

CFS Funding Fact Sheet

The following should not be seen as being critical of staffing levels of other services, rather as a comparison of the current CFS situation and a reflection of where we should be. Also due to complexities of reporting, some approximations have been made with numbers.

CFS volunteers are not demanding improved pay and conditions. All they want is the tools, training, equipment and support to provide the level of response and protection that the people of South Australia expect and demand.

CFS volunteers now provide many more services to South Australians than bushfire fighting and the level of funding needs to reflect this.

Training

CFS is the largest adult training organisation other than TAFE in South Australia.

The CFS Training department consists of 11 State Training Officers, 6 Regional Training Officers and a diminishing number of volunteer instructors. Together they delivered over 32,000 units of competency (08/09). (SAMFS delivered 1656 with a similar number of full time staff).

Current funding does not even allow for minimum training levels to be provided. NOTE – minimum training levels are defined by a 15year old CFS resourcing standards document as those that are considered critical for the viability of a brigade and are not the minimum for operational efficiency.

Maximum training levels (which equate to approximately only half of volunteer membership numbers for many skills) obviously can never be practically achieved under current funding levels. For example, a CFS rescue brigade of 30 firefighters has a minimum of 9 rescue trained personnel and a theoretical maximum of 15. It follows that the chance of achieving a fully trained rescue crew of 6 is seldom achieved even if the brigade fundraises to engage an external provider of these skills.

More importantly, breathing apparatus, essential safety equipment to allow a firefighter to enter a structure to effect a rescue of an occupant, has similar training number limits, yet this is mandatory training for fire services providing the same community service.

Unlike firefighters in CFS brigades who protect major towns, all retained firefighters engaged by the SAMFS receive training for all of their risks.

Building Maintenance

CFS has responsibility for more than 420 stations. All repairs to these stations are relatively unfunded and have been in most cases, left to volunteers to organise and fund.

The South Australian Ambulance Service has 10 employees to manage 117 ambulance stations across the State.

Station Building Program

Only 2 staff are employed to manage CFS buildings including project management of new stations, which are built at a fraction of the cost of other government facilities.

Eg: Seaford MFS station \$3.5 Million compared to a CFS 2 bay station \$450,000;

Pt. Lincoln retained MFS station \$5.2 million compared to the new CFS Region 6 HQ plus the joint CFS / SES station \$2.6 million.

At current funding levels stations will not be replaced until long after their service life and the situation is rapidly deteriorating.

Fleet management

CFS has the largest fleet of heavy vehicles in South Australia. (approximately 650). A staff of 4, with considerable input from volunteers at every level, manages this fleet as well as a smaller fleet of approximately 150 cars and 4WD command cars.

Current funding levels will not be able to replace aging vehicles before their targeted replacement date of 20 years. (This is also the oldest service life of emergency service vehicles in South Australia).

Compare this with SAPOL who manage a similar sized fleet consisting predominantly of cars with 10 personnel or SAMFS who have 4 staff to manage a fleet of approximately 50 heavy vehicles.

Information Technology

There is no funding to create or maintain the IT networks critical for information flow within the CFS. The current hardware is in most cases owned by the CFS members or given to the brigade by local businesses or Government Departments after they have deemed it past its service life. No I.T. support is available for this equipment from CFS.

Particularly due to the large distances and isolated areas in which the CFS operates, Automatic Vehicle Location equipment is urgently required to ensure efficient management, firefighter safety and crucial information flow from the fireground to maximise community safety.

Funding Equity

It is acknowledged that CFS budgets have risen in past years.

Unfortunately these increased funds have been targeted to resolve issues highlighted by Coroners findings, Workcover improvement notices and Government initiatives.

This has meant that funding bids to improve CFS firefighter issues have mostly been given a lower priority and have not been funded adequately.

As a total of the Emergency Services Budget, CFS funding has fallen by 0.9% whilst SAFECOM and SAMFS have risen by 5% each.

This is not to imply that either have been over funded, rather that the funding for CFS is lagging behind in an increasingly complex social, financial and hotter and dryer environment.

The resourcing standards for all the states emergency services need to accurately reflect the risk and community expectations.

Staff Ratio's

It is very difficult to compare staff to volunteer ratios across Australia due to the complex mix of funding, risk profiles and career/volunteer integration and reporting mechanisms. If a parallel can be used then the volunteer component Victorian CFA would be the most appropriate.

The staff support given to CFA volunteers is approximately double that of the CFS. This is evident to the firefighter as a CFA career Officer fills the level of a CFS Group Officer. (CFS has 51 Groups led by volunteer Group Officers)

Conclusion

CFS firefighters are not demanding improved pay or conditions. All they want are the tools and support to protect their neighbours safely and efficiently. Failure to do this will see the further disenchantment of even more good people who will leave the CFS, eventually resulting in the collapse of the service in many areas.

Bushfire is the most devastating natural disaster that the State faces many times annually each summer.

The CFS deserves the same status in funding priority as the State Government gives to Health, Education and Police.