

## Presidents Report 2011 CFSVA AGM

It never ceases to amaze me how quickly the years fly by. When you look back it is like 'WOW has that all really happened in that amount of time' or 'Has that person been here for that long' or for that matter "gone for that long". In a way it is really scary that it all goes that quick and that such a large chunk of life can go by with seemingly a blink of the eye.

That's how I partly feel at the moment as I am writing my very last CFSVA Presidents report, there is also a touch of sadness, but with it a touch of relief, there's all these feelings wrapped up in one big ball. I believe that the team I have had at the helm of the CFSVA and with help from other dedicated members and supporters the CFSVA has moved up several large levels.

There are a whole lot of people I would like to thank but there are five in particular that I must thank. These five people have helped, guided and supported me while being involved with the CFSVA.

Firstly I would like to thank Cam Stafford who was President before me and very much a mentor, I learnt a huge amount from Cam, especially about dealings within the political arena and then he was always available to run things past after I took over the reins.

I need to thank Euan Ferguson our past Chief Officer; Euan became Chief Officer nearly at the same time I was elected Vice President. Euan and I had many discussions over the years, some of which were completely confidential and some still are, some very personal and very much from the heart and others very much business. We didn't always see eye to eye, probably because neither of us liked to back down and neither of us liked to admit that we just might have been wrong but I think that's what made the relationship interesting.

Next to thank is Wendy Shirley and Wayne Thorley; Wendy started as the CFSVA Executive Director just before I became President and Wayne was elected Vice President shortly after I became President. I would hate to add up the hours that I have spoken to these two over the past seven years but Telstra and coffee shops have made a fortune out of us. The running of the Association has been a team effort, although we have different titles, the three of us work very much as equals when in meetings etc. Each of us has different qualities and over the years we have used these qualities to the best of our advantage or the Associations advantage. Without Wayne and Wendy's help I could not have done the job I did, their support has been exceptional, again thank you guys. But the biggest thank you must go to Tracy my wife. When I took on the role as Vice President I had three children aged 13, 11 and 9; I had just started a new job and shifted house a couple of months beforehand (which doubled the distance that Tracy had to go to work and it was all on slippery, rough clay roads). As a result of shifting house the kids had to go to a new school due to the bus routes and we still had to drive 7 km to the bus morning and afternoon.

While I didn't attend as many meetings as I do now, it was a considerable burden I put onto Tracy without much thought at the time. Tracy's support over the years has been above what I could expect and she is also the best friend I could ever have.

I am not normally a person who dwells on the past but I am proud of the achievements of the CFSVA in the last seven years. I think the biggest change and influence that the Association had during that time was probably forced upon us by the events of the Wangary Fire. I think the Associations respectability, status and influence within political circles, communities, CFS and volunteers increased greatly during the time of the inquiry and have stayed with us, which we have been able to use since then for the benefit of the CFS volunteer.

Looking to the future, the CFSVA is now at the stage where I believe the structure of the Association needs to change; the Association needs to be able to better reflect the thoughts of all members, using the skills and ideas of all our members. While the Association has a responsibility to report our activities, the Management meetings and General meetings are being overrun by reporting and not discussing the true business of the Association or debating and solving the issues at the time. It is time to think about the reporting to be done purely by the internet/email, the affairs run by a small

group like the Executive and then have a Council that comes together 4 or so times a year or when needed to discuss the issues or a particular strategy that needs to be taken.

The Association is also now nearly to the point that the CFSVA not only needs an assistant to the Executive Director but the President needs to be put on at least as a part time employee. Although for this and a new structure to happen the CFSVA would need to be able to attract a considerable amount more money from somewhere (an extra \$200,00) and it is probably not going to come direct from the Government/CFS. This only leaves the business sector, the communities or the volunteers. I am not sure what we can offer the Business sector to raise this amount of money. The community while seeing the CFS and its members as an integral part of the community are already being taxed by the levy and not likely to put forth any more. This only leaves the volunteers, if each brigade gave the CFSVA \$500 as a membership fee, this would raise the money needed and I am a firm believer that the volunteers/brigades would get this back 10 fold in the benefits that the Association would be able to advocate for them.

We only need to look at the Executive Directors report for this meeting to see what the Association is currently involved in and the amount of work that is involved, to expect a single employee and volunteers to take this much on and against some of the most influential politicians and business executives in the state is becoming ridiculous. With 14,000 members we do have the numbers, power and the commitment to make a difference but not if it cannot be managed due to a lack of staff or the wrong structure.

Finally one last thank you, thank you to **all** CFS volunteers and staff for your support over the last decade, the South Australian community is oblivious to the amount of work and commitment put in to having 9,000 firefighters on call 24/7, protecting their communities and helping them in times of need. They say that "Australia was built on the sheep's back", which is true but it was also built by the hands of volunteers and I am proud to say that I am a volunteer of the South Australian Country Fire Service.

Ken Schutz AFSM

President

SA Country Fire Service Volunteers Association