



Country Fire Service Volunteers Association

"Representing the interests of CFS Members"

Executive Director's Report to 2011 CFSVA AGM

The Country Fire Service Volunteers Association Inc (CFSVA) represents the interests and welfare of the 15,000 volunteers of the CFS.

The CFSVA works to promote the interests of volunteers to CFS and the Government. It works through a branch system to allow members to raise issues and express their views. The ten branch presidents form the State CFSVA Management Committee along with the State President, Mr Ken Schutz AFSM, Vice Presidents Mr Wayne Thorley AFSM and Mr Roger Flavell, and Executive Director Ms Wendy Shirley.

CFS Volunteers welcomed our new Chief Officer, Mr Greg Nettleton in January 2011. The Association developed a briefing paper for Mr Nettleton, entitled CFS Volunteer Priority Issues, which was presented to him in February. The issues were categorised into four major areas: funding, management systems, communication and consultation and volunteer recruitment and retention. The Association is currently working through those issues with the Chief Officer.

The Association has looked at lessons to be learned from the Victorian Black Saturday fires, in particular the support of volunteers in the aftermath of those fires. To ensure that the best possible support is provided to CFS volunteers in the event of similar devastating fires, the Association, in conjunction with CFS and SAFECOM, has put together a plan to ensure all facets of volunteer support and welfare will be attended to. The plan encompasses all aspects of support including injury and welfare management, a communications plan, potential fundraising for affected volunteers, and support for volunteers throughout any major inquiries.

The CFSVA has continued with the CFS Volunteer Forums, and held a successful forum in Mundulla (Tatiara Group) in April. Our new Chief officer, Mr Greg Nettleton attended the forum as part of the Panel, and heard first hand some of the issues faced by rural brigades. Issues raised included volunteer recruitment, training imposts, CFS funding and the burden of bureaucracy and increasing paperwork.

The Association is concerned with the availability of First Aid training for CFS Volunteers. Standards of Fire and Emergency Cover (SFEC) dictate the availability of first aid training, with the current level limiting CFS funded training to a maximum of four members for a one appliance brigade, rising to eight for a three appliance brigade. The Association considers this to be inadequate, and is lobbying for every CFS Volunteer who wishes to be trained in first aid to have access to a CFS funded course.

The Association has advocated for a total exemption from the driver fatigue laws impacting on our volunteer drivers, allowing similar provisions to apply as to the defense forces. We were happy to see that we now have that full exemption, which will apply until the new national road transport laws come into effect on January 1. The Association will continue to lobby for the full exemption under the national laws.

The CFSVA hosted a forum to examine the compensation and rehabilitation arrangements for injured CFS volunteers. This forum sought:

- For all those involved in assisting injured volunteers to have a full understanding of the various compensation schemes and benefits paid;
- To understand the process of determining the claims, including Crown Law involvement, the Workers Compensation Tribunal and the Medical Assessment Panel;
- To determine in fact whether these schemes provide adequate financial and supportive assistance for volunteers, and if not, what more should be done.

Information has now been sent out to all volunteers explaining the three compensation arrangements for volunteers ie the worker's compensation scheme, the CFSVA disability insurance and the CFS Foundation.

The State Government promised to introduce legislation that would lower the speed whilst passing red and blue flashing lights at emergencies. It is very disappointing that this has not happened to date, and volunteers around the State are questioning the Government's commitment to their safety.

The Association is most keen to see that the introduction of the new SACAD system for call receipt and dispatch, due to be introduced on November 28 2011, causes as few problems as possible for the operations of CFS Brigades in the changeover period. To that end the Association has been active on the SACAD Business Reference Group, and has worked closely with senior CFS Volunteers to increase awareness of the upcoming change and to ensure that CFS Volunteers have a system that meets their needs and way of working.

The CFS Volunteer Charter was signed in June 2008, enshrining the principles of consultation, mutual obligation and partnership between CFS volunteers and CFS, SAFECOM and the Government. The Charter is due for review and resigning by June 2012 and the Association is looking to commence negotiations on this.

Other initiatives of the Association in 2010 / 11 included:

- Free entry for SA national parks for CFS volunteers. Some 670 volunteers have applied for a parks pass so far this year;
- A free legal advice telephone service for our members;
- Production of a new pocket notebook for operational volunteers, which includes vital safety information for the fireground;
- Recruitment advertisements produced by the Association were run in the northern and Riverland areas of the State. These advertisements will run in the South East in August 2011;

The Association continues to be represented on the SAFECOM Board, the Sector Advisory Committee and the CFS Chief Officer's Advisory Committee (COAC). The CFSVA is also active on 13 other CFS and SAFECOM Committees ensuring that the interests of CFS volunteers continue to be protected and their views heard at every level.

It is the opinion of the Executive Director that the major focal points for the coming year must be

- 1) development of a policy document / manifesto stating the position of CFS volunteers for use at the March 2014 State election
- 2) development of a campaign plan for to highlight those issues to political parties and politicians
- 3) invigoration of CFSVA branches

Wendy Shirley, CFSVA Executive Director October 2011