many young people and many cadet program coordinators are also observing greater participation rates by female students.³²¹

³¹² CFA. (2019). *Youth Voices Research final report*. Retrieved from CFA.

³¹³ CFA. (2019). *Youth Voices Research final report*. Retrieved from CFA.

³¹⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³¹⁵ CFA. (2019). *NWR Youth Voices Research Report*. Retrieved from CFA.

³¹⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³¹⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³¹⁸ CFA. (n.d.). *State Championships – Celebrating CFA*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/whats-on/state-championships-celebrating-cfa>

³¹⁹ VFBV. (2022). *2022 State Urban Championship Mooroopna 26th & 27th March*. Retrieved from: https://www.vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/championships/urban/results/2022_State_Urban_Senior_Championship_Mooroopna_Results.pdf

³²⁰ NSW RFS. (2020). *Annual Report 2019-20*. Retrieved from https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/186236/NSW-RFS-Annual-Report-2019-20.pdf pg. 35.

³²¹ Male Champions of Change. (2019). *Fire and Emergency Progress Report 2017-18*. Retrieved from <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/MCC-Fire-and-Emergency-Progress-Report-2018.pdf>. pg. 23.

5.7.7 Supporting Gender Equality at CFA

Gender equality requires us to consider: “all groups of women and men, including those who are most marginalised and may suffer discrimination or inequality by virtue of their sex or gender and other characteristics, such as their sexual orientation, gender identity, race or disability.”³²²

An intersectional approach to gender equality is one which recognises that the impact of inequality is felt differently by different groups of people.

It is widely acknowledged that gender imbalance and gender inequality in the workplace pose a variety of risks to workplace culture, such as how safe, satisfied and capable employees are at work.³²³ Further, there is a higher prevalence of sexual harassment in male-dominated workplaces and this situation is compounded where there is a rigid organisational hierarchy which permits, condones or ignores attitudes that demean women.^{324, 325}

In terms of the proportion of women in various roles in CFA, perhaps the most striking statistic is that there are more than five times more male volunteers than female volunteers in operational roles,³²⁶ and while women make up 25 per cent of CFA’s volunteer workforce, most are in support roles.³²⁷ This means that they are unable to nominate for certain Brigade leadership roles such as Captain and 1st–4th lieutenant. Age, work, and family barriers also prevent women from nominating for certain leadership roles.³²⁸ In contrast, approximately 60% of the permanent paid workforce is female.³²⁹

³²² Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. (2019). *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour, in Victoria Police- Phase 3 audit and review*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/static/9a9be4301421aec42a6cb3620eca1f01/Resource-Independent_Review_Victoria_Police-Phase_3-2019.pdf . pg.80

³²³ Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. (2015). *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police – Phase 1 Report*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/static/c6047d1e6cb4d96861b32cd9295691cd/Resource-Independent_Review_Victoria_Police-Phase_1-2015.pdf. pg. 42.

³²⁴ Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf>. pg. 31.

³²⁵ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_wsh_report_2020.pdf. pg. 264.

³²⁶ CFA. (2021). *CFA at a Glance*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/cfa-at-a-glance> Figures as of 31 December 2021.

³²⁷ FSIM. (2021) *Fire Services Implementation Monitor Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/fire-services-implementation-monitor-annual-report-2020-21/>. pg. 76.

³²⁸ FSIM. (2021) *Fire Services Implementation Monitor Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/fire-services-implementation-monitor-annual-report-2020-21/>. pg. 76.

³²⁹ CFA. (2021) *CFA at a Glance*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/cfa-at-a-glance>. Figures as of 31 December 2021.

This table provides an overview of the current gender breakdown for staff at CFA.

Table 4: CFA current gender paid workforce breakdown as of June 2021 ³³⁰

Staff	2021 Number (Headcount)		
	Male	Female	Total
Permanent Staff	473	678	1,151

The number of female staff in senior roles (which includes PTA5 – 7 roles and those employed under executive contracts) also sits at just under 50%.³³¹

Data collected by the Champions of Change Fire and Emergency group, found that gender equality had been reached in overall recruits/ new hires in 2018-19 and 2019-20.^{332,333} In 2021, this declined, with hires of women falling to 33.4%.³³⁴

Several studies have referenced images of maleness and the central notion of the patriarchy in fire services. Studies have highlighted that “firefighting, like many aspects of emergency management, is both male dominated and culturally masculinised”.³³⁵ The connections between firefighting, masculinity and the military have also been referenced in the literature and the symbol of a fireman as “a symbol of immaculate manhood embodying strength, chivalry, courage and heroism” has been emphasised.³³⁶ Noting that CFA is a volunteer fire service, the altruistic contribution of members has the capacity to elevate their hero status. Traditionally, women’s involvement in fire services has been primarily in administrative and support roles.³³⁷

One stakeholder described the impact of the ‘brotherhood’ saying, “There are some really decent people who make horrible decisions, because they stick with the brotherhood. To get to a level of authority in CFA to have operational ranks, you need to come through the Brigade. You eat, sleep and protect the community with these people. It builds a bond with the

³³⁰ CFA. (2021). *Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-mission/annual-report>. pg 24. Note that this number does not include FRV secondees.

³³¹ FSIM. (2022). 2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report. Retrieved from: https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%20_0.pdf

³³² Male Champions of Change. *Fire & Emergency Impact Report 2018-2019*. Retrieved from: <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Fire-Emergency-Impact-Report-2019.pdf> pg. 16.

³³³ Champions of Change. (2021). *Fire & Emergency Progress Report 2019-2020*. Retrieved from: <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Champions-of-Change-Fire-Emergency-Impact-Report-2020-FINAL.pdf> pg. 18.

³³⁴ Champions of Change. (2022). *Fire and Emergency: Progress Report 2021*. Retrieved from: https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FE_2021-Progress-Report.pdf pg 18.

³³⁵ Tyler, M, Carson, L, Reynolds, B. (2019) *Are fire services ‘extremely gendered’ organizations? Examining the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Australia*. Gender Work Organisation pg. 1304-1323. Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.12393>. pg. 1304.

³³⁶ Tyler, M, Carson, L, Reynolds, B. (2019) *Are fire services ‘extremely gendered’ organizations? Examining the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Australia*. Gender Work Organisation pg. 1304-1323. Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.12393> pg. 1307.

³³⁷ Tyler, M, Carson, L, Reynolds, B. (2019) *Are fire services ‘extremely gendered’ organizations? Examining the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Australia*. Gender Work Organisation pg. 1304-1323. Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.12393> pg. 1307.

brotherhood which trumps everything. So when they come into CFA, the brotherhood is part of their makeup, it is part of their bias.”³³⁸

A hypermasculine culture can suppress people speaking up about harassment, reporting injuries and safety concerns, and asking for help for fear of seeming weak.³³⁹ The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has indicated that having more women in senior leadership roles would change how workplaces deal with sexual harassment and more generally ‘help change the culture’.³⁴⁰

Research has also noted that disasters are managed and responded to in a gendered way. In the 2009 Black Saturday fires, which caused widespread devastation and the greatest loss of life from fire since colonisation, some men felt that they had failed to protect families which led to some men displaying hyper-masculinity, violence and risk-taking in the disaster’s aftermath.³⁴¹

In its 2017-18 Fire and Emergency Progress Report, the Male Champions of Change recognised that in some pockets of fire and emergency organisations, “male-dominated teams can lead to hyper-masculine environments that exclude or marginalise people who do not fit the ‘norm’”.³⁴² Gendered unconscious bias has also been found to particularly persist in workplaces that are male dominated.³⁴³

VEOHRC’s submission to the AHRC’s National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces referred to its work in the fire and emergency services sector: “a dominant masculine workplace culture that ‘often value[s] attributes, characteristics and roles traditionally associated with men while simultaneously devaluing those typically associated with women’ can ‘underpin a broad range of behaviours, ranging from everyday sexism to serious cases of sex discrimination and sexual harassment’”.³⁴⁴

Tyler et al have recently emphasised that “while some efforts have been made in Australian fire services to recruit more female staff, such as affirmative action [at Fire Rescue New South Wales] and diversity and inclusion strategies [at EMV], these efforts appear to have done little to challenge the dominant cultural construction of the heroic male firefighter (and associated understandings of rural fire services as masculine domains).”³⁴⁵

Stakeholders interviewed by the Review Team communicated similar sentiments about the hyper-masculine culture and brotherhood associated with CFA, with statements such as, “CFA

³³⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³³⁹ Khan, Y., Davis, A., Taylor, J. A. (2017). *Ladders and lifting: How gender affects safety behaviours in the fire service*. Journal of Workplace Behavioural Health, 32(3), 206–225. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15555240.2017.1358642> . pg. 222.

³⁴⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_wsh_report_2020.pdf pg. 230.

³⁴¹ Parkinson, D., Zara, C., Davie, S., (2015). *Victoria’s Gender and Disaster Taskforce*. Australian Journal of Emergency Management. Retrieved from: <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-oct-2015-victorias-gender-and-disaster-taskforce/> . pg. 26.

³⁴² Male Champions of Change (2019). *Fire and Emergency: Progress Report 2017-18*. Retrieved from: <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/MCC-Fire-and-Emergency-Progress-Report-2018.pdf> . pg. 10.

³⁴³ Equal Opportunity Commission. (2021). *Review of Harassment in the South Australian Parliament Workplace*. Retrieved from: <https://www.eoc.sa.gov.au/documents/Report-Review-of-Harassment-SA-Parliament-Workplace.pdf> . pg. 37.

³⁴⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_wsh_report_2020.pdf . pg. 231.

³⁴⁵ Tyler, M, Carson, L, Reynolds, B. (2019). *Are fire services ‘extremely gendered’ organizations? Examining the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Australia*. Gender Work Organisation pg. 1304-1323.. Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.12393> pg. 1307.

is a men's shed with trucks in it"³⁴⁶ and, "It's a boy's club – they all went to the same college. They stick together like glue. If you upset one of them, you're in trouble with lots of others."³⁴⁷

Members interviewed also noted the challenge that this presents. One stakeholder explained, "You see these initiatives, these great initiatives, to be inclusive and it just doesn't work at a Brigade level because of this club. Because sometimes people who want to be a fire fighter, also are just alpha males."³⁴⁸ Another stakeholder described that, "The culture is very familial. There's a patriarchy embedded in the system driven by a love for each other. It's very archaic in the way that it applies para-military approach."³⁴⁹

These comments suggest that a dominant masculinised culture persists within CFA, which may to some extent frustrate the efforts made to enhance inclusion within the organisation.

Learnings from other organisations

Women make up 50% of LSV's volunteer membership.³⁵⁰ The organisation has established female-led patrols called Pink Patrols. The Pink Patrol program aims to build women's operational capacity, diversify leadership roles, and provide positive female role models for future generations of lifesavers.

The Pink Patrol mission is to acknowledge and celebrate the contribution of girls and women in shaping the lifesaving movement, and in doing so, make the opportunities and pathways in lifesaving more visible for women and girls.³⁵¹

VEOHRC has noted that a powerful way to counter resistance is to mount a compelling case for change which explains the benefits of gender equality for all members of an organisation. The more members that understand and personally connect with the case for gender equality, the less resistance, and the greater the individual and organisational capability.³⁵²

Part of the case for change to be communicated is that in addition to boosting overall numbers, increasing female participation can confer several advantages on fire services, both on and off the fire ground. On the fire ground, advantages include improvement to service delivery (through having a higher proportion of fit, younger women involved in operational responses) and occupational health and safety standards (noting as above that a hypermasculine culture can suppress people speaking up about injuries and safety concerns).³⁵³ Off the fire ground, advantages include conveying a progressive and inclusive organisation to communities,

³⁴⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁴⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁴⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁴⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁵⁰ Life Saving Victoria. (2021). *Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from <https://lsv.com.au/about/publications/> pg. 33.

³⁵¹ Life Saving Victoria. (2021). *Pink Patrol*. Retrieved from <https://lsv.com.au/clubs-members/leadership/pinkpatrol/>

³⁵² Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2015). *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police – Phase 1 Report*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/static/c6047d1e6cb4d96861b32cd9295691cd/Resource-Independent_Review_Victoria_Police-Phase_1-2015.pdf. pg. 103.

³⁵³ Khan, Y., Davis, A., Taylor, J. A. (2017). *Ladders and lifting: How gender affects safety behaviours in the fire service*. *Journal of Workplace Behavioural Health*, 32(3), 206–225. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15555240.2017.1358642> . pg. 222.

potentially resulting in increased community support.³⁵⁴ Increased community support may be in the form of financial contributions, receptiveness to community fire awareness and safety programs.³⁵⁵

There were common themes on the systemic barriers to female participation at CFA during the Review consultations. These include:

- lack of separate changing facilities, as described by several stakeholders
- a male-standard sizing system for uniforms³⁵⁶
- the masculinised culture across the organisation, as described by several stakeholders
- the gatekeeping of development and training.³⁵⁷

Reflecting the concern it heard about the gatekeeping of development opportunities, AFAC noted in its recent Review that: “[i]f there is a ‘gatekeeper effect’ then the best way for that to be addressed is for District ACFOs to require Brigades and Groups to report to them on how many women are getting on particularly more advanced training courses, to increase transparency and hold them accountable for ensuring that women are being given equal opportunity to access training at all levels.”³⁵⁸

In recent years, CFA has taken steps to improve gender balance and gender equality in its organisation. The Champions of Change Fire and Emergency Progress Report 2021 noted that that CFA “rolled out sanitary packs across all appliances to remove a key barrier to women’s participation and build inclusion.”³⁵⁹ As a stakeholder told the Review Team, such initiatives should not be left to individual Regions or Brigades but be organisation-wide policies. The Review team understands that CFA is planning to put this policy into effect.

As discussed earlier in the report, CFA has also recently established a Women’s Advisory Committee to advise the Executive on how to better support diversity and inclusion in the organisation.³⁶⁰

The Review Team also heard about a range of women’s only training initiatives that have been implemented at CFA, including women only boot camps, training days, burn days, and pilot leadership courses. While some stakeholders objected to women only training because they did not think the segregation was helpful, many spoke in support of all women training sessions run by CFA, for example in one stakeholder’s words: “we have a ladies day, where the females can go and get training, and a lot of the blokes say that this is unfair that the women only get

³⁵⁴ Beatson, R., McLennan, J., (2005). Australia’s women volunteer fire fighters: A literature review and research agenda. *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, 10, p 18-27. Retrieved from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284665788>. pg. 18.

³⁵⁵ Beatson, R., McLennan, J., (2005). Australia’s women volunteer fire fighters: A literature review and research agenda. *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, 10, p 18-27. Retrieved from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284665788>. pg. 18.

³⁵⁶ This standard is the Australian standard for fire industry protective clothing. Ill-fitting uniforms were noted by stakeholders in this review and have also been raised by women in other recent studies which have looked at standard operating procedures and gender differences. See McLennan, J., Birch, A., Beatson, R., & Cowlshaw, S. (2007). Factors impacting on recruiting and retaining Australia’s volunteer firefighters: some research evidence. *Australian Journal of Volunteering*, 12(2), 59 - 69. Retrieved from: research.monash.edu/en/publications/factors-impacting-on-recruiting-and-retaining-australias-voluntee; Hollerbach, B. S., Heinrich, K. M., Poston, W., Haddock, C. K., Kehler, A. K., & Jahnke, S. A. (2017). *Current Female Firefighters’ Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences with Injury*. *International fire service journal of leadership and management*, 11, 41–47. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6586224/>

³⁵⁷ AFAC. (2021). *AFAC Independent Peer Review into CFA Training*. Retrieved from CFA.

³⁵⁸ AFAC. (2021). *AFAC Independent Peer Review into CFA Training*. Retrieved from CFA.

³⁵⁹ Champions of Change. (2022). *Fire and Emergency: Progress Report 2021*. Retrieved from: https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FE_2021-Progress-Report.pdf pg.12 .

³⁶⁰ CFA. (2021). *Our Values and Behaviours*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-values-and-behaviours>

this training...the way I saw it was confidence and networking for women within CFA. There aren't a lot of females in CFA, and through this they could get confidence and buddies."³⁶¹

Further, CFA is a 'defined entity' under the *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) Act* (the *Gender Equality Act 2020*) and is therefore required to plan, implement strategies and report on gender equality in the workplace. Its obligations include a duty to promote gender equality and the development of gender impact assessments. Under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* a defined entity must make reasonable and material progress in relation to the workplace gender equality indicators.³⁶² In 2022, CFA finalised its Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025³⁶³ in line with the Victorian Government requirements under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*. The Gender Equality Action Plan outlines the findings of CFA's gender equality audit and actions being taken to address barriers for employees. The audit is based on an analysis of employee information in line with the requirements of the *Gender Equality Act 2020*. The Gender Equality Action Plan provides an update on CFA's gender equality journey so far, establishes CFA's commitment to gender equality and sets out the vision for the future.

The definition of 'employee' at section 3 of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* specifically excludes volunteers, and the Gender Equality Action Plan does not cover volunteers. The Gender Equality Action Plan notes CFA's intent to replicate the baseline audit analysis with its volunteer membership to further understand gender equality barriers from a volunteering perspective and to build on the current actions in the plan.³⁶⁴

Further, the Gender Equality Action Plan notes that there is a significant gender imbalance when FRV secondees are taken into account. These employees hold key leadership and decision-making roles at CFA (as ACFOs and Commanders). By May 2021, 10 of the 283 FRV secondees (3.5%) were women. The plan notes that CFA is working in partnership with FRV to influence an increase of women into these roles (under the Fire Services Reform, FRV and CFA undertake a joint selection process to decide on suitable officers or employees for secondment – see [Section 4.1](#) Fire Services Reform).

Learnings from other organisations

Improving gender equality is a priority for many organisations. Essex Police have pledged to support the international UN Women solidarity movement for gender equality, HeForShe. The movement encourages men and women to take action to create a gender-equal world. The commitments that Essex Police have signed up to in supporting HeForShe are to:

- engage with the workforce to discuss gender equality within the workplace
- aspire to improve the gender imbalances at senior levels within policing
- continue to work to combat domestic abuse and sexual abuse in society to create communities free from such abuse
- support the annual reporting of gender equality information.³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁶² *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)*, s16(1).

³⁶³ CFA. (2022). *Draft CFA Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025*. Retrieved from CFA.

³⁶⁴ CFA. (2022). *Draft CFA Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025*. Retrieved from CFA.

³⁶⁵ Essex Police. (2020). *Statutory Duty Information Report 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.essex.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/essex/about-us/equality-and-diversity/essex-police-statutory-duty-information-report-2020.pdf> .pg.6 .

In terms of volunteers' views about gender equality within the organisation, the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey,³⁶⁶ applying to volunteers and conducted after the Fire Services Reform came into effect, found that survey respondents thought CFA was meeting expectations in terms of there being no barriers to the roles women can occupy in a Brigade. It is important to note however that only a minority of respondents were female (2,693 volunteers responded to this survey, of which 15% identified as female and 83% as male).³⁶⁷

Many stakeholders who spoke to the Review Team noted movements towards gender equality but cautioned that there was still some way to go to achieve gender equality in the organisation. Stakeholders made comments such as, "I won't say the journey has finished, it has a long way to go, but there are positive signs"³⁶⁸ and, "It is improving – has traditionally been military style, very blokey."³⁶⁹ One stakeholder interviewed reflected on their time at CFA and said, "[W]hen I joined there were jokes about the wet t-shirts and all that sort of thing but that is [sic] all stopped. I do not think they'd do that now."³⁷⁰ While another noted that, "There are Brigades out there that I wouldn't want my daughters to join. In saying that there are some good examples of what a high functioning Brigade should look like."³⁷¹

Other stakeholders noted that the organisation is lagging in terms of what the outside world expects, and that, subject to some exceptions, female fire fighters do not get the same opportunities to step up, or the recognition they deserve. One woman observed: "This is the first org [sic] I've been so acutely aware of being a woman. Derogatory behaviour has been normalised."³⁷² While another reflected that: "CFA is still very much a boys' community – I don't see females being treated as equal... there are a lot of hurdles for females. It's difficult to get training opportunities – we're not treated the same."³⁷³ One stakeholder warned that: "By turning a blind eye, we are doing ourselves a massive disservice."³⁷⁴

Some stakeholders pointed to CFA's recent diversity and inclusion initiatives and saw them as providing hope for CFA of the future, "I think this is improving, there is a lot of women's committees and networks, and initiatives around the Regions and Districts. The women's advisory committee and the youth advisory committee are two great initiatives. They are speaking up and as long as people are listening, something will happen."³⁷⁵

Increasing the percentage of female volunteers across CFA requires targeted recruitment and specialised training programs which accentuate the pride of being a female firefighter.³⁷⁶

³⁶⁶ 2693 volunteers participated in the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey, which was conducted shortly after the Fire Services Reforms came into effect. CFA's 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

³⁶⁷ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement June 2021*. Retrieved from: http://vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202106-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_June2021-web.pdf .pg. 4.

³⁶⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁶⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁷⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁷¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁷² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁷³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁷⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁷⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁷⁶ Schermerhorn-Collins, A. (2017). *The Challenges to Gender Integration in the Career Fire Services: A Comparative Case Study of Men in Nursing*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hsd.org/?view&did=800964> .pg. 13.

Learnings from other organisations

One of the core findings of the Review into the treatment of women in the Australian Defence Force 2011-2013 ('the Review into the ADF')³⁷⁷ was the necessity for targets. The Review into the ADF noted that identical treatment of men and women will not deliver the desired outcome, but will lead to greater gender inequality. It recognised that existing policies and practices which may be assumed to be neutral are embedded in a 'male norm'. It commented that the Chiefs of Services Committee should communicate a strong and unambiguous commitment to the effect that "targets are required to create an environment that is optimal for, and takes full advantage of, the strengths of both men and women."³⁷⁸

CFA has established targets for female representation across volunteer, leadership, and executive roles. In the 2021-22 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report Quarter 2, the number of women in senior roles (which includes PTA 5 – 7 roles and those employed under executive contracts) was the same as the baseline figure at just under 50%. CFA met baseline targets for an increase in female volunteers in active operational roles, and an increase in female volunteers in leadership roles.³⁷⁹

The Victorian Government set a more ambitious target for CFA to raise the number of women in Brigade leadership roles (which at the time the target was set was defined as Captain, 1st – 4th Lieutenant roles) to 15%, or 909 by mid-2022. The FSIM 2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report noted that CFA had revised the definition of leadership to be more inclusive. The revised definition includes roles categorised as Brigade Management Team and Group Management Team roles. The revision of the definition meant that CFA met the female leadership baseline target in quarter 2 and also met the Year Two to Five Fire Services Implementation Plan action target of women holding 15% of Brigade leadership roles. The updated leadership definition incorporates more leadership roles occupied by female volunteers including some non-operational roles and operational leadership roles that were previously not recognised as leadership roles (such as Brigade Training Coordinator, Brigade Community Safety Coordinator and Group Officer roles).³⁸⁰ The Review team notes that this revised perception of leadership should be supported across the organisation to elevate women's voices across the organisation more broadly.

As outlined earlier in the report, under the secondment model, the CO may appoint Deputy Chief Officers (in 2021, CFA employed two female Deputy Chief Officers) but not the next key layers of operational leadership. These members are employed and chosen by the FRV Commissioner.³⁸¹ This diminishes the capacity of CFA to directly influence recruitment of female operational leaders. Instead, Fire Services Reform intends that FRV and CFA

³⁷⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2012). *Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force: Phase 2 Report*. Retrieved from: <https://defence.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/adf-complete.pdf>

³⁷⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2012). *Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force: Phase 2 Report*. Retrieved from: <https://defence.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/adf-complete.pdf> .pg. 1.

³⁷⁹ FSIM. (2022) *2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%202_0.pdf

³⁸⁰ FSIM. (2022) *2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%202_0.pdf P.8.

³⁸¹ Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council's Fire Services Bill Select Committee. (2017). *Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 Final Report*. Retrieved from: https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/Fire_Services_Bill/final_report/FSBSC_58-02_Text_WEB.pdf.pg.29

undertake a joint selection process to decide on suitable officers or employees for secondment. As outlined above, in May 2021, 10 of the 283 FRV secondees (3.5%) were women and there is a plan to further increase this number. The FSIM Annual Report 2020-21 noted that CFA and FRV are running recruitment campaigns targeted at women and have established support programs for women's participation in the fire services.³⁸²

CFA undertakes additional activities to assist in increasing female representation and career development. Activities include targeted support for women to improve access to leadership development and mentoring opportunities; Regional and District training and leadership programs targeted to women; an annual event for women to learn burn-off skills; and a Women's Challenge camp, which includes leadership development and physical activity and is continuing its work to establish district level Women's Reference Groups across the State.³⁸³

Some stakeholders objected to the idea of having targets "[y]ou may get more women in a Brigade, but you really need to make sure they are welcomed and utilised and respected. Mandating ratios is not the best way to do it – each Brigade seems to have a natural level."³⁸⁴ Others also emphasised the importance of support initiatives aimed at increasing inclusion: "Numbers on a book is stupid, build it and they will come. If you have the right culture, they will come."³⁸⁵

Another stakeholder suggested that new rules could be introduced regarding female representation on the BMT: "nowadays there's only a fractional difference in experience between men and women – so we could do with some rules about if there are more than 5 women in the Brigade then at least one of them should be a lieutenant – they can then be mentored."³⁸⁶

5.7.8 Flexible volunteering and work practices

Flexible practices are a critical enabler to supporting gender equality. Flexible work allows both women and men to balance family and career demands, maintain their professional networks and expertise and remain competitive in promotion and progression processes.

Gender imbalance and inequality can also affect other norms and practices in the workplace, such as the use of flexible work arrangements. As the Respect@Work report noted, a number of elements of gender inequality relate to men controlling decision-making and power, including: penalties for using flexible work, sexist assumptions about women returning to work after having children, decreased opportunities for women's career progression, a concentration of men in powerful and senior positions, the gender pay gap, and the equating of leadership with masculinity while minimising women's contributions.³⁸⁷

Discrimination in Australian workplaces towards workers who are pregnant, returning from parental leave or who have caring responsibilities is widespread. These forms of discrimination

³⁸² FSIM. (2021) *Fire Services Implementation Monitor Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/fire-services-implementation-monitor-annual-report-2020-21/>. pg. 8.

³⁸³ FSIM. (2021) *2020-21 Quarter 4 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2020-21%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%204_1.docx.pg. 7.

³⁸⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁸⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁸⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

³⁸⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_wsh_report_2020.pdf. pg. 151.

contribute to women under-participating, leaving the workforce, and failing to advance their career.³⁸⁸

Citing a recent report on women working in the construction industry, the Respect@Work report noted that masculine norms and practices, such as resistance to flexible work, and tolerance for sexism and aggression, impact on the women working in the industry, making them feel that they are intruding in a male-dominated space.³⁸⁹

Men also experience discrimination and the impact of stereotypes when attempting to enact flexible work arrangements. In a national survey to measure the prevalence of discrimination in the workplace, over a quarter (27%) of fathers and partners who responded to the survey reported experiencing discrimination when requesting or taking parental leave or when they returned to work.³⁹⁰ The VEOHRC independent review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment at Victoria Police shows that men are twice as likely as women to have a flexible work request denied. The impact of this discrimination towards men also affects women, as men's limited access to flexibility means women continue to bear a disproportionate share of caring responsibilities.³⁹¹

Flexible work practices are a critical enabler to supporting gender equality. Flexible work allows both women and men to balance family and career demands, maintain their professional networks and expertise and remain competitive in promotion and progression processes.

Learnings from other organisations

The importance of flexible working arrangements was highlighted in the Review into the ADF, where six of the 21 recommendations included changes to ensure flexible working arrangements.³⁹² One recommendation was that a Central Australian Defence Force Flexible Work directorate be established, while another recommendation was that the Chiefs of Services Committee communicate their commitment and support for flexible working arrangements underpinning capability, noting that they are an important recruitment and retention tool.³⁹³

³⁸⁸ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2015). *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/static/c6047d1e6cb4d96861b32cd9295691cd/Resource-Independent_Review_Victoria_Police-Phase_1-2015.pdf

³⁸⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_wsh_report_2020.pdf pg. 232.

³⁹⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2014). *Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return to Work National Review - Report*. Retrieved from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/supporting-working-parents-pregnancy-and-return-work>, p.1.

³⁹¹ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2015). *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/static/c6047d1e6cb4d96861b32cd9295691cd/Resource-Independent_Review_Victoria_Police-Phase_1-2015.pdf pg. 44.

³⁹² Australian Human Rights Commission. (2012). *Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force: Phase 2 Report*. Retrieved from: <https://defence.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/adf-complete.pdf>

³⁹³ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2012). *Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force: Phase 2 Report*. Retrieved from: <https://defence.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/adf-complete.pdf>

Flexible work

Staff at CFA have some mechanisms available to support flexible work and volunteering, however these need to be supported and enhanced. The *CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018* covers employees engaged in specific classifications or occupations contained in the agreement. This agreement provides for specific flexibility arrangements to be agreed. Clause 15 provides for CFA and an employee to make an 'individual flexibility arrangement' about a number of things, including arrangements about when work is performed. Clause 16 makes specific provision for flexible arrangements to be requested by those caring for young children or caring responsibilities, those with a disability, 55 years or older, and those experiencing violence. CFA may only refuse such requests on reasonable grounds.³⁹⁴

The *CFA Professional, Technical and Administrative Agreement 2020*, which covers employees engaged in specific classifications or occupations contained in the agreement, contains similar flexibility clauses.

In its 2021 Progress Report, the Champions of Change Coalition presented data indicating that 61% of CFA employees reported having access to the flexibility they need (comprising 63% of women and 67% men).³⁹⁵ This reflected an improvement since 2020.

In the 2021 People Matter Survey³⁹⁶ (which relates to staff and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform):



75% of respondents reported that they were confident that if they requested a flexible work arrangement, it would be given due consideration



73% agreed that 'my organisation supports employees with family or other caring responsibilities, regardless of gender'.³⁹⁷

This is higher than in previous years, which mostly relate to time periods prior to the Fire Services Reform, (in the 2020 People Matter Survey,³⁹⁸ 73% and in 2019, 67% of respondents reported that they were confident that if they requested a flexible work arrangement, it would be given due consideration).³⁹⁹

However, the 2021 People Matter Survey⁴⁰⁰ also reported lower figures relating to flexible work arrangements:

³⁹⁴ *CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018*. (Entered into operation 26 February 2019). Retrieved from CFA.

³⁹⁵ Champions of Change. (2022). *Fire and Emergency: Progress Report 2021*. Retrieved from: https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FE_2021-Progress-Report.pdf pg. 20.

³⁹⁶ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA's 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

³⁹⁷ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

³⁹⁸ The 2020 People Matter survey was conducted in October 2020, shortly after the Fire Services Reform came into place. 638 CFA employees (55% of applicable staff) completed the 2020 People Matter Survey. CFA's 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

³⁹⁹ CFA. (2020) *2020 People Matter Survey Results Powerpoint Presentation*. Retrieved from CFA.; Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2019) *CFA 2019 People Matter Survey Report*. Retrieved from CFA. The 2019 People Matter survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48 % of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA's 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

⁴⁰⁰ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA's 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.



52% of respondents agreed that there is a positive culture in CFA in relation to employees who use flexible work arrangements (this is a reduction from 2019 which recorded 60%)⁴⁰¹



54% agreed that using flexible work arrangements is not a barrier to success in my organisation



56% agreed that having family responsibilities is not a barrier to success in my organisation.

CFA's Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025 noted that for the period immediately following the Fire Services Reform: 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, 4% of female staff and 1.5% of male staff accessed parental leave; and of the 263 employees who accessed carer's leave, 65% were female and 35% were male.⁴⁰² The plan lists continuing to 'support flexible working options in ways that meet business needs' as a key opportunity.⁴⁰³

Some stakeholders interviewed commented that employers show less support for volunteering than they had in the past. One stakeholder described that, "The older guys who are already retired who perhaps worked in a less strict time where their employers knew they were involved with CFA and respected that. But those in my age bracket who live a long way from work, with bosses who don't understand the point of volunteering with CFA, you don't get paid time off... It's hard. I don't have a young family, but if I did there would be no way I could be an operational member."⁴⁰⁴

Flexible volunteering

There are also opportunities to provide flexible volunteering at CFA. CFA's volunteer toolkit acknowledges the changing nature of volunteering, and the need to consider flexible models of volunteering to make it easier and more attractive for people to volunteer.

The 2020 CFA Brigade Management Manual also notes the different levels (for example at the individual and Brigade level) that flexibility can be introduced into a volunteering model in order to encourage people to join and stay at CFA.⁴⁰⁵

Volunteers interviewed by the Review Team noted the challenge in balancing their many commitments alongside volunteering. The Review Team heard that it would be helpful if different options were available for shift workers to make training, and that flexible options should be available for all firefighters rather than being left to a Brigade's discretion.

The Volunteer Exit Survey Report (January 2020 – June 2020)⁴⁰⁶ (applying to volunteers who move Brigades or take a break from CFA, and conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform) noted suggestions made by participants regarding changes CFA can make to improve the Volunteer experience including more flexible volunteering options.⁴⁰⁷ The need for a more

⁴⁰¹ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2019). *CFA 2019 People Matter Survey Report*. Retrieved from CFA. The 2019 People Matter survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48 % of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA's 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

⁴⁰² CFA. (2022). *Draft CFA Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴⁰³ CFA. (2022). *Draft CFA Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025*. Retrieved from CFA. p.26

⁴⁰⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁰⁵ CFA. (2020). *Brigade Management Manual*, sF. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴⁰⁶ 100 of 894 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 January 2020 – 30 June 2020, which was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform.

⁴⁰⁷ CFA. (2020). *Volunteer Exit Survey Report - 1 Jan 2020 – 30 June 2020*. Retrieved from CFA.

flexible volunteering model was also noted in earlier Volunteer Exit Survey Reports (July 2018 - December 2018;⁴⁰⁸ January 2019 - June 2019;⁴⁰⁹ July 2019 – December 2019⁴¹⁰).

The degree of flexibility that someone has when volunteering at CFA is impacted not just by a Brigade's attitudes, but by a volunteer's employer. As CFA notes, employers who release their staff at their own cost, and self-employed volunteers who forgo personal income and time, contribute to the fabric and resilience of their communities. CFA encourages employers to support their employees. Volunteer friendly employers are often recognised with Certificates of Appreciation and/or acknowledgement stickers that can be displayed at their place of business, letting the public know they support CFA volunteers.⁴¹¹

The VFBV June 2021 quarterly supplement noted that VFBV delegates are working on the design, development and implementation of CFA's flexible volunteering models. Workshops conducted across the State revealed that barriers to flexible volunteering options included (among other things): resistance to change; cultural barriers; lack of resourcing and support required; internal Brigade expectations; lack of appropriate HR training for Brigade Management Teams; policies being in need of review; and the lack of stability across the organisation. The quarterly issue noted that VFBV Delegates will continue to work with CFA to develop flexible volunteering pilot projects which will be subject to feedback from members.⁴¹²

The Volunteer Consultative Forum 2015 report on 'Strategic Priorities for Emergency Management Volunteering in Victoria', states that "people are increasingly looking for organisations with flexible opportunities where volunteering can be integrated with work, study, family and recreation"⁴¹³.

⁴⁰⁸ 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁴⁰⁹ 158 of 1410 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 January 2019 – 30 June 2019, which was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform.

⁴¹⁰ 136 of 1407 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2019 – 31 December 2019, which was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform.

⁴¹¹ CFA. (n.d.) *Employers of Volunteers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/volunteers-careers/volunteer-with-cfa/employers-of-volunteers>

⁴¹² VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement June 2021*. Retrieved from: http://vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202106-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_June2021-web.pdf .pg. 15.

⁴¹³ Volunteer Consultative Forum. (2015). *Strategic Priorities for Emergency Management Volunteering in Victoria*. Retrieved from: <https://files.emv.vic.gov.au/2021-08/Strategic-Priorities-for-EM-Volunteering-in-Vic.pdf> pg. 5.

Learnings from other organisations

The NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) introduced three new categories of volunteering in 2019 to assist with volunteer retention and sustainability. The Volunteer Reimagined initiative provides “flexible volunteering options such as spontaneous volunteering [to] lift up and skill residents so they have a clearer awareness of local hazards, can better prepare themselves and can bounce forward following a disaster”.⁴¹⁴ The three new categories of volunteers include:

- Community Action Team (CAT) members: a group of people or individuals who join a designated CAT and can be tied to a geographical area or a specific functional role
- corporate volunteers: employees of companies that have partnered with the NSW SES and agreed to provide volunteer leave for their workers to contribute to the NSW SES
- spontaneous volunteers: individuals who provide assistance to the NSW SES in a flexible way, usually in response to large disasters⁴¹⁵.

The National Recovery and Resilience Agency commended the NSW SES on Volunteering Reimagined noting its capacity to sustain learning and embed the model into the culture of the State Emergency Service.⁴¹⁶

Learnings from other organisations

FENZ have started a new scheme that will help New Zealanders recognise businesses and organisations’ that employ Fire and Emergency volunteers. In addition to an annual advertising campaign, supporting businesses can display the ‘mark’ of a stylised flame in the shape of a matau or fishhook (digitally or as stickers).

⁴¹⁴ New South Wales State Emergency Service. (2019). *Volunteering Reimagined SES*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/media/2964/volunteering-reimagined-overview-paper.pdf> .pg. 5.

⁴¹⁵ New South Wales State Emergency Service. (2019). *Volunteering Reimagined SES*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/media/2964/volunteering-reimagined-overview-paper.pdf> .pg. 5.

⁴¹⁶ Australian Government National Recovery and Resilience Agency. (2018). Connecting communities through volunteering: lessons learnt at NSW SES. *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management* April 2018. Retrieved from: <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-apr-2018-connecting-communities-through-volunteering-lessons-learnt-at-nsw-ses/>

5.8. Concluding comments relating to CFA culture

A safe and positive culture is at the heart of the Review, to reflect the values of CFA, to build on its strong history and to create a productive environment for all members of CFA into the future. A strong and positive culture will reflect a safe and productive working environment. In the last 18 months, the leadership have put the building blocks in place to address many of the legacy complaints that have lingered too long with the churn and changes that typified CFA until the Fire Services Reform was implemented. There are signs of improvements in some areas, and these must be built on. The process of reconciling the past will take time to enable people to build trust and confidence as these changes are implemented, and the recommendations from this Review take effect.

The views of stakeholders interviewed, the research that looked at past reviews and the collection of information that inform culture have been canvassed extensively in this section. Workplace misconduct including harassment, discrimination and bullying was found in existing prevalence data and raised during interviews with members of the Review Team. There is an uncomfortable history where behaviour has impacted badly on individuals and where there have not been clear ways to address this. That is changing with this Review and prior initiatives previously mentioned. There is also much that is positive that will continue to inform the work of the future.

CFA has a strong profile and recognition across Victoria and is a mechanism to mobilise communities and encourage self-protection and self-sufficiency. This strength should not be underestimated nor taken for granted. There is no doubt that the Fire Services Reform of 2020 has left many feeling suspicious and uncertain. The collaboration with other fire services to work as one response needs all parties to be part of this process – under the framework of EMV.

Volunteers are the backbone of Victoria's fire response and have decades of valuable experience to contribute. Many are operationally trained to a high standard, and governments depend on them for fire response and protection of the community. In addition to the service that these thousands of volunteers make to the community, there is a strong benefit to being a volunteer. CFA provides an opportunity for people who volunteer to join and learn new skills, to have development experiences that they would not get in other walks of life and provide meaningful employment which contributes to the community in regional areas.

CFA members display a unitary purpose of protecting communities (lives and property) across Victoria and a strong commitment when responding to an event. This commitment is extended to the staff, of whom a significant proportion are also volunteers in their own communities.

The reflections in this section also demonstrate the challenges for CFA going forward, to address past challenges, but also to ensure that CFA can operate effectively within the requirements set out in the Fire Services Reform of 2020. This is a changed landscape organisationally, even though its impacts may not be immediately understood by all Brigades across Victoria.

CFA has a Strategic Framework that outlines the values, and there are requirements to be met by all Brigades across Victoria. These include occupational health and safety, regulatory checks, pre-requisites to meet government policies and regulations. This is challenging as there are understandably a range of different cultures that exist across the more than 1200 Brigades within CFA. Culture is impacted by local determinants including size, volume of call-outs, distance from other Brigades/HQ, multiple geographical boundaries, and different workplace arrangements. The challenges of roll out requirements, communication, training and ensuring consistency across more than 1200 Brigades cannot be underestimated. It is also

impacted by the facilities that are available across Victoria, and the CFA of the future must reflect facilities that are inclusive and safe for all. This necessarily will need to be supported through government funding as well as local fundraising.

Recent efforts have also sought to address the ageing profile of volunteers and to bring the best of diversity to CFA – not only in relation to gender diversity but also in all other attributes including age and cultural backgrounds. CFA has been described as a very masculine culture, and this is being addressed with various measures which need to be aligned and consolidated. It is also challenging when the operational level of ACFOs and Commanders rely on FRV meeting their own diversity requirements to reflect diversity at the middle management level of CFA. Ensuring a sustainable volunteer workforce is also challenging in the face of changing demographics in country areas, changing work demands, availability of volunteers during work hours, and declining volunteerism. This is exacerbated by changes in climate and bigger weather events. Broadening the pool of potential volunteers and ensuring that they are welcomed, accepted and given a meaningful role in Brigades becomes even more important. Good practice, positive local initiatives and efforts should be recognised and supported going forward.

The initiatives to support diversity will also be enhanced by the measures to address bullying, discrimination and harassment that have been reported in the past. There has been a concerted effort to address outstanding complaints which fester and create a negative environment, and which also undermine current efforts to implement the latest reforms. Defining the Interim Behavioural Standards⁴¹⁷, setting the expectations and improving the mechanisms to address behaviour when it does not meet these standards are all parts that will continue to build a positive culture in the future. It will take time to regain confidence in some quarters, and also to finally resolve some areas where parties have persisted with their matters long after resolution has been given. Going forward, the cultural journey of CFA must be built on consistency, transparency and a strong communication strategy. All of these matters are addressed in the recommendations.

⁴¹⁷ The Review Team understands that feedback has now been received by key stakeholders in relation to the Interim Behavioural Standards and the final draft will shortly be considered by the CFA Executive.

6. LEADERSHIP

'Leadership' is used to describe the qualities of a person and to refer to a process of influencing others.⁴¹⁸ The values of good leadership should align with organisational values and should be applied at all levels of an organisation, noting that "leadership can come from anywhere."⁴¹⁹ Leadership is essential to the success of any cultural change process and is needed to ensure that workplaces are safe, respectful, diverse and inclusive.⁴²⁰

Positions of leadership exist at all levels of CFA, from the Brigade and Group level to Executive and Governance level, including in volunteer, staff and seconded roles. All members can display leadership in driving the culture of CFA of the future and making the case for cultural change. Those in leadership roles should role model organisational values and demonstrate expected behaviours when representing CFA. This, in turn, will lead to organisational trust and confidence.

Leaders should model clear communication, consistency and transparency of practice and recognise members' contributions. They should empower all members to work together collaboratively and respectfully, to perform at their best and provide the best service to the community they serve.

6.1. Overview of leadership roles

This Review has been undertaken after a period of organisational restructure and reform and following Fire Services Reform, and at a time where there is relatively new executive leadership within the context of the new organisation created by the Fire Services Reform. This section provides an overview of leadership roles which reflects the reformed leadership arrangement following Fire Services Reform.

CFA has a CEO and CO. Natalie MacDonald was appointed CEO in February 2021 and Jason Heffernan was appointed CO in November 2020. Nine Deputy Chief Officers (DCO) report to the CO, with five of these roles being responsible for Regional service delivery, and the other four being function-based. Two Group General Managers, a General Manager and a Chief Information Officer report to the CEO. A Senior Executive Coordinator reports jointly to both the CO and CEO.⁴²¹

The figure below provides an overview of the organisational structure of CFA.

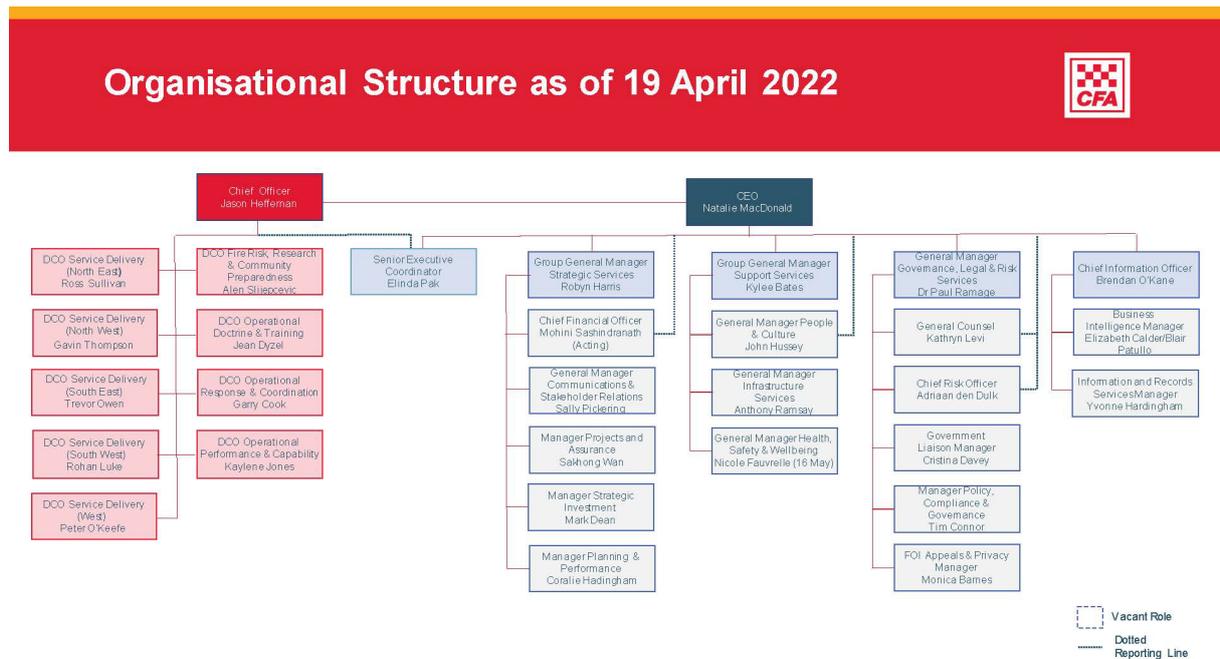
⁴¹⁸ The Australian Defence Force defines leadership as 'the process of influencing others to gain their willing consent in the ethical pursuit of missions'. See Department of Defence. (2018). *Australian Defence Doctrine Publication 00.6—Leadership, edition 2. 1.3*. Retrieved from: https://theforge.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/addp_00.6_leadership_ed2.pdf.pg. 2.

⁴¹⁹ Ashford, S., & Sitkin, S. (2019), From problems to progress: A dialogue on prevailing issues in leadership research, *The Leadership Quarterly* 30, 454-460.

⁴²⁰ Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf> .pg. 18.

⁴²¹ CFA. (2022). *Our Structure*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/our-structure>

Figure 17: Organisational structure of CFA as of 19 April 2022 ⁴²²



Each District is led by an ACFO (seconded from FRV) and supported by Commanders (seconded from FRV), Brigade Administrative Support Officers (BASOs) and other staff who support and empower Brigades and groups to deliver services to the community.⁴²³

Two or more Brigades are referred to as a ‘group’. The role of a group is to support its member Brigades by providing coordination of operations in preparedness and response and support operations to ensure that incidents are managed effectively. Each group requires: a Group Officer; the number of Deputy Group Officers as approved by the Authority, a Group Communications Officer, and a Group Secretary.⁴²⁴

A catchment is generally made up of groups that sit within one Local Government Area. Catchments are managed by a catchment team comprising of Commanders with support by BASOs.

Volunteers fill leadership roles including as Group Officers, Group Secretaries, Group Communications Officers, Deputy Group Officers, Captains, Lieutenants and in a range of other capacities. In its recent report, the FSIM indicated that leadership can take many forms and should include non-operational roles.⁴²⁵ This is reflected in CFA’s updated leadership definition.⁴²⁶ Indeed, leadership roles can be seen across CFA including amongst 5th-10th Lieutenants, Brigade Secretaries and Treasurers, Brigade Training Coordinator, Brigade Community Safety Coordinator, District Planning Committee Chairs and Women’s and Youth Advisory Committee members.

⁴²² CFA. (2022). *Our Structure*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/our-structure>

⁴²³ CFA. (2020). *Brigade Management Manual*, sA. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴²⁴ CFA. (2020). *Brigade Management Manual*, sA. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴²⁵ FSIM. (2021). *Fire Services Implementation Monitor Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/fire-services-implementation-monitor-annual-report-2020-21>.pg. 11.

⁴²⁶ See FSIM. (2022). *2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: <https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%200.pdf> P.8.

In 2021, an organisational realignment took place at CFA with the intention of modernising the structure of CFA to ensure that it is best placed to support its role following Fire Services Reform.

The realignment took place after the CO conducted a state-wide road trip visiting all regions, districts and many volunteer Brigades across Victoria. He travelled approximately 6,443km and met with approximately 1,538 volunteers and staff. The CEO accompanied the CO for various parts of this tour. [Appendix 9](#) shows the locations visited by the CO across the State.⁴²⁷

The realignment included streamlining the Executive Leadership Team and introducing new positions (and aligning existing positions) to form the new Executive Team, including the Group General Manager of Strategic Services, Group General Manager of Support Services, General Manager Governance Legal & Risk Services and the Chief Information Officer. There was no net increase to Executive positions. A range of functions were also moved into the Regions including additional HR resources to support regional operations. The realignment sought to enhance service delivery accountabilities; enhance operational outcomes and accountabilities; create a high performing Senior Executive Team and realign reporting relationships and new resources to strengthen culture.⁴²⁸ The CEO and CO have developed a Service Delivery Mentoring Program in which new Executives are mentored by senior operational leaders to obtain operational perspective with an expectation that Executives spend regular time working from regional and district offices (where feasible) and attend Brigades' activities.

6.1.1 The Brigade Management Team

Brigades operate in towns across Victoria, including small rural towns and in larger, outer metropolitan suburbs. The number of call outs to Brigades varies significantly. In a volunteer context like that of CFA, it is particularly important to have good leadership on the ground, in incident management roles, in Brigades and within communities. This requires the development of Brigade members, in both formal and informal leadership roles. CFA sees this as a key enabler of effective and efficient frontline service delivery and cultural change.⁴²⁹

Under the *CFA Act 1958*, all fire Brigades must first register and enrol their officers and members in accordance with the Act.⁴³⁰ Brigades are then under the order and control of the CO.⁴³¹ ACFOs have delegated accountability for Brigades by the CO.

With respect to Brigade management, Schedule 2 of CFA Regulations 2014 provides for Brigade model rules. Alternatively, Brigades can adopt their own constitutions and rules, with CFA's approval. The Review Team understands that the number of Brigades operating outside of the model rules is relatively low. A group of Brigades can also develop Group constitutions. A Brigade or group who develops their own constitution must be consistent with the *CFA Act 1958*, CFA Regulations 2014, CO's Standing Orders or CO's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The Brigade Model Rules require the President or Secretary to ensure that election of officers is held at every second annual general meeting.

The *CFA Act 1958* defines an officer in charge of a Brigade as including a member of a Brigade below the rank of officer in the absence of a person of the rank of officer. An officer means a

⁴²⁷ CFA. (2021). *CFA Chief embarks on regional tour*. Retrieved from: <https://news.cfa.vic.gov.au/news/cfa-chief-embarks-on-regional-tour>; CFA. (2021). *CFA Chief wraps up regional tour with a visit to the North East*. Retrieved from: <https://news.cfa.vic.gov.au/news/cfa-chief-wraps-up-regional-tour-with-a-visit-to-the-north-east>

⁴²⁸ Consultation materials relating to the realignment provided by CFA, March 2022

⁴²⁹ CFA. (2019). *Volunteer Leadership Development Project Plan*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴³⁰ *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (Vic), s26.

⁴³¹ *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (Vic), s27.

person appointed under section 17(c) of *CFA Act 1958* and includes an officer or employee of FRV under a secondment agreement.⁴³²

The Captain is the highest ranking officer of a volunteer Brigade. The primary purpose of the Captain's role is "to provide effective leadership and management of the Brigade and to ensure its capacity to deliver the statutory responsibilities of CFA and the CO."⁴³³ Under section 25 of the *CFA Act 1958* every volunteer Brigade shall elect a captain (and other officers of the number and rank determined by the Authority for Brigades of that classification).

The Brigade Model Rules do not require a Brigade to have a formal BMT. However, if they do, the BMT consists of elected members who manage and administer the affairs of the Brigade.⁴³⁴

Brigade and group officer elections occur every two years.⁴³⁵ Unless CFA waives the requirement, any member standing for election for the role of Captain must have served as an officer of a Brigade for no less than two years and must have the competencies specified by the CO as requirements for the office of Captain.⁴³⁶ Junior members, probationary members and life members who are no longer enrolled are not permitted to hold office.

Whilst there do not appear to be any further requirements for appointment, the Brigade Management Manual indicates that "in the consideration of a candidate, voters should bear in mind the competency of the candidate and how the candidate will meet the needs of their individual Brigade or group".⁴³⁷

The Brigade Management Manual also outlines the desirable knowledge, skills and experience for the role of Captain and relevant training programs for the role. While the wildfire firefighter qualification is listed as mandatory, other skills listed such as the demonstrated ability to lead, and a demonstrated high level of interpersonal skills are not stated as mandatory requirements in the manual. Similarly, undertaking AFAC leader programs, or Equal Opportunity or Relationship and Diversity Awareness programs are listed as relevant, but not stated as mandatory requirements.⁴³⁸

6.1.2 Views of stakeholders interviewed during the course of the Reviews

Stakeholders noted that the absence of eligibility/selection criteria in addition to that outlined in [Section 6.1.1](#) above for the election of BMT members could be problematic for a number of reasons, as outlined below.

People without people management skills may be elected

Stakeholders noted that under the current election process and requirements people who are leaders on the fire ground often get elected as captains. One stakeholder made the analogy that, "The best footballer doesn't make the best coach. The best fire fighter doesn't make the best captain."⁴³⁹ Another described it as a popularity contest saying, "The process that you can get voted in on popularity is a challenge. It's probably built on operational skills. There's no

⁴³² *Country Fire Authority Act 1958*, s3.

⁴³³ CFA. (2019). *Brigade Management Manual*, Appendix 19. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴³⁴ *CFA Regulations 2014* (Vic), Schedule 2, s24.

⁴³⁵ CFA. (2020). *Brigade Management Manual*, sB. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴³⁶ *CFA Regulations 2014* (Vic), Schedule 8(1).

⁴³⁷ CFA. (2020). *Brigade Management Manual*, sB. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴³⁸ CFA. (2019). *Brigade Management Manual*, Appendix 19_02. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴³⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

guarantee that they have all the leading skills needed. But having said that we have captains who do have these skills, but there's no guarantee."⁴⁴⁰ Many members reflected the sentiment that, "We follow our acts and regulations well, but it doesn't necessarily mean we get the best result for our leadership."⁴⁴¹

Numerous stakeholders also commented on the importance of having some kind of standard or requirements to be eligible for roles. For example, "I'm a strong advocate that to be a volunteer leader you have a democratic process. There should be qualifications required to get on the ballot."⁴⁴² Stakeholders also emphasised the difference between practical skills and leadership skills with one saying, "The BMT should be more focused on people skills, and the fireground leadership team should be based on their firefighting skills. The two don't match."⁴⁴³ As the comments indicate, expertise on the fire ground does not necessarily translate to the skills required to successfully lead a Brigade.

The process for selecting BMTs appears to have resulted in some unsuitable candidates being elected. In the Volunteer Exit Survey Report (July 2020 – December 2020),⁴⁴⁴ applying to volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA and conducted following the Fire Services Reform, the BMTs were identified as one of the top five reasons for volunteers leaving CFA.⁴⁴⁵

A voting system based on popularity does not necessarily advance diversity

Stakeholders noted that the current process for electing captains reinforces the status quo, rather than increasing diversity. One stakeholder said that, "Younger women are encouraged to come and join, and they can be trained, but when it comes to elections, they don't seem to get [...] the support ... The majority of men don't see women in those operational roles."⁴⁴⁶

Another stakeholder reflected on the difficulty of getting people into roles and supporting them, noting that, "In the Fire Services Reform year 1 strategy they had a KPI on increasing female leaders from 265 to 900 by a set date. But how can we do that? People vote people in, it's a popular vote ... We can give women all the leadership training and experience but that doesn't mean they will be voted into a leadership opportunity."⁴⁴⁷

People may be elected because of factors other than merit

Many stakeholders noted the absence of relevant criteria in the process for electing Captains. Members discussed the need for criteria, with comments such as, "The structure of CFA itself doesn't allow for the best candidate to get the position. Maybe 50% of people didn't vote for me. There's no requirement to be in a leadership position."⁴⁴⁸

Many also commented on the unfairness of the process itself and the ways that it could be manipulated. For example, one stakeholder said, "People need to be elected into roles based

⁴⁴⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁴¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁴² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁴³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁴⁴ 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁴⁴⁵ CFA. (2020) *Volunteer Exit Survey - 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴⁴⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁴⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁴⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

on their own ability, not because they have the best BBQs or have the right mates.”⁴⁴⁹ While another suggested, “Get rid of voting system and appoint people on merit.”⁴⁵⁰

Similarly other stakeholders said, “The election process gets abused by people who have connections and start drawing in membership of the Brigade and may not have done anything [sic] – but come along on election night and cast a vote.”⁴⁵¹; and “There are different requirements at different Brigades and again this can happen as a result of mates voting mates in.”⁴⁵²

Stakeholders also commented on the logistics of the voting process with one stakeholder saying, “In the voting process, you need to get half the people in attendance plus one vote to win. If you don’t get that, names are put into a hat and whoever’s name is pulled out holds the position.”⁴⁵³

These comments demonstrate that the BMT election process including nominations for candidacy need to be considered to ensure that fair processes are followed, and in order to build trust in the system and its outcomes. Participants in the Volunteer Exit Survey (July 2020 – December 2020),⁴⁵⁴ applying to volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA and conducted following the Fire Services Reform, suggested changes that should be made to the appointment of the BMT:

- brigade leadership positions should be like going for a job with an interview and selection criteria – not voted in on popularity
- there should be minimum training requirements in leadership and people management to be on a BMT
- BMT members should be role models of behaviour and CFA values.

⁴⁴⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁵⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁵¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁵² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁵³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁵⁴ CFA. (2020) *Volunteer Exit Survey - 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA. 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

6.2. Leaders managing change: communication, transparency and accountability

The Review Team asked stakeholders about their understanding of the role of CFA leadership in embedding behavioural and cultural standards and creating an inclusive organisation. Members reflected on the influential role that leaders play in setting the culture and leading cultural change, with most stakeholders noting that leadership starts at the top of the organisation. Stakeholders made comments such as, “A leader can change the environment in any setting”⁴⁵⁵ and, “Leaders make the culture. Any problems that we are having at a lower level, can be fixed by good leaders at the top.”⁴⁵⁶

Stakeholders also recognised that leadership needs to be demonstrated throughout the organisation to ensure that these standards and expectations are embedded throughout the organisation. One stakeholder described that, “Leadership has to be modelled at every level. We have leaders at every level. We need to value and recognise that leadership.”⁴⁵⁷

Another stakeholder emphasised the importance of leadership saying, “Leadership is hugely important, and I think the way your leaders behave, sets the standard for the Brigade and if your leaders call out incidents like not having your helmet on or not wearing your gloves, that sets the standard [sic].”⁴⁵⁸

Stakeholders noted the importance of the CEO and CO holding leaders in the organisation to account, and more broadly members holding each other to account, ensuring that everyone is acting on the policies, strategies and directions that the CEO and CO set. One stakeholder said, “It goes without saying that we expect leaders at all levels to model appropriate behaviours. More importantly, all members should be empowered to hold each other and our leaders accountable.”⁴⁵⁹ Another noted that, “We’re encouraged to, you know, ask questions and report things, and all that sort of stuff. We certainly have support from the operational staff and the ACFO is really really keen to go down a pathway that will make everyone’s job a lot easier and create a really good culture.”⁴⁶⁰

Whilst CFA has undergone a period of significant change in recent years, stakeholders generally spoke positively about efforts the CO and CEO had made to work together with one describing that, “I’ve never seen a CEO and Chief as connected, and I also haven’t seen them as accessible as they are.”⁴⁶¹

Others spoke about there being a clear organisational direction, and the visibility of the senior leaders.

⁴⁵⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁵⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁵⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁵⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁵⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁶⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁶¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

6.2.1 The impacts of devolved leadership

The Review Team also heard that leaders were not working well together across the various levels of the organisation. A lack of clarity and fear around decision-making power at different levels of the organisation was also raised. Stakeholders particularly noted the blockages between HQ and Districts/Regions and Brigades, which prevented the different parts of the organisation working together as a cohesive organisation.

This is consistent with findings from the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey⁴⁶² (applying to volunteers and conducted shortly after the Fire Services Reforms came into effect), where participants were asked if ‘volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at CFA Corporate level?’ In response, volunteers identified a large gap in the consultation expected and the consultation that is received.⁴⁶³ Similarly, when asked about consultation and decision making at the local District/Regional level volunteers indicated there is a critical gap between what is expected and what is performed. Findings from the VFBV survey indicate volunteers are highly dissatisfied with cooperation across CFA and were dissatisfied at the ability of corporate policies and leadership to support an effective volunteer base and fully integrated organisation.⁴⁶⁴

In a similar vein, stakeholders told the Review Team that, “There is a clash between headquarters and the field and there are silos within silos which also creates the competitive edge rather than we need to work together [sic]. There has never been leadership to enforce that. It is my District, my Brigade, my Region.”⁴⁶⁵ This disconnect was noted in comments such as, “It comes from the behaviour at the leadership at the top. They don’t properly delegate to the Regions to manage, they are binding them up in rules. It makes the Districts scared to make decisions.”⁴⁶⁶

One stakeholder noted, “[t]he middle management of CFA is where reviews hit a brick wall.”⁴⁶⁷ Another noted, “ACFOs are left in a vacuum in the middle between CFA/FRV.”⁴⁶⁸ One stakeholder also noted that, “That’s one thing [in relation to Brigades] District has been doing - is promoting succession planning.”⁴⁶⁹

The Volunteer Exit Survey (July 2020 – December 2020),⁴⁷⁰ applying to volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA and conducted following the Fire Services Reform, revealed that departing volunteers also felt that more cohesive working relationships with neighbouring Brigades are required.⁴⁷¹

These comments and findings demonstrate the need for greater coordination and collaboration between the various levels of the organisation. One aspect of this coordination relies on

⁴⁶² 2693 volunteers participated in the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey, which was conducted shortly after the Fire Services Reforms came into effect. CFA’s 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

⁴⁶³ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement June 2021*. Retrieved from: http://vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202106-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_June2021-web.pdf.pg. 6.

⁴⁶⁴ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement June 2021*. Retrieved from: http://vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202106-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_June2021-web.pdf.

⁴⁶⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁶⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁶⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁶⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁶⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁷⁰ 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁴⁷¹ CFA. (2020). *Volunteer Exit Survey - 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA.

leaders providing clear communication and demonstrating transparency and accountability in their words and actions.

When discussing the need for cultural change within some areas of CFA, many stakeholders noted a lack of change management expertise in the organisation with comments such as, “Everything that I have looked at in the past, changes that they have tried to make, they haven’t had the expertise to do these things. Bad behaviours have been allowed because of that lack of expertise.”⁴⁷² Another stakeholder said, “People in CFA seem to find change particularly hard. We’re not led through change well.”⁴⁷³

An important part of change management is ensuring that the case for change is well understood by members. As one stakeholder put it: ““You have to be able to build a bridge between the corporate vision and the volunteers in the field. They need to understand why it would be better for their Brigade to have better diversity, so that we get the result that we want. Corporate visions only mean something to people in at Headquarters.”⁴⁷⁴ Another noted: “[u]nfortunately staff feel like change happens without good enough reasons – we need buy in to change, so people open their eyes and know ‘we need to change’.”⁴⁷⁵

The CFA 2021 People Matter survey,⁴⁷⁶ which relates to staff and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform, revealed that only 41% of respondents agreed that senior leaders support staff to work in an environment of change. This figure is down 2% since 2020⁴⁷⁷ and is 8% lower than agreement recorded in similar organisations.⁴⁷⁸

6.2.2 The impacts of leadership turnover

As noted, CFA has experienced significant change and upheaval in recent years and the Review Team heard about the impact of the churn of leadership through this time. In 2016, the Victorian Government replaced the CFA Board. In the 10-year period (2012 – 2022) the CEO position has been held by eight different people and the CO position held by four different people. In the five years to February 2022, CFA has also experienced a total of 44 executive departures.⁴⁷⁹ Since the Fire Services Reform, CFA has also undergone an organisational realignment to support CFA in its role as a volunteer fire service.

Turnover was also experienced at other levels of management. During the course of the review, stakeholders shared experiences of multiple managers coming through, for example, one stakeholder had been in a role 4.5 years and had seen seven or eight line managers move through.

⁴⁷² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁷³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁷⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁷⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁷⁶ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

⁴⁷⁷ The 2020 People Matter survey was conducted in October 2020, shortly after the Fire Services Reform came into place. 638 CFA employees (55% of applicable staff) completed the 2020 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

⁴⁷⁸ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴⁷⁹ Data received from CFA, including advice that ‘Executive’ refers to any person on an executive contract and does not distinguish between pre and post Fire Services Reform personnel, but rather is based on the payroll classifications of contract ending, redundancy, resignation or retirement.

One stakeholder said: “We need to stop the rotating door of people leaving and coming. People are leaving in droves and taking all the information with them.”⁴⁸⁰ Another reflected that: “The transient nature of the paid staff is another issue – they have no deep roots into the community.”⁴⁸¹

A high turnover of members creates a lack of consistency, loss of institutional knowledge and lack of local knowledge. These factors make effective change management difficult. One stakeholder noted that the turnover of senior leaders made it hard to take the messaging seriously because they didn’t expect them to be around for very long.

In the 2021 People Matter Survey,⁴⁸² which relates to staff and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform, 18% of respondents reported that they intended to leave.⁴⁸³ Where staff intended to leave, they were asked what the major factors influencing their decision to leave were. The most selected factor was a lack of confidence in Senior Leadership (52%). Importantly, the survey reported that only 33% of staff that responded believe that Senior Leaders⁴⁸⁴ provide clear strategy and direction.

6.2.3 Lack of communication

The Volunteer Exit Survey (July 2020 – December 2020), applying to volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA and conducted following the Fire Services Reform, noted comments made by participants regarding changes CFA can make to improve the Volunteer experience. In regard to leadership these included that Regional leaders are unseen and unknown and that more needs to be done to address this; and that improved communication is needed including being transparent about CFA changes, especially around FRV.⁴⁸⁵

While some stakeholders interviewed by the Review Team noted the clear direction they were receiving from the new CEO and CO, and positive initiatives undertaken, including the all staff and volunteer member forums that are held at CFA on a monthly basis, many stakeholders raised a lack of clear, consistent and transparent communication within the organisation. Many also spoke of the need for two-way communication.

One stakeholder described that, “When I approach the District, I am rarely answered, they are spread too thin. Taking stuff to District is fine when it’s District management stuff. But when something needs fixing quickly, I think it’s appropriate to go to HQ. We need a system to elevate complaints and a formalised system for acknowledging the complaint and outlining what will happen and the reasons for it. There’s nothing that gives us the opportunity to direct our suggestions.”⁴⁸⁶ Others reflected similar sentiments that, “You have to lead by example, ... leadership needs to be from the top of the organisation. It needs to be quite transparent,

⁴⁸⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁸¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁸² Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

⁴⁸³ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021) *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴⁸⁴ Where senior leaders are defined as the senior group of managers in CFA. At the time of the survey this included the CEO, Chief Officer, Executive Directors, DCOs, RDCOs and Executive Managers.

⁴⁸⁵ CFA. (2020) *Volunteer Exit Survey - 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA. 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁴⁸⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

and they need to be consistent in their approach and how they behave and treat people”⁴⁸⁷ and, “We need to be up front about what we are supporting and why.”⁴⁸⁸

The Review Team notes the efforts that have been made by the CFA leadership team to advance communication channels in the organisation, however, it takes time and strategic communication to shift perceptions, particularly in a large and diverse organisation, and CFA is at the beginning of this journey.

6.2.4 Accountability of leaders

In the 2021 People Matter Survey,⁴⁸⁹ which relates to staff and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform, only 39% of staff that responded believed that Senior Leaders demonstrate honesty and integrity; and only 44% of staff that responded believed that Senior Leaders model CFA values.⁴⁹⁰ Similarly, in the Volunteer Exit Survey (July 2020 – December 2020), applying to volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA and conducted following the Fire Services Reform, departing volunteers noted that equity, equality and fairness principles are not being lived by leaders and are not being cascaded from BMT leaders to members.⁴⁹¹

The need for accountability and adherence to CFA values was also noted by stakeholders, with many commenting on the need for leaders to be accountable and fair in their messages and behaviours. For example, one stakeholder said, “It needs to start with people being accountable for what they do... it is starting with the little things and the people in command. Matters must be followed up.”⁴⁹² Another stakeholder felt that, “The concern is they don’t want to end up in the newspaper. Do they actually want to really change when you have people in leadership positions saying its interpersonal conflicts.”⁴⁹³

Some stakeholders suggested that owning up to past mistakes was important for demonstrating accountability and for the organisation’s future. However, stakeholders thought there was a reluctance for the organisation to do this with one noting: “I think the organisation can’t say sorry sometimes. Sorry as in, ‘We made a bit of a blue here’. I think this is an important thing.”⁴⁹⁴

Another stakeholder reflected that, “CFA is very adverse to admitting that they have made mistakes. Much of the culture is surrounded in secrecy and silence [and] because of this many CFA staff and members fear the media or investigations for fear someone may find that a mistake has been made. I know we are an important service and that mistakes should not happen but we are also a service that is staffed by humans and mistakes will happen. It’s far better to learn from mistakes than it is to cover them up.”⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁸⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁸⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁸⁹ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

⁴⁹⁰ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁴⁹¹ CFA. (2020). *Volunteer Exit Survey - 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA. 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁴⁹² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁹³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁹⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁹⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

In her CEO message in the most recent annual report, the CEO recognised the considerable work that was required to bring about a cultural shift at the organisation, “There has been considerable effort put in this year to resolve a number of legacy complaints which had been unresolved for a long time, to improve the way we handle complaints and support those who are involved in the process. We are serious about making CFA a great place to volunteer and work and while there is more to do, it is also pleasing to see progress in this area.”⁴⁹⁶

Consistency and ongoing communication of organisational commitment to this change will be central to achieving a positive cultural shift.

6.3. Recognising the value of members

CFA has multiple avenues through which to recognise the value of its members, including formal awards and recognition; training and professional development; peer support, and pastoral care and support following potentially traumatic events.

Many stakeholders spoke of the importance of the organisation demonstrating that volunteers are valued for their contribution and supported to perform their role. One stakeholder said that, “[l]eaders are being compassionate and making your team feel valued and safe. Those things are things I value.”⁴⁹⁷

The Spirit of CFA Awards, launched in 2018 are one of the ways that CFA values are recognised and celebrated with one category being ‘Living the Values Award’. This is a prestigious award for those who promote safety at all times, show respect, empathy and understanding, act with integrity, honesty and fairness.

However, many of CFA Volunteer Exit Surveys (applying to volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA) in the last five years identified the culture of the Brigade and not feeling valued as two of the top five reasons for leaving the organisation.⁴⁹⁸ The Volunteer Exit Survey Report (July 2020 – December 2020), conducted following the Fire Services Reform, noted that ‘[d]id not feel valued’ has been in the top five reasons for leaving since January 2014 in all but four surveys.⁴⁹⁹

Many stakeholders also commented that they did not feel recognised or valued by the organisation: “Those not linked to a Region/District state-based position left out of the loop [sic] resulting in being ostracised and left feeling “invisible” and without any recognition, sense of value or satisfaction.”⁵⁰⁰

Another noted the need for a corporate philosophy around being responsive to volunteers’ needs... There needs to be a big shift in recognising and being responsive to volunteers.”⁵⁰¹

The Review team also heard that some non-operational staff felt less valued than operational staff, with the division between the two being described as ‘us and them’⁵⁰² and ‘the haves and

⁴⁹⁶ CFA. (2021). *Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-mission/annual-report> p. 5.

⁴⁹⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁴⁹⁸ CFA Volunteer Exit Surveys from January-June 2017; January- June 2018; July- December 2018; January-June 2019; July- December 2019, which were conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform, and Jul-Dec 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁴⁹⁹ CFA. (2020). *Volunteer Exit Survey Report - 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA. 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁵⁰⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁰¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁰² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

the have-nots,⁵⁰³ with one stakeholder saying, “we’ve always felt like the bad cousin ... operations can click their fingers and things happen for them”.⁵⁰⁴

The Volunteer Exit Survey Report (July 2020 – December 2020)⁵⁰⁵ noted suggestions made by participants regarding changes CFA can make to improve the Volunteer experience. In regard to leadership these included more: recognition of volunteers, even if it is just a thank you; and consideration of volunteers’ time.⁵⁰⁶

6.3.1 Awards and recognition

Awards and public recognition are a simple and effective mechanism through which to acknowledge the contribution of members to CFA. In the 2015 Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review, inadequate organisational acknowledgement of staff achievements was noted. The 2015 Review was told that all-staff messages acknowledging the service of corporate staff (even if short-term) were sent when they left the organisation, but significant service milestones of operational staff were not similarly acknowledged.⁵⁰⁷

In 2018, CFA revised its approach to staff and volunteer recognition. Historically, 81% of all CFA awards were awarded to men and 100% of the elite Australian Fire Services Medal (AFSM) Recipients, Certificates of Recognition and Citations for Courage, were given to men. However, in recent years, women have now also received the AFSM in the Queen’s Birthday Honours. In 2018, the Spirit of CFA awards were launched. They were designed to recognise members who champion every day, the organisational values of Safety, Teamwork, Adaptable, Integrity and Respect. In 2018, 40% of award recipients were women and 60% were men.⁵⁰⁸

Learnings from other organisations

QFES has established a range of honours and awards which provide a broader way to recognise people and their contributions. QFES awards include:

- Close the Gap – to recognise the significant work and outcomes within the department that have contributed to 'Closing the Gap' in Queensland communities.
- Women in Fire and Emergency Services – to identify and acknowledge individuals, teams, initiatives, projects and activities which support, promote or improve the standing of women in QFES.
- Peer Support Officer Awards – to acknowledge QFES Peer Support Officers who provide outstanding service and support to QFES members and their families in times of difficulty.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁰⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁰⁵ 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁵⁰⁶ CFA. (2020). *Volunteer Exit Survey Report - 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵⁰⁷ O’Byrne, D., (2015). *Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review, Drawing a line, building stronger services*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵⁰⁸ Male Champions of Change. *Fire and Emergency: Progress Report 2017-18*. Retrieved from: <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/MCC-Fire-and-Emergency-Progress-Report-2018.pdf>.pg. 21.

⁵⁰⁹ Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. (2019). *Honours and Awards*. Retrieved from <https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-04/QFES-Honours-and-Awards-2019-Edition.pdf>.pg. 32.

One way of demonstrating that volunteers are valued is to maintain a strong link to the community and prioritise building relationships. An example of recognition and consideration of volunteers' time was reported in the Autumn Brigade Magazine 2021, where the Commander and BASO for District 7 held a 'Thank You Day' for its CFA Members. "Members and their families felt appreciated for their dedication to CFA and also felt connected to their community."⁵¹⁰

Learnings from other organisations

Training and building connections between headquarters and local Brigades/clubs provides another way to support and value volunteers.

For example, LSV has a Volunteer support officer (VSO) network, who visited each of LSV's 57 clubs during the course of the 2019-20 lifesaving season to meet with and support volunteers. The addition of a VSO to the volunteer training team ensures clubs have a dedicated contact person for training enquiries. In 2019/20, the volunteer training team worked to improve its communications pathways with area Training and Assessment Officers and club Chief Instructors. Events including the pre-season training and assessment officer briefing, professional development day and the 'Meet the Managers' roadshow helped to make connections between key staff and volunteer members.⁵¹¹

The Review Team understands that CFA is currently undertaking a further review of their recognition program with recommendations to be released in 2022 following consultation with CFA members.⁵¹² [Figure 18](#) outlines the current approach to recognition at the various levels of the organisation.⁵¹³

⁵¹⁰ CFA. (2021). *CFA Brigade News Autumn Edition*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/publications/brigade-magazine>.pg. 56.

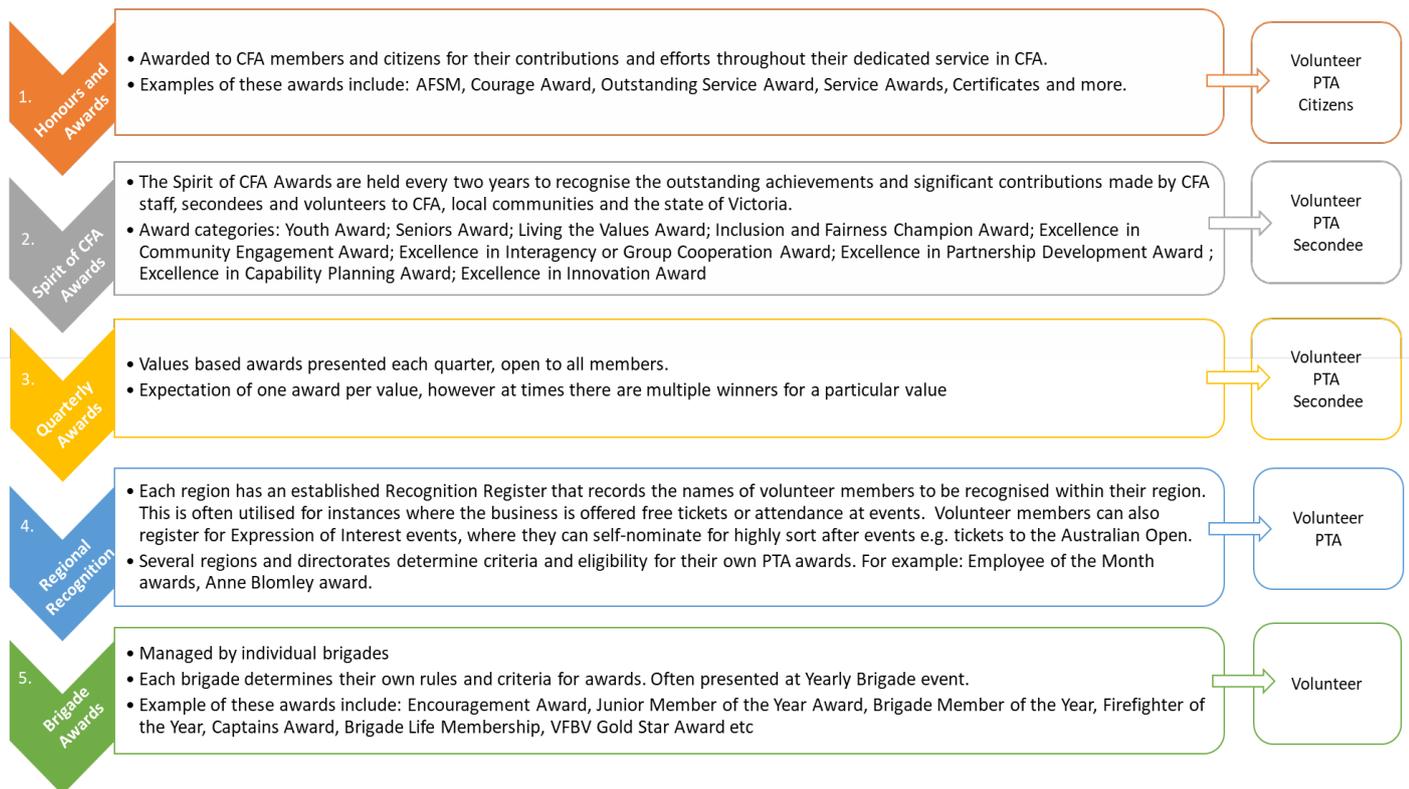
⁵¹¹ Life Saving Victoria. (2020). *Annual Report 2019-20*. Retrieved from <https://lsv.com.au/about/publications/> .pg. 23.

⁵¹² CFA & Review Team Communication (2 February 2022).

⁵¹³ CFA. (n.d.). *Recognition at CFA Review Background Powerpoint*. Retrieved from CFA.

This diagram, developed by CFA, provides an overview of the recognition initiatives in place at CFA.

Figure 18: Diagram of Recognition Initiatives at CFA⁵¹⁴



Standard 7 of Volunteer Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement relates to volunteer recognition, requiring volunteer contribution, value and impact to be understood, appreciated and acknowledged. The standard identifies four elements.

- 7.1 The governing body and employees understand how volunteers benefit the organisation, service users and the community.
- 7.2 Volunteers are informed about how their contributions benefit the organisation, service users and the community.
- 7.3 The organisation regularly acknowledges contributions made by volunteers and the positive impact on the organisation, service users and the community.
- 7.4 Volunteer acknowledgement is appropriate to the volunteer role and respectful of cultural values and perspectives.⁵¹⁵

These four elements may be usefully considered as part of CFA's current review of their recognition program.

⁵¹⁴ CFA. (n.d.). *Recognition at CFA Review Background Powerpoint*. Retrieved from CFA

⁵¹⁵ AFAC. (2020). *Volunteer Inclusion Guideline*. Retrieved from <https://www.afac.com.au/insight/operations/article/current/volunteer-inclusion-guideline>. pg. 13.

6.3.2 Wellbeing support

The provision of debriefing support is also a critical way to show members that the organisation cares and supports them. The 2021 People Matter Survey,⁵¹⁶ which relates to staff at CFA and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform, reported that:

 54% of respondents agreed with the statement ‘my organisation has effective procedures in place to support employees who may experience stress’.⁵¹⁷ This is 2% higher than the average agreement recorded by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey and is up from 47% in 2019.⁵¹⁸

 32% of respondents agreed with the statement ‘Senior leaders show support for stress prevention through involvement and commitment’.⁵¹⁹ This is 5% lower than in 2020, and 8% lower than the average agreement recorded by respondents in the comparator group used in the survey.⁵²⁰

The CFA Staff COVID-19 August 2020 pulse survey results reported positive (4.26 out of 5 in terms of level of agreement) sentiments towards the statement ‘I understand what member wellbeing services are available to me and my family during the COVID-19 pandemic’.⁵²¹

Volunteer Exit Survey Reports (applying to volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA) conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform captured suggestions by participants regarding potential changes to improve the volunteer experience included wellbeing and mental health checks on members.⁵²²

Some stakeholders consulted during the Review indicated that they had reached out to the hotline or sought professional services support such as a psychologist. One stakeholder reflected that they had been hesitant about seeking support but that they were glad they did as “they were a big help”.⁵²³

However, the Review Team also heard concerns about the support services available. One stakeholder indicated: “there’s some hotline but wouldn’t have a clue about it.”⁵²⁴ Delays with the member line were also reported, with one stakeholder noting that “it was appalling that the member line took three days to get back to me”.⁵²⁵

⁵¹⁶ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

⁵¹⁷ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵¹⁸ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2019). *CFA 2019 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA. The 2019 People Matter survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48 % of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

⁵¹⁹ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵²⁰ Victorian Public Sector Commission. (2021). *CFA 2021 people matter survey report*. Retrieved from CFA. The 2020 People Matter survey was conducted in October 2020, shortly after the Fire Services Reform came into place. 638 CFA employees (55% of applicable staff) completed the 2020 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

⁵²¹ CFA. (2020). *CFA Staff COVID-19 Pulse Survey Results August 2020*. Retrieved from CFA. 569 of the 1102 PTA and executive staff invited to participate in the survey responded.

⁵²² Volunteer Exit Surveys from July 2016- December 2016; January-June 2017; July 2018-December 2018; January-June 2019; January 2020-June 2020. All Volunteer Exit Surveys cited in this reference were conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform.

⁵²³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵²⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵²⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

One stakeholder indicated, “We need to focus on a critical incident debriefing process for all volunteers to be given consistently. We need to recognise the fact that it’s not just going out fighting fires, there [are] other things that will trigger people. There also needs to be an automatic debriefing and follow up process when certain events happen.”⁵²⁶

CFA has a ‘Managing Mental Health: Tips from Brigades’ guidebook,⁵²⁷ which was developed from discussions with Brigades. It focuses on how to prepare and support members before, during and after potentially traumatic incidents.⁵²⁸ The intention of the guidebook is not to summarise CFA policy, but to offer practical suggestions, or best practice examples, for Brigade leaders to consider and apply where appropriate.⁵²⁹ The examples focus on how to support members before an operational response, on the way to an incident, and during and after an incident. The guidebook notes that where an incident involves a fatality, Brigades contact the Duty Officer and ask for a peer to attend either at the scene or back at the station.⁵³⁰ It notes that Brigades remind members that they can request peer support and that other Brigade members are also available to talk about things. A range of measures for providing support to members following an incident are listed, including getting together immediately after to review the response effort or have an informal talk. It also lists a range of other actions that can be taken such as accessing peer support, encouraging the entire crew to meet with a peer where someone voices the need for peer support, and checking up on members the day following a potentially traumatic event.⁵³¹

CFA’s Peer Support Program provides initial support and guidance to members. Each peer is a CFA member and can help members work through issues and access further support.⁵³² CFA peers are trained to provide Psychological First Aid and personal support. Members can raise personal or CFA-related issues in the Peer Support program.⁵³³ CFA chaplains work alongside the peers, providing non-denominational pastoral care and wellbeing support.⁵³⁴

⁵²⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵²⁷ CFA. (2019). *Brigade Management Manual*, Appendix 61. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵²⁸ CFA. (2020). *Brigade Management Manual*, D19. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵²⁹ CFA. (2019). *Brigade Management Manual*, Appendix 61_03. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵³⁰ CFA. (2019). *Brigade Management Manual*, Appendix 61_07. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵³¹ CFA. (2019). *Brigade Management Manual*, Appendix 61_08, 61_09. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵³² CFA. (2020). *Brigade Management Manual*, D17. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵³³ CFA. (n.d.) *Wellbeing Support Services for Family Members of CFA People*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/volunteers-careers/health-and-wellbeing/wellbeing-support-services-for-family-members-of-cfa-people>

⁵³⁴ CFA. (2020). *Brigade Management Manual*, D18. Retrieved from CFA.

6.3.3 Training and development

The provision of training and professional development opportunities for members is also an important component of building capability and investing in members. The Strategy and Outcomes Framework commits to investing in its leaders, clearly defining their roles and responsibilities and removing barriers to leadership for minority groups.⁵³⁵ It notes that a sustainable and effective workforce for CFA is one where its volunteer and paid workforce is appropriately skilled, resourced, empowered and continually learning.⁵³⁶

The Review Team heard that leaders, and members more generally, could benefit from further training in relation to:

- good practice engagement
- how to be empathetic listeners
- how to manage expectations
- how to have the right kind of conversations.

Some noted that training courses for these skills, and the acquiring of the relevant skills, should be a prerequisite for leadership roles. Others noted that mentoring, coaching or secondments were good ways to acquire new skills. And some noted that non-operational skills were not properly valued at CFA due to the masculinised culture that exists with comments such as, “As far as support for leaders goes, one of the things for me is that it is critical that we place as much emphasis on the non-technical leadership skills as we do on the technical skills. We are a long way behind the other emergency services. If you look at our culture it is operational leadership skills, they are tough and manly. People within our organisation still refer to non-technical skills as ‘soft skills’. They’re viewed as soft, girly, and feminine. They aren’t valued in an organisation like CFA.”⁵³⁷

Time pressure and the scheduling of training was also noted by many members as an obstacle to ensuring proper training and professional development. CFA recently requested the AFAC to undertake a review of CFA’s training requirements following CFA’s transition to a fully volunteer firefighting agency. That review recommended:

- the development of a comprehensive capability framework and training pathways for all service delivery roles and all staff and volunteers⁵³⁸
- a single, representative decision-making directorate overseeing strategic planning, prioritisation of training resources, monitoring and accountability of training and assessment, course/ material approvals, quality assurance and compliance, and ultimate decision-making/approval capacity for training across CFA⁵³⁹
- the exploration of what training CFA could provide to its members jointly or in collaboration with other fire and emergency service agencies in Victoria and further afield⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁵ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-2030*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>

⁵³⁶ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-30*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>

⁵³⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵³⁸ AFAC. (2021). *AFAC Independent Peer Review into CFA Training*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵³⁹ AFAC. (2021). *AFAC Independent Peer Review into CFA Training*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵⁴⁰ AFAC. (2021). *AFAC Independent Peer Review into CFA Training*. Retrieved from CFA.

- prior to scheduling training, a process should be in place for gauging what training is required and where⁵⁴¹
- giving further consideration to how the expression of interest process can be more user-friendly for volunteers, and how the nomination and selection process can be better communicated, supported by clearly defined criteria, managed and monitored.⁵⁴²

The Review Team heard that CFA Headquarters played a role in the strategic aspect of training, but that the training system required improvements. The Review Team heard that while there is some leadership training, the priority is to ensure that core foundational operational training is completed for a large volunteer workforce.⁵⁴³ The FSIM 2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report noted that CFA did not meet its baseline relating to the average number of training courses expected to be offered during this quarter (in part due to COVID-19 related restrictions) but that strategies were in place to increase training courses.⁵⁴⁴ That report did however note that CFA had met its baseline targets for maintaining overall training satisfaction and overall digital learning satisfaction at 4 or above.⁵⁴⁵ Strengthening and enhancement of leadership capabilities is required throughout the organisation, including at the local level. The local leadership capabilities required extend beyond operational capabilities; they include skills that will assist in building teams and empowering new volunteers to join, to stay and contribute to the organisation.

CFA's Succession Planning Framework covers six areas for developing leadership and skill capability across Brigades and groups. The framework outlines the importance of exploring opportunities to address skill gaps and prepare members for leadership roles. The framework promotes mentoring and coaching, and the use of individual development plans as a means of recording and monitoring a member's learning needs and aspirations.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴¹ AFAC. (2021). *AFAC Independent Peer Review into CFA Training*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵⁴² AFAC. (2021). *AFAC Independent Peer Review into CFA Training*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵⁴³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁴⁴ FSIM. (2022). *2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%202_0.pdf p.7

⁵⁴⁵ FSIM. (2022). *2021-22 Quarter 2 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/2021-22%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%202_0.pdf p.28

⁵⁴⁶ CFA. (2021). *Succession Planning Framework*. Retrieved from CFA.

The range of leadership development programs provided by CFA⁵⁴⁷ is outlined in this table.

Table 5: Leadership development programs

Leadership development programs	Target Audience
Change Readiness	Leadership teams and Brigade Management Teams
Constructive Conversations	All CFA members
Conflict Resolution	People managers, including Brigade Management Teams/ Captains, 1st Lieutenants
Developing Coaching and Mentoring Capability	People managers, Brigade Management Teams, volunteer operational leaders
Having Challenging Conversations	Targeted at people managers, particularly volunteer leaders, but available to all CFA members
Inclusive Leadership	People managers, including Brigade Management Teams/ Captains, 1st Lieutenants
Mastering the Art of Feedback	People managers, Brigade Management Teams
Leading Change	People managers, including Brigade Management Teams/ Captains, 1st Lieutenants
Volunteering for Leadership	Captains BMTs or emerging Brigade leaders (a series of targeted stand-alone workshops)
Captains Peer Mentoring Program	Mentors and Captains (specialised, tailored PD opportunity)

While the range of programs demonstrate a dedicated investment in leadership training, there appeared to be a lack of awareness among volunteers of the many leadership training courses on offer, or how to access them. One member acknowledged the need to make information about the programs more easily accessible saying, “Thinking about the skills in our people for their roles and responsibilities. How can we lead them to the resources? One of the volunteers asked us to collate a list of what leadership programs are out there. It’s a bit disjointed at the moment; we need a one stop shop.”⁵⁴⁸

The Youth Voices Research final report noted the need for more Brigade training on a regular basis (which is well-scheduled with plenty of notice) and having a calendar for the year. It also suggested the adoption of youth specific training days.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁷ CFA. (n.d.). *Leadership development program outlines*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵⁴⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁴⁹ CFA. (2019). *NWR Youth Voices Research final report*. Retrieved from CFA.

Consistent with these findings, the Review Team heard that further investment and development of those in leadership roles at CFA was required: “We need to skill our people for success.”⁵⁵⁰ One stakeholder said: “Even though there are courses to help with people management, lots of captains think they don’t need to utilise them because they believe they know best.”⁵⁵¹

Some stakeholders credited their Captains with setting the right example and giving the encouragement they needed to succeed, with one recalling their captain saying to them: “You can go as far in CFA as you want to, or you can stay where you are, and the only person who will ever get in your way is yourself’. And he said ‘if anyone tries to tell you otherwise, send them to me and I will set them straight because CFA has a motto of fit and able, and it’s never been gendered.”⁵⁵²

Stakeholders also noted the importance of leaders developing and mentoring others, “Good leaders also mentor and build capacity as part of succession planning and Brigade development. Good leaders also use the skills of other members to mentor other Brigade members.”⁵⁵³

The Captain’s Peer Mentoring Program is a specialised professional development program to support volunteer Captains to develop their leadership skills in people and Brigade management. The program is individually tailored and provides a space for Captains to explore their leadership goals, plan strategically, discuss challenges and share ideas in a confidential space.⁵⁵⁴ Previous feedback reported by CFA noted that the program enabled participants to learn, develop their skills and boost their confidence.⁵⁵⁵

While the Review team also heard good feedback regarding the Captain’s Peer Mentoring Program, others noted the insufficient training that captains and lieutenants received. “The training provided for captains and lieutenants tends to be difficult to get to, planned at inappropriate times and frankly, not fit for purpose and not adaptable to people’s skills.”⁵⁵⁶

The 2020 VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey,⁵⁵⁷ applying to volunteers and conducted shortly after the Fire Services Reforms came into effect, also identified training as an area of concern. When asked if ‘CFA provides enough training opportunities in formats, at times and locations that make it easy for me to participate’ a large gap was identified between expectations and performance of this. This was the second most critical area identified in the survey (following CFA corporate level consultation with volunteers).⁵⁵⁸

The Volunteer Exit Survey Reports (applying to volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA) note some suggestions about improvements to be made to training including:

⁵⁵⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁵¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁵² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁵³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁵⁴ CFA. (2022). *Executive Summary 2022 Captains’ Peer Mentor Program*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵⁵⁵ CFA. (2021). *Executive Summary 2021 Captains’ Peer Mentor Program*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵⁵⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁵⁷ 2693 volunteers participated in the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey, which was conducted shortly after the Fire Services Reforms came into effect. CFA’s 2019-20 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2834 staff members and 54,795 volunteers.

⁵⁵⁸ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement June 2021*. Retrieved from: vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202106-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_June2021-web.pdf.pg. 7.

- training needing to be more flexible in length of time, nights per week, locations etc⁵⁵⁹
- training should be a centralised activity, rather than being run at Brigade level⁵⁶⁰
- training in equity, equality and fairness principles topics be included for all members⁵⁶¹
- recognition of prior learning so that gaining minimum skills can be obtained quicker.⁵⁶²

6.3.4 Recognition of prior learning and current competency

Members in CFA bring with them a range of professional, industrial and life skills. During the Review, stakeholders spoke of the difficulty in obtaining CFA recognition of prior learning (RPL), knowledge, and skills when beginning to work or volunteer for CFA. This appears to be a longstanding matter with CFA as the 2011 Report of Inquiry into the Effect of Arrangements made by CFA on its Volunteers provided:

- there was general agreement that the RPL and Recognition of Current Competency (RCC) processes are difficult⁵⁶³
- problems were raised about the difficulty of gaining RPL or RCC. It was expressed that it is easier to do the course rather than apply for RPL.⁵⁶⁴

The Volunteer Exit Survey Report (July 2020 – December 2020),⁵⁶⁵ which applies to volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform, included suggestions made in relation to changes CFA could make to RPL 'so that gaining minimum skills can be obtained quicker. There were some examples from members who had been firefighters with interstate fire services and were not able to have this recognised'.⁵⁶⁶ The 2019 Youth Voices Research report had recognition of prior learning as a theme to its research and identified it as a challenge experienced by young members.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁵⁹ CFA. (2020). *Volunteer Exit Survey Report - 1 January 2020 – 30 June 2020*. Retrieved from CFA; CFA. (2020) *Volunteer Exit Survey Report - 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA. 100 of 894 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 January 2020 – 30 June 2020, which was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform..

⁵⁶⁰ CFA. (2020). *Volunteer Exit Survey Report - 1 January 2020 – 30 June 2020*. Retrieved from CFA. 100 of 894 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 January 2020 – 30 June 2020, which was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform.

⁵⁶¹ CFA. (2020). *Volunteer Exit Survey Report - 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA. 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁵⁶² CFA. (2020). *Volunteer Exit Survey Report - 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA. 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁵⁶³ Jones AM, The Hon. D., (2011). *Report of Inquiry into the Effect of Arrangements made by the Country Fire Authority on its Volunteers*. Retrieved from: https://www.vfbv.com.au/index.php/news/inquiries/jonesinquiry/item/download/6_7943cacb203b6446483463d4a78b6dca. pg. 156.

⁵⁶⁴ Jones AM, The Hon. D., (2011). *Report of Inquiry into the Effect of Arrangements made by the Country Fire Authority on its Volunteers*. Retrieved from: https://www.vfbv.com.au/index.php/news/inquiries/jonesinquiry/item/download/6_7943cacb203b6446483463d4a78b6dca. pg. 44.

⁵⁶⁵ 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁵⁶⁶ CFA. (2020). *Volunteer Exit Survey Report - 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020*. Retrieved from CFA. 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁵⁶⁷ CFA. (2019). *NWR Youth Voices Research Report*. Retrieved from CFA.

One stakeholder noted the difficulties experienced with RPL noting, “[w]e have people who are qualified, who have trades, who are doctors, nurses, psychologists, welfare officers and everything else. Why can’t our qualifications be recognised by CFA? Even if you do a first aid course, if it [is] not run by CFA, it is not recognised.”⁵⁶⁸

In June 2021, VFBV noted that delegates had been engaged by CFA to assist in the process and development of RPL packages for two operational courses.⁵⁶⁹ While it appears that CFA does not have a RPL process adopted on a larger scale to recognise the wide range of skills and trainings that members may have obtained prior to joining CFA, *CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018* and *CFA Forest Industry Brigades Training and Specifications Guidelines* does outlines processes for RPL:

- Clause 40.2 of *CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018*, states that ‘Recognition of Prior Learning may be accepted, as appropriate, for any competency listed in this clause’.⁵⁷⁰ However, the process as to how RPL is assessed or accepted is not detailed.
- *CFA Forest Industry Brigades Training and Specifications Guidelines* ‘provides a diverse range of people from across the country and overseas to perform firefighting roles; interstate and overseas qualifications may be recognised by CFA where certain criteria for recognition have been met’⁵⁷¹ for Forest Industry Brigade Members. The Training and Specification Guideline outlines the RPL process and how it is ‘designed to give members support throughout the process by putting members in touch with an RPL assessor early in the application process, your assessor will assist you in identifying what evidence is required and help members decide if the RPL process is the correct pathway to pursue’.⁵⁷²

In August 2021, AFAC released its fifth AFAC Guide to Recognition of Prior Learning. It provides an overview of the regulatory framework and RPL process and highlights four approaches being taken by fire and emergency services in applying RPL processes, including the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service.⁵⁷³ There are therefore existing frameworks that can be drawn on to support an organisation-wide RPL policy.

⁵⁶⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁵⁶⁹ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV quarterly supplement June 2021*. Retrieved from: http://vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202106-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_June2021-web.pdf

⁵⁷⁰ *CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018*. (Entered into operation 26 February 2019). Retrieved from CFA. The entire agreement is considered the ‘clause’.

⁵⁷¹ CFA. (2020). *Forestry Industry Brigades Training Specifications & Guidelines*. Retrieved from https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/526/2020_Appendix_3_FIB_Training_GuideLines_Edition_4.2_89207.pdf.aspx . pg. 19.

⁵⁷² CFA. (2020). *Forestry Industry Brigades Training Specifications & Guidelines*. Retrieved from https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/526/2020_Appendix_3_FIB_Training_GuideLines_Edition_4.2_89207.pdf.aspx pg. 20.

⁵⁷³ Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council Limited. (2021). *Guide to Recognition of Prior Learning - For Fire and Emergency Services Organisations*. Retrieved from: <https://www.afac.com.au/insight/doctrine/article/trusted>

Learnings from other organisations

- NSW RFS created their RPL Guidelines – Applying Recognition Strategies in the Service (the RPL Guidelines) in June 2017. The RPL Guidelines outlines the NSW RFS assessment process for RPL obtained via formal learnings (for example: a certificate, diploma, or university degree), non-formal learnings (for example: professional development workshops), or informal learnings (for example: through experience including on the job, social, family, hobby or leisure activities). The RPL Guidelines outline its RPL assessment methodology and identifies the person(s) responsible at each step of the assessment. Importantly, the RPL Guideline states, “RPL must be made available to all members. RPL allows members who already have the skills, knowledge and experience to be ‘on boarded’ quicker, which is good for member morale and increases the Services operational capability.”⁵⁷⁴
- NSW SES acknowledges that “people often bring a range of skills, knowledge and experience acquired from work, volunteering or previous study” and that by “receiving recognition of what you bring to the NSW SES means you can focus on learning new skills, rather than re-learning things you are already qualified in”.⁵⁷⁵ The Victorian Auditor-General’s Report acknowledged the work being done by the NSW SES, “SES has a Training and Assessment Procedures Manual, which is a single source of reference on training safety, delivery, records, career progression, assessment and the recognition of prior learning”.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁴ NSW RFS. (2017). *RPL Guidelines Applying Recognition in the Service*. Retrieved from: https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/71400/Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-RPL-Guidelines.pdf. pg. 4.

⁵⁷⁵ State Emergency Service New South Wales. (n.d.). *About NSW SES Training*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/get-involved/volunteer/training/>

⁵⁷⁶ Auditor General Victoria. (2014). *Managing Emergency Services Volunteers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20140205-Emergency-Volunteers.pdf>. pg. 27.

6.4. Concluding comments on leadership

CFA has been subject to significant leadership change and churn in recent years. In 2016, the Victorian Government replaced the CFA Board. In the 10-year period (2012 – 2022) the CEO position has been held by eight different people and the CO position held by four different people. In the five years to February 2022, CFA has also experienced a total of 44 executive departures. Since the Fire Services Reform, CFA has also undergone an organisational realignment to support CFA in its role as a volunteer fire service. This realignment has also seen an improvement in gender diversity at the Executive level with the appointment of two female Group General Managers and two female DCOs. Whilst there was recognition of the significant change in leadership over recent years including at the CEO, CO and Executive level, members consulted by the Review Team generally spoke positively about efforts the current CO and CEO had made to work together, and their investment in organisational change.

This is a positive indication. Leadership is central to the success of any cultural change process and to restoring trust and confidence in CFA. To restore that trust, CFA must now provide consistency and stability to its members in order to facilitate and support cultural change. It is incumbent on leaders at all levels of CFA to lead this change. This includes volunteer, staff and seconded leaders from the Brigade level to the executive and governance level. Leaders across CFA should model alignment with CFA values and clear communication, consistency and transparency of practice.

CFA is unique in that its leadership opportunities are not limited to the Executive. It provides leadership opportunities to members across the organisation – for staff, volunteers and secondees. This devolved leadership style has both positive and negative outcomes. It provides opportunities for members to demonstrate leadership at various levels of the organisation. However, it also leads to inconsistency in approaches to leadership and a lack of clarity in relation to priorities for leaders, with flow on effects for Brigades. Since the Fire Services Reform, the organisation also has diminished capacity to influence its own middle management, as 16% of its staff are seconded from FRV. The devolved nature of leadership across CFA contributes to blockages between HQ and Districts/Regions and Brigades, which prevent the different parts of the organisation working together as a cohesive organisation. There is a perception that these barriers to communication are exacerbated by a lack of understanding and awareness from HQ about what is happening at the District/Region/Brigade level and a lack of transparent and clear communication from leadership at HQ to members. There is also a perception that some leaders at lower levels actively prevent communication between HQ and members. This can, at times, be compounded when leaders rely on communication based on command-and-control management styles, rather than adopting a more consultative management approach.

During the Review, some concerns were raised about how volunteer leaders are appointed. Issues such as the current election process for the BMT, the absence of additional values-based eligibility and broader selection criteria prior to appointment to the BMT, the election of some members who do not have people management skills - all these create challenges to achieving diversity at the BMT level. It can also lead to the election of some members on factors other than merit.

A range of initiatives have been implemented to support and promote leadership skills across CFA. These include volunteer leadership development programs and the Captain's Peer Mentoring Program. However, whilst there are many leadership courses in place, there seems to be inconsistent awareness of their availability and how to access them. The level of turnover

that has existed within CFA including at staff, volunteer and secondee level also creates challenges to implementation of training.

In an organisation based on volunteerism, where 41% of paid CFA employees and 42% of secondees are also, or have been, CFA volunteers in their own community⁵⁷⁷, recognition of contribution and service by the leadership is critical to supporting positive cultural change. Whilst there are formal recognition processes in place for members including awards, post-incident debriefing support and wellbeing support, there is a perception amongst some members that there is inadequate recognition and respect for the commitment of members, particularly for those who invest additional time in leadership roles at the Brigade and Group levels. There is also a perception amongst some staff that non-operational staff are less valued than operational staff. This lack of recognition is a gap identified by CFA who are seeking to address this by way of an internal review into their recognition program.

Finally, there is also a perception of a lack of accountability and transparency of leaders for behaviour that is inconsistent with CFA's stated values. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of the CEO and CO holding leaders in the organisation to account and communicating the consequences for actions that do not align with organisational values for those in leadership roles. Improved processes around issues management outlined in the section relating to systems and processes relating to issues management below seek to address the concerns raised around scrutiny, transparency and accountability.

⁵⁷⁷ Volunteers including non-active and/or non operational volunteers. This statistic draws on internal data provided by the CFA Business Intelligence Team (March 2022)

7. SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES FOR ISSUES MANAGEMENT

Harassment, bullying and discrimination remain prevalent in Australian workplaces, including in the emergency services sector. Working in the sector can provide a strong sense of purpose and social connection, but conversely, poor workplace culture and practices can have a damaging effect on the mental health of emergency services personnel, in addition to occupational trauma.⁵⁷⁸ For firefighters, the trauma and adverse consequences of bullying, harassment, and discrimination may be compounded where they are also repeatedly exposed to trauma and its aftermath in the course of their work.⁵⁷⁹

An improved culture at CFA will require the support of robust systems and processes that prevent and manage bullying, harassment and discrimination and provide adequate support for those who experience such conduct at CFA. Reporting/complaint management systems and processes should ensure consistency, transparency, timeliness, accountability, procedural fairness and continual improvement, as this will restore trust in the complaints management process. Members should be empowered to manage and address some complaints locally; and to understand the appropriate pathway for escalating other complaints in a confidential, victim-centred, trauma-informed and safe manner.

7.1. Ensuring safe and effective issues management

An organisation's systems and processes can impact an organisation's culture. The Strategy and Outcomes Framework, which sets the framework for CFA following Fire Services Reform, notes the importance of systems and processes in ensuring a great place to volunteer and work (which is one of the framework's goals). The Strategy and Outcomes Framework commits to protecting "the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of our people by strengthening our processes, systems and tools to identify and manage workplace hazards."⁵⁸⁰

The Year One Fire Services Reform Implementation Plan notes, "the fire services need to fully integrate into modern, efficient and flexible new systems and arrangements and the entities need to establish the methodologies and approaches necessary for them to perform their functions."⁵⁸¹

Safe and effective issues management processes are critical for preventing and responding to bullying, harassment, and discrimination. An effective reporting and complaints process is important because it can:

- empower complainants
- act as a deterrent to unlawful behaviour
- be a key component in modelling leadership on workplace equality and setting expectations about what behaviour is, and is not, appropriate in the workplace

⁵⁷⁸ Beyond Blue. (2020). *National Mental Health and Wellbeing Study of Police and Emergency Services (2016-2020)*. Retrieved from: <https://esf.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Beyond-Blue-phase-three-report.pdf>. pg. 5.

⁵⁷⁹ Phoenix Australia. (2013). *Recovery after Trauma - A Guide for Firefighters with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵⁸⁰ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework for 2020-2030*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>. pg. 14.

⁵⁸¹ Victorian Government. (2020). *Year One Fire Services Reform Implementation Plan*. Retrieved from: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/council/tailed-documents/search-tabled-documents/details/3/9804>. pg. 12.

- provide organisations, like CFA, with information and intelligence on emerging risks and issues.⁵⁸²

Similarly, a poor or inadequate complaints system can cause further harm to complainants and respondents.⁵⁸³ For example, the 18-month review of the UK Parliament’s Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme, published in February 2021, drew attention to the prolonged distress of respondents and complainants caused by protracted investigations and resulting in adverse wellbeing and productivity impacts. Lack of regular progress updates from an investigator and clarity on procedural next steps were also found to exacerbate this stress.⁵⁸⁴

In relation to the health and wellbeing impacts of poorly managed complaints processes on members of fire services, the 2015 Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review made the following observations, “The failure to address such claims professionally, expeditiously, and with care and concern, has led to some individuals feeling locked for years in a grievance with the organisation without any resolution. This has a consequent impact on their health and wellbeing, often combined with a sense of being treated like a perpetrator rather than a victim. This situation is exacerbated for volunteers who, not being employees, have more limited avenues to seek redress... Many members of the fire services proudly described their Brigades as being like a family where everyone looks out for one another. In such an environment, exclusion is much more powerfully felt.”⁵⁸⁵

Recent reviews have identified elements of safe and effective issues management frameworks. In its review into sexual discrimination and sexual harassment within Victoria Police, VEOHRC reported that a best-practice workplace harm response model is one that consistently applies the principle of victim-centricity. A victim-centric model “treats victims/survivors with empathy and sensitivity and without judgement, maintains their confidentiality and supports them throughout the complaint process.”⁵⁸⁶ It also ensures “strong protections against victimisation and makes managers and supervisors accountable for preventing victimisation in their workplaces.”⁵⁸⁷

Similarly, the AHRC’s 2020 Respect@Work also proposed that approaches to better prevent and respond to sexual harassment in the workplace should be:

- evidence-based
- victim-focused to enhance outcomes for people experiencing harassment

⁵⁸² Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2021). *Independent Review into Workplace Equality in Ambulance Victoria*. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/legal-and-policy/research-reviews-and-investigations/ambulance-victoria-review/final-report/#:~:text=Ambulance%20Victoria%20has%20engaged%20the.and%20bullying%20in%20the%20organisation>.

⁵⁸³ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2021). *Independent Review into Workplace Equality in Ambulance Victoria*. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/legal-and-policy/research-reviews-and-investigations/ambulance-victoria-review/final-report/#:~:text=Ambulance%20Victoria%20has%20engaged%20the.and%20bullying%20in%20the%20organisation>. pg. 255.

⁵⁸⁴ Stanley, A., (2021). *Independent Complaints & Grievance Scheme: Independent 18-Month Review*. Retrieved from: https://www.parliament.uk/contentassets/e3ed0297d92a400bb249c887a30aa59b/icgs-18-month-review_final.pdf . pg. 29.

⁵⁸⁵ O’Byrne, D., (2015). *Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review, Drawing a line, building stronger services*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁵⁸⁶ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2015). *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police – Phase 3 audit and review*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/static/237bccb2ac22d53b2eca3fccd13a1e85/Resource-Independent_Review_Victoria_Police-Phase_3-2019.docx. pg. 221.

⁵⁸⁷ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2015). *Independent Review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police – Phase 3 audit and review*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/static/237bccb2ac22d53b2eca3fccd13a1e85/Resource-Independent_Review_Victoria_Police-Phase_3-2019.docx. pg. 221.

- framed through the lens of gender and intersectionality
- based upon existing legal frameworks to avoid duplication, ambiguity or undue burden on employers, consistent with the Government's Deregulation Agenda.⁵⁸⁸

Further, the AHRC recommends that best practice issues management systems include a reporting mechanism which is coordinated and accessible; has multiple entry points; guarantees anonymous and confidential disclosures; allows complainants to make a complaint at a time and place where they feel comfortable and secure; offers both formal and informal reporting options or processes; and removes barriers that particular groups may face – for example, people with disability and people from CALD backgrounds.⁵⁸⁹

It is important that workers feel safe to speak up about wrongdoing in the workplace, given that they are usually the first to become aware of it.⁵⁹⁰ Anonymous reporting pathways can encourage employees to report wrongdoing, if it enables them to speak up without fear of reprisal.⁵⁹¹ This thinking is reflected in Victoria's *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012*, which is designed to help people make disclosures about improper conduct within the public sector. The *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012* allows for public interest disclosures to be made anonymously.⁵⁹² While the anonymity of a disclosure may have implications for how a disclosure is investigated, anonymity need not prevent it from being investigated.⁵⁹³

The VEOHRC also recommends the establishment of anonymous reporting pathways or other mechanisms to address power imbalances within the workplace.⁵⁹⁴ With regard to workplace bullying, Work Safe Victoria recommends that all employees should receive training in how to intervene when they witness bullying behaviour, with training aiming to build skills by practising brief responses and anonymously reporting behaviour to their employer if the behaviour continues.⁵⁹⁵

In relation to the required conditions for safe reporting environments, the Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts Report noted the need for the following in order to create a safe reporting environment within an organisation:

- the organisation has no tolerance for unacceptable behaviour
- complaints are treated seriously
- complainants will not be further victimised

⁵⁸⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_wsh_report_2020.pdf. pg. 15.

⁵⁸⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_wsh_report_2020.pdf, pp.696-699.

⁵⁹⁰ OECD. (n.d.). *Whistleblower protection*. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/corruption/ethics/whistleblower-protection/>

⁵⁹¹ OECD. (n.d.). *Whistleblower protection*. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/corruption/ethics/whistleblower-protection/>

⁵⁹² *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012*, s12A

⁵⁹³ Victorian Government. (2022). *Guide to Making and Handling Public Interest Disclosures, Procedures for the Department of Premier and Cabinet*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/dpc-public-interest-disclosures>

⁵⁹⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Guideline – Preventing and Responding to Workplace Sexual Harassment*. Retrieved from https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/static/8070e6b04cd51969490ccdecddff0c00/Resource-Guidelines-Workplace_sexual_harassment-Aug20.pdf. pg. 20.

⁵⁹⁵ WorkSafe. (n.d.). *Responding to workplace bullying*. Retrieved from: <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/responding-workplace-bullying>

- if complaints are substantiated, action will be taken.⁵⁹⁶

In addition, whilst action on alleged breaches of workplace standards might be triggered by a complaint from a victim, responding to a breach should not rely on a victim driving the process. A workplace is responsible for ensuring appropriate action is taken against a perpetrator where allegations are established.⁵⁹⁷

7.2. Issues management at CFA

7.2.1 The legislative and regulatory framework

The *CFA Act 1958* establishes that all Brigades, groups of Brigades, officers and members of Brigades are subject to the order and control of the CO, while section 29 describes the CO's general powers and duties.⁵⁹⁸ Section 110 provides a regulation making power, including with respect to:

- regulating the discipline and good conduct of officers and employees of the Authority and volunteer officers and members of Brigades, including providing for suspension or removal or the imposing of a penalty
- providing and regulating appeals by volunteer officers and members of Brigades to an Appeal Panel constituted by the regulations.

With respect to discipline, the CFA Regulations 2014 provide for offences, penalties, investigations and hearings.

For investigations, regulation 46 provides that the CO may appoint an employee or other person as an investigator to gather information concerning the circumstances which may have given rise to an offence under regulation 44. An investigator must give a written report on the circumstances to the person responsible for determining whether a charge should be laid 'as soon as practicable'. Under regulation 47, a member may be suspended from their Brigade until an investigation report authorised by regulation 46 has been given.

Regulation 44 provides that a member of a Brigade is guilty of an offence if they:

- are involved in a contravention of section 20A(2) of *CFA Act 1958* by a Brigade or group (which deals with authorised attendances to protect property or in an emergency and reporting of that attendance) (regulation 44(a))
- are involved in the contravention of section 26 of *CFA Act 1958* by an association of persons (which deals with operating as a fire Brigade without registration) (regulation 44(b))
- contravene a direction of the CO given under section 30(1) of *CFA Act 1958* (which relates to directions regarding fires and prevention) (regulation 44(c))
- commit an act of misconduct (regulation 44(d))
- are negligent in the discharge of the member's duties (regulation 44(e))

⁵⁹⁶ Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf>. pg. 68.

⁵⁹⁷ Equal Opportunity Commission. (2021) *Review of Harassment in the South Australian Parliament Workplace*. Retrieved from: <https://www.eoc.sa.gov.au/documents/Report-Review-of-Harassment-SA-Parliament-Workplace.pdf>. pg. 108.

⁵⁹⁸ *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (Vic), s29.

- are inefficient or incompetent and the inefficiency or incompetence arises from causes within the member's control (regulation 44(f))
- are guilty of disgraceful or improper conduct (regulation 44(g)).

It is important to note that misconduct and disgraceful or improper conduct are not currently defined in the Regulations, which can therefore lead to inconsistency in application. There is some guidance in case law. For example, in the case of *Fire Brigade Employees Union (NSW) v Fire & Rescue* (2013) 235 IR 234 [88]-[90], it was held that misconduct should include an element of 'wilful' or 'deliberate' behaviour in order to result in termination. However, a simple definition of these terms would promote transparency and clarity around the complaints process.

Regulation 45 establishes that a member who is guilty of an offence under regulation 44 may be subject to one or more of the following penalties:

- admonition
- reprimand
- reduction in rank
- reduction in classification
- removal from an office in a Brigade to which the member was elected or appointed and appointment to another office in the Brigade
- suspension of membership of the Brigade for a specified period
- recommendation to the Authority that the enrolment of the member be cancelled.

7.2.2 Issues management under enterprise agreements

The *CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018* (covering specified CFA employees described in the agreement) provides a grievance/dispute settlement procedure.⁵⁹⁹ Employees must first approach their immediate supervisor to discuss the grievance/dispute. If this does not resolve the issue, either party may refer the matter to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for conciliation. If conciliation does not resolve the matter, either party may request the FWC to determine the matter by arbitration.

The *CFA Professional, Technical and Administrative Agreement 2020* (covering employees engaged in specific classifications or occupations contained in the agreement) also provides a grievance/dispute settlement procedure.⁶⁰⁰ Each step of the procedure has a designated timeframe (which can be extended by mutual agreement). Employees must first approach their immediate supervisor to discuss the grievance/ dispute. If this does not resolve the issue, the employee may refer the matter to the supervisor's manager. If not resolved, the employee may choose to refer the matter to the departmental Director or Regional Manager. If this does not resolve the issue, the employee may refer the matter to the General Manager, People and Culture. The CEO (or nominated representative) will make a decision based on discussions and the written submissions of the Employee and the General/Regional Manager regarding the grievance/dispute. If this does not resolve the issue, either party may refer the issue to the

⁵⁹⁹ *CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018*. (Entered into operation 26 February 2019) Retrieved from CFA.

⁶⁰⁰ *CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018*. (Entered into operation 26 February 2019) Retrieved from CFA.

FWC for conciliation. If still unresolved, either party may request the FWC to determine the matter by arbitration.

Clause 21 of the Agreement defines misconduct and provides for it to be investigated and addressed. The definition is not an exhaustive one, and includes 'disgraceful or improper conduct', which is not defined in the Agreement. A process for managing misconduct is also provided, where there is an investigation (by a person appointed by CFA with no prior personal involvement in the matter), and an opportunity for the employee to respond prior to a determination being made by CFA. Possible outcomes of the process are no action through to termination of employment. The complainant will be provided with information about the outcome where it is reasonable and practicable.

7.2.3 Issues management under the secondment agreement with FRV

While secondees from FRV report to the CO, performance management issues remain the responsibility of FRV. Secondments under the CFA and FRV Secondment Agreement may however terminate for a number of reasons including where the CO terminates the secondment due to the secondee's conduct, under section 25C(6) or 25C(7) of the *FRV Act*.

Clause 8.4 of the Secondment Agreement describes the required processes for handling this, including referral to the Fire Rescue Commissioner for investigation where the CO receives a complaint or allegation concerning the conduct of the secondee and has reasonable grounds to question the conduct of the secondee.

Subject to the outcome of the investigation, the CO may terminate a secondee on advice of the Fire Rescue Commissioner. Where the Fire Rescue Commissioner advises that termination is not appropriate and the CO does not agree, the CO is required to seek agreement with the Fire Rescue Commissioner on an agreed independent arbitrator. Where such agreement cannot be reached, the Fire Rescue Commissioner will refer the matter to the FWC for resolution.⁶⁰¹

7.2.4 Policies, guidelines and the Right Environment

There are varied information sources, policies, programs and supports for CFA members who have experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination. The CFA website provides guidance on what someone should do if they, or others, are affected by these behaviours. The 2020 CFA Brigade Management Manual also provides information and resources for those seeking to resolve such issues either internally or externally.

In recent years, significant investment has been allocated to addressing concerns with complaints management at CFA. The 2020/21 FSIM Annual Report observed the steps taken by CFA and FRV to update their complaints management approaches, noting the importance of "inclusive and respectful workplace conduct" for cultural change.⁶⁰² Since Fire Services Reform, the leadership at CFA has invested significant effort into developing the Right Environment initiatives including the Interim Behavioural Standards and the Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines to better support CFA into the future.

Right Environment initiatives

Since Fire Services Reform, the leadership at CFA has invested significant effort into developing the Right Environment Program which included the development of Interim

⁶⁰¹ Secondment Agreement. (Entered into operation 31 October 2020), cl8.4k. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶⁰² FSIM. (2021) *Fire Services Implementation Monitor Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/fire-services-implementation-monitor-annual-report-2020-21/>. pg. 8.

Behavioural Standards and the Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines to better support CFA into the future. The initiatives from this Program are continuing to be rolled out at CFA.

Significant focus is being put on supporting local resolution (where appropriate) with clear, defined processes for escalation of serious matters.⁶⁰³ One stakeholder described the Right Environment Initiative as having two drivers, "the first one to effectively manage complaints and the second to drive local resolution."⁶⁰⁴

An overview of Right Environment Program's Outcomes and Achievements from February 2022 identifies the following progress against success criteria, as identified by CFA:

Table 6: Right Environment Program outcomes and achievements

Success criteria met	Success criteria yet to be achieved as on hold or work in progress	Success criteria to measure in 12 months
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legacy cases closed effectively • Average duration of a complaint reduced for new cases • Complaints related data is accurate and reflective of the situation • Local leaders have access to data insights (local dashboard) via HRBPs • Centralised access through system (Tracker) to current case information • Clearly defined triage process to determine informal vs. formal cases • Improved and clear process and operating model in place • Pain points raised (feedback) are fixed in the new model • Number of identified roles filled (four vacant HRBP positions to be filled) • Interim Behavioural Standards and Complaints Resolution Guidelines released for consultation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Managers introduced to new guidelines, tools and templates (format has been revised to a series of online sessions due to COVID-19 restrictions and inability to run this session face to face) • Information Management system in place – internal InfoHub system to be utilised (set up work in progress) • Centralised access to all legacy cases information (as above – work in progress to set up InfoHub). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased Satisfaction results in the People matter survey and Volunteer's survey responses (such as CFA rating as a place to work and volunteer and questions around Bullying/Harassment) • Sustained cost reduction per complaint • Line managers equipped and trained to manage early resolution • Regional leaders engaging in dashboard and reporting (via HRBP).

⁶⁰³ CFA. (2021). *Program Plan - Right Environment*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶⁰⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

Interim Behavioural Standards

As part of Right Environment initiatives, CFA recently developed Interim Behavioural Standards which are being socialised across the organisation and apply to all CFA Members, Officers and contractors. The Standards can be found in Appendix 7.

The Interim Behavioural Standards specifically define and prohibit bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination and victimisation, with relevant examples of the behaviours. They also explicitly prohibit sexual or intimate relationships with those under 18 and other 'inappropriate behaviour'.⁶⁰⁵ Disciplinary consequences for breaching the Interim Behavioural Standards range from counselling, being held out of duty, reprimands, demotion, suspension or membership cancellation.⁶⁰⁶

The Interim Behavioural Standards were in the process of being piloted and communicated across the organisation at the time the Review Team was undertaking consultation, including through VFBV consultation processes and youtube videos by the CO and others. As the messaging around the Standards had not yet reached many stakeholders who the Review Team spoke to, many were unaware of their existence.

Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines

CFA's Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines (attached as Appendix 8) (the Guidelines) have also been developed under Right Environment initiatives. These Guidelines set out CFA's approach to managing and resolving concerns and complaints that it receives about the behaviour of CFA Members, Officers or contractors.

The Guidelines apply to complaints made by members of the public, CFA Members, Officers and/or contractors but do not apply to employment disputes, reasonable management action, operational matters or matters where CFA decides there is a more appropriate process that should be applied.

The Guidelines provide principles for complaint resolution,⁶⁰⁷ which include CFA's: commitment to matters such as timeliness, confidentiality, and procedural fairness; preference for informal resolution (where appropriate) and for identified rather than anonymous complaints; the position that it will dismiss frivolous or ill-founded complaints; and areas where CFA will exercise its discretion (such as where the complaint is more than 12 months old).

The Guidelines outline steps that someone should take if they have a concern or complaint, and options for how these will be dealt with. The Guidelines encourage a focus on 'Self-Help' in the first instance and provide guidance for how this should be approached.

The Guidelines note that conduct that could constitute a serious breach of CFA Interim Behavioural Standards, including bullying or harassment, sexual harassment, prohibited discrimination or victimisation, is likely to be resolved through the Formal Resolution process.⁶⁰⁸

The Formal Resolution process requires complainants to provide a detailed account of their complaint, any relevant supporting documentation (where possible), and identify the outcome sought.⁶⁰⁹ The Complaints Management Team undertakes an initial assessment of the complaint, and will (or the HR Business Partner will) communicate the outcome of that

⁶⁰⁵ CFA. (n.d.) *CFA Interim Behavioural Standards*, Item 7. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶⁰⁶ CFA. (n.d.) *CFA Interim Behavioural Standards*, Item 5. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶⁰⁷ CFA. (n.d.) *CFA Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines*, Item 4. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶⁰⁸ CFA. (n.d.) *CFA Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines*, Item 6.3. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶⁰⁹ CFA. (n.d.) *CFA Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines*, Item 9.3. Retrieved from CFA.

assessment to the complainant, including any next steps. A case manager will also be assigned at this point, if this has not already occurred.⁶¹⁰

CFA determines the process that will be undertaken for formal resolution of the complaint, depending on the nature of the complaint and whether legislation or enterprise agreements apply.⁶¹¹ If an investigation is required, the guidelines provide that it will be conducted by CFA or an external investigator.⁶¹² The Review team understands that CFA's current process is for the internal Complaints Team to determine if a formal investigation is warranted (on the basis for example that the matter is complex or serious), and if so, an external investigator is engaged.

The process for investigation is dependent on who is involved and whether a process under the CFA Regulations 2014 or an enterprise agreement is triggered.⁶¹³ Suspension during investigation, and outcomes of the Formal Resolution process will also be in accordance with these instruments. Outcomes may range from apologies, counselling, to penalties under regulation 45 of the CFA Regulations or cancellation of enrolment registration (for volunteers).

7.3. Support available to CFA members

There are a range of support services and resources to help CFA members and their families maintain good mental health and deal with difficulties when they arise including in relation to bullying, discrimination or harassment they may experience or report to CFA. These include:

- twenty-four hour Wellbeing Support Line (for CFA members and their immediate families), which links the caller to professional counselling and advice services (see [Support services available](#))
- Member Assistance Program, which offers short-term solution-focussed counselling (up to 6 one-hour sessions)
- Peer Support Program to provide support, and referrals for professional services particularly following critical incidents
- Chaplaincy Program for pastoral care
- Bullying and Harassment support and access to the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) for specialist support for survivors of historic sexual abuse (CFA has a partnership with CASA)⁶¹⁴
- mediation services, which can be used to assist with workplace conflict between two or more members. CFA has the discretion to determine if a matter is eligible for mediation based on the circumstances⁶¹⁵
- wellbeing education and training⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁰ CFA. (n.d.) *CFA Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines*, Item 9.7. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶¹¹ CFA. (n.d.) *CFA Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines*, Item 9.8. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶¹² CFA. (n.d.) *CFA Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines*, Item 9.12. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶¹³ CFA. (n.d.) *CFA Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines*, Item 9.13. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶¹⁴ CFA. (n.d.) *Wellbeing tip sheet - how to access the wellbeing support line*. Retrieved from CFA; CFA. (2021) *Mental Health & Wellbeing for Volunteers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/volunteers-careers/health-and-wellbeing>

⁶¹⁵ CFA. (n.d.) *Mediation Services - Support to resolve workplace issues*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶¹⁶ CFA. (n.d.) *Need Wellbeing Support Poster*. Retrieved from CFA.

Each Region also has their own dedicated Member Wellbeing Advisor, whose role is to deliver a range of targeted educational packages to support leaders and their teams to promote positive mental health and wellbeing⁶¹⁷ The CFA website and CFA Brigade Management Manual direct users to a number of tools, resources and tip sheets relating to potentially traumatic events, interpersonal conflict and mental health.⁶¹⁸

CFA also provides its members with information about available support services for those who have been directly affected by fires, including free counselling, Medicare rebates for psychological therapy sessions and video telehealth services. A range of externally produced information sheets, which provide general advice and information and outline where assistance and support may be found are accessible to CFA members.

7.4. Challenges with CFA's issues management systems and processes

The Review heard of several concerns about the systems and processes in place to prevent and respond to bullying, harassment and discrimination. These related to inconsistency, accountability, lack of independence, communication barriers, and lack of transparency of processes. These concerns are at the heart of procedural fairness and have served to undermine respect and trust in the existing complaints management process at CFA. Given the timing of the consultation, recent changes introduced by CFA to improve systems and processes may not have been experienced or learnt of by those spoken to by the Review team. The Review's recommendations are intended to support CFA to build on positive initiatives that have been implemented in the past 18 months.

For example, there have been recent positive examples of the development of new and efficient systems, such as the streamlining of the Expression of Interest (EOI) and registration process for new members through the volunteer hub.

In discussing CFA's general systems and process many stakeholders criticised them as 'inconsistent', 'terrible', 'not talking to each other', 'making life on the ground extremely difficult' and 'in need of transparency'. The disconnect between the different levels of the organisation, and between HQ and the Regions was also noted. One stakeholder said:

"It's like there's two CFAs. We have the corporate CFA. We have the head office. The closer you get to head office, the more corporatised it becomes."⁶¹⁹

Another said, "[t]hese Brigades are largely left to run their own show – there's not much intervention."⁶²⁰

In terms of the resourcing of technology, systems and processes, stakeholders noted, "We are always working on the smell of an oily rag"⁶²¹; "use of technology and new equipment is very slow"⁶²²; and "budget is a barrier"⁶²³.

⁶¹⁷ CFA. (2021). *Mental Health & Wellbeing for Volunteers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/volunteers-careers/health-and-wellbeing>

⁶¹⁸ CFA. (2021). *Mental Health & Wellbeing for Volunteers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/volunteers-careers/health-and-wellbeing> ; CFA. (2019). *Brigade Management Manual*, D17-D19.

⁶¹⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶²⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶²¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶²² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶²³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

There was also commentary about leaders' capacity to address these issues, "[l]eaders are under-resourced. There's no fluidity in leadership to work out how [to] improve systems – they don't have time; they're too busy."⁶²⁴

The Review Team has been cognisant of these broader systems issues when considering the issues raised in relation to CFA's issues management processes. Stakeholders indicated their lack of trust in the issues management process. A number of concerns were raised about the existing system and processes including:

- lack of timeliness and ownership of claims management
- recrimination and victimisation towards complainants
- lack of independence and confidentiality
- inconsistency and concerns around procedural fairness
- lack of communication and transparency
- lack of support provided to complainants.

Many of these issues have a long history and precede reforms to the complaints management system and the introduction of CFA's new Interim Behavioural Standards and Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines. For example, the Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review in 2015 found CFA's claim management processes to be lacking: Consistent stories of claims regarding poor or bullying behaviour being badly managed. In some instances, this was due to a lack of skills or lack of interest on the part of the responsible manager. In others, it was due to a lack of authority of the responsible manager, irrespective of how willing, to take any real, positive steps towards resolution. And in others, it was a case of the matter being handed up the line with no one taking any responsibility to address the issue or maintain communication with the complainant.⁶²⁵

The 2015 Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review also noted barriers to raising issues in the first instance. The Review heard that it can be difficult for women in the fire services to raise certain issues, particularly regarding behaviour towards them, and that the reprisals for doing so were often worse than the original offence. The same was said for those who were being bullied or excluded. Women and men in the fire services reported that women must work twice as hard to achieve the same level of acceptance as men. The Review also heard instances of sexual harassment and threatening behaviour. Other women indicated that they have not been targeted but that "you just had to keep your head down and get on with it."⁶²⁶

A confidential report commissioned by CFA highlighted the following problems resulting from 'silos' in both policy and the organisation for different types of complaints: "The same issue spawns multiple complaint handling processes at different times and in different silos of the organisation, complainants and affected persons don't know or understand the status or progress of the complaint, and front line managers don't take responsibility for management of complaints in part because the task of categorising and tracking what is happening to the complaint is perceived as too hard or risky."⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶²⁵ O'Byrne, D., (2015). *Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review, Drawing a line, building stronger services*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶²⁶ O'Byrne, D., (2015). *Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review, Drawing a line, building stronger services*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶²⁷ Confidential report commissioned by CFA

These reviews were undertaken prior to the Fire Services Reform but an understanding of these issues is important for understanding views that may still be held, and for understanding the context of recent changes introduced by CFA to improve issues management.

7.4.1 Current state of complaint processes at CFA

The 2020/21 FSIM Annual Report noted that CFA has “decentralised and allocated additional human resources capability to the Regions.”⁶²⁸ This includes the appointment of HR Business Partners (HRBPs) in the Regions. The report noted that this change “saw a reduction in the number of recorded complaints, reduced the time to resolve complaints, and enabled CFA to conclude several longstanding investigations.” At least one stakeholder reflected that the HRBPs were a positive initiative, noting “a step forward is to have HR Business Partners invested in the Region”.⁶²⁹

The VFBV has noted that it had formed a small working party to liaise with CFA management out of session on issues relating to the complaints process and management, “[t]his working group will provide information gleaned directly from volunteers involved in complaint matters both as complainants and respondents. It is hoped this information will further influence change and drive more timely policy around the complaints process in the future.”⁶³⁰

In recognition of the backlog of complaints and impacts on those affected by delays in resolving issues, CFA brought in additional case management support. An external law firm has been engaged to manage historical ‘legacy’ cases.⁶³¹

[Figure 19: CFA Complaints Management](#) below, which was provided to the Review Team by CFA, outlines the progress that has been made in complaints management at CFA since September 2020. Between September 2020 and February 2022, on average 8.8 cases were opened per month with the lowest number of cases opened being 1 per month and the highest number being 28 per month.⁶³²

⁶²⁸ FSIM. (2021). *Fire Services Implementation Monitor Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/fire-services-implementation-monitor-annual-report-2020-21/>. pg. 8.

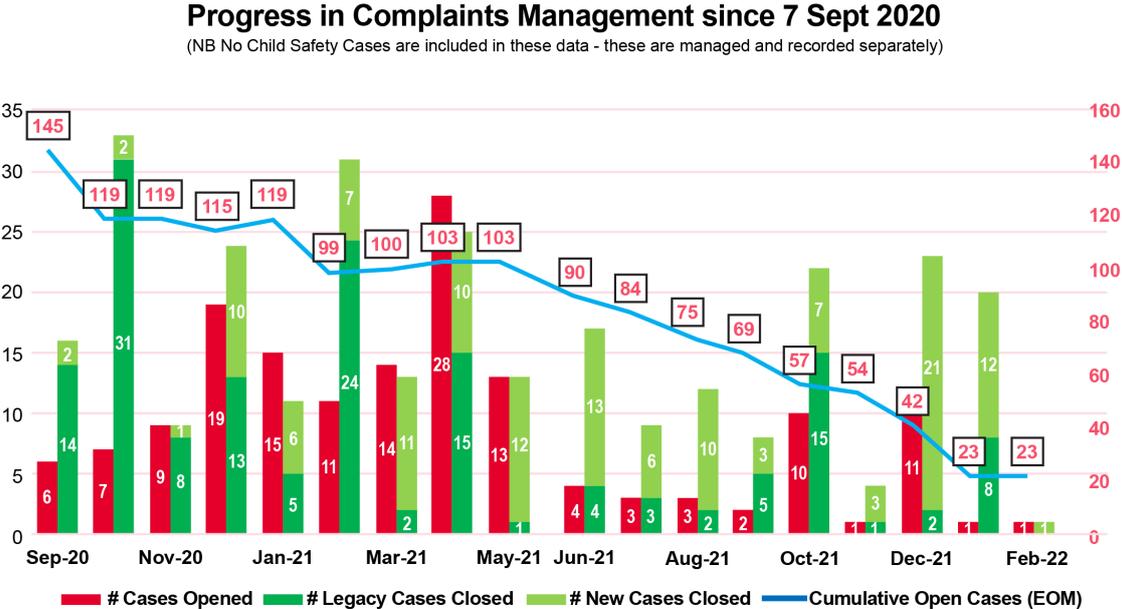
⁶²⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶³⁰ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement September 2021*. Retrieved from: http://www.vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202109-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_September2021-web.pdf pg. 12.

⁶³¹ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement September 2021*. Retrieved from: http://www.vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202109-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_September2021-web.pdf pg.12.

⁶³² Information provided by CFA, March 2022

Figure 19: CFA Complaints Management



The progress made in complaints management at CFA reflects the significant effort invested by CFA leadership in developing initiatives to better support CFA into the future. Notwithstanding this, there is room for further improvement as it will take time to rebuild confidence in new policies and processes, and a number of issues with the complaints management process remain. An outline of these issues is provided below.

To support a positive workplace culture, it is important for organisations to foster a safe environment where people are encouraged to raise concerns. In the 2021 People Matter Survey,⁶³³ which relates to staff at CFA and was conducted following the Fire Services Reform:

-  28% of respondents agreed with the statement ‘I am confident that if I raised a grievance in my organisation, it would be investigated in a thorough and objective manner’, (in 2019,⁶³⁴ 30% of respondents agreed with the statement)
-  44% of respondents reported being confident that they would be protected from reprisal for reporting improper conduct⁶³⁵ (in 2019, 33% of respondents agreed with the statement).

Of those respondents who had experienced bullying in the last 12 months only 51% told a manager, 18% told the person the behaviour was not OK and 10% submitted a formal complaint. Of those who did not submit a formal complaint, 64% said this was because they believed there would be negative consequences for their reputation, 61% did not think it would

⁶³³ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

⁶³⁴ The 2019 People Matter survey was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform. 601 CFA employees (48 % of applicable staff) completed the 2019 People Matter Survey. CFA’s 2018-19 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 2772 staff members and 54,621 volunteers.

⁶³⁵ CFA. (2021) *2021 People Matter Survey Results PowerPoint presentation*. Retrieved from CFA.

make a difference, 45% believed there would be negative consequences for their career and 28% did not feel safe to report the incident.

Only 11% of those who had reported experiencing sexual harassment submitted a formal complaint.⁶³⁶ These trends are seen more broadly in society, where sexual harassment continues to be pervasive, under-reported, poorly understood in workplaces, with its corrosive and traumatic impacts not adequately recognised.⁶³⁷

Of those who reported experiencing discrimination, 30% told a manager, 28% did not tell anyone, 10% submitted a formal complaint. Of those who did not submit a formal complaint, 71% believed there would be negative consequences for their reputation, 58% did not think it would make a difference, 58% believed there would be negative consequences for their career and 31% did not feel safe to report the incident.

Of those who reported they had experienced workplace violence and/or aggression, 55% told a manager, 5% submitted a formal incident report, and 15% did not tell anyone about the incident.⁶³⁸

7.4.2 Feedback from stakeholders about raising concerns

Stakeholders shared their personal experiences of the complaints process with the Review Team. Some were deeply hurt by the process and its impacts. Recent changes introduced by CFA and the significant investments made to improve the process were not yet well understood or bedded down by most members consulted by the Review Team.

The Review Team received mixed responses when stakeholders were asked if they were encouraged to raise issues. Some felt “there is an encouragement not to complain”⁶³⁹ and “it’s a culture of suck it up [rather than making complaints].”⁶⁴⁰ Some attributed these issues to the chain of command structure in place at CFA, noting that “there needs to be a separate complaints structure, so you don’t have to go through local chains of command.”⁶⁴¹ Many stakeholders were concerned about the related difficulties with making a complaint about a manager. One stakeholder described that “it’s a big no-no to make a complaint against your line manager – if you do, then your career is sabotaged.”⁶⁴² Another noted that, “everything gets pushed, and you can’t go to the person above. If you have issues with the person you are reporting to where do you go? It’s a small organisation and people talk. What happens then?”⁶⁴³

When looking at the complaint process as a whole, stakeholders tended to feel that victims would not be supported: “I would personally be very fearful to be making any sort of complaint. I think that our systems have certainly let down a lot of staff in the past. I know that there has been work going on to make those processes better and I think that there is probably a fair way to go. I don’t think any of my peers and not even myself would understand the process

⁶³⁶ CFA. (2021). *2021 People Matter Survey Results PowerPoint presentation*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶³⁷ Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf>. pg. 7.

⁶³⁸ CFA. (2021). *2021 People Matter Survey Results PowerPoint presentation*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶³⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁴⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁴¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁴² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁴³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

even now”⁶⁴⁴. Another stakeholder said: “A victim should never have to feel they’ll be treated differently as a result of standing up and fighting for what is right... We have a tendency to lean towards victim blaming rather than victim assuring and supporting.”⁶⁴⁵ One stakeholder also said: “...there’s no way I would make a complaint, not in a million years – my life would be miserable, it’s bad enough now.”⁶⁴⁶

A safe environment in which to raise issues is also required for encouraging bystander intervention. In relation to bystander intervention, the Review Team heard a view about “[m]ale culture, they don’t want to dob on their buddies.”⁶⁴⁷ Another said, “[t]he CFA has good values; people are aware of them; more people are prepared to speak up where the values aren’t being displayed. I don’t speak up every time I see bad behaviour as sometimes it’s too deep.”⁶⁴⁸ Further, one stakeholder highlighted: “people who agitate for change often end up with the targets on their backs...I have really limited faith in the processes that exist”.⁶⁴⁹

Enabling and supporting people to intervene when they observe misconduct can make a contribution to effective culture change across an organisation. However, sensitivity also needs to be given to the wishes of the victim-survivor including that their experience is not disclosed unwillingly or that they are not put at the centre of an investigation that they did not choose, or which was unnecessary.⁶⁵⁰

7.4.3 Timeliness and effectiveness of complaint resolution

Following the Fire Services Reform, in 2020, the VFBV noted “an urgent need to improve the investigative process immediately which in VFBV’s view is often cruel, punitive and drawn out, leaving volunteers distressed and feeling unwelcomed at their Brigade.”⁶⁵¹ The VFBV Quarterly Supplement of March 2021 identified that issues regarding timeliness, support of volunteers and communication with volunteers throughout the complaints process have been “major stumbling blocks for CFA and some volunteers have been left for months, even years without support, feedback or progress reports on their case.”⁶⁵² The quarterly issue did however note that in many other cases volunteers felt heard, respected, and given sufficient time through the complaints process.

The September 2021 edition of the VFBV Quarterly Supplement reported the complaints process timeframes are a continual challenge for CFA.⁶⁵³ This was echoed by stakeholders spoken to by the Review Team who felt that while new frameworks and systems are being put in place, matters are not currently handled in a timely fashion.

⁶⁴⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁴⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁴⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁴⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁴⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁴⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁵⁰ Champions of Change.. (2021). *Disrupting the System: Preventing and responding to sexual harassment in the workplace*. Retrieved from: <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/resource/disrupting-the-system/>. pg. 54.

⁶⁵¹ VFBV. (2020). *2 Minute Briefings December 2020*. Retrieved from: https://www.vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/2MinBriefings/202012-2MinuteBriefingPackage_December2020.pdf. pg. 5.

⁶⁵² VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement March 2021*. Retrieved from: https://www.vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202103-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_March2021.pdf. pg. 12.

⁶⁵³ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement September 2021*. Retrieved from: https://www.vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202109-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_September2021-web.pdf. pg. 12.

Many stakeholders shared experiences of complaints that have continued for a number of years with no resolution, “holding people responsible for their actions is really, really, complex. Some of this stuff goes on for ever because making it stop is impossible.”⁶⁵⁴ One stakeholder said that the “CFA doesn’t deal with the issues, and they prolong it and stretch it out until it gets forgotten about or people leave the organisation”⁶⁵⁵, with another reflecting that “justice delayed is justice denied”⁶⁵⁶ and one simply stating that “processes are slow and silent”.⁶⁵⁷

Stakeholders noted several reasons for the delays including staff turnover, lack of process around complaints management, and complaints being handed on to other people. The Review Team heard about the detrimental impacts of these delays, “CFA often drags things out for months or years until the mental health of the person is so damaged that they leave, and then the matter is closed.”⁶⁵⁸

7.4.4 Independence of processes

When asked what the systems and processes for handling bullying were like, one stakeholder noted that “[t]hey are there. You are freely told to do it, but why would you when you have no trust in the people that deliver it?”⁶⁵⁹

Reasons for having limited trust included a perception that those in the complaint management system may be friends with, or the person, the complaint is about. The Review Team notes similar concerns may have prompted participants of Volunteer Exit Surveys to suggest (prior to the Fire Services Reform) that complaints should be dealt with independently and not by people at the District/Region (July 2019-December 2019).⁶⁶⁰

In June 2021, the VFBV Quarterly Supplement also noted the VFBV’s continued advocacy with the Government for the establishment of a dedicated Volunteer Ombudsman for CFA discipline process, but that this issue was at an impasse. In the meantime, delegates have agreed to continue to pursue procedural improvements to the current system.⁶⁶¹ The VFBV has also previously suggested that as a measure of the level of expertise and professionalism of both internal and external investigators, volunteers should be provided with the opportunity to comment on the investigator and the interview as part of the Customer Service Survey.⁶⁶²

Learnings from other organisations

In March 2020, FENZ established the Behaviour and Conduct Office. The office is a self-contained team accountable for proactively setting standards, providing education, data and intelligence to prevent unwanted behaviour as well as manage all stages of the complaints process. The resolution

⁶⁵⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁵⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁵⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁵⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁵⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁵⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁶⁰ 136 of 1407 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2019 – 31 December 2019, which was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform.

⁶⁶¹ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement June 2021*. Retrieved from: http://vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202106-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_June2021-web.pdf. pg. 12.

⁶⁶² VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement March 2021*. Retrieved from: https://www.vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202103-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_March2021.pdf. pg. 12.

Learnings from other organisations

stage is split with the Behaviour and Conduct Office or external investigator conducting the investigation. Any external allocation must be to a suitably-qualified external investigator based on agreed and consistent criteria. The respondent's manager will conduct the resulting action e.g., disciplinary process or performance management, with oversight from the Behaviour and Conduct Office and support from HR in the People branch.⁶⁶³

Stakeholders expressed their concern about the lack of confidentiality throughout the complaints process, particularly at the local level. Examples were shared of experiences where Brigade members were informed of complaints made against them. Members had “really limited faith in the processes that exist. That those queries and concerns will make it to the right people.”⁶⁶⁴ One stakeholder suggested that the “CFA leaks like a sieve as far as confidential processes go”⁶⁶⁵, while another described the organisation as having “a strong culture of gossip”.⁶⁶⁶

One of the consequences of a perceived lack of confidentiality is fear of recrimination, further bullying or a counter complaint being lodged. Stakeholders said, “As soon as a victim speaks out, that's it for them. They are called out and victimised even further. They either have to cop it or move on.”⁶⁶⁷ Other stakeholders highlighted fear of recrimination: “Uncertainty whether I can trust everybody that I speak to. If we raised something, perhaps that would be used against us somehow”⁶⁶⁸; and “People are afraid to call out behaviour because it will come back and bite them.”⁶⁶⁹

After describing a man's repeated sexualised comments towards her, a stakeholder noted “I am concerned that this behaviour will continue and that I will need to avoid contact with him to protect myself from these kinds of incidents with this person. I feel also embarrassed to be in this situation and am concerned about how he might respond if he knows that I have said something.”⁶⁷⁰

These comments echo the findings of the 2021 People Matter Survey⁶⁷¹ (applying to staff and conducted following the Fire Services Reform), with many members spoken to indicating a reluctance to lodge a complaint as “people fear retribution”.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶³ Fire and Emergency New Zealand. (2022). *Permanent Behaviour and Conduct Office*. Retrieved from <https://portal.fireandemergency.nz/projects-and-programmes/positive-workplace-culture/permanent-behaviour-and-conduct-office-bco/>

⁶⁶⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁶⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁶⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁶⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁶⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁶⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁷⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁷¹ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey. CFA's 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

⁶⁷² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

7.4.5 Consistency and procedural fairness

In relation to the investigative process, the VFBV noted that delegates have requested that the guiding principles of consistency and fairness, and treating everybody with dignity and respect, be implemented immediately. This will mitigate and minimise any further distress and possible harm to volunteers.⁶⁷³

The Review Team also heard commentary around inconsistency of practice, with one stakeholder concluding that “the only [thing] that is consistent [about the complaints process] is that it is inconsistent”.⁶⁷⁴ Interviewees suggested that complaints are handled differently depending on who receives them, lodges them, and is the subject of them.

Stakeholders also expressed concerns to the Review Team about the possible outcomes of complaint processes, noting common outcomes included standing people down or suspensions, moving someone to a new role or area, or for the issue to remain unresolved.

Many stakeholders referred to incidents where they had seen people stood down or suspended from service while the complaint was being handled. Several stakeholders raised concerns around the length of their suspension and the delays involved in the process. There was a sense that in some instances people should be stood down or suspended, but that the way this measure was currently being used was inappropriate. Members made comments such as, “Sometimes I wonder if our standard practice of standing people down gets used in the wrong way.”⁶⁷⁵ While another noted that, “The only faith I have is that I know if I reported it that person would be suspended. It’s guilty until proven innocent. It can be devastating if you’re innocent ... the process is wrong that we can have a discussion and that suspension is automatic.”⁶⁷⁶

Barriers to communication and transparency of process and outcomes are a challenge. In 2019, the following recommendations were made to CFA in relation to improving the effectiveness and suitability of the complaint handling process, much of which has been reflected in stakeholder comments in this Review:

- a single, plain English, updated policy and procedure for inappropriate and unreasonable behaviour
- clarity about responsibility for the management of complaints and inappropriate and unreasonable behaviour
- establishing benchmarks for the management of complaints
- changes to the culture surrounding the management of inappropriate and unreasonable behaviour.⁶⁷⁷

The Review Team heard that there was a general lack of awareness of what CFA complaint processes looked like. Stakeholders commented that “I wouldn’t even know how to access the complaint system”⁶⁷⁸ and “I don’t think the processes are known or shared, or accessible.”⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷³ VFBV. (2020). *2 Minute Briefings December 2020*. Retrieved from: https://www.vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/2MinBriefings/202012-2MinuteBriefingPackage_December2020.pdf, pg. 5.

⁶⁷⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁷⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁷⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁷⁷ Confidential report commissioned by CFA (2019)

⁶⁷⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁷⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

The several policies and procedures available on CFA intranet has contributed to the confusion felt by members. One stakeholder indicated: “the first thing I did was to look at the procedure...I ended up with 5 [procedures on the same topic]...I was given 2 that were marked ‘under review’”⁶⁸⁰.

Stakeholders also felt that communication of the complaint process and outcomes were inadequate. Several stakeholders shared experiences of raising a complaint and it just being ‘lost’ or passed along, “our systems are terrible at following through.”⁶⁸¹ One member questioned that if people can’t see how complaints are being handled “what’s to stop them from pushing it under the rug and pretending it didn’t happen?”⁶⁸² Another urged “we need transparency and accountability.”⁶⁸³

Lack of meaningful action and transparency reduced people’s confidence in the system. One stakeholder commented that “if it is something very serious, we are so slow. We don’t deal with things in a timely manner, and when we do deal with them, 80% of the time it is swept under a rug.”⁶⁸⁴ Another simply said, “at face value, CFA doesn’t resolve problems, it moves them.”⁶⁸⁵ Another stakeholder commented “I think what CFA should be doing is that they should be publicising how many complaints they get. How many are there from years ago, how many have [come] in recently. We need transparency”⁶⁸⁶.

The importance of transparent complaints data has been widely recognised. The AHRC’s Guideline for Preventing and Responding to Workplace Sexual Harassment states that employers must be “transparent about trends, patterns and lessons with workers, boards and key stakeholders and ensure they have confidence that sexual harassment is being eliminated in their workplace. This requires visibility of the steps employers take to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and information about the success or failure of those steps.”⁶⁸⁷

In the report on Preventing and Responding to sexual harassment in the workplace, Champions of Change also identify the need for some transparency and disclosure to employees, stakeholders and the community (balanced against confidentiality requirements).⁶⁸⁸ The report observes that transparency about the “prevalence of sexual harassment in a workplace...first and foremost sends a clear signal about the standards of behaviour that will be accepted. It also shines a light on sexual harassment and supports close examination of lessons from specific cases and the culture and standards which are either driving or enabling the behaviour.”⁶⁸⁹ The report further notes that this approach rebuilds confidence as people know that issues are taken seriously.

⁶⁸⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁸¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁸² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁸³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁸⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁸⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁸⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁸⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Guideline – Preventing and Responding to Workplace Sexual Harassment*. Retrieved from https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/static/8070e6b04cd51969490ccdecddff0c00/Resource-Guidelines-Workplace_sexual_harassment-Aug20.pdf. pg. 95.

⁶⁸⁸ Champions of Change. (2021). *Disrupting the System: Preventing and responding to sexual harassment in the workplace*. Retrieved from: <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/resource/disrupting-the-system/>. pg.54.

⁶⁸⁹ Champions of Change. (2021). *Disrupting the System: Preventing and responding to sexual harassment in the workplace*. Retrieved from: <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/resource/disrupting-the-system/>. p.42.

Learnings from other organisations

Essex Police provides an example of an organisation that has implemented strong public accountability mechanisms through public and statutory reporting. The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner publishes quarterly reports on Essex Police conduct matters reported by members of the public.⁶⁹⁰ Reporting includes analysis of the complaint category, timeliness and outcomes of complaints, misconduct and other matters processed by the Professional Standards Department. A Statutory Duty Report also publishes information on the number of public complaints made and the gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and disability status of complainants to support analysis by complainant profiles and identification of discrimination and systemic issues. These reports also include information on internal grievances being raised within Essex Police.⁶⁹¹ In addition to these consolidated reports, Essex Police publish outcomes of investigations relating to individual misconduct.⁶⁹²

A victim-centric complaints process at CFA requires clear communication and clarity of process and outcomes. A tool akin to the professionalism pyramid developed by the Vanderbilt Center for Patient and Professional Advocacy could assist to provide this transparency. The tool is often used to address sexual misconduct in the workplace and supports in providing clarity of processes and outcomes.⁶⁹³ By way of example, if applied to CFA, the pyramid may reflect that at [Figure 20](#) below.

⁶⁹⁰ Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex. (2022). *Essex Police Performance*. Retrieved from <https://www.essex.pfcc.police.uk/finance-reporting/conduct-professional-standards/>

⁶⁹¹ Essex Police. (2021). *Equality and Diversity*. Retrieved from <https://www.essex.police.uk/police-forces/essex-police/areas/essex-police/au/about-us/equality-and-diversity/>

⁶⁹² Essex Police. (2021). *Published items*. Retrieved from <https://www.essex.police.uk/foi-ai/af/accessing-information/published-items/?q=&dt=Misconduct+outcome>

⁶⁹³ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_wsh_report_2020.pdf pg. 691.

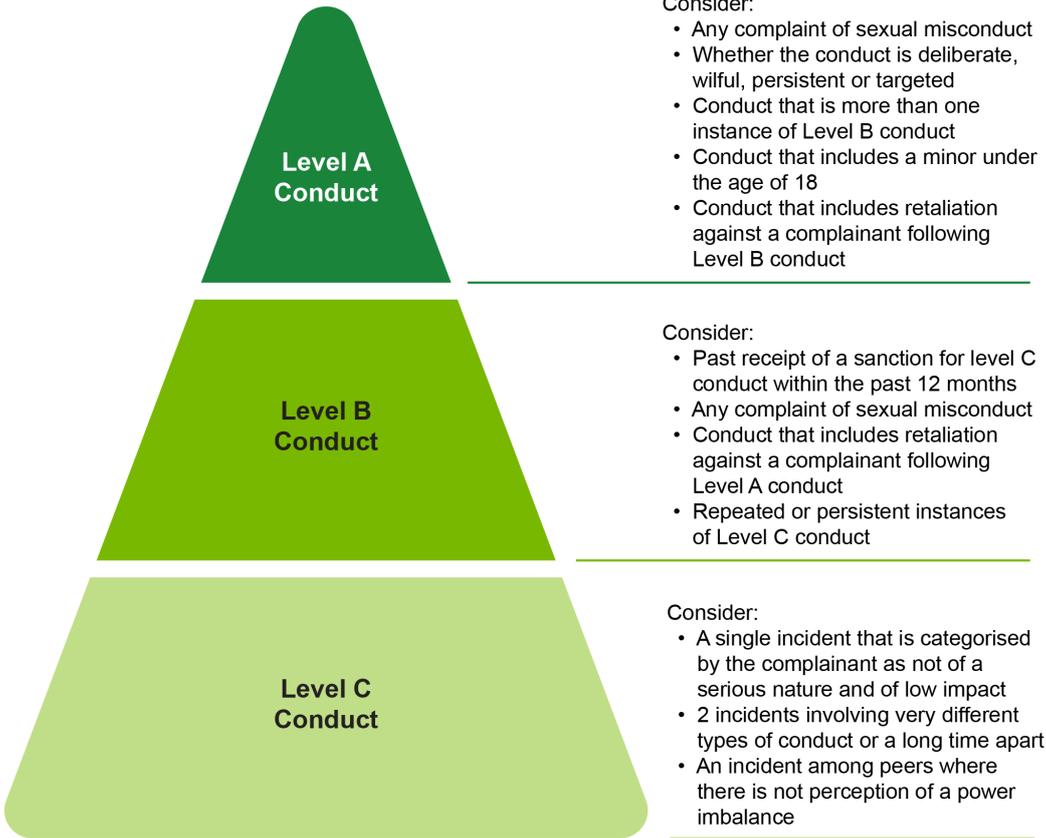
Figure 20: Vanderbilt Professionalism Pyramid applied to CFA⁶⁹⁴

The below framework is a guide and not determinative. The act that gives rise to a complaint may be level C conduct for one complainant and Level A conduct for another complainant. The assessment of conduct will always turn on the facts and merits of each unique case. Penalties that sit under each level will vary depending on whether the respondent is a staff member or volunteer.

Regardless of the level of conduct, decisions should:

- Be victim-centred and trauma-informed and consider the impact on the complainant and the complainant’s wishes and safety
- Consider the power imbalance between the complainant and the respondent

- Not take into consideration the rank or seniority of the respondent
- Be informed by proportionality of response to the proposed action
- Hold the respondent to account for their behaviour
- Consider the CFA’s duty of care
- Be consistent with decisions made in previous cases
- Sanction wrong doing and aim for behavioural change
- Be made as promptly as possible
- Consider the level of insight provided by the respondent into the behaviour



⁶⁹⁴ Source: Adapted from Hickson G.B., et. al.: A complementary approach to promoting professionalism: Identifying, measuring, and addressing unprofessional behaviors. *Acad Med* 82:1040-1048, Nov. 2007. Used with permission.

7.4.6 Organisational support and training for leaders on handling concerns/complaints

Under CFA's current complaints framework, members are encouraged to resolve issues locally. CFA assists its leaders to respond to workplace issues and manage wellbeing through various supports:

- 'Responding to Inappropriate Behaviours Guide' that outlines a hierarchy of responsibility for addressing inappropriate behaviours in Brigades and groups and provides guidance as to which issues leaders are expected to report immediately, and which issues are expected to be managed locally.
- 'Duty of Care and Legal Requirements Checklist' for Leaders for Mental Health, which provides behavioural and other guidance, and provides steps to follow in the case of a mental health disclosure.
- 'Managing Conflict Tip Sheet' which explains the possible causes of conflict and provides guidance on how to address it in constructive ways.

Despite such assistance, a range of stakeholders did not feel assured that those handling complaints were equipped to do so. This does not appear to be a new issue, with the 2015 Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review making the following recommendation in recognition of the harmful effects of failing to address complaints properly and promptly: 'That Brigade leaders and their immediate supervisors be provided with clear processes and tools to deal professionally, expeditiously and compassionately with instances of bullying and poor behaviour and be supported in doing so. A clear, alternative mechanism should be established, and communicated to all members, for when matters cannot be handled locally.'⁶⁹⁵

One stakeholder noted that "I don't know what training leaders have had. The impression is that they don't have the HR skills. Lots of experience there. Most of them are very, very good but they need HR stuff."⁶⁹⁶ Similarly, another stakeholder said, "I'm not assured that there is a solid application of the knowledge of how to have a hard conversation in an appropriate manner. I'm also not necessarily sure that all management have the same level of understanding of what is appropriate or what's not, or being able to look at circumstances from someone else's perspective".⁶⁹⁷ This is consistent with previous findings from Volunteer Exit Surveys (applying to volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA) which found that the BMT should be trained in people management (July 2019-December 2019, conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform).⁶⁹⁸ The Review team understands that this contributed to the expansion of HR capability in the regions and expansion of mediation services.

Learnings from other organisations

Two comparator organisations have established specific roles to assist the operation of organisational complaint management processes.

Within Essex Police, trained Fairplay Advisers provide guidance to officers and staff around issues of unfairness in the workplace. Fairplay Advisers carry this role out in a voluntary capacity in addition

⁶⁹⁵ O'Byrne, D. (2015). *Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review, Drawing a line, building stronger services*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁶⁹⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁹⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁶⁹⁸ 136 of 1407 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2019 – 31 December 2019, which was conducted prior to the Fire Services Reform.

Learnings from other organisations

to their paid role. The Fairplay Adviser role offers a pathway for someone unsure about how to access support mechanisms. Essex Police's goal is to increase the number of Fairplay Advisers to ensure coverage across the county. Fairplay Advisers are trained to direct officers and staff to the appropriate procedure to enable early resolution of their concern and to offer support in sensitive cases of potentially unlawful or unfair treatment, discrimination, bullying and harassment. On-going training and support are provided to the Fairplay Advisers by the HR Strategy team and best practice is shared across the network of Fairplay Advisers to provide a consistent approach and response.⁶⁹⁹

Within Life Saving Victoria, Member Protection Officers (MPOs) are a volunteer role within a club. MPOs receive training in member protection matters and procedures responsible for supporting member protection and wellbeing. MPOs are trained to investigate and manage complaints and moderate mediation conferences. Their primary role includes:

- Provision of confidential support and assistance to other members who wish to raise a concern or grievance, or who have had a grievance lodged against them.
- Provision of triage; acting as initial contact for members; their role is to prioritise actions, needs and urgency based on assessed risk, need and grievance/complaint.
- Investigation and management of complaints and moderation of mediation conferences or referring such matters to appropriate persons.
- Provision of support and education around safeguarding children to other members.
- Referring matters to Life Saving Victoria and/or police as outlined in Member Protection Policy.⁷⁰⁰

7.4.7 Misuse of complaints system or unreasonable complaints

Throughout the Review, concerns were raised about vexatious use of the complaints system, or the complaints system being used to achieve an ulterior motive. Stakeholders raised concerns about complaints being made through CFA as a mechanism to resolve complaints that related to conduct that had occurred outside CFA and to undermine the reputation of CFA.

While research from the health sector suggests that vexatious complaints are rare – comprising no more than 1% of complaints⁷⁰¹ - a good complaint process should reflect the statutory prohibition on victimisation and seek to protect members from vexatious and malicious complaints.⁷⁰² Consistent with this, CFA's Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines refer to frivolous or vexatious complaints, noting that: 'Complaints that CFA assesses to be false, frivolous or vexatious will be dismissed and may result in potential action against the complainant. A frivolous complaint is one which is petty or minor, that does not have any serious purpose or value, or that is otherwise not worthy of serious attention. A vexatious complaint is one that is not based on an honestly held opinion or that is made for an ulterior purpose, including a complaint that is raised without merit to cause inconvenience, upset, annoyance, frustration or worry to the person(s) against whom it is made, or to CFA.'

⁶⁹⁹ Kent Police. (2019). *Grievance Protocol*. Retrieved from <https://www.kent.police.uk/foi-ai/kent-police/Policy/human-resources/grievance-protocol-11420/>

⁷⁰⁰ Life Saving Victoria. (n.d.) *Member Welfare*. Retrieved from: <https://lsv.com.au/clubs-members/support/member-welfare/>

⁷⁰¹ Centre for Health Policy. (2017). *Reducing, identifying and managing vexatious complaints*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ahpra.gov.au/Notifications/How-we-manage-concerns/Vexatious-notifications.aspx> pg. 8.

⁷⁰² Australian Human Rights Commission. (2014). *Good practice guidelines for internal complaint processes*. Retrieved from: https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/GPGB_good_practice_guidelines_0.pdf

Further, the Interim Behavioural Standards also emphasise that the making of knowingly false, frivolous or vexatious complaints may constitute misconduct, serious misconduct and/or disgraceful or improper conduct and a breach of duties owed to CFA. The roll out of these documents is still in its early phases and it is too early to tell whether they have had an impact on the use of the complaints system for ulterior motives.

In addition to vexatious complaints, the Review Team heard concerns about people making complaints about minor issues, about people making multiple or persistent complaints in relation to the same, or related conduct. In one stakeholder's words: "...trivial complaints, as I said, I think that some people have been advised to throw as many complaints in as they can because it's a weight of numbers thing rather than a validity. I think that the validity of complaints needs to be investigated, which is another reason as to why I think there should be a specialist team."⁷⁰³

Acknowledging these concerns, a victim centric complaints process requires victims/survivors to be treated fairly and without judgement. As reflected by the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service, just because a [person] demonstrates unreasonable conduct, it does not mean their complaint or issue does not warrant further review.⁷⁰⁴ In circumstances of unreasonable complainant conduct, options regarding the timing and methods of interaction could be considered to ensure a balance between fairness and complainant support, and the health and safety of those managing the complaint and resourcing demands.

Noting that under-reporting, as opposed to excessive or unnecessary reporting, is typically a larger problem in terms of both magnitude and impact, it is important that any approach to managing unreasonable behaviour does not adversely impact trust and confidence in the complaints system.

⁷⁰³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁰⁴ Parliamentary Workplaces Support Service. (2021). *Vexatious, frivolous and unreasonable complaints policy*. Retrieved from <https://pwss.gov.au/resources/vexatious-frivolous-unreasonable-complaints-policy>

7.5. Concluding comments on systems and processes for issues management

Whilst significant inroads have been made in relation to improving systems and processes for issues management, these systems are still being bedded down. This lack of robust systems and processes for addressing and managing issues at CFA has contributed to a lack of organisational trust and confidence amongst members to raise concerns relating to bullying, harassment and discrimination. The Strategy and Outcomes Framework which supports the implementation of the Fire Services Reform notes the importance of systems and processes in ensuring a great place to volunteer and work. Since Fire Services Reform, CFA has invested significant efforts in improving systems and processes for issues management most notably through the Right Environment initiatives which includes Interim Behavioural Standards and Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines, and through a concerted effort to deal with the backlog of issues lodged as formal complaints. The backlog of 'legacy complaints' has now largely been resolved, yet this does not seem to be understood nor accepted by many members.

Currently, there are still identified delays, significant communication gaps and inconsistency in the application of processes across the organisation in addressing and managing issues. Processes for managing formal complaints have historically been slow and inconsistent and these processes have at times been opaque and inconsistently applied. The investment in Right Environment initiatives must be built on to drive a continuous improvement in complaints processes and to regain confidence and trust.

Stakeholders who talked to the Review team, whilst small in number relative to the membership of CFA, often seemed unaware of the existing complaints system and processes, including new processes that had been implemented. Greater communication from leadership is required to bed down these changes. There is likely to be a lack of confidence in the implementation of new systems and processes and in change management expertise across the organisation.

How disclosures are made at CFA in the future must build trust, and this requires an understanding across all members of how confidentiality is protected, how members can be protected from fear of recrimination and confidence must be built in how misconduct will be addressed. The provision of pastoral care and support to both respondents and complainants during the complaints process must also be consistently applied and understood. Enabling and supporting a safe environment in which to raise issues is critical to support bystander intervention, and to broader cultural change and will need to be central to CFA's journey to improving systems and processes.

Whilst incremental improvements have been made, there continue to be challenges to procedural fairness in addressing issues when they arise includes issues relating to timeliness, impartiality, transparency and power imbalances as well as barriers to confidentiality of process and disclosures. This has led to a culture of silence, lack of bystander intervention and a perception that reporting could lead to political repercussions, recrimination and victimisation – all of which will make further reforms from this Review challenging.

The Review Team also identified concerns relating to the overly legalistic and formal manner in which conflicts were sought to be resolved. Many volunteers consulted by the Review Team sought increased involvement in decision-making processes relating to their peers. The Review Team also identified challenges with the existing legislative and regulatory framework as they relate to complaints processes and dispute resolution.

There were also concerns raised about the way in which the complaints system was sometimes misused. Stakeholders raised concerns around the vexatious use of the complaints process (including the suspension process and counter complaints) with some stakeholders indicating that the process was being used to achieve personal gains, political gains or for ulterior purposes. There were also concerns raised about the complaints management process being used by complainants to persistently lodge the same complaint multiple times to frustrate processes and divert resources.

To support cultural change and restore trust, the systems and processes at CFA must provide consistency, transparency, timeliness, accountability, procedural fairness and continual improvement. Where appropriate, members should also be empowered to manage and address complaints locally, and to understand the appropriate mechanism for escalating certain complaints. Since 1 July 2020, CFA has committed significant investment to restoring faith in its own systems and processes. The investment of leadership in managing this change has been apparent to the Review Team, evidenced by their initiation of this Review and their continued involvement and availability to the Review Team. This has been complemented by the design and implementation of a range of initiatives since the establishment of the Fire Services Reform including:

- bringing additional resourcing into the organisation from an external law firm to assist in closing out legacy matters
- the development of improved guidelines for the management of complaints
- expansion of mediation services across the State to support early intervention when issues arise
- reviewing support to BMTs to ensure a clear understanding of CFA expectations of volunteer leaders in addressing behavioural matters and the assistance available to them when matters do arise
- the identification of additional support to organisational leaders at all levels to ensure a clear understanding of CFA expectations of staff leaders in proactively addressing behavioural matters and the assistance available to them when matters do arise
- provision of more prominent and visible information about where CFA members can raise issues of concern, both internally and externally.

This investment is the beginning of CFA's journey to restoring trust and to developing a system that supports its members in a confidential, victim-centred, trauma-informed and safe way.

8. PREVENTION OF HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION AND BULLYING

Employers have various legislative responsibilities to maintain a safe workplace without risks to psychological and physical health and safety, so far as is reasonably practicable. These employment standards are consistent with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement which establish an expectation that the health, safety, and wellbeing of volunteers will be protected in the workplace.⁷⁰⁵

To ensure that CFA is a ‘great place to volunteer and work,’⁷⁰⁶ as outlined in its Strategy and Outcomes Framework; and to provide a safe and supportive environment it is critical to prevent bullying, harassment and discrimination from taking place at any level. Clear, consistent and effective prevention initiatives will support a positive and inclusive workplace culture based on trust and accountability. The aim of prevention initiatives is to address the risk factors and core drivers which enable misconduct.⁷⁰⁷ This will be achieved by investing in preventing harassment, discrimination and bullying from occurring at any level of CFA and when they do occur, responding quickly and effectively to incidents and ensuring that those who engage in those behaviours are held to account – and met with meaningful consequences.

The Strategy and Outcomes Framework prioritises a goal for the organisation to ‘provide a great place to volunteer and work.’⁷⁰⁸ It further acknowledges a requirement to provide every volunteer and member of staff with a safe and supportive environment and commits to a range of actions, including strengthening of processes, systems and tools to identify and manage workplace hazards.

The Independent Review into Workplace Equality in Ambulance Victoria identified that ‘no person, no matter how skilled or passionate, can be happy or effective when working or volunteering in conditions where unlawful or harmful conduct is allowed to flourish or where there is inequality.’⁷⁰⁹ Consistent with this finding, the Report into Workplace Culture at Rio Tinto reflected that psychological safety is a well-established driver of high quality decision making; healthy group dynamics and interpersonal relationships; greater innovation and more effective execution in organisations’.⁷¹⁰ Harm prevention is also efficient; SafeWork South Australia states that ‘the most effective way to stamp out bullying is to stop it before it starts.’⁷¹¹

⁷⁰⁵ Volunteering Australia. (2015). *The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement*. Retrieved from <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material/#/>

⁷⁰⁶ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-2030*. Retrieved from: cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y.pg. 14.

⁷⁰⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2021). *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces*. Retrieved from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/set-standard-2021>.pg. 139.

⁷⁰⁸ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-2030*. Retrieved from: cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y.pg. 14.

⁷⁰⁹ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2021). *Independent Review into Workplace Equality in Ambulance Victoria*. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/legal-and-policy/research-reviews-and-investigations/ambulance-victoria-review/final-report/#:~:text=Ambulance%20Victoria%20has%20engaged%20the, and%20bullying%20in%20the%20organisation>.pg. 107.

⁷¹⁰ Broderick, E., & Co. (2022). *Report into Workplace Culture at Rio Tinto*. Retrieved from <https://www.riotinto.com/-/media/Content/Documents/Sustainability/People/RT-Everyday-respect-report.pdf>.pg. 22.

⁷¹¹ SafeWork South Australia. (n.d.). *Bullying & Inappropriate behaviours*. Retrieved from: <https://www.safework.sa.gov.au/workers/health-and-wellbeing/bullying-and-inappropriate-behaviours>

It is clearly important for organisations to prevent harassment, discrimination, and bullying, including to:

- ensure people are treated with respect
- support the creation of safe workplaces by reducing or stopping workplace harm
- reduce the legal and financial impact of unlawful or harmful conduct on organisations
- support service delivery by enabling members to focus on doing the job they joined the organisation to do.⁷¹² People who work in safe, respectful, diverse and inclusive organisations are more likely to innovate and provide excellent service than those in disrespectful or unsafe workplaces.⁷¹³

8.1. Framework for prevention at CFA

There is a framework for prevention at CFA which consists of longstanding documents as well as new documents aimed at setting a standards and preventing bullying, harassment and discrimination. The application of these documents varies across the workforce.

This table illustrates a range of documents which apply to CFA members, many of which have at their core a basis in the prevention of bullying, harassment and discrimination and a focus on mutual respect.

Table 7: Illustration of prevention initiatives in place at CFA

Volunteer Charter	<p>The Volunteer Charter, signed on 27 February 2011 and amended from time to time, is an agreed commitment by the State of Victoria, CFA and VFBV on behalf of CFA Volunteers to each other. It is enshrined in ss6G and 6H of CFA Act.</p> <p>It sets down key principles for the relationship between the parties, including mutual respect and support; volunteers attempting to resolve differences of opinion internally in the first instance; and CFA nurturing and encouraging volunteers and engaging them in meaningful consultation.</p>
Volunteer Code of Conduct	<p>CFA Volunteer Code of Conduct applies to CFA volunteers.</p> <p>It is a statement of behavioural principles, expectations and ideals,⁷¹⁴ and is intended to reflect how volunteers respect and treat each other as members of CFA and provides an ethos that guides our decision making.</p> <p>The Code of Conduct covers: safety; respect; trust, integrity, honesty and truthfulness; commitment and loyalty; communication; comradeship, teamwork, support and welfare; leadership and discipline; and equity and diversity.</p>
Interim Behavioural Standards	<p>As part of the Right Environment initiatives, CFA recently developed Interim Behavioural Standards which are being socialised across the organisation and</p>

⁷¹² Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2021). *Independent Review into Workplace Equality in Ambulance Victoria*. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/legal-and-policy/research-reviews-and-investigations/ambulance-victoria-review/final-report/#:~:text=Ambulance%20Victoria%20has%20engaged%20the, and%20bullying%20in%20the%20organisation>.

⁷¹³ Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf>

⁷¹⁴ CFA. (n.d.). *CFA Volunteer Code of Conduct*. Retrieved from: https://cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/induction/assets/docs/CodeOfConduct_Volunteer.pdf

apply to all CFA Members, Officers and contractors. The standards can be found in [Appendix 7: CFA Interim Behavioural Standards](#).

Victorian Public Sector Commission Code of Conduct

The Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC) Code of Conduct applies to all CFA staff including CFA Board members and is noted as a requirement in employment, higher duties and promotion offers. It does not apply to CFA volunteers.

The Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees describes the behaviours that exemplify the values contained in the Public Administration Act 2004 (Vic). The Code is designed to help public sector employees understand the responsibilities and obligations of working in the public sector.

Organisational policies

CFA have organisational policies which apply to CFA volunteers and staff. This includes CFA Business Rule: Traditional, Social and Digital Media; and CFA Procedure: Electronic Media Usage.

These documents aim to provide overarching organisational guidance in the use of traditional, social and digital media,⁷¹⁵ as well as standards and principles in relation to the use of media, noting that responsibilities include those under the VPSC Code of Conduct, CFA organisational values, CFA Volunteer Code of Conduct and the Inclusion and Fairness Principles, as outlined in the Inclusion and Fairness business rule. It also provides more specific requirements for media usage, and consequences for breach of the business rule.⁷¹⁶

Supporting material/posters

In addition to more formal instruments, CFA has also mapped acceptable and unacceptable behaviours to CFA values,⁷¹⁷ and prepared a draft guide for responding to inappropriate behaviours which aims to support local resolution.⁷¹⁸

Visual collateral, such as posters, have also been prepared to promote the right workplace behaviours.⁷¹⁹ CFA Brigade Magazine also seeks to promote positive behaviour across the organisation. The magazine is a twice-yearly publication sent to CFA volunteers with a mailing list of approximately 39,000 people. Positive examples in the Brigade Magazine include showcasing the Inclusion and Fairness Team;⁷²⁰ initiatives to support junior members:⁷²¹ peer support initiatives;⁷²² and volunteer recruitment and retention initiatives.⁷²³

⁷¹⁵ CFA. (2019). *CFA Business Rule: Traditional, Social and Digital Media*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷¹⁶ CFA. (2019). *CFA Business Rule: Traditional, Social and Digital Media*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷¹⁷ CFA. (n.d.). *Statement of Expected Behaviours PowerPoint*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷¹⁸ CFA. (n.d.). *Responding to Inappropriate Behaviours Guide (Draft)*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷¹⁹ The No triangles' poster promotes respect and encourages people to speak up and address a person directly and is often used as a model in the Expected Behaviours workshops. CFA. No Triangles Poster. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷²⁰ CFA. (2019). *CFA Brigade News Spring Edition*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/publications/brigade-magazine>. pg. 33.

⁷²¹ CFA. (2019). *CFA Brigade News Spring Edition*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/publications/brigade-magazine>. pg. 77.

⁷²² CFA. (2020). *CFA Brigade News Autumn Edition*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/publications/brigade-magazine>. pg. 45.

⁷²³ CFA. (2021). *CFA Brigade News Autumn Edition*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/publications/brigade-magazine>. pg. 56-57.

8.2. Accountability and transparency in supporting prevention

Various prevention initiatives have been implemented at CFA at varying levels, some at state-wide level and others at Brigade level. State-wide initiatives include organisational policy statements, recruitment and induction processes, training, and preventative measures relating to children. Brigade level initiatives include, for example, alcohol-free fire stations in response to the increased likelihood of bullying and harassment when alcohol is present.

When asked about prevention initiatives, stakeholders recognised good initiatives had started but many had failed to continue. When looking at prevention of harassment, discrimination and bullying at CFA, one stakeholder described, 'I'm not seeing an emphasis on prevention. It's very much reactive'.⁷²⁴

Initiatives were often viewed as siloed, under resourced, or not readily available. Stakeholders had inconsistent awareness of what programs were available indicating that prevention activities were not widely or consistently communicated to members. This reflects previous observations where the Review Team found that while a clear message may be sent at an organisational level, this may not translate into widespread organisational action.

One stakeholder shared a positive experience with the Review Team about the availability of these documents, stating that '[w]e had an incident of a volunteer behaving inappropriately, and the values and code were really helpful because when we confronted the individual, we had something concrete to point to'.⁷²⁵

Other stakeholders identified opportunities for further work to address prevention of bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Within workplaces, it is vital that 'everyone is subject to the same standards and is equally accountable for their actions'.⁷²⁶ One way to establish these standards is through shared policy statements, such as codes of conduct, that set clear expectations as well as processes and sanctions to respond to alleged breaches. To be effective, guiding documents about behaviour and conduct need to be clear and accessible to all members. When stakeholders talked about CFA values to the Review Team, there was a shared sense of purpose and value of protecting the community. However, one stakeholder said 'if I went to my local Brigade, I don't think they could tell me what CFA's values are'.⁷²⁷ One stakeholder noted that CFA currently release guides, leaving it up to the individual Brigade to interpret and manage appropriate conduct. There were also comments made to the Review Team that a clearly articulated prevention framework, which can be easily understood, is crucial.

The recent development of the Interim Behavioural Standards by CFA aims to consolidate and embed expectations in organisational culture (see [Appendix 7](#)). They are also intended to provide a single point of reference for all CFA members. This aligns with work undertaken at other organisations. For example, the Member Protection policy within SLSNSW and LSV provides an example of this approach. This policy sets out a commitment that every person involved in surf lifesaving is treated with respect and dignity and protected from bullying, discrimination, harassment, and abuse. It also seeks to ensure that everyone involved in surf

⁷²⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷²⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷²⁶ Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf>. pg. 58.

⁷²⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

lifesaving is aware of their legal and ethical rights and responsibilities, as well as expected standards of behaviour.⁷²⁸

One stakeholder expressed concern that the Interim Behavioural Standards were too legalistic and would benefit from scenarios which illustrated what is right and wrong.⁷²⁹ Stakeholder consultation for this Review was undertaken by the Review Team at a time when the Behavioural Standards were interim and were in the process of being piloted and communicated across the organisation. The Review Team understands that workshops are being rolled out which will provide such scenario examples. The following stakeholder comment reinforced this view where a member stated, “We struggle sometimes in the aspect of what can you do and what you can’t do. For example, we didn’t know whether we could hug a female member who was moving away. I find this is a very hard area to find the right line. I do think that that we have made great strides, but in some instances, it may have gone too far.”⁷³⁰

There are some examples of local areas who have developed their own standards - for example, the North West Region has produced a statement of expected behaviours, which outlines what these look like, and what is unacceptable.⁷³¹

However, there is recognition across the organisation that the Standards must be upheld and communicated by the leadership of CFA, and work is underway to achieve this. Leaders across CFA should be able to share knowledge of expected workforce behaviours and support all members to create an environment where harmful behaviour is not tolerated.

Reflecting on leaders’ roles in relation to preventing bullying, harassment and discrimination, members expressed a desire to see this work led from the top. This was emphasised by several stakeholders who told the Review Team: “The culture of bullying starts and ends at the top of an organisation with the leaders, they set the examples and they set the tone. If bad behaviour is tolerated, ignored, supported, and or protected then it will flourish. If the managers have the strength and the determination to lead by example and not just say the nice words at the right time when someone is watching, then the culture changes. This kind of change does not work from the bottom up, it works from the top down.”⁷³² Another stakeholder said: “One big training session is not sufficient, you need people to lead by example.”⁷³³ Another stakeholder noted the importance of implementation: “Setting the standards is one thing, the next step is to call and cut inappropriate behaviour out so that the standards aren’t “just a bit of verbiage on the internet.”⁷³⁴

The Review Team heard about possible barriers to this outcome. The first of these relates to the ‘capability of people to actually have difficult conversations well and to create that accountability’.⁷³⁵ One stakeholder reflected “[w]e [CFA] are very good at telling people how we want them to behave. But we aren’t very good at teaching our leaders on how to respond when people don’t behave in the way we would like.”⁷³⁶ Capability building and training to

⁷²⁸ Surf Life Saving Australia. (2021). *Member protection*. Retrieved from <https://www.surflifesaving.com.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/Policy-6.05-Member-Protection.pdf>. pg. 6.

⁷²⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷³⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷³¹ CFA. (n.d.). *Example statement of Behaviours*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷³² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷³³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷³⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷³⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷³⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

support prevention of bullying, harassment and discrimination is further discussed at [Section 8.3](#) below.

Clarity may also be enhanced by greater involvement from volunteers during the development of initiatives aimed at prevention. A key principle of the Volunteer Charter is that CFA should “ensure that volunteer views, opinions and concerns are fully considered before adopting any new or changed policies, procedures or approaches which impact on them as CFA volunteers”.⁷³⁷ Whilst the Review team heard that some documents have had significant volunteer input, other volunteers voiced a concern about a lack of volunteer input. For example, one stakeholder thought that the values ‘were presented on a platter rather than working with Brigades to come up with something that they own’.⁷³⁸

The Review Team also heard some members were frustrated about the inconsistent application of standards, noting that each member should be held accountable to the same level of expected conduct. Stakeholders made comments such as, “We need to call out bad behaviour and deal with this. Need to put everyone on an even footing – can’t say here’s the rule for volunteers, staff and secondees. CFA needs to show that they will follow the same rule for everyone – they’ll practise what they preach and everyone will be treated fairly and equally.”⁷³⁹

A number of stakeholders expressed a view that long-serving members were largely unaccountable for their behaviour, ‘it often gets back to a person’s length of time and service – I am not sure why we should be advised to accept poor behaviour from people who have been around a long time.’⁷⁴⁰ One stakeholder suggested this reflected a misalignment in values where the organisation valued tenure enormously, ‘beyond safety, beyond anything else’.⁷⁴¹

These comments relate to a further theme of enforcement. Some stakeholders felt that members are not held accountable to written standards stating ‘there are just no consequences’⁷⁴². One stakeholder described the Interim Behavioural Standards and code of conduct as ‘deck chairs on the Titanic. You can call them what you like but if you’re not going to hold people accountable then what’s the point?’⁷⁴³. Many stakeholders suggested that CFA was good at talking the talk but that it was not good enough just to say ‘we’re going to do something – we have to walk it’.⁷⁴⁴ Others suggested that enforcement was sporadic and that “too often we apply them in a tokenistic manner, and they are used for enforcement convenience with the best people and avoided with the worst people.”⁷⁴⁵

As outlined earlier in the report, CFA’s Right Environment initiatives, developed in 2020, are intended to address such concerns by instilling fair and transparent complaint resolution initiatives underpinned by CFA values and behaviours. However, it takes time to embed new initiatives and to restore trust in processes.

⁷³⁷ CFA. (2011). *CFA Volunteer Charter*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷³⁸ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷³⁹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁴⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁴¹ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁴² Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁴³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁴⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁴⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

8.3. Preventative measures relating to children and young people

Organised community activities for children and young people, including sport, are an integral part of the fabric of childhood in Australia,⁷⁴⁶ and there is a need to ensure they are protected from unlawful behaviours or harmful conduct during their time with organisations.

Every year, CFA engages with thousands of children and young people through junior programs, community engagement and provision of services. CFA also has young people in Brigades, with 16 years being the minimum age to become a CFA volunteer (though 11–15-year-olds can join CFA's Junior Volunteer Development Program).⁷⁴⁷

To support child safeguarding, CFA has a dedicated Child Safety team,⁷⁴⁸ a Child Safety Compliance Plan 2021-2024 and a Child Safety Implementation Plan as well as a number of policies and processes, including in relation to the management of complaints or allegations involving children. The Child Safety Compliance Plan supports an improved process around child safety including quarterly reporting by CFA to the Commission for Children and Young People.

Whilst the Review Team understands that CFA requires that new members and junior leaders are required to have working with children checks, some stakeholders indicated a lack of clarity about application of working with children checks. The Volunteer FAQs on CFA's website notes in response to the question 'Will I need a working with children or police check?' that "It is required that all volunteers hold a current Working with Children's Check. It is a requirement to have a WWCC to undertake roles that interact with young people, which may include Junior Leaders, Fire Safe Kids presenters and schools programs."⁷⁴⁹

A draft CFA procedure provides a process whereby membership of a member who receives an adverse notice regarding a Working With Children Check will be assessed by the Volunteer Membership Review Panel.⁷⁵⁰ The Review Team is not aware of whether this process is occurring. It is also unclear whether there is consistent application of the requirement for Working With Children checks across all Brigades.

Learnings from other organisations

As an organisation with a significant degree of young members, SLSNSW has a clear focus on child safety, with the Board accepting a standing report from Management specifically on Safeguarding Children and Young People.⁷⁵¹ SLSNSW also have a Safeguarding Children and Young People Program which is designed to build the capacity of SLS to protect children and young people by

⁷⁴⁶ Australian Childhood Foundation. (2016). *Surf Life Saving Australia – Recommendations for the Safeguarding of Children and Young People*. Retrieved from https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/SLSA_0004_001_0268.pdf. pg. 14.

⁷⁴⁷ CFA. (2022). *Volunteer with CFA*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/volunteers-careers/volunteer-with-cfa>

⁷⁴⁸ CFA. (2019). *Brigade Management Manual*, sB. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷⁴⁹ CFA. (2021). *Volunteer FAQs*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/volunteers-careers/volunteer-with-cfa/volunteer-faqs#:~:text=Will%20I%20need%20a%20working,current%20Working%20with%20Children's%20Check.>

⁷⁵⁰ CFA. (n.d.). *Draft Working With Children Check Adverse Notice Procedure*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷⁵¹ Surf Life Saving New South Wales. (2021). *Annual Report 2020/21*. Retrieved from <https://www.surflifesaving.com.au/?s=annual+report>

Learnings from other organisations

providing resources and education to support clubs to provide a safe environment for all members.⁷⁵²

The RFS also have a number of service standards relating to the involvement of children and young people in the organisation. Some of the key requirements relating to the supervision of children and young people, and management of junior Brigades within the RFS, are:

- Organisers of activities involving children and young people must ensure there are enough adults available to provide adequate supervision at all times. This includes making provisions to supervise children if members are required to respond to an operational incident.
- Organised activities involving children and young people should have a minimum of two adults in attendance and provide supervision at all times.
- Where both male and female children are involved in the activity, supervisors of both genders should be present where possible.
- One-on-one contact between adults and children (family members excepted) should be avoided. If one-on-one interactions are required, they should always be conducted in view of other people.
- Before accepting Junior Members, the Brigade executive committee should consider the Brigade's capacity to adequately supervise and manage activities involving Junior Members.
- Brigades who choose to accept Junior Members must appoint a Junior Member Coordinator. The role and responsibilities of the Junior Member Coordinator will vary between Brigades, based on the number of Junior Members and the activities they participate in.⁷⁵³

When asked about Working With Children Checks, many stakeholders emphasised the importance of having these in place to protect children and young people, although there was some uncertainty around the application of working with children check requirements.

Stakeholders expressed frustration at the inconsistent application of these checks between staff/volunteers, new members/existing members and Brigades. For example, one stakeholder said, "They are being soft on WWC checks – I'm really disappointed about this...I think it sends the wrong message, it sends the message that we are being soft."⁷⁵⁴

Other members commented on the management of junior Brigades, suggesting limited consistency and support across the organisation. One member suggested, "There needs to be more structure around what we can and cannot do with the junior Brigade. Whoever is in charge of it should be doing emails to each Brigade leader i.e., 'we've had changes to COVID' etc. We're all trying to do our own lesson plan but that is something that could be more standardised, so you have consistency across Brigades about what junior Brigades are doing."⁷⁵⁵ The Child Safety Implementation Plan developed by CFA includes initiatives aimed at supporting Brigades.

Inconsistent application of Working With Children Check requirements and a broader lack of understanding around the Child Safety Compliance Plan aligns with the concerns the Review

⁷⁵² Surf Life Saving New South Wales. (n.d.). *Member Safeguarding*. Retrieved from <https://www.surflifesaving.com.au/members/members-info/member-safeguarding/>

⁷⁵³ NSW RFS. (2021). *Service Standard 2.1.5 Child and Youth Participation in NSW RFS activities*. Retrieved from https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/8857/2.1.5-Child-and-Youth-Participation-in-NSW-RFS-Activities.pdf. pg. 3.

⁷⁵⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁵⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

Team heard about the lack of transparency, cohesion and consistency at CFA. Greater transparency and communication of process would support cultural reform.

8.4. Training

In addition to written policies, organisations commonly use training and guidance resources as tools to prevent harmful workplace conduct. This is consistent with the minimum prevention standards reflected in the Independent Review of Ambulance Victoria which included knowledge, identifying the importance of:

- employers understanding the law relating to unlawful workplace conduct
- employers having knowledge of the drivers and impacts of unlawful workplace conduct
- leaders and supervisors knowing how to identify and respond to unlawful workplace conduct.⁷⁵⁶

In its 2017-18 Annual Report, CFA noted that it had developed a Matter of Respect training program, and appointed Inclusion and Fairness Coordinators across the Regions,⁷⁵⁷ although the Review Team notes that the Matter of Respect program has since been discontinued. The Report also noted tailored programs being delivered to multicultural groups through local Brigades including work to educate CFA engagement on understanding different faiths.⁷⁵⁸ Ideally, training such as this would be incorporated into the suite of training packages provided to members across the organisation.

As described in [Section 6 Leadership](#), CFA also has a range of training sessions in place including Constructive Conversations (for all CFA members), Conflict Resolution (for people managers, including Brigade Management Teams/ Captains, 1st Lieutenants) and Having Challenging Conversations (targeted at people managers, particularly volunteer leaders, but available to all CFA members).

CFA also has resources available for members to help guide and advise on issues relating to bullying, harassment, and discrimination. For example, a series of 'tip sheets' have been created which provide practical advice on how to have difficult or sensitive conversations with members. The 'Having a Conversation' resources provide pointers on key things to think about when preparing for a conversation, having a conversation, developing solutions, following up and managing difficult interactions.⁷⁵⁹

CFA also has guides relating to engagement of multicultural communities,⁷⁶⁰ supporting others after traumatic events,⁷⁶¹ creating a safe and healthy CFA⁷⁶² and managing performance concerns.

⁷⁵⁶ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2021). *Independent Review into Workplace Equality in Ambulance Victoria*. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/legal-and-policy/research-reviews-and-investigations/ambulance-victoria-review/final-report/#:~:text=Ambulance%20Victoria%20has%20engaged%20the.and%20bullying%20in%20the%20organisation>. pg. 155.

⁷⁵⁷ CFA. (2018). *Annual Report 2017-18*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/520/CFAAnnualReport-2018.pdf.aspx>. pg. 4.

⁷⁵⁸ CFA. (2018). *Annual Report 2017-18*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/520/CFAAnnualReport-2018.pdf.aspx>. pg. 21.

⁷⁵⁹ CFA. (n.d.). *Having a conversation - Organisational wellbeing tip sheet*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷⁶⁰ CFA. (2013). *Engaging Multicultural Communities - How your brigade can remain connected to your changing communities*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷⁶¹ CFA. (n.d.). *Supporting each other after a Potentially Traumatic Event - Organisational wellbeing tip sheet*. Retrieved from CFA.

⁷⁶² CFA. (n.d.). *Creating a Safe & Healthy CFA - Organisational wellbeing tip sheet*. Retrieved from CFA.

The Review Team found that most of the current mandatory training for CFA members focusses on operational matters. Training related to harm prevention was described as ‘box ticking at the end of the year’⁷⁶³ where members would do the required training, with no subsequent behavioural change. One stakeholder said ‘we have pretty brochures, but the attitude towards it is not a genuine uptake of what’s being said. These people just continue on with the same behaviour’.⁷⁶⁴

Another stakeholder asked, “What are we actually providing to them [leaders] to help them implement the behavioural standards? A lot of the middle-aged white males that I am talking about don’t know how to implement these kind of things... I think there is a lot of work in CFA to educate the leaders and our mangers to teach them how to behave and then how they can teach those behaviours to other people.”⁷⁶⁵

The Review Team also heard about the competing demands on leaders’ time to undertake relevant training sessions, ‘the complexity that exists for fire Brigade leaders, there are so many different elements that a leader has to be across in the role, and they can just get overwhelmed’.⁷⁶⁶

The Review Team heard there was an appetite for greater training and knowledge sharing on these matters, identifying a clear nexus to organisational safety. One stakeholder commented that, “In CFA, we have a motto called Safety First. CFA need to look at that for its members too – not just firefighting. Safety of us. Our welfare.”⁷⁶⁷

Learnings from other organisations

As one example of a prevention training program, QFES have implemented a Think Say Do (TSD) program to give staff and volunteers the opportunity to pause and think about what they are saying and the actions they are doing or are about to do. The focal point of TSD is a conduct awareness training program that outlines several key areas of conduct and performance that has and continues to cause QFES negative reputational damage. Modules include:

- Code of Conduct
- Ethical decision-making
- Positive workplace behaviours
- Complaint management and reporting
- Financial Management
- Conflicts of Interest
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Social media

All staff and volunteers are required to complete TSD every three years.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶³ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁶⁴ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁶⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁶⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁶⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁶⁸ Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. (2021). *Annual Report 2020-2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/Full-Report-QFES-2020-21-Annual-Report.pdf>. pg. 72.

8.5. Recruitment, induction and human resources practices

Human resource practice is critical to both achieving and reinforcing organisational culture and preventing misconduct. Employers can undertake activities at the front end of the human resources cycle to prevent misconduct or reduce the risk of it occurring in their workplaces.⁷⁶⁹ This extends to induction practices which provide an important opportunity for organisations to set standards and expectations for workplace behaviour.

Learnings from other organisations

All volunteers at SLSNSW are provided with information on behavioural/conduct expectations when they join and commit to them during the sign-up process. SLSNSW also provides an online executive induction to members who are involved in running a club to ensure members understand their role responsibilities, governance, and compliance. New club executive members, or those wanting to refresh their induction, can access the Club Executive Induction Program online to learn more about their role, the expectations that come with it, and access resources.

Good practice human resources systems, reviews and continuous improvement can also promote effective volunteer involvement and reduce the opportunity for harassment, discrimination and bullying to occur. One example of a review system comes from discussion with FENZ, where they are building analytics and insight into behavioural trends to enable targeted education and training to specific areas.⁷⁷⁰

A good practice is conducting role and membership reviews. These can assist Brigades to increase their understanding of their active and disengaged membership and their recruitment needs. These reviews can help identify those who may be suitable for different roles, those suitable as leadership successors, gaps and recruitment needs (including in relation to diversity), Brigade capability, opportunities for re-engaging disengaged members, training needs etc. CFA has various supporting documents for role and membership reviews, including a Brigade Operating Procedure Membership & Role Review, a Role Review flowchart, a Membership and Role Review Resources User Guide and template letters.⁷⁷¹

IT systems can also operate as an enabler to good human resource practices by providing appropriately authorised people with access to timely and relevant information about their membership.

⁷⁶⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_wsh_report_2020.pdf

⁷⁷⁰ FENZ & Review Team Communication (14 December 2021).

⁷⁷¹ CFA. (2020). *Membership and Role Review Resources User Guide*; CFA. (2021). *Membership and Role Review flowchart*; CFA. (2020). *Brigade Operating Procedure Membership: Membership & Role Review*; CFA. (2020). *Membership Review Letter*. Retrieved from CFA.

Learnings from other organisations

SLSNSW and LSV both use an existing membership database, known as Surfguard where each member's details are listed upon joining the movement. It is a web-based application and is part of a suite of applications that enable members, clubs, state offices and Surf Life Saving Australia to access the national membership database.

A person's record is the centrepiece of data in Surfguard around which all records are based. Lifesaving qualifications, patrols and other personal details are attached to the member record and used by many parties in the organisation. This includes the ability to screen members for identified issues recorded in the system, for example prior to accepting membership applications.⁷⁷²

LSV also offers governance 101, member protection and welfare training for members and staff free of charge through the dedicated LSV Member Training Portal.⁷⁷³

While some of CFA's recruitment and induction practices have already been discussed throughout this report, including in the context of diversity of recruitment and induction support provided to volunteer leaders (see [Section 5.7.2](#)), the following points are noted for the purposes of this section:

- CFA's website provides information on becoming a new member, including the requirement to undertake police, medical and working with children checks.
- Those interested in becoming a CFA volunteer must be screened by their local Brigade and the ACFO must approve all new applications.
- The Brigade Management Manual provides an overview of expected enrolment processes for new members, including forms for completion. The Review Team notes that a number of these forms require hardcopies to be sent into Districts for processing.
- The Brigade Management Manual recommends that a Captain should do a performance evaluation and make a recommendation to the ACFO at the conclusion of a new volunteer's six-month probation period. However, if no concerns are raised prior, full membership is automatically granted at the completion of a person's probationary period.
- CFA has a policy and procedure for recruitment, selection and appointment, although some stakeholders indicated a lack of adherence to it, and some stakeholders expressed concerns around some appointments being made that do not follow proper and fair processes.
- New volunteers are inducted into CFA, with Captains responsible for running the induction process at the Brigade level.
- The process for inducting Captains appears to be varied.
- The Review Team understands that operational employees coming across to CFA as a secondee on a permanent basis who have not previously worked in CFA are required to complete a 4-week secondment induction training program. For secondees who have

⁷⁷² Surf Life Saving Australia. (2022). *Surfguard*. Retrieved from <https://www.manula.com/manuals/surf-life-saving-australi/surfguard/1/en/topic/introduction>.

⁷⁷³ Life Saving Victoria. (2021). *Annual Report 2020-21*. Retrieved from <https://lsv.com.au/about/publications/>, pg. 14.

worked at CFA prior to the Fire Services Reform, and for secondees who are temporarily providing backfill, this induction program is not required.⁷⁷⁴

- Members who transfer between Brigades are expected to complete a form, which is available from District offices.

There was a general sense from stakeholders that improvements could be made within recruitment and induction processes. Enhancements in these areas would better support new members entering the organisation and those accepting leadership positions to understand and uphold their obligations, including in relation to the application and enforcement of Interim Behavioural Standards.

A number of stakeholders indicated that the policies and procedures for recruitment of CFA members are not necessarily followed in practice. One member commented that, “Merit based recruitment, transfer etc [sic] may exist on paper but they are poorly implemented. There’s very little consistency in how we manage people’s performance – there’s discrepancy – people’s positions are often given to them based on cronyism, as well as their access to training etc.”⁷⁷⁵

While another stakeholder felt CFA give promotions based on ‘whether someone is a member of the same footy club’.⁷⁷⁶ There was also a sense amongst some stakeholders that greater opportunities for career progression were provided to operational staff.

These stakeholder views highlight the perception amongst some stakeholders that there may be deficits in opportunities for promotion and career progression within CFA. These perceptions could indicate barriers to increasing diversity, and a failure to recognise existing members and their achievements.

There was also a view that access to opportunities is limited and that advertisements were confined to an internal pool, which may be reducing the chance for new people and ideas to come into the organisation.

CFA have advised the Review Team that they currently use Seek and LinkedIn to advertise positions, however some stakeholders felt that more could be done with one stakeholder saying, “I have sat through some panel interviews and they really just fish in their own pond. You have got 50,000 volunteers, they don’t cast the net wide enough to fish beyond their volunteer network.”⁷⁷⁷

CFA’s Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025 confirms an opportunity to strengthen equity and fairness in recruitment and promotion decisions, reflecting that only 30% of women respondents and 38% of men respondents of the 2021 People Matter survey⁷⁷⁸ (applying to staff and conducted following the Fire Services Reform), agree that CFA makes fair recruitment and promotion decisions based on merit. Equally, only 34% of women respondents and 36% of men respondents agree they have equal chance at promotion at CFA.⁷⁷⁹

In terms of induction processes, the Review Team heard that processes are not always followed through or there is a strong emphasis on operational requirements at induction, rather than behavioural expectations. As has also been previously observed, the support provided to

⁷⁷⁴ CFA & Review Team Communication (16 February 2022).

⁷⁷⁵ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁷⁶ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁷⁷ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁷⁸ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey, which was conducted following the Fire Services Reform. CFA’s 2020-21 Annual report reported a workforce comprising 1151 staff members and 54,186 volunteers.

⁷⁷⁹ CFA. (2022). *Draft CFA Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025*. Retrieved from CFA.

incoming Captains is limited, with one stakeholder noting that the induction process is only as good as the departing Captain.⁷⁸⁰

The Review Team also heard of more general delays in the processing and administration of volunteer paperwork which may make it difficult to manage member movements, transfers and departures. Findings of the Volunteer Exit Surveys (applying to volunteers moving Brigades or taking a break from CFA) included that there should be improved screening of new members (July - December 2020, conducted following the Fire Services Reform)⁷⁸¹ and that volunteers should be made to sign a values and behaviour agreement and be held accountable if they do not behave appropriately (July – December 2020).⁷⁸²

8.6. Concluding comments on prevention of harassment, discrimination and bullying

The prevention of bullying, harassment and discrimination at CFA is critical to support alignment with the Strategy and Outcomes Framework that supports the implementation of Fire Services Reform. Whilst significant work has already been undertaken, further investment is required to support the design, development and implementation of initiatives aimed at addressing the risk factors and core drivers which enable misconduct. Further work is also needed to ensure that when bullying, harassment and discrimination does occur, the response is quick and effective.

CFA has a range of documents which apply to its members which focus on mutual respect, including the Volunteer Charter, the Volunteer Code of Conduct and the VPS Commission Code of Conduct. Most recently, the implementation of the Interim Behavioural Standards seek to set the bar for behaviour across the organisation. The Interim Behavioural Standards were rolled out during the course of the Review and were not yet well understood by members interviewed by the Review Team.

There remains a widespread perception that CFA ‘talks the talk’ but does not ‘walk the walk’ in relation to prevention – that it publishes and distributes material relating to preventing harassment, discrimination and bullying but that this is not substantiated with action. This perception has been exacerbated by the level of turnover and change at CFA in recent years particularly at the leadership level, which has resulted in initiatives losing momentum and leading to members becoming disillusioned. The challenge going forward will be to demonstrate that change is happening and having appropriate data to support this.

Whilst there have been increased efforts to prevent bullying, harassment and discrimination, increased stability in leadership and increasing maturity of implementation of the Fire Services Reform, there is still a perception amongst stakeholders that standards across the organisation are inconsistently applied and that some members are not being held to account for their behaviour. This may be contributed to by a lack of widespread training and awareness around prevention of harassment, discrimination and bullying.

Each year, CFA interacts with thousands of children within CFA programs and in the community. Whilst the Review Team understands that CFA requires that new members and junior leaders are required to have working with children checks, some stakeholders indicated a lack of clarity about application of working with children checks. A Child Safety Compliance

⁷⁸⁰ Stakeholder (second round of stakeholder engagement).

⁷⁸¹ 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

⁷⁸² 136 of 861 eligible volunteers participated in the Volunteer Exit Survey Report 1 July 2020 – 31 December 2020, conducted following the Fire Services Reform.

Plan 2021-2024 has been developed by CFA. However, it is not known how widely understood the Plan is. The Plan seeks to support an improved process around child safety including quarterly reporting by CFA to the Commission for Children and Young People.

Further, whilst efforts have been made since the Fire Services Reform to improve recruitment practices for staff members and to develop targeted recruitment strategies, the Review Team found that there is a lack of robust process when implementing recruitment and induction practices across CFA. This represents a lost opportunity to screen out applicants who exhibit behaviours and values that are inconsistent with CFA's values, and to explicitly set expectations for them about the organisation's Interim Behavioural Standards.

Investing in preventing bullying, harassment and discrimination across CFA is central to its organisational reform. Given the initiatives implemented to support prevention since the Fire Services Reform; it is apparent that there is recognition by the CEO and CO of the importance of this investment. However, in order to support cultural change and retain momentum, an enhanced and sustained commitment to supporting prevention of bullying, harassment and discrimination across the organisation will be required.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY



9. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
ACFO	Assistant Chief Fire Officer
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission is an independent statutory organisation that protects and promotes human rights in Australia and internationally. The Commission is Australia's National Human Rights Institution. ⁷⁸³
AFAC	Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council, is a collaborative organisation for public fire services, land management, and emergency service organisations in Australia and New Zealand. ⁷⁸⁴
BASO	Brigade Administrative Support Officer
Bullying	<p>"Workplace bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed at an employee or group of employees that creates a risk to health and safety."⁷⁸⁵</p> <p>Examples of workplace bullying include repeated verbal abuse, hostile behaviour toward an employee or group of employees, abusive or offensive e-mails or other correspondence, threatening body language, unreasonable demands, unnecessary pressure and impossible deadlines which are targeted at an employee or group of employees, unfair allocation of tasks and/or working hours, deliberately changing work rosters to inconvenience an employee, setting tasks that are above or beyond a person's skill level without access to training or support.⁷⁸⁶</p>
Bystander	"Someone who witnesses an incident or incidents of misconduct in a workplace or hears about an incident/s after it has occurred." ⁷⁸⁷
Career firefighter	Career firefighter means a person who is or was employed by a fire service as a firefighter in a role in which firefighting duties are or were a substantial portion. ⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸³ Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *About*. Retrieved from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/about>

⁷⁸⁴ AFAC. (n.d.). *AFAC is the Australian and New Zealand National Council for fire and emergency services*. Retrieved from: <https://www.afac.com.au/auxiliary/about/us>

⁷⁸⁵ Worksafe Victoria. (n.d.). *Responding to workplace bullying*. Retrieved from: <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/responding-workplace-bullying>

⁷⁸⁶ Worksafe Victoria. (2020). *A Guide for Employers: Workplace Bullying*. Retrieved from: <https://content.api.worksafe.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/ISBN-Workplace-bullying-guide-for-employers-2020-04.pdf>. pg. 21

⁷⁸⁷ Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf> . pg. 9

⁷⁸⁸ *Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019*, (Vic) s 4.

Term	Definition
CALD	“Culturally and linguistically diverse communities is a term often used to describe people living in Australia who were born overseas, or people living in Australia who have parent(s) or grandparent(s) born overseas, and are predominately from non-English speaking or non-Western countries.” ⁷⁸⁹
CFA	Country Fire Authority is Victoria’s volunteer fire service, operating across the state to reduce the occurrence and impacts of fire and other emergencies. ⁷⁹⁰
CFA Act	<i>Country Fire Authority Act 1958</i> (Vic)
CFA Regulations	Country Fire Authority Regulations 2014 (Vic)
Command and Control	“Command: Internal direction of personnel and resources of an agency, operating vertically within the agency. Control: Overall direction of response activities in an emergency, operating horizontally across agencies.” ⁷⁹¹
Complainant	A complainant is someone who makes a complaint/report pursuant to being the subject of, witnessing or being told about misconduct.
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
Discrimination	“Discrimination happens when a person, or a group, is treated less favourably than another person or group because of their background or certain personal characteristics. This is known as ‘direct discrimination’... It is also discrimination when an unreasonable rule or policy applies to everyone but has the effect of disadvantaging some people because of a personal characteristic they share. This is known as ‘indirect discrimination’.” ⁷⁹²
Diversity	“Diversity is about what makes each of us unique and includes our backgrounds, personality, life experiences and beliefs, all of the things that make us who we are. It is a combination of our differences that shape our view of the world, our perspective and our approach. Diversity is also about recognising, respecting and valuing differences based on ethnicity, gender, age, race, religion, disability and sexual orientation. It also includes an infinite range of individual unique characteristics and experiences, such as communication style, career path, life experience, educational

⁷⁸⁹ Fung, P., Macreadie, R. (2018). *Engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities in Parliamentary Inquiries*. Parliament of Victoria. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/publications/research-papers/summary/36-research-papers/13885-engaging-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-cald-communities-in-parliamentary-inquiries>. pg. 7

⁷⁹⁰ CFA. (2021). *What CFA Does*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/what-cfa-does>

⁷⁹¹ Emergency Management Victoria. (2021). *The six c’s*. Retrieved from: <https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/the-six-cs>

⁷⁹² Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *Discrimination*. Retrieved from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12030>

Term	Definition
	background, geographic location, income level, marital status, parental status and other variables that influence personal perspectives.” ⁷⁹³
District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018	CFA employees may be subject to the District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018, which is an enterprise agreement covering employees engaged in specific classifications or occupations contained in the agreement.
Equal Opportunity	“Equal opportunity is about giving and getting a fair go. It does not assume everyone is the same and it does not mean treating everyone the same. In some circumstances, treating everyone the same is unfair and against the law.” ⁷⁹⁴
Everyday sexism	“Everyday sexism is common and frequent sexist behaviour caused by prevailing gender stereotypes. Examples include looking first to women to do office chores and characterising women differently for the same behaviour as men. Everyday sexism is frequently invisible, and often accepted and normalised.” ⁷⁹⁵
FENZ	Fire and Emergency New Zealand
Fire Services Reform	On 1 July 2020, new legislation came into effect which made CFA a volunteer firefighting service. It followed 8 significant reviews of fire-fighting services since the tragedy of the 2009 fires in Victoria and the Royal Commission established following those fires.
FFMVic	Forest Fire Management Victoria
FRV	Fire Rescue Victoria is a fire and rescue organisation established on 1 July 2020 as part of Victoria’s Fire Services Reform. It responds to fires, complex rescues, road crashes, emergency medical calls and hazardous chemical spills in Melbourne and Victoria’s major regional centres.
FRV Act	<i>Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958 (Vic)</i>
FSIM	Fire Services Implementation Monitor
Gender-based violence	“Gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms. Gender-based violence can include sexual, physical, mental and economic harm inflicted in public or in private. It also includes

⁷⁹³ Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2019). *DPC Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/dpc-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2019-2021/what-do-we-mean-diversity-and-inclusion> . pg. 4

⁷⁹⁴ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (2015). *Quick guide – Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. Retrieved from: https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/static/6d906e29e6cf6eef361744a785fce591/Resource-EOA_Quick_guide-2015.pdf pg. 4

⁷⁹⁵ Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf> pg. 11

Term	Definition
	threats of violence, coercion and manipulation. This can take many forms..." ⁷⁹⁶
Harassment	<p>"Harassment can be against the law when a person is treated less favourably on the basis of certain personal characteristics, such as race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, breastfeeding, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status. Some limited exemptions and exceptions apply.</p> <p>Harassment can include a broad range of behaviour, with examples including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • telling insulting jokes about particular racial groups • sending explicit or sexually suggestive emails or text messages • displaying racially offensive or pornographic posters or screen savers • making derogatory comments or taunts about a person's disability • asking intrusive questions about someone's personal life, including his or her sex life."⁷⁹⁷
HR Business Partner	CFA HR Business Partners are responsible for ensuring compliance with CFA key legislative requirements, job design, workforce analysis, managing workplace grievances and complaints, providing advice regarding entitlements, supporting leaders in resolution of conflict and providing advice on behavioural issues in the workplace. ⁷⁹⁸
Inclusion	<p>"Inclusion occurs when people feel, and are, valued and respected, regardless of their personal characteristics or circumstances. Inclusion is where people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have the opportunity to fulfil their individual and combined potential • have access to opportunities and resources • can contribute their personal best in every encounter • can contribute their perspectives and talents to improve their organisation • can bring far more of themselves to their jobs • have a sense of belonging."⁷⁹⁹
IGEM	Inspector-General for Emergency Management, an independent statutory role created through the reform of Victoria's emergency management arrangements.
Intersectionality	"Intersectionality refers to a way of seeing people's experiences as shaped by (but not limited to) their race, socio-economic background, sex, gender,

⁷⁹⁶ UNHCR. (n.d.). *UNHCR policy on the prevention of, risk mitigation, and response to gender-based violence*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/gender-based-violence.html>

⁷⁹⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *Harassment*. Retrieved from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12040>

⁷⁹⁸ CFA. (18 October 2021) HR Business Partner Advertisement. Retrieved from: <https://decjobs.com/job-details/hr-business-partner-country-fire-authority-cfa-8175255>

⁷⁹⁹ Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2019). *DPC Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/dpc-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2019-2021/what-do-we-mean-diversity-and-inclusion> pg. 4

Term	Definition
	and sexuality all at the same time. This overlap or combination of differences makes up a person’s unique identity. Identities within an individual may come, go or converge, depending on time or place (for example life stages). The point of understanding intersectionality is to also to understand the variety of privileges and/or forms of discrimination or exclusion that one may experience simultaneously at any given time (for example gender and race together).” ⁸⁰⁰
Intersectional discrimination	“Different aspects of a person’s identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. Intersectional discrimination refers to the additional and compounding discrimination experienced by some groups. For example, women of colour, women with a disability and women who identify as LGBTIQ+ experience discrimination and harassment not only because of their gender but also, and in different ways, because of their race, disability and sexual orientation.” ⁸⁰¹
LGBTIQ+	“LGBTIQ+ is an evolving acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual and other terms (such as non-binary and pansexual) that people use to describe their experiences of their gender, sexuality and physiological sex characteristics.” ⁸⁰²
Member	For the purposes of this report, the term ‘member’ is an inclusive term referring to any CFA volunteer, staff member or secondee. The term is often used in this way across CFA. NOTE: The Country Fire Authority Regulations 2014 (Vic) define member as “a person who is enrolled by the Authority as a volunteer officer or volunteer member of a Brigade”. That definition has been used by the Review Team for the purposes of interpreting the Country Fire Authority Regulations 2014 (Vic). ⁸⁰³
Organisational culture	“Organisational culture is a system of shared assumptions, beliefs and values that governs behaviour in an organisation.” ⁸⁰⁴
PTA	Professional, Technical and Administrative (PTA) classification level. Under the Enterprise Agreement, CFA classifies work in the following 7 PTA levels. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 1 – technical, clerical or administrative support roles requiring supervision and instruction

⁸⁰⁰ Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2019). *DPC Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/dpc-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2019-2021/what-do-we-mean-diversity-and-inclusion> pg. 4

⁸⁰¹ Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf> pg. 11

⁸⁰² Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf> pg. 11

⁸⁰³ *Country Fire Authority Regulations 2014* (Vic), reg 5

⁸⁰⁴ Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf> pg. 12

Term	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 2 – technical and administrative support roles requiring operational knowledge, capability and independence. Customer service and liaison is a feature of work at this level. • Level 3 – specialist operational, technical and administrative roles requiring knowledge, experience and proficiency in a particular area. Level 3.5 is the minimum classification applicable to an Information Technology Officer. • Level 4 – supervisory positions where extensive professional, technical or administrative knowledge, experience, skills and training is required. Roles coordinating and supervising implementation of elements of a plan or program. Technical/professional roles with specialist knowledge and experience. This level is the minimum entry point for a Legal Officer or a Technical Officer. • Level 5 – experienced, specialist professionals providing authoritative advice within a defined strategic context. Managers accountable for the local management and implementation of a function, program or project. • Level 6 – senior advisors providing authoritative expertise, professional, technical or project leadership, requiring significant professional expertise and extensive experience. Functional Managers accountable for service delivery, professional and functional outputs and outcomes, with business impact. • Level 7 – senior managers leading functional units or departments, with organisational and strategic scope, influence and impact. Specialist advisers providing expert advice on complex organisational issues.⁸⁰⁵
Professional, Technical and Administrative (PTA) Agreement	CFA employees may be subject to the CFA Professional, Technical and Administrative (PTA) Agreement 2020, which is an enterprise agreement covering employees engaged in specific classifications or occupations contained in the agreement.
QFES	Queensland Fire and Emergency Services
Respondent	Respondent means a person about whom a complaint or report of misconduct is made.
Right Environment initiatives	The Right Environment Program was developed by CFA to address complaints, case management and resolution; preventative intervention; mediation; public comment and feedback. The Right Environment Program has formally concluded with the project team having completed its original scope of work. Several key initiatives were launched under this Program, including Interim Behavioural Standards and Interim Complaint Resolution Guidelines. The Right Environment initiatives are ongoing and are in the process of being embedded as part of CFA core operating processes and procedures.

⁸⁰⁵ CFA Professional, Technical and Administrative Agreement 2020. (Entered into operation 24 June 2021). Retrieved from CFA.

Term	Definition
RFS NSW	Rural Fire Service NSW
Secondment Agreement	CFA and FRV entered into a Secondment Agreement on 31 October 2020. The Secondment Agreement acknowledges that CFA requires additional resources and support and represents the agreed basis on which FRV officers or employees are made available to CFA. ⁸⁰⁶ The Agreement provides for 223 FRV staff to be seconded to CFA to provide volunteer Brigades with operational and management support.
Sexual assault	Sexual assault is a criminal offence in Victoria and has been defined in the <i>Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)</i> as “A person (A) commits an offence if – A intentionally touches another person (B); and the touching is sexual; and B does not consent to the touching; and A does not reasonably believe that B consents to the touching”. ⁸⁰⁷
Sex discrimination	<p>“Sex discrimination happens when a person is treated less favourably than a person of a different sex would be treated in the same or similar circumstances. For example, it may be direct sex discrimination if male employees are paid more than employees of a different sex who are doing the same work.</p> <p>Discrimination also happens when there is a rule or policy that is the same for everyone but has an unfair effect on people of a particular sex. This is called indirect discrimination. For example, it may be indirect discrimination if a policy says that managers must work full-time, as this might disadvantage women, who are more likely to need to work part-time due to responsibilities for caring for children.”⁸⁰⁸</p>
Sexual harassment	<p>“Sexual harassment is any unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviour where a reasonable person would have anticipated the possibility that the person harassed would feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. It has nothing to do with mutual attraction or consensual behaviour. Examples of sexual harassment include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staring, leering or unwelcome touching • suggestive comments or jokes • unwanted invitations to go out on dates or requests for sex • intrusive questions about a person's private life or body • unnecessary familiarity, such as deliberately brushing up against a person • emailing pornography or rude jokes • displaying images of a sexual nature around the workplace

⁸⁰⁶ *Secondment Agreement*. (Entered into operation 31 October 2020). Retrieved from CFA.

⁸⁰⁷ *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*, s 40.

⁸⁰⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *Fact sheet: Complaints under the Sex Discrimination Act*. Retrieved from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/complaints/complaint-guides/information-people-making-complaints/complaints-under-sex-discrimination-act>, pg. 1

Term	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicating content of a sexual nature through social media or text messages.”⁸⁰⁹
SLS NSW	Surf Life Saving NSW
SLS VIC	Surf Life Saving Victoria
Stakeholders	This reports refers to ‘stakeholders’ which include CFA volunteers, staff, secondees and others who participated in interviews during the course of the Review.
Strategy and Outcomes Framework	CFA Strategy and Outcomes Framework is a ten-year framework (2020-2030) which sets out a pathway for CFA to achieve its outcomes. It is intended to form the basis of a set of strategic plans which will be developed to implement the commitments in the Framework. ⁸¹⁰
Trauma-informed approach/ services	A trauma-informed approach recognises the prevalence of trauma and its impact on the emotional, psychological and social wellbeing of people and communities. Trauma informed services do no harm i.e., they do not re-traumatise or blame victims for their efforts to manage their traumatic reactions, and they embrace a message of hope and optimism that recovery is possible. ^{811 812}
VEOHRC	The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission is an independent statutory body that protects human rights, promotes fair treatment for all Victorians, and advocates for a diverse and inclusive state. VEOHRC work with government, the public sector, community organisations and individuals to create a fairer, safer Victoria. ⁸¹³
VFBV	Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria is the single and unified body representing all CFA Volunteers to CFA Board and Management and to Governments, Ministers, Members of Parliament, councils and instrumentalities, business and the public. ⁸¹⁴
Victimise	“When we talk about a person being victimised, it means they’re being treated badly or unfairly because they have made a complaint about discrimination, sexual harassment or racial and religious vilification, it is

⁸⁰⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *Sexual Harassment*. Retrieved from: <https://humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12096>

⁸¹⁰ CFA. (n.d.). *Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-30*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/521/FINAL-CFA-Strategy-Outcomes-Framework.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>. pg. 8

⁸¹¹ Independent Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts. (2021). *Preventing and Addressing Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT*. Retrieved from: <https://www.shreview.courts.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Report-and-Recommendations-Preventing-and-Addressing-Sexual-Harassment-in-Vic-Courts.pdf>. pg. 12

⁸¹² Kezelman, C., (2014). *Trauma Informed Practice*. Retrieved from: <https://mhaustralia.org/general/trauma-informed-practice>

⁸¹³ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/about-us/>

⁸¹⁴ CFA. (2021). *Volunteer Association*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/volunteer-association>

Term	Definition
	<p>believed they intend to make a complaint, or they've helped someone else to make a complaint.”⁸¹⁵</p> <p>“The Equal Opportunity Act 2010 makes it against the law to victimise someone because they have: asserted their rights under equal opportunity law; made a complaint, or it is believed they intend to make a complaint; helped someone else make a complaint; refused to do something because it would be discrimination, sexual harassment or victimisation.”⁸¹⁶</p> <p>Examples of victimisation may include but are not limited to being moved to a position with lower responsibility after making a complaint or helping someone make a complaint; demoting or threatening to demote someone; ostracising or excluding someone in the workplace or the denial of a promotion.</p>
Victim-Survivor/ Target	A victim-survivor or target is someone to whom misconduct is directed.
Volunteer firefighter	Volunteer firefighter means a person who performs or has performed firefighting duties, in a role in which firefighting duties are or were a substantial portion, and who receives or received no remuneration for the performance of those duties. ⁸¹⁷
VPSC	Victorian Public Sector Commission, established in 2014 and headed by a single commissioner, works to improve the performance of the Victorian public sector to provide services more effectively and efficiently. The VPSC performs a number of functions designed to foster an integrated and responsive public sector that is ethical, accountable and professional. ⁸¹⁸

⁸¹⁵ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *Victimisation*. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/victimisation/>

⁸¹⁶ Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *Victimisation*. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/victimisation/>

⁸¹⁷ *Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019*, (Vic) s 4.

⁸¹⁸ Victorian Government. (2021). *About the Victorian Public Sector Commission*. Retrieved from: <https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/about-vpsc/>



APPENDIX 2: BIBLIOGRAPHY



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APPENDIX 3: METHODOLOGY METHODOLOGY

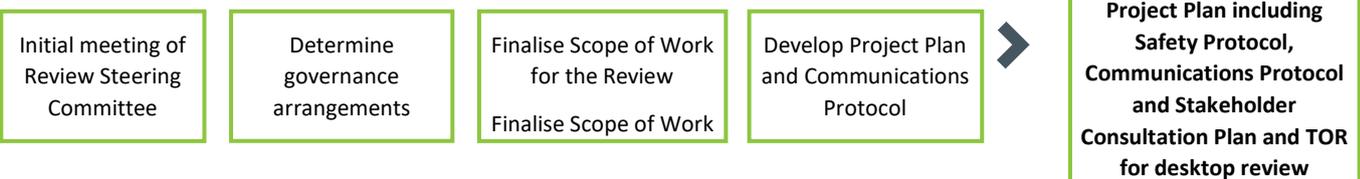


APPENDIX 3: METHODOLOGY

The Independent Review has been conducted in five phases. The methodology for undertaking the Review is outlined below.

This Review was carried out amidst changing COVID-19 government guidance. An agile approach was taken to consultation, with virtual meetings and COVID-safe in-person meetings held where possible.

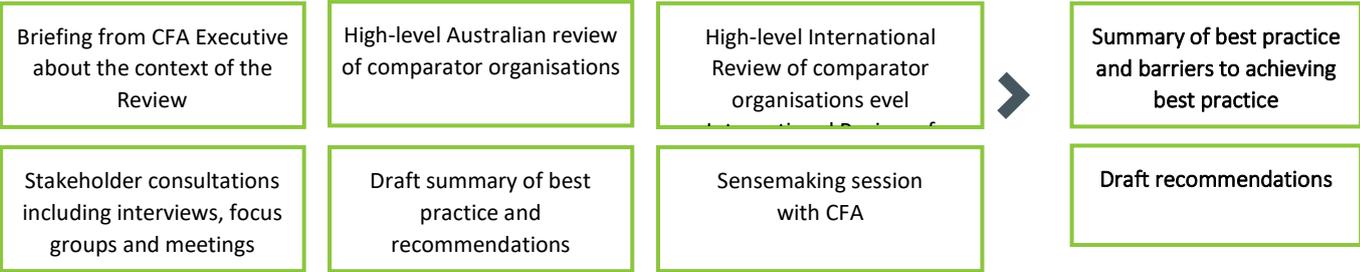
Phase One: Project initiation (September 2021)



Phase Two: Establishing the Baseline and identifying systemic or procedural issues that prevent CFA realising its value proposition (September/ October 2021)



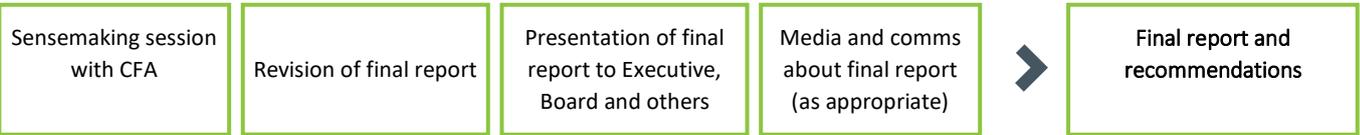
Phase Three: Discovery Phase – Understanding best practice (October -December 2021)



Phase Four: Developing and testing recommendations (December 2021- March 2022)



Phase Five: Finalisation (February - April 2022)



Phase One: Project initiation

During Phase One, the Review Team and CFA agreed the scope and framing for the Review. This included the development of a Project Plan, Communications Protocol, Discussion Paper (including a Safety Protocol for stakeholder), Stakeholder Consultation Plan, Terms of Reference for the desktop review and Terms of Reference for the Review Steering Committee.

Project Plan

The Project Plan established the scope of work for the Review and determined the methodology to be used.

Communications Protocol

The Communications Protocol outlined the way in which the Review Team would respond to any direct approaches by media, the announcement of the Review, ongoing stakeholder engagement, requests for information and the release of reports.

Discussion Paper

The Discussion Paper provided background information on the Review and stakeholder consultation for stakeholders. Prior to engagement all stakeholders were sent a copy of the Discussion Paper and emailed a link to a consent form on Qualtrics.

The Discussion Paper and consent form informed stakeholders of the purpose of the Review, how their information would be used, discussed safety and wellbeing during the consultation process and provided a list of support services. The online consent form also asked stakeholders if they consented to the terms of engagement, and a voice/video recording of their interview. A copy of the consent form questions can be found at [Appendix 6: Consent Form](#).

Stakeholder Consultation Plan

The Stakeholder Consultation Plan outlined the scope and purpose for stakeholder consultation. It identified the list of stakeholders in scope, process for notification, process for conducting meetings, questions for consultation and approach to analysis of stakeholder feedback.

Terms of Reference – desktop review

The desktop review terms of reference established the objective of the desktop review, scope, methodology and list of documents to be considered. Further discussion about the desktop review is below.

Review Steering Committee

The Review Steering Committee was the governance group established to help inform the Review. It was chaired by Dr Helen Szoke AO (Lead Reviewer) and its members were: Natalie MacDonald (CEO, CFA), Jason Heffernan (Chief Officer, CFA), Kylee Bates (Group General Manager – Support Services), John Hussey (General Manager People and Culture, CFA), Tracey May (Director Workplace Relations), Paul Houliston (Project Sponsor, Allen + Clarke) and Linda Gyorki (Project Lead, Allen + Clarke).

The purpose of the Steering Committee was to support the Review with operational guidance, communication assistance and to monitor the Review's progress. The group met regularly to discuss project updates, risk management, and to provide feedback.

Phase Two: Establishing the Baseline and identifying systemic or procedural issues that prevent CFA realising its value proposition

During Phase Two the Review Team established a baseline understanding of the current systems and processes in place at CFA. This was established through the desktop review and stakeholder consultation.

Desktop review

The Review Team commenced Phase Two by undertaking a desktop review of over 250 documents including policies, procedures, reviews, reports, existing prevalence surveys, guidance documents and legislation.

The scope of the desktop review was agreed in the Terms of Reference by the Steering Committee. Documents in scope were those written and published between 2016 – 2021, and material was provided by CFA and gathered from publicly available sources.

The full list of documents reviewed can be found in [Appendix 2: Bibliography](#).

Documents were analysed against the following themes in line with the Scope of Work:

- Current CFA culture, including as informed by organisational activities, communications and policies that seek to enhance diversity, and prevent harassment, discrimination and bullying
- The role of CFA leadership in embedding behavioural and cultural expectations and creating an inclusive organisation
- CFA's current systems and processes for managing issues relating to diversity, harassment, discrimination and bullying
- CFA's current systems and processes for preventing harassment, discrimination and bullying.

Reviewing current CFA documents helped the Review Team establish an understanding of the environment CFA operates in, including what tools, processes and advice are in place to support culture and prevent bullying, harassment and discrimination. Findings from the desktop review have been drawn on in this final report.

Existing prevalence surveys

Surveys were an important source of information in the desktop review and are drawn on throughout this report. CFA members currently participate in a range of surveys relating to the culture of the organisation. Three of the key surveys are:

- The VFBV Volunteer Welfare & Efficiency survey takes an annual snapshot of volunteer opinion and welfare. It monitors short-and long-term trends, and the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at improving CFA volunteer engagement and wellbeing. The survey asks 33 questions on issues chosen by CFA volunteers. The first survey was conducted in 2012, with most recent available data from the 2020 VFBV Volunteer Survey where 2,693 CFA volunteers took part. The survey measures CFA volunteer attitudes of the importance of seven themes and volunteer attitudes on the performance of each theme. The gap between how closely performance meets the expectation of importance is referred to as the Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Level (VolWEL) outcome. A VolWEL outcome of 2.5 or more is indicative of a significant issue needing to be addressed, while a gap of less than 1.5 indicates volunteer expectations are closer to being met.

- CFA Volunteer Exit Survey is an online survey provided to volunteers who have left CFA, or changed CFA Brigades, and provide an opportunity to give feedback on their volunteer experience. All information is treated in the strictest of confidence. Information received is consolidated and used to capture key trends, not single out individual responses. 153 surveys informed the 1 January 2021 – 30 June 2021 Volunteer Exit Survey Data.
- The People Matter Survey is an annual employee opinion survey conducted by the Victorian Public Sector Commission designed to measure and build positive and ethical workplaces in public sector organisations. CFA employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups are able to take part. The survey measures how employees feel about CFA and gathers information on a broad range of issues that affect employees' working life. 577 CFA staff took part in the 2021 People Matter Survey (50% of applicable staff). The Survey also conducts a comparison with responses from similar organisations. CFA responses are compared with the following organisations: Ambulance Victoria; Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority; Victoria Police; Victoria Police – Sworn and PSOs; Victoria State Emergency Service; Victorian Public Sector Commission.

These existing surveys provide an indication of CFA member experiences and perspectives of CFA. The Independent Review did not conduct a survey to inform this work as; existing surveys could be drawn on to gather data on member experiences over a number of years, stakeholders expressed fatigue at taking part in surveys, stakeholder interviews were considered to be an approach that was more victim-centred and trauma-informed and stakeholder interviews were able to capture more in-depth analysis.

Results from existing prevalence surveys are drawn on throughout the report. It is important to note that none of these surveys reflect the entirety of CFA membership. They provide an indication of volunteer or employee experiences. The Review Team also acknowledge that there is survey fatigue and that not all eligible participants take part.

Stakeholder consultation

During the second phase of the Review, the Review Team engaged with 33 stakeholders. The interviews conducted during this phase were primarily intended to support the Review Team to have a greater depth of understanding of the complexities and opportunities in the existing organisational framework of CFA. Findings and insights from these interviews were analysed, summarised and grouped thematically to inform the development of the recommendations for the Review. Stakeholders in scope included people in CFA and a range of external organisations whose work overlaps, contributes or supports the work of CFA. Stakeholders interviewed included CFA staff, volunteers and board members; the VFBV; Victoria's Emergency Management Commissioner; the Fire Services Implementation Monitor; AFAC; FFMVic; FRV; an external law firm and a range of industrial bodies.

Initial stakeholders were engaged in open dialogue where stakeholders reflected on their experiences and understanding of CFA culture and systems.

The stakeholder engagement undertaken in this early phase provided a greater depth of understanding of the possible complexities and opportunities in the existing organisational framework that may be preventing CFA from realising its value proposition.

Phase Three: Discovery Phase - Understanding best practice

During Phase Three, the Review Team spoke with 199 stakeholders about their experiences at CFA, and heard their views on current culture, leadership, issues management and prevention of bullying harassment and discrimination. The Review Team also conducted a review of comparable organisations to understand what best practice could look like for CFA of the future.

Stakeholder consultation

Stakeholder consultation was a key component of the Review.

During Phase 3 the Review Team met with 199 stakeholders comprised of CFA paid staff, operational and support volunteers (including active and inactive members), seconded staff from Fire Rescue Victoria, and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria staff members.

CFA members were invited to take part in the Review via an email update from the CEO and CO. The email invited members to take part in an in-person or online interview, in a one-on-one or focus group format.

During Phase Three of the Review, with a few very limited exceptions, stakeholders who were interviewed were not directly invited to participate in the Review. Rather, eligible stakeholders were invited to request an interview with the Review Team if they wished to participate. Accordingly, the sample of stakeholders is a self-selecting sample.

Participants interested in engaging in the review contacted the independent Review Team by email: cfareview@allenandclarke.com.au to arrange an interview time. If stakeholders had anything further to add following consultation, they were also able to contact the Review Team via this independent email address.

Prior to engagement all stakeholders were sent a copy of the Discussion Paper and emailed a link to a consent form (see [Appendix 4: Discussion Paper](#)). The Discussion Paper and consent form informed stakeholders of the purpose of the Review, how their information would be used, discussed safety and wellbeing during the consultation process and provided a list of support services. The online consent form also asked stakeholders if they consented to the terms of engagement, and a voice/video recording of their interview. A copy of the consent form questions can be found at [Appendix 6: Consent Form](#).

The Review commenced while Victoria was amid varying COVID-19 restrictions. An agile approach was taken to the methodology allowing consultation to take place in-person and online. Stakeholders were provided with a range of options for interviews and to the extent possible, the Review Team tried to accommodate the requests of the majority of stakeholders. Options provided to stakeholders for interviews included virtual interviews; in-person interviews at a local Brigade or in-person interviews at an alternative location. Many interviews were held after-hours or on weekends to accommodate volunteers. In November and early December 2021, the Review Team travelled across Victoria to meet with 82 stakeholders in-person and with 101 stakeholders virtually.

The Review Team travelled to 30 sites. A spread of locations was selected so that members from different Districts had the opportunity to engage in-person. The Review Team visited each Region and met with members from almost every District. The Review Team note that while best efforts were made to reach a number of different communities, the Review Team appreciates that not everyone could make an in-person interview. The option for online interviews was offered to all stakeholders to ensure anyone who wanted to take part in the Review was able to do so. Further, if stakeholders were unable to comply with COVID-Safe requirements they were offered the opportunity to meet virtually with the Review Team.

Interviews were 30-60min in length and focus groups 60min, with discussions following a semi structured format. During interviews, stakeholders were invited to identify opportunities for, and barriers to, improvement within CFA. The list of questions that guided discussions can be found in [Appendix 4: Discussion Paper](#).

All stakeholders were reminded that these discussions have the capacity to trigger personal experiences or raise distressing subject matter. Stakeholders were provided a list of free confidential support services they could access should they require, and were welcome to end the engagement at any point. For some interviews, the Review Team arranged external counsellors to be available for 24-hour debriefing support after interviews for stakeholders, if required.

Stakeholders were asked to avoid disclosing the names of any individuals affected by specific cases of harassment, discrimination or bullying and were provided with the contact details for a range of support services before and after interviews.

With consent, audio and written recordings were made of most interviews.

The Review Team asked a series of demographic questions about individuals and their involvement with CFA (see [Appendix 3: Methodology](#)). This enabled the Review Team to ensure that there were a range of people participating in the Review. At the mid-point for stakeholder engagement, the Review Team conducted an assessment to ensure that a broad cross-section of members were participating in the Review. The demographic questions were as follows:

- a) District: Number
- b) Volunteer: yes; no; prefer not to say
- c) Years of service: Number
- d) Age: under 18; between 18 – 25; between 25-55; over 55; prefer not to say
- e) Gender: female; male; non-binary, prefer to self describe, prefer not to say.
- f) Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander: yes; no; prefer not to say
- g) Do you identify as having a disability: yes; no; prefer not to say
- h) Were you born in a country other than Australia: yes; no; prefer not to say
- i) If yes, which country?
- j) Do you speak another language at home: yes; no; prefer not to say
- k) Do you identify as LGBTIQ+?: yes; no; prefer not to say
- l) Do you practice a religion? yes, no, prefer not to say

An indication of the spread of stakeholders engaged during Round 3 stakeholder engagement is provided in [Figure 6](#).

Information provided during the interviews was analysed in NVivo and identified and grouped by theme.

Review of Comparator Organisations

Many Australian and overseas fire and emergency management organisations are on a similar path to CFA in seeking to improve workforce diversity and manage issues. Champions of Change recently identified that the Australasian fire and emergency sector is currently evolving its identity towards a more inclusive organisational culture.

In order to develop meaningful recommendations to support CFA of the future, it was critical for the Review Team to understand how other organisations are undertaking this work and their approaches to associated challenges. For this purpose, the Review Team identified six organisations who:

- draw on a sizeable volunteer workforce
- function under a command and control structure
- have a large geographic span
- have expressed a public commitment to improving organisational approaches to diversity, bullying, harassment or discrimination.

An organisation’s selection as a comparator does not indicate they have completed their cultural reform journey or that their internal structures are directly comparable to CFA, but rather that they provided the Review Team with an opportunity to obtain insight into effective initiatives and learnings on associated challenges.

Independently of CFA, the Review Team identified four Australian and two international comparator organisations: Surf Life Saving New South Wales (SLSNSW); New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS); Life Saving Victoria (LSV); Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES); Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ); and Essex Police. For each comparator organisation, members of the Review Team undertook a desktop review of publicly available information and met with organisational representatives, either in-person or virtually.

In addition to the six comparator organisations selected for the Review, the Review Team also drew on research from other organisations including for example NSW SES and the Australian Defence Force.

The desktop review focused on identifying the comparator organisation’s regulatory/political framework and publicised initiatives relating to diversity, discrimination, harassment, and bullying. This included in response to any recognised issues, for example, where an independent review had raised particular concerns.

To complement this analysis, members of the Review Team also engaged directly with stakeholders at each comparator organisation. The purpose of these discussions was to have open dialogue about how their organisation was improving workforce diversity and addressing issues of discrimination, harassment, and bullying. It was also an opportunity to identify benefits and disadvantages of different approaches, and to reflect on ongoing opportunities.

The Review Team used a range of research questions to inform the collection and analysis of information from the desktop review and stakeholder consultations. These questions operated as a guide for engagement only and not all questions were applicable to every comparator organisation. A copy of the research questions is provided in [Appendix 5: Guidance Questions for Comparator Organisations](#)

The following tables identify the timing and format of consultation by the Review Team with each comparator organisation.

Consultation with Australian comparator organisations

Date of engagement	Comparator organisation
10 November 2021	Surf life Saving New South Wales (in-person)
10 November 2021	New South Wales Rural Fire Service (in-person)

3 December 2021	Life Saving Victoria (in-person)
13 December 2021	Queensland Fire and Emergency (virtual meeting)

Consultation with international comparator organisations

Date of engagement	Comparator organisation
14 December 2021	Fire and Emergency New Zealand (virtual meeting)
15 December 2021	Essex Police (virtual meeting)

The Review Team heard that all comparator organisations believe their volunteers play a critical service delivery role and significantly contribute to community confidence in their organisations. Comparators also told the Review Team of their organisation’s commitment to both delivering a positive culture for their members (paid and volunteer) and preventing the occurrence of harmful behaviours or practices in their workplaces.

During these discussions, comparator organisations talked about a range of associated initiatives as well as their approach to cultural reform – relevant examples are provided throughout this report.

Phase Four: Developing and testing recommendations

During Phase Four the Review Team developed and tested recommendations.

Developing recommendations

Recommendations were developed drawing on the findings from stakeholder consultation, the desktop review (including existing prevalence surveys) and review of comparator organisations.

Key Engagements

The draft recommendations were then tested in Key Engagements.

Key Engagements were 90-minute online focus groups where 202 stakeholders were presented with the preliminary draft of the key findings; a sample of what the Review Team had heard during the Review and draft recommended directions for comment.

A targeted approach was taken to the Key Engagements with engagement sessions held with: CEO, CO, DCOs, Group General Managers, General Managers, Board representatives, VFBV, Women’s Advisory Group (two engagements), Youth Advisory Group, Regional Business Managers / District Business Managers, HRBPs / BASOs (two engagements), Training Managers, Allies of Inclusion Network, Volunteer Sustainability Team, HR Leaders, ASU, UFU, Brigade Captains (two engagements), and Group Officers.

Feedback from the Key Engagements was noted, and amendments were made to the draft recommended directions.



APPENDIX 4: DISCUSSION PAPER



The Discussion Paper below was developed in October 2021 and provided background information on the Review and stakeholder consultation for participants during the course of the Review. Prior to engagement all stakeholders during the second round of engagement were sent a copy of the Discussion Paper and emailed a link to a consent form on Qualtrics.

Discussion paper (October 2021)

Introduction



Background

An independent Review Team from *Allen + Clarke*, which includes Dr Helen Szoke AO as Lead Reviewer, has been engaged by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to undertake a review of culture and issues management to support CFA of the future (the Review).

The Review will seek to ensure that CFA:

- has a robust and effective approach to issues management across a complex volunteer-based organisation
- sets and embeds behavioural and cultural expectations at all levels of the organisation
- efficiently and effectively manages issues when they do arise and supports members and leaders to work these issues through.

The Review will consider structural and systemic issues and improvements. It will not investigate individual reports of misconduct.

The final report and recommendations will be made available to the membership and employees of CFA.

The Review Team will:

1

Consider CFA's:

1. Culture
2. Management of issues relating to diversity, harassment, discrimination, and bullying
3. Organisational approach to promoting diversity
4. Systems and processes to prevent harassment, discrimination and bullying

2

Identify any opportunities to improve and address any barriers to improvement in these areas

3

Consider and recommend measures as appropriate

Sources that will inform the Review



Establishing the Baseline:

- Desktop review of current policies, procedures and climate surveys
- 20 meetings with key stakeholders



Understanding best practice:

- Review of Australian comparator organisations
- Review of international comparator organisations
- 120 stakeholder interviews with CFA leaders, members and other stakeholders
- 24 focus groups with CFA leaders, members and other stakeholders
- Identifying practices that best suit CFA context



Developing and testing recommendations

- 20 roundtables with CFA leaders, members and other stakeholders
- 20 interviews with CFA leaders, members and other stakeholders

Purpose of this Discussion Paper

This Discussion Paper builds upon and is informed by the valuable feedback already provided to the Review Team during initial consultation and a high-level desktop review of CFA's policies, procedures and other relevant documents. The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to provide the framing for the next stage of stakeholder consultation.

Stakeholder Consultation is central to the Review



Consultation with CFA members - both volunteer and paid - is central to the Review and the Review Team will listen to the experiences of CFA members to help shape recommendations for CFA of the future.

The Review Team will invite participants to identify opportunities for, and barriers to, cultural improvement and issues resolution within CFA.

The Review Team encourages participants to share their experiences, both positive and negative.



Consultation with CFA volunteers, employees, secondees and other stakeholders across the Regions is a key part of the Review. Between October and December 2021 the Review Team will consult with participants through interviews, focus groups and meetings, preferably face to face but potentially via telephone, or online. Where consultations are held in-person, the Review Team will comply with the relevant public health directives to help contain the spread of COVID-19. Interviews will be between 30-60 minutes. During consultations, the Review Team will ask a series of questions and invite participants to share their views and experiences. A sample of the sorts of questions the Review Team will ask appears in part 5 of this Discussion Paper.

How will your input be used?

Information you provide during consultations will be analysed, summarised and grouped by theme to inform the development of recommendations for CFA of the future. An audio recording of consultations may be made with your consent for internal use to ensure the accuracy of the Review Team's notes and assist with analysis. Consultations may be transcribed before being de-identified. Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. The information you provide may be used in the final published report, but you will not be identified. Your name or the names of other participants will not be published in the final report. CFA members may have been involved in previous reviews. This Review is independent of other reviews.

Your safety and wellbeing during the consultation process

Participating in this consultation may trigger personal experiences or raise distressing subject matter. For this reason, we ask that you familiarise yourself with the following information and expectations, designed to protect your safety and wellbeing during the consultation process.

- You are welcome to leave the consultation at any time, without judgement, if you need to take a break or access support or if you want to stop participating. A list of free, confidential 24/7 specialist support services is provided below.
- To protect your confidentiality, during group consultations or focus groups, avoid disclosing specific cases of harassment, discrimination and bullying, including naming any individuals affected.
- If identifying disclosures are made inadvertently during the consultation, we ask that all participants treat these with the utmost confidentiality.
- The Review Team may have an obligation to report concerns to CFA and/or the relevant authorities or relevant health authorities for example if someone's safety or wellbeing is at risk, or as otherwise appropriate. However, unless required by law or for the safety of an individual, individuals will not be named without their permission.

How to report instances of harassment, discrimination and bullying

The Review Team encourages people who wish to make disclosures or complaints about harassment, discrimination or bullying at CFA to consider accessing support and making a report or complaint.

A list of CFA and external support services appears below.

CFA members can report harassment, discrimination or bullying via the following formal channels:

- to their line manager and/or Human Resources Department.
- to the police (in the case of criminal behaviour). Details of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams can be found at police.vic.gov.au or a call can be made to triple zero.

Depending on the type of misconduct involved, reports may also be made to appropriate external tribunals, agencies or regulators, such as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Australian Human Rights Commission, WorkSafe Victoria or the Fair Work Commission.

The Review Team cannot investigate nor make findings about individual allegations made during this Review.

Support services available

Specialist support services for those impacted by bullying, harassment and abuse:

CFA wellbeing Support Line: Phone: 1800 806 292 (free call)

CFA Member Assistance Program/ Peer Support Program/ Chaplaincy Support Program: Phone: 1800 959 232 (follow the prompts to reach the appropriate support service)

Member Wellbeing Advisors: Phone: 1800 959 232, wellbeing@cfa.vic.gov.au

1800RESPECT (National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling, Information and Support Service), open 24/7, free service

Phone: 1800 737 732, website: www.1800respect.org.au

No To Violence (for men concerned about their own behaviour), open 24/7 free, live web chat options

Phone: 1300 766 491, website: <https://ntv.org.au/get-help/>

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) or the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) to make a formal complaint about unlawful discrimination, sexual harassment or victimisation and/or anonymously find out more about your rights and legal options.

Contact for VEOHRC: Phone: 1300 292 153, email: enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au; Contact for AHRC: Phone: 1300 369 711, email: infoservice@humanrights.gov.au

Lifeline provides 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services

Phone: 13 11 44, website: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Sexual Assault Crisis Line (crisis response phoneline for people who have experienced sexual violence), after-hours telephone crisis counselling support, information, advocacy and referral to anyone living in Victoria.

Phone: 1800 806 292 (free call), website: <https://www.sacl.com.au>

Further information or questions

Questions or concerns about the Review can be directed to:
CFARReview@allenandclarke.com.au.

THE JOURNEY TO SUPPORT THE CFA OF THE FUTURE

THE CFA'S INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT POSITIVE CHANGE

- Diversity, Inclusion and Fairness initiatives
- Women's Advisory Committee
- Youth Advisory Committee
- Support for leadership at all levels
- Development of behavioural standards and guidelines for complaints management
- Expansion of mediation services
- Aboriginal Engagement Guidelines and a Koori Engagement Plan
- Resources to support people experiencing family violence
- Allies of Inclusion Network and CFA Pride
- Disability Action Plan and Disability Confidence Training
- Support for multicultural groups
- Case tracking system for complaints
- Wellbeing education

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US ABOUT THE CURRENT CFA

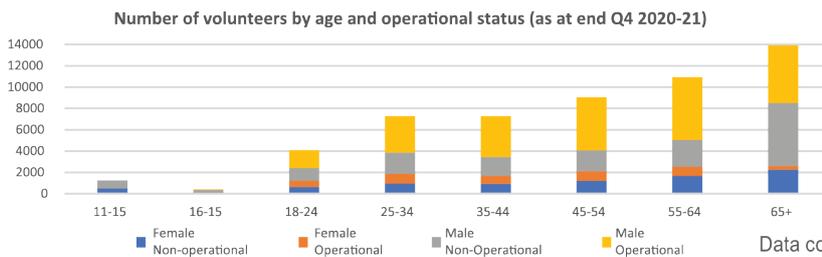
Women represent:

23% of CFA's volunteer membership	15% of CFA's operational volunteers	60% of CFA's permanent staff	6.4% of Leadership roles from Captain to 1st-4th Lieutenants
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In the Volunteer Exit Survey (July – December 2020)

harassment and bullying and the culture

of the brigade were identified as **two of the top five** reasons for volunteers leaving the CFA.



Discussion Paper, October 2021

Data collected by the VFBV

The People Matter Survey is an annual employee opinion survey run by the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC) for public sector organisations. **577 CFA** employees completed the survey.

 6% Identify with having a disability	5% Identify as LGBTIQ+	1% Identify as non-binary genders	1% Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	9% Speak a language other than English at home
 24% have experienced bullying in the last 12 months.	8% have experienced sexual harassment in the last 12 months.	 Place of birth (in percentage)		
9% have experienced discrimination in the last 12 months.	10% reported that they had experienced workplace violence and/or aggression in the last 12 months.	79 13 8		
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australia Overseas Prefer not to say 	

35% of respondents reported that they were experiencing **high, very high or severe levels of work-related stress** at the time of the People Matter Survey (June 2021)

A high-level overview of CFA's approaches to culture and issues management



This is a Review which is forward looking, drawing on the lessons learnt, and changes and improvements made across CFA.

Victoria is one of the most fire-prone regions in the world and in recent years, CFA and its members have come together as communities and fought and endured extreme fire conditions. The Review recognises the unitary purpose in protecting communities across Victoria and also that the nature of the work of CFA members as firefighters means that they may have been repeatedly exposed to trauma and its aftermath.

The Review recognises that CFA and its organisational culture have undergone a period of significant change and that CFA is currently operating within the context of a ten-year reform agenda for fire services in Victoria.

The Review will seek to build on CFA's core strengths of fire safety, professional standards for fire-fighting, community connectedness and volunteering and will seek to highlight the importance of a positive, supportive and inclusive culture that is focused on increasing diversity, flexibility and inclusiveness to support CFA of the future.

This Review is one of many initiatives that CFA has implemented to support positive change. These include for example:

 INITIATIVES THAT THE CFA HAS IMPLEMENTED TO SUPPORT POSITIVE CHANGE		
The development of an Inclusion and Fairness Framework and an Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2021-2025 and the development of an Allies of Inclusion Network	The creation of a CFA Women's Advisory Committee and a CFA Youth Advisory Committee to advise the CEO and the Chief Officer directly on systemic matters and issues which need to be addressed to support diversity and inclusion	A review of support to Brigade Management Teams to ensure that there is a clear understanding of CFA expectations for volunteer leaders in addressing behavioural matters and the help available to them to assist when matters arise
Expansion of mediation services across the State to support early intervention of issues	The development of behavioural standards and improved interim guidelines for the management of complaints	A Disability Action Plan (which is in the process of being updated) and Disability confidence training
Provision of more prominent and visible information on where CFA members can raise issues of concern, both internally and externally	Introduction of Family Violence resources including paid leave, family violence contact officers, training and resources for people affected by family violence and their managers ¹	Delivery of tailored programs to multicultural groups through local brigades; and work to educate CFA members on understanding different faiths ²
CFA Pride, a support network for CFA's LGBTIQ+ firefighters which received the 2017 Volunteering Victoria State Award for Inclusion ³	An increase of investment in leadership development (including volunteer leaders)	Aboriginal Engagement Guidelines and a Koori Engagement Action Plan (which is in the process of being updated)
An independent review of training at the CFA ⁴	Availability of wellbeing education and training and Matter of Respect training	A case tracking system for complaints, guidelines to promote a trauma-informed approach to the participation of children in the hearing process and the engagement of Kooyoora to focus on child related complaint processes
Identification of additional support to organisational leaders at all levels to ensure that there is a clear understanding of CFA expectations for staff leaders in proactively addressing behavioural matters and the help available to them to assist when matters arise	Regional and district training and leadership programs aimed at supporting women, including an annual event for women to learn burn off skills, and a Women's Challenge camp, which includes leadership development and physical activity ⁵	A Diversity and Inclusion data collection process; an Inclusion and Fairness business rule to provide guidance in relation to enabling inclusive, safe and equitable work practices, Inclusion Advisory Councils and the appointment of Inclusion and Fairness Coordinators across the regions as well as regional and state Inclusion and Fairness Councils.

Notwithstanding, we are told that there continue to be systemic and procedural issues and gaps relating to diversity, harassment, discrimination and bullying at CFA.⁸¹⁹ There are industrial agreements in place which have also been raised as features of the challenges and opportunities for CFA.

A high level overview of some of these barriers is outlined below to inform consultation. These issues and solutions to overcoming them will be further explored during the course of the Review.

¹ Male Champions of Change. Fire & Emergency Impact Report 2018-2019. Retrieved from: <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Fire-Emergency-Impact-Report-2019.pdf>

² CFA Annual Report 17-18, p.21.

³ CFA Annual Report 2016-17, p.37.

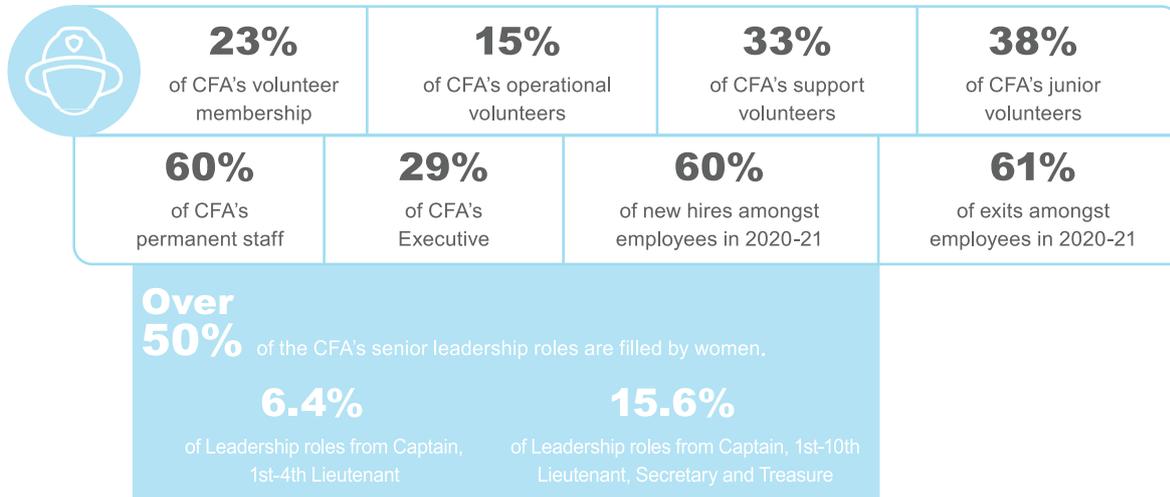
⁴ FSIM. (2021) *2020-21 Quarter 4 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2020-21%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%204_1.docx.

⁵ FSIM. (2021) *2020-21 Quarter 4 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2020-21%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%204_1.docx.

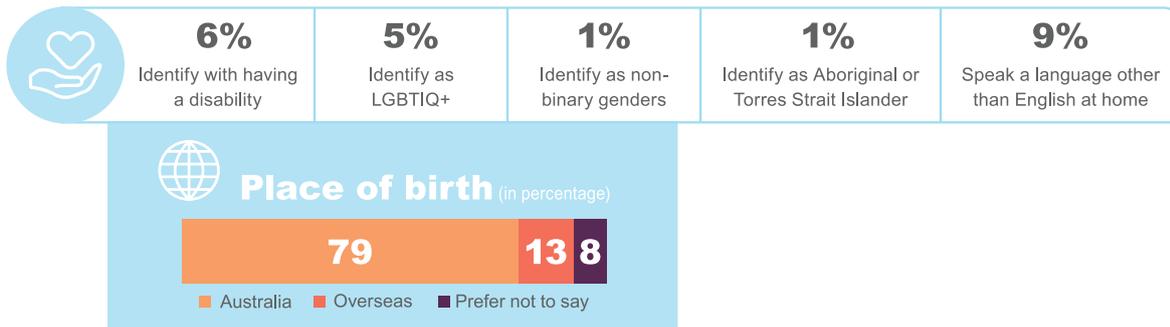
⁸¹⁹ The issues outlined below have been drawn from the initial consultation period as well as a desktop review of CFA's policies, procedures and other relevant documents.

CFA’s ability to connect with, attract and retain a diversity of members is a recognised challenge.⁸²⁰ Of 136 volunteers who completed an exit survey between July and December 2020, 23% were unsatisfied with the level of diversity in their brigade. CFA has recognised that whilst some brigades seek out, recruit and make significant investment in retaining diverse volunteers, other brigades do not recognise the need to focus on inclusion and diversity.⁸²¹

Women represent:⁸²²



Of 577 employees who responded to the People Matter Survey:⁸²³



Further, at least 70 per cent of CFA’s volunteers are over the age of 40.⁸²⁴

⁸²⁰ CFA Volunteerism Strategy 2015-2020.

⁸²¹ Draft Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

⁸²² CFA. (2021) CFA at a Glance. Retrieved from: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/cfa-at-a-glance> Figures as of 31 December 2021; Statistics provided by CFA; FSIM. (2021) 2020-21 Quarter 4 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report. Retrieved from: https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2020-21%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%204_1.docx.

⁸²³ Employees from PTA, DMO, TO and Executive groups were invited to participate in the 2021 People Matter Survey. 577 CFA employees (50% of applicable staff) completed the survey.

⁸²⁴ FSIM. (2021) 2020-21 Quarter 4 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report. Retrieved from: https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2020-21%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%204_1.docx.pg.

Bullying, discrimination, harassment and stress

A high-level desktop review and preliminary stakeholder consultation identifies a range of concerns about workplace culture, misconduct, stress and unmet expectations suggesting that there is scope for further improvement on these matters. Key concerns are summarised below.

Volunteer concerns

Of 136 volunteers who completed an exit survey between July and December 2020, harassment and bullying and the culture of the brigade were identified as two of the top five reasons for volunteers leaving CFA. The VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey⁸²⁵ found that volunteers thought there was a large gap between what CFA was doing to actively discourage workplace bullying and CFA volunteers' expectations about what should be done.

The gap between volunteer expectations and organisational performance has recently been determined by the Fire Services Implementation Monitor to be at critical levels.⁸²⁶

Employee concerns

The 2021 People Matter survey showed that 71% of CFA respondents felt they were treated with respect in the workplace and community, and 73% of those who witnessed negative behaviours spoke to the person who experienced the behaviour. However, there is scope for improvement to ensure that CFA creates a positive workplace free from discrimination, bullying and harassment.

Almost a quarter of employees who responded to the 2021 People Matter Survey indicated that they had experienced bullying in the last 12 months; 8% of employees indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment; 9% of employees had experienced discrimination in the last 12 months and 10% of employees reported that they had experienced workplace violence and/or aggression in the last 12 months. While the continuation of this behaviour is deeply problematic and concerning, there do appear to be marginal improvements in relation to previous years.

The People Matter survey also revealed that:

- 35% of CFA respondents were experiencing high, very high or severe levels of work-related stress
- the main causes of stress for CFA respondents were workload (49%); time pressure (32%); organisation or workplace change (28%) and job security (19%). 22% of respondents reported that they intended to leave CFA, with 52% indicating that their reason for leaving was a lack of confidence in senior leadership.

⁸²⁵ Conducted between November 2020 – January 2021

⁸²⁶ FSIM. (2021) *2020-21 Quarter 4 Fire Services Outcome Framework Progress Report*. Retrieved from: https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2020-21%20Fire%20Services%20Outcome%20Framework%20Progress%20Report%20Quarter%204_1.docx.

Systems, Processes and Training

The recent introduction of the Interim Behavioural Standards demonstrate that CFA is investing in efforts to foster a safe, respectful and inclusive workplace for CFA Members, Officers and Contractors.

However, there appear to remain barriers to disclosures and reporting of complaints and grievances as well as delays in resolution.

The process for investigating and conducting hearings into allegations of workplace misconduct should protect the wellbeing of those involved and ensure that participants in the process are supported with due process and procedural fairness.⁸²⁷ However, a substantial number of employees have expressed a lack of confidence in the investigation process and fear of reprisals for complaints made.⁸²⁸ Volunteers have reported issues relating to timeliness, support and feedback throughout the Complaints process.⁸²⁹

Some employees have also identified concerns about accessing professional development and training. The 2021 People Matter survey showed a decline in how well employees felt they can learn and grow at CFA. The Review Team has also been informed about barriers to women attending training which, in turn, impedes their career development.

⁸²⁷ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement June 2021*. Retrieved from: vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202106-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_June2021-web.pdf

⁸²⁸ In the 2021 People Matter Survey only 28% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I am confident that if I raised a grievance in my organisation, it would be investigated in a thorough and objective manner', and only 44% of respondents reported being confident that they would be protected from reprisal for reporting improper conduct.

⁸²⁹ VFBV. (2021). *VFBV Quarterly Supplement June 2021*. Retrieved from: vfbv.com.au/documents/documents/QuarterlySupplement/202106-VFBVQuarterlySupplement_June2021-web.pdf

Learnings from other approaches to culture and issues management

There have been many reviews undertaken into workplace culture and issues management across a range of organisations and sectors. These reviews have recognised that a diverse and inclusive workplace is linked to a number of benefits not just for individuals, but for organisations and the broader community as well.

The reviews identify a range of factors and practices that help prevent disrespectful workplace behaviour and build and maintain safe, diverse and inclusive workplaces, including for example:

- strong and courageous leadership to drive reform
- the provision of support services to members including counselling, wellbeing support or other forms of support which is consistent with the adoption of a victim-centred approach
- structured recruitment and retention processes, including targeted recruitment of people from diverse backgrounds
- clear policies, guidelines, procedures and frameworks (with clear delineation of roles and responsibilities) aimed at supporting diversity; preventing bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation; and providing appropriate mechanisms to make disclosures and raise and resolve complaints
- formal and informal professional development and training opportunities for all members of the workforce, to support professionalism, and ensure a clear understanding of expected standards of behaviour and processes for raising concerns
- recommendations in relation to updates that might be required to legislation, regulations, policies, procedures or other documents to support an inclusive culture
- supporting local managers and supervisors to ensure workplace safety and welfare
- addressing barriers to reporting and disclosure, including by ensuring that complaints and resolution processes are timely, victim-centred and trauma-informed and provide options for anonymous reporting
- ongoing data collection and reporting to leadership on key complaint statistics, and diversity and workplace culture metrics, as well as monitoring and evaluation to support continuous improvement and best practice.

Questions for consultation

Consultation questions will relate to the following themes and may cover the following questions:

Current CFA culture

- what constitutes a safe and diverse workplace and to what extent CFA is achieving that aim
- positive and negative experiences of CFA culture including what is and is not working well, what members like most and least about being part of CFA
- actions taken by CFA to promote diversity, and prevent harassment, discrimination, and bullying
- prevalence of harassment, discrimination, and bullying by CFA members
- the impact on culture of a workplace that includes volunteers, employees and secondees and operates within a command-and-control structure.

The role of CFA leadership in embedding behavioural and cultural expectations and creating an inclusive organisation

- the extent of visible leadership and gender and diversity representation in CFA leadership roles
- management responses to reported instances of harassment, discrimination, or bullying and any variation between locations/brigades
- bystander awareness and intervention.

Current CFA systems and processes for managing disclosures and complaints relating to diversity, harassment, discrimination and bullying

- reporting structures and support systems and the degree to which they are clear, culturally appropriate, inclusive, and accessible in regional, remote, and rural locations
- clarity and accessibility of relevant policies and procedures
- timeliness of finalisation/resolution of reported matters, and communication of outcomes.

Preventing harassment, discrimination and bullying

- training
- communities of practice and opportunities for sharing between Brigades
- the role of leadership.

Barriers to improvement

- structural, legislative, cultural or other barriers
- patterns of perpetrator behaviour and treatment of inappropriate behaviour by 'high value' individuals

- any recriminations for complainants who have reported harassment, discrimination, or bullying.

Recommendations for improvement

- opportunities to address concerns, gaps or issues.



APPENDIX 5: GUIDANCE QUESTIONS FOR COMPARATOR ORGANISATIONS



APPENDIX 5: GUIDANCE QUESTIONS FOR COMPARATOR ORGANISATIONS

The Review Team used a range of research questions to inform the collection and analysis of information from the desktop review and stakeholder consultations for the comparator review. The questions outlined below operated as a guide for engagement only and not all questions were applicable to every comparator organisation.

Theme	Questions
Organisational culture	<p>What is the organisation’s authorising environment (regulatory and political framework) and how has that impacted culture?</p> <p>What are the organisation’s values and cultural expectations?</p> <p>Does the organisation reflect this messaging in its public facing communications?</p> <p>Are the values and cultural expectations the same for staff and volunteers?</p> <p>What initiatives/achievements has the organisation put in place to support positive cultural change for staff and volunteers?</p> <p>How have staff/volunteers responded to these changes?</p> <p>What steps has the organisation taken to establish a consistent culture across a large and geographically disparate organisation?</p> <p>Are there any specific challenges in establishing cultural change within a hierarchical organisation, which typically operates under chain of command?</p> <p>Are there any specific challenges in establishing cultural change within an organisation which relies on volunteers to deliver operational services to the community?</p> <p>What challenges has the organisation experienced in achieving cultural change and how these have been overcome?</p> <p>Are there any ongoing barriers? What is their cause?</p> <p>How do organisational leaders communicate with staff/volunteers on matters relating to diversity, harassment, discrimination and bullying?</p> <p>What formal communication measures exist in relation to complaints?</p> <p>How are outcomes of formal processes communicated?</p> <p>What informal communication mechanisms exist within the organisation?</p> <p>How has the organisation ensured that volunteer members feel valued and recognised in the absence of financial reimbursement?</p>
Improving workforce diversity	<p>Has the organisation undertaken any specific attraction, retention, or attrition initiatives to improve workforce diversity for staff/volunteers?</p> <p>If yes, have they been successful?</p> <p>Has the organisation taken any specific action to improve gender equity for staff/volunteers?</p> <p>What other systems, policies, processes, and programs are in place to support organisational diversity?</p> <p>What definitions of diversity have been used? Has anything been included/excluded in these definitions?</p> <p>Have these systems, processes or programs positively impacted on the organisation’s diversity and member retention?</p>

	<p>What diversity training (formal or informal) does the organisation provide to staff and volunteers?</p>
<p>Preventing and responding to harassment, discrimination and bullying</p>	<p>What is the process for managing complaints? How are these matters resolved? Are outcomes of these processes communicated to the organisation or reported anywhere?</p> <p>What systems, policies, processes (including training) and programs are in place for preventing harassment, discrimination and bullying for staff and volunteers? Are they effective? How is this measured?</p> <p>What systems, policies, processes (including training) and programs are in place for responding to harassment, discrimination and bullying for staff and volunteers? Are they effective? How is this measured?</p>



APPENDIX 6: CONSENT FORM



APPENDIX 6: CONSENT FORM

The Consent Form below was developed in October 2021 and provided to stakeholders during the second round of engagement, either in paper-form or through Qualtrics.

External Review of Culture and Issues Management to support CFA of the Future – Consent Form

Participant Information Sheet

The Review: An independent Review Team from Allen + Clarke Consulting, which includes Dr Helen Szoke AO as Lead Reviewer, has been engaged by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to undertake a review of culture and issues management to support CFA of the future.

The Review will seek to ensure that CFA has a robust and effective approach to issues management across a complex volunteer-based organisation; sets and embeds behavioural and cultural expectations at all levels of the organisation; efficiently and effectively manages issues when they do arise and supports members and leaders to work these issues through.

The Review will consider structural and systemic issues and improvements. It will not investigate individual reports of misconduct.

The final report and recommendations will be made available to the membership and employees of CFA.

Support Services Available

We recognise that this Review may bring up issues for participants where specialist support services for those impacted by bullying, harassment and abuse may be needed.

Specialist support services for those impacted:

CFA wellbeing Support Line
1800 959 232 (free call)

CFA Member Assistance Program/ Peer Support Program/ Chaplaincy Support Program
1800 959 232 (follow the prompts to reach the appropriate support service)

Member Wellbeing Advisors
1800 959 232
wellbeing@cfa.vic.gov.au

1800RESPECT (National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling, Information and Support Service)
1800 737 732 (open 24/7, free service)
www.1800respect.org.au

No To Violence (for men concerned about their own behaviour)
1300 766 491(open 24/7)

Free, live web chat options: <https://ntv.org.au/get-help/>

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) or the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) to make a formal complaint about unlawful discrimination, sexual harassment or victimisation and/or anonymously find out more about your rights and legal options

VEOHRC: Phone: 1300 292 153, email: enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au

AHRC: Phone: 1300 369 711, email: infoservice@humanrights.gov.au

Lifeline provides 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services

13 11 44

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Sexual Assault Crisis Line (crisis response phonenumber for people who have experienced sexual violence), after-hours telephone crisis counselling support, information, advocacy and referral to anyone living in Victoria.

1800 806 292 (free call)

<https://www.sacl.com.au>

Further information or questions

If you have any questions about the Review or participating in it, you can contact the Review Team directly on CFAReview@allenandclarke.com.au.

Please complete the following information:

Participant information	
Name:	
Role:	
Age: (please circle)	<input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 <input type="checkbox"/> Over 18
Email address:	

Informed Consent form

Project Title: External Review of Culture and Issues Management to support CFA of the Future

I am prepared to be involved in the stakeholder consultation for the independent review of culture and issues management to support CFA of the future. In agreeing to be involved, I am saying that:

I have been provided with contact details for the Review Team and I have had an opportunity to communicate with the Review Team about the Review. Any questions I have about the Review have been answered and I know that if I have any further questions, I can ask the Review Team.

I understand what the Review is about

I understand what I will be asked to do

I know that I don't have to participate in the Review if I don't want to

I know that I can change my mind about being involved in the Review

I know that I don't have to answer any questions that I don't want to answer

I know that my information will remain confidential unless the Review Team are required to tell someone my information by law or for my safety, and that may include if I say that I am in immediate danger or my safety or wellbeing is at risk by someone or if I say that I am hurting myself or someone else

I understand that my personal information will be stored securely

I understand that the Review Team will take notes of what I tell them and may make an audio recording of our discussion with my consent

I understand that what I tell the Review Team may be published and used to inform the Report but that it will be deidentified.

I consent to a voice/video recording being made of my interview (please circle): yes / no

Signature: _____

Date: _____



APPENDIX 7: CFA INTERIM BEHAVIOURAL STANDARDS



CFA Behavioural Standards

1. OVERVIEW

This Behavioural Standards (**Standards**) set out the required standards of behaviour for all CFA Members, Officers and contractors.

2. DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATION

In these Standards:

- (a) CFA Activities has the meaning in clause 4.2
- (b) "CFA Members" means both CFA volunteers and CFA employees;
- (c) "CFA Premises" includes fire stations, workshops, training facilities, district offices, regional offices, headquarters, and the ground surrounding or immediately adjacent to those premises. It also includes CFA vehicles, boats and aircraft; and
- (d) "IBAC" means the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission.
- (e) "Officers" includes persons appointed as officers, from Lieutenant to Chief Officer; (including seconded staff from Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV))

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THESE STANDARDS?

- 3.1 CFA is committed to fostering an environment that is free from discrimination, harassment, bullying or violence and where all CFA Members, Officers and contractors are treated with dignity and respect.
- 3.2 CFA expects all CFA Members, Officers and contractors to work safely and cooperatively for the benefit of the Victorian community and in keeping with the CFA values which include teamwork, integrity, respect, safety and being adaptable.
- 3.3 Those CFA values include guiding principles of working cooperatively in inclusive teams, acting with integrity at all times, being truthful, open and honest, and treating everyone fairly and with respect, including other CFA Members, Officers, CFA visitors and members of the public.
- 3.4 This Standards set out the required standards of behaviour for all CFA Members, Officers and contractors whenever they are performing work for or on behalf of CFA or undertaking CFA activities. This Standards have been developed to complement relevant existing values, codes of conduct, and business rules, including (but not limited to) the:
 - (a) CFA Values;
 - (b) VPS Code of Conduct (employees only);
 - (c) Volunteer Code of Conduct (volunteer members only);
 - (d) CFA Executive Integrity Policy Suite and associated Business Rules;
 - (e) Health Safety Environment and Wellbeing Policy;
 - (f) CFA Values & Behaviours Executive Policy;
 - (g) Chief Officers Command Philosophy.

4. APPLICATION- WHO DOES THESE STANDARDS APPLY TO?

- 4.1 All CFA Members, Officers and contractors are required to comply with these Standards as:
- (a) a lawful and reasonable direction issued from CFA to all CFA employees;
 - (b) a Standing Order of the Chief Officer issued under section 27(1) of the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (Vic) (**CFA Act**) to all CFA volunteers; and
 - (c) a Standing Order of the Chief Officer under both section 25C(5) of the *Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958* (Cth) (**FRV Act**) and section 27(1) of the CFA Act to all CFA officers that are employees of Fire Rescue Victoria performing work as secondees for CFA under a secondment agreement within the meaning of section 25C(10) of the FRV Act; or
 - (d) a direction to all CFA contractors in accordance with the applicable contract.
- 4.2 All CFA Members, Officers and contractors are required to comply with these Standards whenever they are performing work for or on behalf of CFA or otherwise representing CFA (**CFA Activities**). This includes when:
- (a) acting in the capacity of a CFA Member, Officer or contractor;
 - (b) attending or participating in any CFA or CFA sponsored activity or event. This includes:
 - (i) incidents, training, or other community relations events;
 - (ii) functions or events organised by a brigade or brigade social committee, competitions, training courses (whether or not they are conducted on CFA premises) and meals provided at, or social gatherings held in conjunction with, meetings, training courses or other events;
 - (iii) any CFA sponsored event;
 - (c) on CFA Premises;
 - (d) wearing a CFA uniform, whether on duty or otherwise;
 - (e) holding himself or herself out as a CFA employee, volunteer, officer or contractor. This includes when a person describes themselves as a CFA employee, volunteer, officer or contractor or implies their association with CFA. This includes, for example, posting an image of themselves in CFA uniform or identifies their association with CFA, including online and in online forums (eg Facebook and What's App).

5. **WHAT IF THESE STANDARDS ARE BREACHED?**

- 5.1 Breach of the Standards may constitute misconduct, serious misconduct and/or disgraceful or improper conduct (including under the CFA Regulations) and a breach of duties owed to CFA. A breach of these Standards may result in disciplinary consequences, including:
- (a) counselling;
 - (b) being held out of duty;
 - (c) admonishment or reprimand;
 - (d) reduction in rank or classification;
 - (e) removal from office or suspension;
 - (f) cancellation of membership.

- 5.2 Breach of these Standards by Officers seconded from FRV will be referred to the Fire Rescue Commissioner as required by the secondment agreement between CFA and FRV.
- 5.3 Any breach of these Standards by CFA Members or Officers may also lead to other consequences as set out in legislation, or under civil and criminal law. Where appropriate a matter may be referred to IBAC or to Victoria Police.

6. **WHAT BEHAVIOURAL STANDARDS APPLY AT CFA?**

- 6.1 All CFA Members, Officers and contractors must comply with the following behavioural standards whenever they are performing work for or on behalf of CFA or undertaking CFA Activities.

General behavioural standards

- 6.2 CFA Members, Officers and contractors must:

- (a) act in accordance with the CFA Values and guiding principles;
- (b) comply with CFA reasonable and lawful directions and orders of the Chief Officer or his/her delegate(s);
- (c) comply with all requirements and directions of CFA regarding safety, including regarding psychological health;
- (d) act in accordance with law;
- (e) act with integrity;
- (f) be courteous and respectful;
- (g) be truthful, open and honest;
- (h) treat others fairly and with respect;
- (i) work cooperatively in inclusive teams;
- (j) acting in the interests of CFA and the community including where you have a competing interest;
- (k) generally, act in a decent and appropriate manner that will promote the reputation and standing of CFA.

General behavioural prohibitions

- 6.3 CFA Members, Officers and contractors must not engage in inappropriate behaviour or conduct, including (but not limited to):

- (a) breaches of State or Federal law;
- (b) acts of negligence, neglect of duty or disobedience;
- (c) breaches of any applicable CFA policies and business rules;
- (d) breaches of any applicable CFA requirements, lawful and reasonable directions or orders of the Chief Officer or his/her delegate(s);
- (e) lateness or absenteeism without reasonable excuse;
- (f) offensive, disorderly or threatening behaviour;
- (g) damage to or theft of property;

- (h) engaging in unsafe work practices or any action which endangers the health or safety of others within the workplace;
- (i) harassment or bullying (see below),
- (j) sexual harassment, prohibited discrimination, or victimisation (see below);
- (k) being under the influence of drugs or alcohol whilst at CFA premises or during performance of CFA duties;
- (l) aggressive acts and/or physical violence (including threats);
- (m) fraud or other criminal activity;
- (n) misuse of social media or online behaviour involving other CFA Members, Officers or contractors; or
- (o) any other conduct that would reasonably be expected to damage the reputation and standing of CFA.

Interactions with Children (Persons under 18)

7. Without limiting the general obligations, particular care needs to be taken in any dealings with or interactions with children. CFA Members, Officers and contractors must:
- (a) ensure that they act professionally and maintain a respectful and professional distance around any child or young member or with whom they come into contact during the course of their duties.
 - (b) avoid any behaviour in respect of children or involving which might be considered by a reasonable person as inappropriate including but not limited to:
 - (i) having a sexual or intimate relationship;
 - (ii) using sexual innuendo or inappropriate language;
 - (iii) holding conversations where they disclose inappropriate private information about themselves;
 - (iv) giving gifts of a personal nature;
 - (v) taking inappropriate photographs; or
 - (vi) having contact via social media, text, phone, email or letters in inappropriate circumstances.

Bullying and Harassment

- 7.2 CFA Members, Officers and contractors must not engage in bullying or harassment.

What is bullying?

- 7.3 Bullying is **repeated**, unreasonable behaviour directed towards another person(s) that creates a risk to health and safety.

- 7.4 Bullying can take many forms, and it may be obvious or subtle. Bullying can be directed downwards (from a more senior person to a more junior person), sideways (between persons of the same seniority) or upwards (from a more junior person to a more senior person).

- 7.5 Examples of bullying include (but are not limited to):

- (a) verbal abuse, including making threats, swearing and shouting, or humiliation through sarcasm or insults;
- (b) cyber bullying, being bullying on electronic platforms including social media;
- (c) bullying through other conduct, such as setting impossible deadlines or deliberately withholding information that is vital for work performance, or excluding someone from activities that they should ordinarily be involved in; or
- (d) hazing or unreasonable initiation processes.

What is not bullying?

7.6 A single instance of any of the above type of behaviours **does not** constitute bullying, however, depending on the conduct it may still be unlawful, may be considered harassment (as defined below) or otherwise be regarded as behaviour that is inconsistent with CFA's values and not tolerated.

7.7 Reasonable management action, carried out in a reasonable manner, is not bullying. For example, bullying does not include:

- (a) issuing reasonable and lawful directions;
- (b) setting reasonable performance goals, standards and deadlines;
- (c) appropriate performance management or monitoring;
- (d) failure to congratulate or praise an individual simply for doing their job;
- (e) making a merit-based recruitment or selection decision;
- (f) comments which are objective and indicate observable deficiencies in performance or conduct; or
- (g) constructive feedback or counselling that is intended to assist CFA Members or Officers to improve their work performance or the standard of their behaviour.

7.8 Occasional differences of opinion, non-aggressive conflicts and problems in working relations also do not by themselves constitute bullying.

What is harassment?

7.9 Harassment is unwelcome behaviour, which a reasonable person could anticipate would intimidate, humiliate or offend the other person(s) in those particular circumstances.

7.10 Harassing behaviour does not have to be intentional and can range from serious to less serious levels. One-off incidents can still constitute harassment.

7.11 Harassment may include (but is not limited to):

- (a) racial vilification, including telling insulting jokes about particular racial groups;
- (b) making derogatory comments or taunts about someone's race, age, or religion;
- (c) making fun of someone's personal circumstances, personal appearance or mental or physical disability;
- (d) making remarks about a person's skin colour or ethnic traits;
- (e) unreasonable displays about a person's poor work performance in front of peers;
- (f) using racist slang, phrases or nicknames; or

(g) sharing inappropriate or offensive material.

7.12 Harassment can also occur if someone is working in a hostile or intimidating environment. An example of a potentially hostile working environment is where racist materials are displayed and where crude conversations, innuendo or offensive jokes are part of the accepted culture. CFA Staff are encouraged to actively prevent the development or continuation of any hostile working environment, even if the conduct in question was not specifically targeted at them.

Sexual harassment

7.13 CFA Members, Officers and contractors must not engage in sexual harassment.

What is sexual Harassment?

7.14 Sexual harassment is any unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature, which a reasonable person could anticipate would intimidate, humiliate or offend the other person(s) in those particular circumstances. Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances or unwelcome requests for sexual favours.

7.15 Sexual harassment does not have to be repeated and motive or intention are not relevant. That is, the fact that someone didn't intend to sexual harass another person does not mean that it is not sexual harassment.

7.16 Examples of sexual harassment include:

- (a) uninvited sexually suggestive touching or gestures;
- (b) making jokes or comments with sexual connotations or sex-based insults, taunts, teasing or name-calling;
- (c) displays of sexually graphic material including posters, cartoons or messages left of notice boards, desks, computer screens, through social media groups or in common areas;
- (d) staring or leering at a person, or at parts of their body;
- (e) repeated invitations to go out after prior refusal;
- (f) persistent questions or insinuations about a person's private life; or
- (g) criminal behaviour such as stalking, sexual assault or rape.

What is not sexual harassment?

7.17 Consensual behaviour that is based on mutual attraction, friendship and respect does not constitute sexual harassment.

7.18 Sexual harassment is prohibited under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) and the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth).

Discrimination

7.19 CFA Members, Officers and contractors must not engage in prohibited discrimination.

What is prohibited/unlawful discrimination?

7.20 Prohibited discrimination is the unfair or unequal treatment of an individual on the basis of one or more of the following actual or assumed protected attributes:

- (a) age;

- (b) gender or gender identity;
- (c) impairment or disability;
- (d) industrial activity or inactivity;
- (e) marital, parental or carer status;
- (f) physical features;
- (g) political belief or activity;
- (h) pregnancy or potential pregnancy, or breastfeeding;
- (i) race;
- (j) religious belief or activity;
- (k) sexual activity or orientation; or
- (l) personal association with a person who is identified by reference to any of the above attributes.

7.21 Discrimination can be direct, where a person treats, or proposes to treat, a person with a protected attribute unfavourably because of that attribute.

7.22 Discrimination can also be indirect, where a person imposes, or proposes to impose, a requirement, condition or practice that has the effect of disadvantaging persons with an attribute and is unreasonable.

7.23 Discrimination does not have to be repeated. Further, it is irrelevant whether a person who discriminates is aware of the discrimination or whether the person intends to discriminate.

7.24 Examples of prohibited discrimination include:

- (a) treating someone less favourably because of their gender or their race or age;
- (b) making recruitment or selection decisions on the basis of a protected attribute, rather than merit, and where no formal legal exemption is obtained (e.g. an exemption to the prohibition on discrimination so as to meet gender equity targets);
- (c) failing to offer overtime to an individual due to assumptions about their family responsibilities; or
- (d) failing to provide training opportunities because of a person's gender.

What is not prohibited/unlawful discrimination?

7.25 Treating someone differently is not necessarily prohibited discrimination. An action is not prohibited discrimination if it is:

- (a) permissible under anti-discrimination legislation, for example with respect to requiring the fulfilment of the inherent requirements of a role, or not making adjustments that would impose an unjustifiable hardship on CFA; or
- (b) a legitimate, reasonable and fair action to direct and control how work is done, or to ensure health and safety.

7.26 Discrimination on the basis of the protected grounds is unlawful under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) and Commonwealth legislation.

Victimisation

- 7.27 CFA Members, Officers and contractors must not engage in victimisation.
- 7.28 Victimization occurs where a person is retaliated against or is subjected to a detriment because they:
- (a) have raised a concern, grievance or complaint,
 - (b) they threaten to raise a concern, grievance or complaint; or
 - (c) they are involved in a concern, grievance or complaint (for example, as a witness) of any kind, including in relation to any process under an enterprise agreement, the CFA Complaints Resolution Guideline or any other relevant procedure, instrument or law.

8. **HOW CAN YOU RAISE CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS?**

- 8.1 All CFA Members, Officers and Contractors are encouraged to call out behaviour that is inconsistent with these Standards.
- 8.2 Any CFA Member, Officer or contractor who believes they have been subjected to or witnessed behaviour that breaches these Standards may raise a concern or make a complaint in accordance with the CFA Complaints Resolution Guideline, or any replacement guideline or procedure.
- 8.3 The making of knowingly false, vexatious or frivolous complaints may constitute misconduct, serious misconduct and/or disgraceful or improper conduct, (including under the CFA Regulations), and a breach of duties owed to CFA.

9. **WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE INFORMATION?**

If you have any queries, would like to provide feedback or would like more information about the Behavioural Standards you can email CFAbehavioursfeedback@cfa.vic.gov.au



APPENDIX 8: CFA INTERIM COMPLAINT RESOLUTION GUIDELINES



CFA Complaint Resolution Guidelines

1. Overview and Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the Complaints Resolution Guidelines (**Guidelines**) is to set out in general terms CFA's approach to managing and resolving concerns and complaints that it receives.
- 1.2 CFA is committed to all CFA Members, Officers and contractors working safely and cooperatively for the benefit of the Victorian community and in keeping with the CFA values which include teamwork, integrity, respect, safety and being adaptable.
- 1.3 Those CFA values and guiding principles are also reflected in the [CFA Behavioural Standards](#), which sets out the standards of behaviour that CFA requires of all of CFA Members, Officers and contractors, including that CFA will not tolerate bullying or harassment, sexual harassment, prohibited discrimination, or victimisation.
- 1.4 CFA acknowledges that circumstances can arise where a CFA Member, Officer or contractor or member of the public/community, may wish to raise a concern, or make a more formal complaint about the conduct of other CFA Members, Officers or contractors. CFA is committed to facilitating the proper resolution of such complaints in an appropriate, transparent, efficient, fair and effective manner.
- 1.5 The **attached flowchart** summarises matters in these Guidelines and will assist CFA Members, Officers and contractors in raising and resolving concerns and complaints.

2. Scope

- 2.1 These Guidelines apply in relation to concerns raised and complaints made by a member of the public/community, CFA Members, Officers and/or contractors, in relation to CFA Members, Officers or contractors.
- 2.2 However, these Guidelines do not apply to:
 - (a) disputes or grievances about employment entitlements under the National Employment Standards or Enterprise Agreements;
 - (b) reasonable management action and/or management decisions taken in a reasonable manner;
 - (c) complaints by members of the public about matters other than the behaviour of a CFA Member, Officer or contractor; and/or
 - (d) matters that are operational matters or any matters where CFA determines that there is a more appropriate process or procedure that should be applied, taking into account the subject matter of the issue or concern raised.
- 2.3 These Guidelines are not an exhaustive statement of the CFA's process for handling concerns, complaints or other related matters. Please note that:
 - (a) it does not displace any other instruments that may apply in circumstances considered by these Guidelines, including the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (Vic) (**CFA Act**), the *Country Fire Authority Regulations 2014* (Vic) (**CFA Regulations**), other legislative instruments or Enterprise Agreements;
 - (b) if you have any concerns about the safety or welfare of a child who is involved with the CFA in any way, you should complete the [CFA Child Safety Incident Report Form](#) and submit it to the CFA's Child Safety Officer as soon as practicable.
- 2.4 These Guidelines will remain in place until varied or replaced by new Guidelines or a new Policy or Business Rule.

3. Definitions

- (a) "CFA Members" means both CFA volunteers and CFA employees;
- (b) "CFA Premises" includes fire stations, workshops, training facilities, district offices, regional offices, headquarters, and the ground surrounding or immediately adjacent to those premises. It also includes CFA vehicles, boats and aircraft;
- (c) "Enterprise Agreement" means an enterprise agreement made under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) and includes the *Country Fire Authority Professional, Technical and Administrative Staff Agreement 2016 (PTA Agreement)* and the *CFA District Mechanical Officers and Tower Overseers Agreement 2018 (DMO/TO Agreement)*, and any replacement agreements;
- (d) "IBAC" means the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission;
- (e) "Officers" means persons appointed as officers from Lieutenant to Chief Officer (and includes seconded staff from Fire Rescue Victoria (**FRV**));
- (f) "supervisor/manager" means the person to whom a Member, Officer or contractor reports; and
- (g) "respondent" means a person or persons against whom a complaint is made.

4. Principles for Complaint Resolution

4.1 CFA will, so far as reasonably practicable, handle all concerns and complaints in accordance with the following principles:

- (a) Complaints will be handled confidentially to the extent reasonably possible. All parties to a complaint are to maintain appropriate confidentiality.
- (b) It is preferable for concerns and complaints to be resolved informally between those concerned, where appropriate. CFA acknowledges that informal resolution may not always be appropriate or effective, and that sometimes it may be necessary for a more formal complaint resolution process to be undertaken.
- (c) CFA will assess all complaints received and determine the most appropriate approach for addressing or progressing each complaint, including whether to progress informally, to progress as a formal complaint and/or to refer to another process or body.
- (d) CFA will seek to deal with concerns and complaints in a timely manner.
- (e) Complaints will be handled in accordance with principles of procedural fairness and in a manner that is fair to the complainant and to the person(s) against whom the complaint is made. Procedural fairness includes the absence of bias, and a reasonable opportunity to respond.
- (f) Where the concern or complaint is about a matter that occurred more than 12 months prior, CFA will consider whether it is appropriate to progress the concern or complaint.
- (g) CFA will seek to provide appropriate support to those persons affected by a complaint, including the complainant, the respondent(s) and any other persons involved. This will include, where possible and appropriate, the provision of regular progress updates and explanations throughout the complaint process.
- (h) Complaints that CFA assesses to be false, frivolous or vexatious will be dismissed and may result in potential action against the complainant. A frivolous complaint is one which is petty or minor, that does not have any serious purpose or value, or that is otherwise not worthy of serious attention. A vexatious complaint is one that is

not based on an honestly held opinion or that is made for an ulterior purpose, including a complaint that is raised without merit to cause inconvenience, upset, annoyance, frustration or worry to the person(s) against whom it is made, or to CFA.

- (i) Complaints which are ill-founded or for which there is insufficient detail or evidence to proceed or for which there is no reasonable expectation of a satisfactory resolution, will be closed. The complainant will be notified in writing of the stated reasons why no further action will be taken.
- (j) It is preferable for complaints to be raised by identified complainants as greater steps and action can be taken and procedural fairness provided to any people complained about. If a complaint is made anonymously:
 - (i) CFA may be restricted in its ability to effectively handle the complaint and a formal investigation may not be available;
 - (ii) nonetheless, CFA will, to the extent reasonable and possible, take appropriate action to address the matters raised by the complaint in the circumstances. This may include identifying any particular issues and trends and communicating CFA's expectations, even if an investigation is not undertaken or is limited because of the complaint being anonymous.
- (k) Complaints or parts of complaints that raise a matter or matters that have previously been dealt with by CFA as part of an earlier or prior complaint will generally not be progressed as a complaint and will not be the subject of a second or further investigation.
- (l) A complaint or concern about a previous complaints process will not be a new complaint, but rather considered as a request for review by CFA of the previous outcome, and CFA will determine whether any review will be conducted.
- (m) Nothing in this Guideline precludes the CFA from taking direct action in respect of matters that it is or becomes aware of (including to ensure a safe environment). CFA may investigate and/or take direct action irrespective of whether a complaint has been made.

5. What to do if you have a concern or complaint?

Self-help and obtaining information/guidance and preliminary assistance

- 5.1 CFA Members, Officers and contractors are encouraged to seek guidance and to discuss concerns they have about the conduct of other CFA Members, Officers or contractors, with:
- (a) the [other person\(s\)](#) where they feel comfortable doing so;
 - (b) their supervisor/manager for support to resolve if appropriate;
 - (c) if the concern is about their supervisor/manager and they don't feel comfortable, raising it directly with their supervisor/manager, their next in charge;
 - (d) their [HR Business Partner](#);
 - (e) the [CFA Complaints Management Team](#) – The Complaints Management Team can provide advice and guidance to CFA Members, Officers and contractors without the obligation to raise a formal complaint.

Making a complaint

- 5.2 A complaint may also be made, which may be dealt with through an informal or formal process – refer below.

6. How are complaints and concerns dealt with?

6.1 The appropriate process adopted to address and resolve a concern or complaint will be a decision for CFA and will depend on the nature of the concern or complaint raised and all of the surrounding circumstances. The approach and process could involve:

- (a) provision of advice to the complainant and no further action;
- (b) further encouraging and supporting self-help;
- (c) a facilitated informal resolution process to address the complaint;
- (d) a formal investigation and resolution process to address the formal written complaint.

6.2 Where a concern or complaint is of the following nature, the concern or complaint will likely be resolved through the provision of advice, self-help and/or an **Informal Resolution** process:

- (a) interpersonal disputes or personality clashes;
- (b) differences of opinion or attitude;
- (c) minor differences of views about performance and work ethic;
- (d) tone of communications, such as being rude or condescending; or
- (e) conduct that does not or is unlikely to constitute a serious breach of the CFA Behavioural Standards, the law, or operational procedures, including the Chief Officer's directions, SOPs, and Standing Directions.

6.3 Where a complaint is of the following nature, the complaint will likely be resolved through the **Formal Resolution** process:

- (a) conduct that could constitute a serious breach of the CFA Behavioural Standard, including bullying or harassment, sexual harassment, prohibited discrimination or victimisation;
- (b) conduct that could constitute a breach of CFA's conflicts of interest policy and business rules;
- (c) conduct that could constitute a breach of the VPS Code of Conduct (employees only);
- (d) conduct that could include misconduct under an applicable Enterprise Agreement (employees only);
- (e) conduct that could constitute a breach of operational procedures, including the Chief Officer's directions, SOPs and Standing Directions (volunteers and officers only); or
- (f) conduct that could otherwise constitute a breach of State or Federal law.

7. Preliminary process to deal with a concern/complaint – self-help/advice and assisted resolution

7.1 As set out above, initially a focus on self-help and the provision of information is generally encouraged.

Self-help

7.2 Self-help allows a person to bring a complaint to the attention of the other person (respondent) directly and attempt to resolve the issue themselves. The complainant should keep an open

mind and focus on a positive outcome. Prior to attempting self-resolution, complainants can seek support and/or confidential advice from their supervisor/manager or HR Business Partner to enable them to approach the matter with the other person or persons.

7.3 In attempting to resolve a concern or complaint themselves, the complainant should:

- (a) Be respectful;
- (b) Explain the conduct/issue that has caused the problem and why they feel concerned or upset
- (c) Ask the other person(s) to stop the behaviour that has caused the complaint;
- (d) Provide the other person(s) with an opportunity to respond;
- (e) Listen to and try to understand the other person's point of view;
- (f) Explore options for resolution with the other persons; and
- (g) Attempt to mutually agree a resolution to the complaint with the respondent.

Assisted resolution and options

7.4 Where a supervisor/manager receives a concern or complaint, they may discuss the complaint with the HR Business Partner for advice as to how to respond and try to resolve the complaint.

7.5 If a concern or complaint has not been readily resolved at a local level or through seeking and obtaining advice, then the complainant or their supervisor/manager are encouraged to contact the HR Business Partner, if they have not already done so. That may be done verbally or in writing.

7.6 The HR Business Partner or relevant supervisor/manager as appropriate will contact the complainant, acknowledging their continued concern/complaint and may:

- (a) further assist the CFA Member, Officer or contractor to try to resolve the concern without the need for a formal complaint to be made (for example, through direct or facilitated discussions), particularly if self-help options or attempts at local (informal) resolution have not occurred;
- (b) provide information and advice to the CFA Member, Officer or contractor about their options; and
- (c) assist the CFA Member, Officer or contractor to identify whether the concern raised would warrant a formal complaint being made and if so, how it should be addressed under the processes outlined below.

8. Complaint Resolution Process

8.1 If a complaint has been referred to or received by the HR Business Partner or the Complaints Management Team, then:

- (a) if it has not been considered by the relevant local management, then unless it is inappropriate to do so, it will be referred back to the relevant local management to discuss and seek to resolve through assisted resolution, with assistance from the HR Business Partner as required;
- (b) if it is considered by the HR Business Partner or the Complaints Management Team to be an appropriate matter for mediation/facilitated discussion or to be addressed through some other informal resolution process the HR Business Partner will organise the mediation/facilitated discussion for the relevant parties or adopt another informal process. Outcomes from that mediation/facilitated discussion or other informal resolution process may include:

- (i) acknowledgment and commitment to improve behaviours;
 - (ii) apologies and counselling or training;
 - (iii) an agreed set of actions as between the parties concerned; and/or
 - (iv) a directed set of actions as ordered by someone with delegated authority to issue directions, such as a Commanding Officer or supervisor/manager;
- (c) if the complaint has not been resolved through local or informal resolution processes or those processes are not appropriate (eg it is considered to be a serious/complex matter), then the complaint may be progressed as a complaint under a formal complaint resolution process.

9. Formal Resolution Process

- 9.1 Where a concern or complaint has not been resolved informally and a formal complaint is made, or where the HR Business Partner or Complaints Management Team has identified that an informal resolution process and/or mediation/facilitated discussion is not appropriate for a particular complaint, the matter will be considered through the formal resolution process.

Making or documenting a formal complaint

- 9.2 A complaint to be progressed under the formal resolution process will be made or captured in writing using the CFA Complaint Form (if this had not already occurred) and will be provided to the relevant HR Business Partner or the Complaints Management Team at complaints@cfa.vic.gov.au
- 9.3 Complainants must provide an honest and detailed account of their complaint and, where possible, provide any relevant supporting documentation and identification of the outcome sought. Any additional information received from the complainant after submitting the Complaint Form will be considered together with the original complaint as outlined in the Complaint Form.
- 9.4 Consistent with the principles of confidentiality and to avoid appearing vexatious, complainants are not to copy or blind copy any other person to the lodgement of a complaint under the Formal Resolution Process (other than their supervisor/manager should they wish to do so). To the extent the complainant feels it necessary that other persons be copied into the complaint, they are encouraged to identify this in the CFA Complaint Form and outline the reasons why.

Initial assessment

- 9.5 Upon receipt of the Complaint Form, the Complaints Management Team or HR Business Partner will contact the complainant to acknowledge receipt.
- 9.6 The Complaints Management Team will undertake an initial assessment of the complaint. An initial assessment may include:
- (a) an assessment of whether the complaint is frivolous or vexatious, in which case it will not be considered a proper complaint and it will not be further considered;
 - (b) an assessment of the terms of the complaint, including whether it is sufficiently detailed and clear or whether any further information or supporting documentation is required to be provided by the complainant. Further information may then be sought from the complainant before the assessment can be completed;
 - (c) an assessment of the content of the complaint, including:
 - (i) whether the complaint relates to alleged conduct that should properly be the subject of the Formal Resolution Process and whether the complaint

should be referred back to the appropriate supervisor/manager, Commander or other person in the order of command (and copied to the relevant HR Business Partner) for informal resolution and/or the complainant advised that no further action will be taken;

- (ii) considering whether the complaint needs to be referred to or dealt with under another process or referred to another body. For example:
 - A. if the complaint alleges criminal conduct (eg, sexual assault), CFA may refer the matter to the Police or other relevant external body;
 - B. if the matter involves child safety matters, it may be referred to the CFA Child Safety team for case management; and
 - C. if it involves a complaint in respect of the conduct of an FRV secondee, the complaint may be referred to the Fire Rescue Commissioner for consideration and action.
- (iii) determining the appropriate next steps to be taken in the circumstances, including what type of approach and outcome may be appropriate.

9.7 The Complaints Management Team or HR Business Partner will communicate the outcome of that initial assessment, including any next steps to be taken, to the complainant. A Case Manager will be assigned, if one has not already been assigned, and this will be communicated to the complainant.

Formal resolution processes

9.8 If the Complaints Management Team or HR Business Partner determines that a formal resolution process should proceed in relation to the complaint, the actual process to be undertaken will be determined by CFA and will depend on the nature of the complaint, whether any other instruments including the CFA Act, CFA Regulations, other legislation or any Enterprise Agreements apply, and any other relevant circumstances.

9.9 A formal resolution process will be conducted in accordance with principles of procedural fairness and may (but is not required to) include:

- (a) a preliminary inquiries or allegations process to potentially obtain an early response and potentially dispose of the matter and/or to help inform CFA of whether any further action is required or appropriate. Such process may:
 - (i) include seeking and obtaining a response to the issues or allegations raised in the formal complaint; and
 - (ii) may also be used to help inform CFA whether any further action is required, including whether formal investigation under the Regulations or an Enterprise Agreement is necessary or appropriate; and/or
- (b) a formal investigation under the CFA Regulations or the relevant Enterprise Agreement, where applicable.

When is an investigation appropriate?

9.10 In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for a formal investigation to be conducted into the subject matter(s) of the complaint.

9.11 Further, even if there is not a complaint, where CFA becomes aware of or observes unacceptable behaviour or conduct, including conduct in breach of the CFA Behavioural Guidelines, CFA may decide that an investigation and potential disciplinary process should be undertaken.

- 9.12 An investigation may be conducted by CFA or an external investigator.
- 9.13 The process for investigation may be affected by who is involved in the complaint and any allegations:
- (a) If a complaint is assessed as raising allegations about volunteer conduct that may amount to an offence under the CFA Regulations, the Chief Officer may cause an investigation to be conducted into the circumstances giving rise to the allegations under those Regulations. The Process to be followed thereafter as well as the potential outcomes will be in accordance with the CFA Regulations.
 - (b) If a complaint is assessed as raising allegations about the conduct of a CFA employee(s) who is covered by the DMO/TO Agreement that may amount to an offence under the CFA Regulations, the Chief Executive Officer may cause an investigation to be conducted into the circumstances giving rise to the allegations under those Regulations. The process to be followed thereafter as well as the potential outcomes will be in accordance with applicable industrial instruments and/or CFA Regulations.
 - (c) If a complaint is assessed as raising allegations of misconduct against a CFA employee(s) covered by the PTA Agreement, CFA will cause the allegations to be investigated in accordance with the provisions of that Enterprise Agreement, unless the employee admits the allegations,. The Process to be followed thereafter as well as the potential outcomes will be in accordance with the PTA Agreement.
 - (d) If a complaint is assessed as raising allegations about the conduct of a seconded FRV employee, then the complaint will be referred by CFA to the Fire Rescue Commissioner for consideration and action via the FRV Ethical Standards Unit.

Suspension

- 9.14 A CFA Member may be suspended from duty in accordance with the CFA Regulations at any time before, during or after an investigation has been initiated.
- 9.15 A CFA employee who is covered by the PTA Agreement may be suspended with pay at any point after having been advised of the allegations and until the Formal Resolution Process is completed.
- 9.16 A CFA employee who is covered by the DMO/TO Agreement may be suspended from duty in accordance with the CFA Regulations at any time after the laying of a charge of an offence under the CFA Regulations.
- 9.17 A contractor's services may be suspended or terminated in accordance with the relevant contract.

Outcomes

- 9.18 Outcomes from the Formal Resolution Process may include, without limitation:
- (a) acknowledgment and commitment to improve behaviours;
 - (b) apologies and counselling or training;
 - (c) an agreed set of actions as between the parties concerned;
 - (d) a directed set of actions as ordered by someone with delegated authority to issue directions, such as a commanding Officer or supervisor/manager;
 - (e) amendments to or introduction of policies, procedures, business rules or orders;
 - (f) the imposition of penalties under Regulation 45 (volunteers);

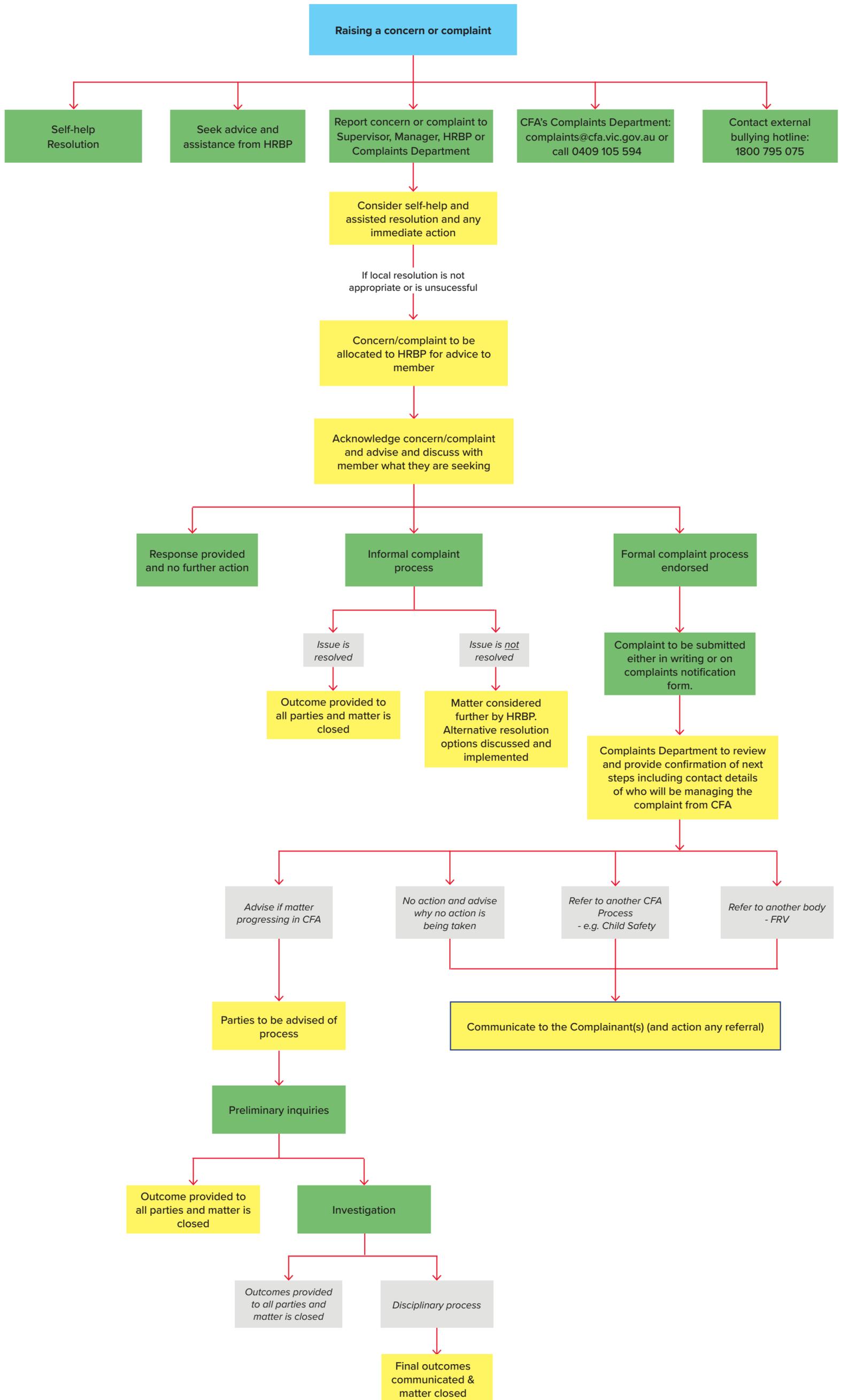
- (g) cancellation of enrolment or registration (volunteers); and/or
 - (h) action under an applicable Enterprise Agreement (eg the imposition of disciplinary actions in accordance with the PTA Agreement for CFA employees covered by the PTA Agreement).
- 9.19 CFA will inform the complainant and respondent(s) of the outcome of the Formal Resolution process and the complaint will be closed.
- 9.20 A record of the outcome will be held by CFA.
10. **Supports**
- 10.1 CFA acknowledges that being involved in a complaint may be difficult and stressful.
- 10.2 Throughout the informal and formal resolution processes, complainants and respondents, and any other person involved in the complaint, are entitled to the assistance of a support person as chosen by them. A support person may provide emotional support, assistance and help with clarifying matters and may take notes. A support person's role is not to speak for the person they are supporting or to be an advocate.
- 10.3 CFA also provides support to all CFA Members, Officers and contractors and their immediate family, which is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. If you or a member of your family require Wellbeing Support, please contact 1800 959 232 for access to the Member Assistance Program, Organisational Wellbeing team, Peers or Chaplaincy Program. These services are confidential and free of charge.
11. **Further Information**
- 11.1 If CFA Members, Officers or contractors require further information about raising a grievance or complaint, please contact an [HR Business Partner](#) or the [CFA Complaints Management Team](#).

Attachment: Flowchart



COMPLAINT RESOLUTION GUIDELINE

NOTE: This flowchart does not apply where the issue to be addressed relates to unsatisfactory performance, or a dispute arising under the terms of an applicable enterprise agreement.

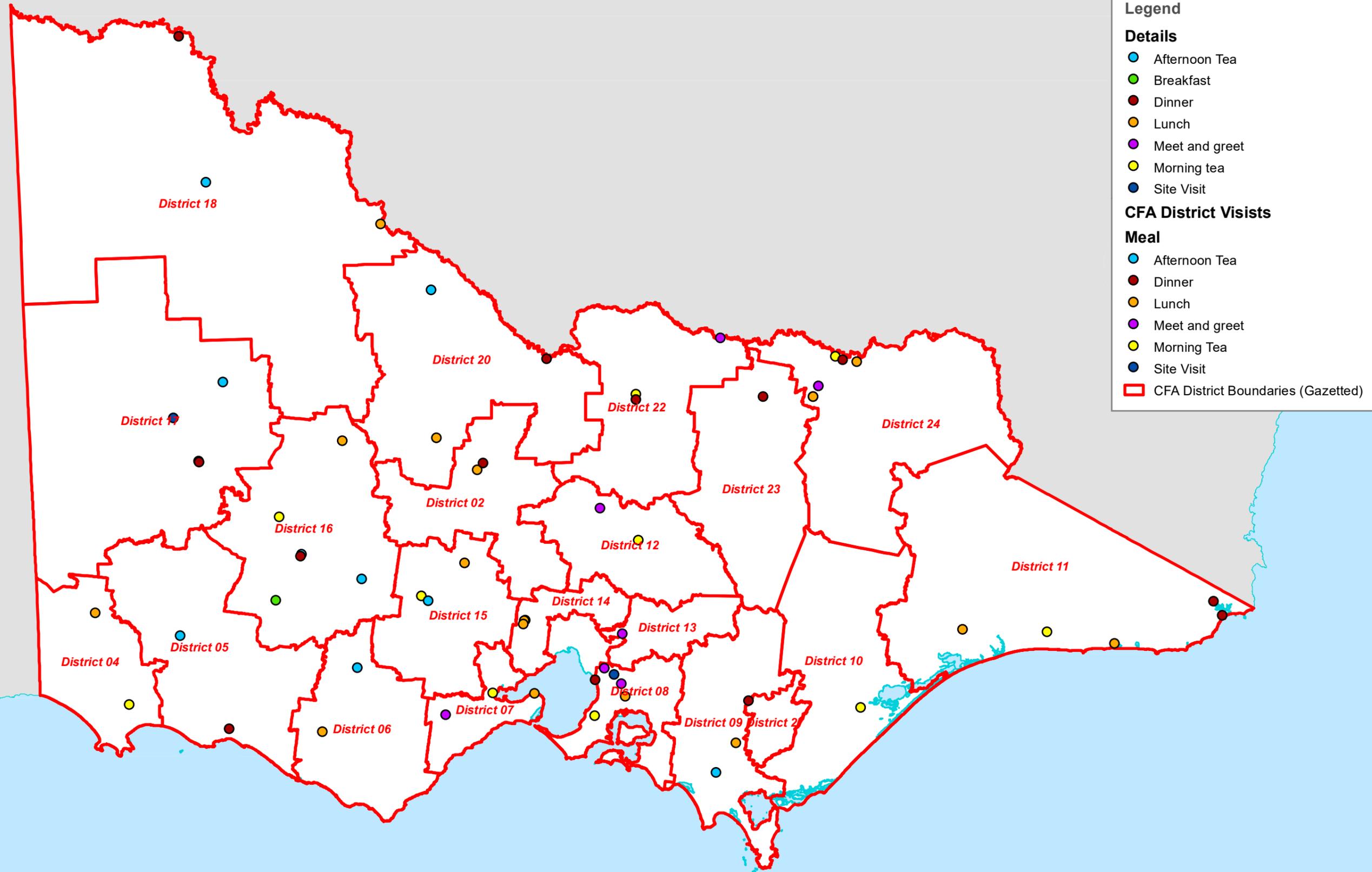




APPENDIX 9: CHIEF OFFICER REGIONAL VISITS



Chief Officer Regional Visits



Privacy:
This map is provided to the Chief Officer for the sole purpose of his regional visits and must ONLY be used for this purpose. It must not be kept or used for other purposes and must not be provided to anyone not responsible for providing the work associated with this described use. Any use of this map contrary to the above stated use will be considered an intentional breach of duties and responsibilities associated with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014. Use, transferral and disposal of this product must be handled with care.

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This map is a snapshot generated from Victorian Government data as well as data from various other sources. This does not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for error, loss or damage which may arise from reliance upon it. All persons accessing this information should make appropriate enquiries to assess the currency of the data.

Explanation:



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