

# "WATER OFF"

*NEWSLETTER OF THE  
RETIRED FIREFIGHTERS'  
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA  
(VICTORIAN BRANCH) INC.*



*Nov 2025 Vol 30 No 4  
Inc/No: A16839F*

## **General Meeting \*NOTE\* Burnley Complex Burnley**

**Wed 19th Nov, 2025  
at 10:30am**

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**20 & 27 C Shift Crews after a visit from the Peugeot Car Club of Victoria.**

# **“ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING”**

**Burnley Complex, Burnley  
Wednesday 19th Nov, 2025 at 10:30am.**

**Volunteers Required**  
**The Fire Services Museum needs past  
fire service members to assist on an  
occasional basis at the Museum**  
**Please contact**  
**Bryan Robertson**  
**0418 129 252**

**All Correspondence to:**  
Colin Harris  
2 Gowar Ave  
Camberwell  
Phone 0432 302 414  
or email at  
[retiredfirenews@gmail.com](mailto:retiredfirenews@gmail.com)

## **Non financial Members**

Members be advised if your newsletter has an expiry date of 2/1/2020 that means you have not paid your subs since 2019 therefore if no remuneration is received by the 2/1/22 your name will be automatically removed from the mailing list. If, for whatever reason any member is unable to meet this request please do not hesitate to call the secretary, (confidentiality is assured)

## **OFFICE BEARERS**

**President:** Alex Shepherd  
**Vice President:** Sam Capes  
**Secretary:** Colin Harris  
**Treasurer:** Phil Cleary

**General Committee:**  
Len Manning  
Mike McCumisky  
Ian Geddes  
Matt Nardella

**“Water Off”  
Editorial Staff**  
Colin Harris  
James Harris

## **Diary Dates**

**“ ANNUAL GENERAL  
MEETING”**  
**Burnley Complex, Burnley**  
**Wed 19th Nov 2025 at**  
**10:30am.**

**Stan Cameron,  
\*Gary Spicer,  
John Williams,  
Bob Chiron,  
Hookey,  
Frank Souter.**

**Note:** If you know of any member who may be ill please notify a committee member.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT



It's November, but the weather makes me think its winter again, anyway summer is just around the corner and it will be warm again (hopefully). The Footy is over the best side won, the big races have been run and won and cricket is just a couple of weeks away. How time flies when you're not looking.

Anyway it's been a good year in some respects Australia is still the lucky country, today we paid our Gratitude and our Respect to those who gave up their lives for the Freedoms we enjoy today we also should pay our Respects to those that serve today to keep our Country safe.

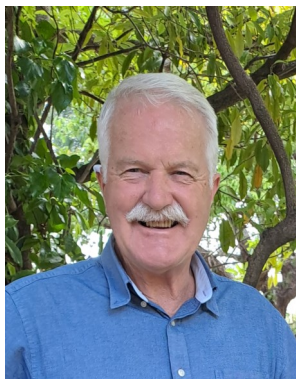
I'm looking forward to Christmas and getting together with Family and Friends and celebrate being healthy and wise? I hope you are all well and like me are looking forward to Christmas and the New Year with a hope of good health and enjoyable times with your own Family and Friends. My thoughts go out to all who have lost someone during the year being family or a friend, please know help is always a telephone away.

Respect Always,

Alex Shepherd.

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## SECRETARY'S REPORT



Hi all,

I'm the latest Secretary voted in of the Retired Firefighters Association. At our last meeting in August, this year, Phil Cleary stood down as secretary. The meeting thanked Phil for his time as Secretary/Treasurer. The task ahead to keep our organisation viable will be difficult. I along with President, Alex Shepherd and our committee, will attempt to keep things ticking along with interesting guest speakers, FRV news, and viewing new fire appliances as they come on line and into operations. At our November meeting, we will hear from a representative at Dementia Australia (Jo Crow) who will give an informative talk about Dementia. This will be followed by a viewing of the latest FRV

Pumper which will go into commission shortly.

As we are getting towards the end of the year and the beginning of the festive season, I along with President Alex Shepherd and the RFA Committee wish all members a Happy Christmas and a splendid New Year ahead in 2026. We are thinking of our sick members and their families at this time. Be safe over the festive season and watch out for idiots on the road, big potholes if you are travelling on our country roads and give a smile to all the workers you come across in retail, petrol stations, emergency workers & many others who work while we are on holidays.

Kind regards,

Colin Harris

<p><b>Any enquiries call the Secretary:</b> <b>Mob. 0432 302 414 Email: <a href="mailto:retiredfirenews@gmail.com">retiredfirenews@gmail.com</a></b></p>
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## Guest Speaker – Jo Crowe DEMENTIA

At our next General Meeting in November, Jo Crowe from Dementia Australia, will be presenting an educational talk about Dementia to our membership. It's an important message for all of our members as we advance in age.

Jo Crowe is a Team Leader at Dementia Australia in the Client Services team which provides services and supports for people living with dementia, their families, and carers across Australia. At Dementia Australia Jo works closely with a team of Dementia Support Specialists and Counsellors and plans the family education and group programs for the Victorian team to deliver face to face and online.

In Australia, there are over 433,000 people living with dementia and over 1.7 million people involved in their care. Dementia Australia is the peak body for people impacted by dementia in Australia.

Jo is passionate about raising the awareness of dementia, reducing stigma, and promoting brain health. She has worked in the field of dementia diagnosis and support for over twenty years and has a background in Occupational Therapy.

Members are encouraged to come along & bring your partners to hear some important information.

## New Series 1 Urban Pumper on Display

At our November meeting and before our BBQ Luncheon, FRV's new Series 1 Urban Pumper will be on display for all members and visitors to view and hear about new equipment, rescue equipment and other innovations found in the design of this latest pumper to Fire Rescue Victoria's fleet. Most of our retired members were be suitably impressed with this well designed urban pumper together with the latest pumping technology in a rear mounted pump. Come along to our meeting for a first-hand look and climb into the vehicle and see the difference from riding the back seat or driving a pumper 40 years ago. It's most impressive.



## Newly elected Secretary of R.F.A.

OK members, I welcome you to (me) the latest Secretary of the RFA. My name is Colin Harris and I've been a member of the RFA for 10 years. I joined after John Berry sent me an application form, which I diligently completed and returned to John, who was the then Secretary/Treasurer. Well, the years have quickly passed and now here we are with Phil Cleary hanging his boots up being Sec/Treasurer for the past 6 years. Phil has done a sterling job of keeping the RFA ticking along. Phil believed his time was up having had some health issues and believed a baton change was required. (Thankyou Phil for carrying on the legacy of Allan Roberts and John Berry and other passed RFA officials along the journey of the RFA - Vic).

It's now my turn to carry the torch for the RFA members as Secretary. At the August AGM & General Meeting, and after I was elected as Secretary/Treasurer, I spoke to the members and said that I would do the job as Secretary, but not the Treasurer's job. Yes, I went against the rules, however, as Editor of "Water Off", someone else needs to step up and be the Treasurer. (Let's see what happens?). Meanwhile, Phil Cleary will continue as Treasurer for time being.

Well, I suppose you all need to know a little about me, as I have been under the radar for many years. I joined the MFB in 1973 when the Abbotsford training College was still under construction. I joined with fellows like Paul Riley, Bob Cheshire, Graham Stroud, Russell Knight and others whose names are a foggy mist & may come to me when I'm finished typing this page or pages (maybe?). Recruits was a tough time and many of us didn't think we would make it! The firehouse was the test, as was the Magirus ladder climb to the top of the administration building. I came off the top of the ladder and had to change my undies!! After 14 long weeks, with Ray Griffiths screaming into our heads, we marched out on our last day and celebrated long and hard at the local pub (The famous Terminus hotel which was financed by the MFB).

Time marched on and after a stint at No.1 (Eastern Hill), I was sent to No.41 Station (St. Albans). Well, I did know the area, as I lived in the cold part of sunny Sunshine (Monash Street) so the roster room (thanks Ray Wellard) sent me packing off to 41 Station. In those days, this lonely little station had a hose carriage, a senior firefighter (Ron Mc Donald), a qualified firefighter by the name of Laurie Plummer and little (green) me! Well, the bastards locked me out of the station on the first night shift. Where in the hell was I going to eat and sleep? Finally after 25 minutes, the game was up and I was allowed back in! Well, St. Albans was the arse end of the world to me. Very few houses, lots of grasslands, lots of thistles, lots of rocks and tiger snakes. Green Gully was a place where we had fires on steep banks in the summer time. You came back to the station with thistle wounds on your legs, up your arse, in your hands and arms. Smokey fire jacket, dusty boots, sore feet and generally very tired and worn out.

The time marched on, and before I knew it, I was sent (thanks Ray!) to the great 48! Well, everyone in the job knew about 48 Station. There was a grand hotel across the road called "The Black Prince". I reckon the Black Price made a fortune out of the fires who frequented that pub after shift 6 days a week. (Sundays were for going to church!). I remember Gus Reid telling the boss, he was off to church for half an hour one Sunday. He said to the boss, if we get a call, just come past the big church on Victoria Street, West Melbourne, where he would be picked up after he had said a pray or three! Oh, North Melbourne Fire Station where many things happened and "MUM" was the word. Now, some of the characters I remember were officers like Bob Burrows, Gary Cronin, and Harry Floyd. Jock Baxter, Ray Dingy and many others. The firefighters on shift with me were notable characters like Brian Severson, Charlie Hurrell, Jan Lindeboom, John McFayden, Barry Masuglia, Peter Thomas & Brian "Spiderman". I do know that Peter Thomas is still in the job these days and has risen to the dizzy heights of ACFO!

Forty Eight Station where the main fire calls were to the Housing Commission flats in North Melbourne, Kensington, Flemington and Ascot Vale. We became experts at changing sprinkler heads in the rubbish-chute fires. These flats, where people left food cooking (burning) on the stoves, the malicious false alarms which were an everyday occurrence. We has grass fires on railway property land, people stuck in lifts, car fires and cars accidents. One of the larger fires we attended was in a freezer storage building on a Saturday afternoon. Bob Burrows was the SSO and, we responded to the bells on 48A and 48B appliances to this building which was fully alight with plumes of black smoke billowing over the adjoining streets. B.A. was the go and in we went. Couldn't see a bloody thing and our recruit training

came back to me. Small steps, find a wall, hose line and branch at the ready and start squirting as much water as we could. We had to move up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor where the fire was and two of us almost came to grief when later it was found, and when the smoke had cleared, my buddy and I were half a metre away from falling down into the fire below. Sheer luck we weren't killed that day!

From 48 Station, it was the Training College for 2 years. I'd done my time at 48 and it was time to get out. I decided to do the SO's Course as a way of extracting myself from North Melbourne Fire Stn. I completed the course and failed. I went back six months later and passed. I was ready for a cosy spot out east or one of the city stations. Bad luck was on my side, when Uncle Ray Wellard decided I needed to go back to 48 Stn on "D" platoon. I worked as an SO with Terry Hitch. Jock Pollock was the District Officer. Learned a lot under Terry Hitch and Jock. I spent 2 years there with firefighters Gary Martin, Neville Colbert, Gus Reid, Paul Scott, Wayne Simpson and others. Finally, after 2 years, I'd had enough of the great 48! Time to move on. I went to the training dep't at Abbotsford as an instructor, working with Ted Dyson and Jeff Patman I also became an instructor of recruits and SO promotional courses. I lasted 2 years there and then "Big John Perry" said, time to move on son! I took the hint and went back on shift for a short time.

For some strange reason, I thought I had it in me to have a go at becoming an SSO! Oh well I thought, let's have a go! I passed with a 51% mark and then it was 39 Station (Port Melbourne) for about 1 year, then onto Carlton (6-7 years), and finally No.1 Stn after DO John Rampling said "time to move on son!" I took Eddie McMullen's spot there, as Eddie moved on to 38 or was it 35 Stn? I enjoyed No.1 Station, as I did Carlton. I had great blokes on shift at both stations. About that time, women were coming into the job. Louise Cannon, Gina Kenny are the two I remember during those times. We had to start behaving! Minding our manners!

By this time, I had done about 31 years in the job. Was I ready for commander? Oh well, why not have a go! I did and passed with a 53% mark this time. There were a few clever dicks on the course. There was Ken Brown, Mark Swiney, Dave Bruce and Dave Youseff. They were all destined for CFO! I did this commander role for 9 years and went to every station in the metro area as a relieving commander. I met many good MFB people. The Workshops come to mind for keeping the fleet of pumpers serviceable. The corporate staff were always there to help. The FSCC staff who kept an eye on us and relayed important info at major fires/incidents.

I have to say, that the job as a firefighter/officer in the old MFB was fantastic. It was the best job I could ever have come into. I remember the time when I saw the advertisement in the "Sun" newspaper for the fire brigade. "Security, shift work, uniform, 4 x week's holiday and the best of all, superannuation. Well, I thought this was the job for me! I put in my resignation to the printing company I was with (as a typesetter – compositor) as I knew the writing was on the wall and that I would be unemployed in 4-5 years' time due to the introduction of photo and computer typesetting, more offset printing etc so, the printing game was up for me.

I fronted to Eastern Hill Fire Station and was confronted with 70-80 applicants before me in an orderly queue outside of the new fire station. The queue slowly moved forward, but not quickly enough. It was time to get back to work. A second day was scheduled for applicants to come forth and present themselves. I was there on the second day and stayed in the queue until I rounded the corner and finally sat for a dictation test. Well, I passed that, they then measured my athletic chest and said that I would be hearing from them. A couple of weeks passed and a letter arrived. The letter said, present yourself to the Brigade Medical Officer in Collins Street, Melbourne. I presented to Sir William Upjohn, a very aged man and was passed fit to carry on the recruiting process. Another 10 days passed and another letter arrived for the brigade. I was required to present myself to a board of 2 senior officers and a union rep at Eastern Hill Fire Station. The interview went well, as I was a very fit athlete (runner) and I liked the idea of shift work. A final letter arrived in the mail and, "I was in". Starting date was early July, 1973. The weather was cold, new uniform, top boots, shiny shoes etc. I can still remember the wafting aroma of cakes being baked from a bakery (factory) somewhere in Abbotsford, very close by.

Recruits was hard in winter time! Cold and wet uniforms, boots and sore feet, marching and still more marking and wet hose drill. Orders being shouted at us green recruits and not forgetting the early morning runs with a very fit older senior firefighter. I remember the day, a very unfit Paul Riley decided to hitch a ride with a tram travelling down Victoria Street to the college. (I told you he was a clever dick).



He made it back to base before all of us and had this smile a mile wide as he had fooled us recruits and failed the instructors.

So my fellow retired firefighters of the RFA, this is my story and I hope as secretary, we can all contribute to the RFA in a positive and practical way to keep the RFA relevant. Keep the stories in “Water Off” continuing & most importantly communicating with our members and wives of passed members. Once again, Phil (Cleary), thank you for keeping the RFA ship heading in the right direction and I hope to continue contributing to this journey as a legacy to all the men & women who have put in the hard yards in times of hardship, inclement weather, exhaustion at firefighting jobs, be it house/factory fires, car accidents, chemical spills & so on.

During my down time, I’m on the committee of a French Car Club (Peugeot Car Club Vic), Volunteer my services to promote Senior Fire Safety (as do 5 other retired firefighters) with FRV. I love travelling to Europe and throughout Australia. I have a wife (Susan) and 3 sons. One is in FRV, stationed at Nunawading. He and I both say, **“it’s the best job in the world.”** And it is! – **\*I shall carry on the work of Phil Cleary, Allan Roberts and John Berry etc.**

Col Harris – Secretary, RFA. Victoria



Training exercise at BP Newport.



Colin (Ret), Julian (Ret), James.

*It could only happen in Queensland!!!!*

## **GARDEN SNAKES CAN BE DANGEROUS**

Green Tree Snakes (*Dendrolaphis punctulata*) can be dangerous.

Yes, tree snakes or grass snakes, **not** brown snakes or taipans.

Here's why:

A couple in Townsville, had a lot of potted plants.

During a recent cold winter (for Townsville that is!), the wife was bringing some of the valued tender ones indoors to protect them from the cold night.

It turned out that a little green tree snake was hidden in one of the plants. When it had warmed up, it slithered out and the wife saw it go under the lounge. She let out a very loud scream.

The husband (who was taking a shower) ran out into the living room naked to see what the problem was. She told him there was a snake under the lounge.

He got down on the floor on his hands and knees to look for it. About that time the family dog came and cold-nosed him on the behind. He thought the snake had bitten him, so he screamed and fell over on the floor.

His wife thought he had had a heart attack, so she covered him up, told him to lie still and called an ambulance.

The paramedics rushed in, would not listen to his protests, loaded him on their stretcher, and started carrying him out.

About that time, the snake came out from under the lounge and the paramedic saw it and dropped his end of the stretcher. That's when the man broke his leg and why he is still in hospital.

The wife still had the problem of the snake in the house, so she called on a neighbour who volunteered to capture the snake. He armed himself with a rolled-up newspaper and began poking under the lounge. Soon he decided it was gone and told the woman, who sat down on the lounge in relief.

But while relaxing, her hand dangled in between the cushions, where she felt the snake wriggling around. She screamed and fainted, the snake rushed back under the lounge.

The neighbour, seeing her lying there passed out, tried to use CPR to revive her.

The neighbour's wife, who had just returned from shopping at Woolies, saw her husband's mouth on the woman's mouth and slammed her husband on the back of the head with a bag of canned goods, knocking him out and cutting his scalp to a point where it needed stitches.

The noise woke the woman from her dead faint and she saw her neighbour lying on the floor with his wife bending over him, so she assumed that the snake had bitten him. She went to the kitchen and got a small bottle of whiskey, and began pouring it down the man's throat.

By now, the police had arrived.

They saw the unconscious man, smelled the whiskey, and assumed a drunken fight had occurred. They were about to arrest them all, when the women tried to explain how it all happened over a little garden snake!



The police called an ambulance, which took away the neighbour and his sobbing wife.

Now, the little snake again crawled out from under the lounge and one of the policemen drew his gun and fired at it. He missed the snake and hit the leg of the end coffee table. The table fell over, the lamp shattered and, as the bulb broke, it started a fire in the curtains.

The other policeman tried to beat out the flames, and fell through the window into the yard on top of the family dog who, startled, jumped out and raced into the street, where an oncoming car swerved to avoid it and smashed into the parked police car.

Meanwhile, neighbours saw the burning curtains and called in the fire brigade. The firemen had started raising the fire ladder when they were halfway down the street. The rising ladder tore out the overhead wires, put out the power, and disconnected the power in a ten-square city block area (but they did get the house fire out).

Time passed! The snake was caught and both men were discharged from the hospital, the house was repaired, the dog came home, the police acquired a new car and all was right with their world.

A while later they were watching TV and the weatherman announced a cold snap for that night. The wife asked her husband if he thought they should bring in their plants for the night.

And that's when he shot her!

**Now, you may think this is a load of bulldust, however, it's true! Just ask our esteemed J.B. & remember, it could only happen in Queensland or was it Far North Queensland?**



### **Peer support is available to Retired Firefighters and Associated Members**

#### **FRV**

Employee Assistance Coordinator

Irina Tchernitskaia – PH: 0407 665 174

Email:- [irina.tchernitskaia@frv.vic.gov.au](mailto:irina.tchernitskaia@frv.vic.gov.au)

Peer Coordinators

Chloe Henderson PH: 0417 538 289

Scott Darcy PH: 0429 771 849

Email:- [sdarcy@frv.vic.gov.au](mailto:sdarcy@frv.vic.gov.au)

Retirees

John Howe PH: 9729 0984—MO: 0417 112 993

Tony Branchflower Retired SSO MO: 0400 695 622

Peer Coordinator Trent Egan

PH: 0448 071 299

Email:- [Careerpeercoordinator@frv.vic.gov.au](mailto:Careerpeercoordinator@frv.vic.gov.au)

## **NOTICE**

**For all future RFA membership payments, electronic transfers, internet banking etc RFA new banking details are as follows:**

**GOULBURN MURRAY**

**Credit Union**

**BSB 803 078 - Account No 37460**

**Any queries, contact:  
Phil Cleary - Secretary**

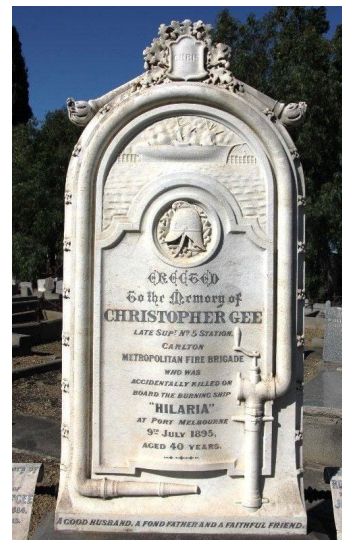
## A Water Off Story from 1998

1895 - THE "HILARIA" BURNS - Barbara McCumisky continues with her historical series of significant fires that occurred during the formative years of the MFB. "Hilaria", a jinxed ship? MFB District Superintendent Gee killed.

### THE 'HILARIA' FIRE - 1895 The Illustrated Australian News, - Aug 1, 1895

The "Hilaria" caught fire while she was berthed at Port Melbourne's Town Pier on Sunday July 7, 1895. The watchman on the ship gave the alarm about 1am. Capt. Allen, his wife and child made a hasty escape from the burning ship. C/F/O Stein arrived with five steamers, five hose carts and 36 men. D/C/O O'Brien went into the hold in a smoke jacket to investigate the blaze and succeeded in extinguishing it with a hose line. Some of the 200-300 cases of kerosene in the hold were damaged and the woodwork of the 'tween decks had been charred to a depth of 1/4 inch. Cause of this fire was a mystery. On Tuesday July 9, the watchman again gave the alarm for fire soon after 2am. This time the first and second mates were on board. The M. F.B. arrived with ten appliances and 30 men under C/O Stein. Again O'Brien went below in a smoke jacket, but was forced to return when tins of kerosene began to explode. Altogether there were 2,300 cases of kerosene and 500 barrels of resin on board. Stein decided to fill the ship with water but this caused the ship to list to port, over the pier. When the fire could not be controlled, he ordered a tug boat to tow the ship away from the pier and other vessels. Capt. Throssell, the Deputy Harbour Master, arrived in the tug "Albatross" at about 5am. Whilst assisting a party of firemen to release the moorings of "Hilaria", District Supt. Gee tripped over the chains and fell 26ft. down into the burning hold. For the third time O'Brien went below in a smoke jacket to attempt his rescue. This took nearly 1/2 hr. and several times it was thought he had been overcome by smoke and heat. However he succeeded in attaching a rope to the unconscious Gee, who was immediately brought to the surface. Firemen on the deck gave him artificial respiration. O'Brien was then hauled to the surface in a semi-conscious condition with his safety rope and air tube entangled. A Dr. Cuscaden from a ship nearby, examined Gee and discovered that he had a fractured skull. Later, Dr F. Bird, the Brigade's Medical Officer, was summoned, but Gee died in the Melbourne Hospital without regaining consciousness. Gee had been a fireman for 25 years and had been a Captain with the Carlton Brewery Brigade before joining the M.F.B. He was now a District Superintendent with No. 5 Stn., Bouverie St. and was 40 years old. Gee's rescue now made it impossible to move the ship. At 9am a firing squad under Lt. Colquhoun from the "Nelson" fired six cannon balls at her in an attempt to sink her, but this had little effect. However they eventually blasted her with dynamite which flung the ship bodily into the air, causing the masts to topple over the pier. The "Hilaria" finally sank. Capt. Allen stated that he thought his ship was jinxed because he had fitted one of the "Habitant,s" spars to the "Hilaria" a short time before the fire. "Habitant" \*was the sister ship and met a fiery fate at Port Melbourne the year before. On Wednesday July 24, the Coroner held an inquest. The jury found that 2nd mate, Mark Lindsay and the watchman Edward Benson had wilfully set the ship on fire. They were arrested and committed for trial. \**The "Habitant" was not a sister ship, this was wrongly reported. The ships were built in different shipyards.*

**Another great story from Barbara McCumisky (Ed)**





## Clem Seaton – Way Back When

A visit to see Clem a few weeks ago. Nursing home (Bolton – Clarke) at Lynbrook, Vic. Clem's memory is scant, however, his photo album told me a snapshot of his running career in the MFB. Clem mentioned the Darwin to Melbourne Relay Team. There were 13 members of the team. They had a back-up support crew. The team broke a world record, set by the L.A. Police Dep't in 1974. The Darwin to Melbourne distance was 6375 kilometres. It took 18 days, 20 hours and 25 minutes to complete. Some of the hazards were snakes, donkeys and wild pigs. Clem had a big smile on his face when we were talking about this feat. Thousands of dollars were raised for the Deafness Foundation. He reminded me a few times, that Robbie Dean is his best mate. My wife and I stayed with Clem for just over an hour. Sadly, there wasn't much conversation other than the MFB running team. Below are some photos of Clem in his younger days with fellow athletes like Mick Whiteoak, Peter Adamson, Kevin Tate, John Rampling and Graham Harris. If any retired members have time, Clem would appreciate a friendly catch-up and chat. Please phone prior. **Bolton-Clarke 89033200**





# Exposure to Tesla Battery Fumes Sidelines Sacramento, CA, Firefighters

Four Sacramento firefighters have been undergoing experimental IV-therapy since the April incident.

[Susan Nicol](#)

Oct. 2, 2025

Four Sacramento firefighters are undergoing experimental therapy following being exposed to a Tesla's EV battery several months ago.

The IV-infused procedure is an effort to remove the heavy metals from their lungs and bloodstreams, Capt. Justin Sylvia told [KCRA](#).

"We've never had anyone off related to any type of lithium-ion battery fire. This is the first," he said.

Sylvia explained that the firefighters weren't wearing SCBA because the fire was out and they were in clean-up mode. He now urges crews to stay on air while on the scene of electric vehicle battery fires.

"A very low-lying white cloud, as it was described by those members, came across them. They immediately had a metallic taste in their mouth. One of the chemicals in those batteries, once it hits water, it turns to an acid. Once you split that series (of batteries), that's when it becomes dangerous, because it can short-circuit and get into that thermal runaway and become very unpredictable on its own."

"These EVs are something that is new to us. We really need to look at what the best practice on fighting these fires and not becoming a victim ourselves."



# This quick test could protect you from Australia's deadliest hidden threat

By: **Lexanne Garcia** – **YOUR LIFE CHOICES** 24 June 2025

Even though heart failure is responsible for tens of thousands of deaths every year, millions of Australians remain unaware of the easy checks that could save lives. But did you know that a simple blood test could help protect you or your loved ones from one of Australia's most dangerous and overlooked health threats?

Let's break down the facts, bust some myths, and empower you to take charge of your health—because when it comes to heart failure and its sneaky sidekicks, what you don't know really can hurt you.

Heart failure isn't just a dramatic event that happens suddenly. It's a chronic, progressive condition that affects around half a million Australians, with more than 67,000 new cases diagnosed each year.

Even more sobering: heart failure is responsible for about 61,000 deaths annually, and up to three-quarters of those diagnosed won't make it past five years. That's a higher five-year mortality rate than many cancers!

But here's the kicker—heart failure rarely travels alone. It often brings along a posse of other health problems, known as comorbidities.

These include kidney disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, iron deficiency, and even mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

About half of all people with heart failure are also living with chronic kidney disease, and many don't even know it.

Heart failure affects about half a million Australians and costs the health system \$3.1 billion annually. Credit: Motortion Films/Shutterstock

A recent YouGov survey commissioned by the heart health charity Hearts4heart found that more than five million Australians aren't aware of the common conditions linked to heart failure. Even more concerning, 63 per cent of us don't know about the specific connection between heart failure and kidney disease—a dangerous oversight, given how closely these two conditions are linked.

Kidney disease itself is a massive problem, affecting about 2.7 million people nationwide. But because it's often symptomless in the early stages, a staggering 2.5 million Australians are living with signs of kidney disease without realising it. The only way to catch it early is to have a simple Kidney Health Check, which includes a blood test, urine test, and blood pressure check.

Here's where things get interesting. Only half of Australians know that heart failure can be detected with a straightforward blood test called NT-proBNP.

This test measures the level of a protein in your blood that rises when your heart is under stress. If you're experiencing symptoms like shortness of breath, swelling in your legs or ankles, trouble sleeping while lying down, or sudden weight gain, this test could be the key to an early diagnosis.

Professor Andrew Sindone, a leading heart specialist, added the NT-proBNP test to the Medicare Benefits Schedule in late 2024.

That means it's now freely available to eligible Australians—no need for expensive specialist appointments or long waits for an echocardiogram.

This is excellent news for those living in rural or regional areas, where access to heart specialists can be limited.

Catching heart failure and kidney disease early can make a world of difference. New medications on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme can slow the progression of kidney disease by 15 years or more. Kidney Health Australia's chief executive officer (CEO), Chris Forbes, said, 'Being diagnosed early is key, as early diagnosis allows for proactive treatment.'

'We can help turn off the tap by raising awareness and encouraging patients to proactively discuss with their healthcare providers. This can make all the difference.'

Tanya Hall, CEO and founder of Hearts4heart, knows firsthand how devastating heart failure can be. She lost her dad to the condition when he was just 59.

Her message is clear: 'Anyone experiencing common symptoms of heart failure, such as shortness of breath, swelling in the legs, ankles or feet, struggling to sleep while lying down and sudden weight gain—especially those over 65—should speak with their GP about their risk and seek early screening as soon as possible.'

## Minutes of AGM – General Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2025 at Burnley Complex

Meeting opened at 10.30am

15 Members present and 5 apologies

President, Alex Shepherd, opened the meeting and welcomed all.

We had a one minute's silence for our fallen members.

A.G.M. Election of a new Secretary/Treasurer. The only nominee was Col Harris who accepted the position, with the proviso, that a Treasurer would be found to split the position of Secretary/Treasurer into two positions. Col Harris is also filling the role of editor of Water Off and believes that another person needs to be found to be the treasurer. Phil Cleary said he would continue to do the treasurer's job whilst a new treasurer was found. Moved by Col Harris, that Matt Nardella be on the Committee. Matt accepted this position. Kevin Hede will be asked to stand down due to illness.

Moved that Col Harris be accepted as the new Secretary – Ian Geddes and seconded by Matt Nardella as there were no other nominations – Accepted.

At this time in proceeding, Rescue 3 turned up and all members adjourned to the drill yard to view the new rescue unit. Officer Brendan from N0.3 Station talked about the new equipment and showed the members with the help of his assistant firefighter the ins and outs of the rescue unit. We saw half of the equipment etc, then a fire call came through and off they went!

Back to the meeting room to continue on with the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of the General Meeting. Minutes of the last General Meeting in May, 2025 were read out by Phil Cleary. Moved Phil Cleary, seconded by Len Manning.

Financial Report was also read out by the Treasurer Phil Cleary. Moved Phil Cleary, seconded by Mike Mc Cumisky.

After discussions (General Business), it was decided to increase membership fees, from \$15.00 to \$20.00 for all members, due to increase in postage and printing costs. Moved Phil Cleary, seconded Ian Geddes.

Ian Geddes, in General Business, asked that minutes be included in Water Off. This was accepted by the members and passed. Col Harris will ensure this is carried out. Ian Geddes also mentioned that an application form be included in Water Off so that prospective members leaving/retiring from FRV have an opportunity to complete an application for and join RFA as a future member. Accepted and passed by members.

Meeting closed at 12.00 Members adjourned to the Mess Room where we enjoyed a lovely prepared lunch by the Community Resilience personnel & we were all very happy!

\*NOTE Secretary phoned Kevin Hede and asked him to resign from the committee and the replacement was Matt Nardella. (Kevin admitted he has health issues).



## R.F.A. MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

The Secretary:  
Retired Firefighters Association of Australia  
Victorian Branch Incorporated

The aims of the Association, which was formed in June 1988, cover the following:

- To act as a medium for the promotion of communication between fellow firefighters, spouses and kindred members;
- To provide a regular newsletter
- To encourage dialogue between relevant community groups which are of assistance to members and dependants;
- To give support and fellowship to each other and stimulate participation in activities which assist members development;
- To foster social participation among its members;

NOTE: The association is non-political and membership is open to all retired/ex-firefighters, volunteer/career and support staff.

NAME:.....

Partners Name:.....

Service: FRV (MFB), CFA, other.

Please indicate which service Starting/Ending dates

...../.....

Reg No: (if applicable)..... Home address.....

Phone No:..... Mobile:.....

Email:.....

Payment each year of **\$20.00** to be made on application, which includes a joining fee of \$5.00 and \$15.00 for one year's subscription. Payable December each year.

Please pay directly (electronically) into Goulburn Murray Credit Union.

**BSB 803 078 – Account 37460 – Retired Firefighters Association, Vic.**

~ ~ ~

OFFICE USE ONLY: Date Received:.....Date Approved:.....

Approved By:.....Entry Computer Date.....

Phil Cleary, Secretary – PO Box 93 Numurkah, Vic 3638 Ph: 0419778161

Email: [rfavic1@gmail.com](mailto:rfavic1@gmail.com) - Website: [www.rfav.com.au](http://www.rfav.com.au)



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