



## The Country Fire Service Volunteers Association

*"Representing the interests of CFS Members"*

### CFSVA STATE EXECUTIVE REPORT October 2020

Writing this report has made me contemplate not just the year just gone, but also the past several years and the road we have travelled to get to where we are today. It has not been a smooth ride, however the gains made along the way have made it worthwhile, and whilst some gains have been significant, and others not so obvious, the safety and welfare of our volunteers has always been in the forefront of these achievements.

The challenges of the past year, commencing with a severe fire season and followed by a global pandemic have indeed tested us all, however as always, CFS volunteers have risen to the challenge and once again you have all shown your high level of commitment, and the strength and ability to face adversity and challenge. The restrictions have been severe, however, yet again CFS volunteers and staff have stood tall and have continuously delivered on your commitment to South Australian communities.

Often the work undertaken by the CFSVA is sensitive in nature, so we can't always share information, however you can be assured that your representative Board holds a strong strategic position which is based on your collective views and represents the best interest of our volunteers. The diversity of thoughts and opinions shared at the CFSVA Board table can only result in good outcomes for you, our members.

From the outside looking in, it is not always easy to understand why matters take so long to reach a conclusion. The CFSVA Board shares your frustration as we also find it difficult to fathom why outcomes take so long to achieve, however, the Board assures you that whilst it may appear that matters have stalled, this is not certainly the case, as the tenacity and resolve of the CFSVA Executive team ensures that your matters continue to remain on the agenda until a satisfactory conclusion is reached.

It is a privilege to take a position on the CFSVA Board, however with this privilege also comes responsibility and scrutiny, and whilst we appreciate that there will be frustrations and challenges, it is disheartening when your professional and personal integrity is challenged for no other purpose than to drive agendas which are not for the benefit of our volunteers, nor indeed the emergency services sector.

The current CFSVA leadership team, President Andy Wood, Vice President David Lindner and Deputy Vice President Jeff Clark and I have represented volunteers in an exemplary manner and have remained true and honest to the CFSVA's mantra of representing the interests of CFS volunteers. At times we may be too harsh on each other or too critical of others without realising some of the huge impediments your representatives face when lobbying on your behalf. It is not an easy task, as your leadership group, to represent and satisfy such a diverse group of individuals.

This year we welcomed and indeed was pleased to have Chief Officer Mark Jones QFSM lead CFS through a significant fire season and unprecedented pandemic lockdown. Chief Officer Jones' professionalism and high level of international skills are apparent, as is the integrity with which he leads and represents CFS at all levels. The CFSVA has developed a good working relationship with the Chief which we anticipate will continue.

Minister Vincent Tarzia has recently been appointed Minister for Emergency Services, an appointment which the CFSVA welcomes. Although only Minister for little more than a month, the CFSVA has already met with Minister Tarzia and his staff on several occasions and look forward to working with the Minister to overcome some of the unproductive barriers set in place by the previous Minister.

The greatest disappointed for the CFSVA this year has been the inordinate amount of time and precious resources which have focused on a flawed Analysis document, which was written as the personal view of the SAFECOM CEO and supported by the previous Minister, Corey Wingard. The analysis' misinterpretation of the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (FES), coupled with the SAFECOM CEO and former Minister insistence to promulgate erroneous information shows an utter contempt for the very foundations of the sector and has made the SAFECOM CEO's ability to lead the sector come under scrutiny. It is also unfathomable that although the erroneous information contained within the analysis has been identified that the document remains on the table.

The CFSVA continues to support the Sector Advisory Committee (SAC), as SAC, which is a legislated committee under the Fire and Emergency Service Act 2005 and is a vital link between key stakeholders and the SAFECOM Board. SAC comprises of all Chief Officers (CFS /SES /MFS/SAFECOM) and representatives from all our sector partner including associations, unions and staff and is the united voice of the sector and an important conduit for communication and discussion amongst sector partners. SAC further highlights that as a sector we work together; and do it well. The CFSVA does not support divisive comments driven by personal agendas which suggest anything to the contrary. The CFSVA is well represented on SAC by Andy Wood who is the current Chair and Jeff Clark both of whom are committed and outspoken when necessary.

An important part of the CFSVA's work is also to represent CFS volunteers nationally through CAVFA, our national body which collectively represents over 250,000 volunteer firefighters nationwide. CAVFA also provides a national benchmark for the CFSVA and it is rewarding to note that the CFSVA measures up extremely well when compared to our interstate counterparts, and whilst we are not the largest organisation, nor the best funded we carry considerable achievements and influence when it matters. Andy Wood is the current Chair of CAVFA and I represent CAFVA on the AFAC Volunteer Technical Management Group (VTMG) which enables the CFSVA to both nationally and as a state based association, to influence the national agenda both through AFAC and the Federal Government. The CFSVA, through its representatives of Andy Wood, David Lindner and myself is highly respected for its work and the outcomes achieved on behalf of our volunteers.

The CFSVA remains particularly focused on the health and wellbeing of volunteers with attention turned to extending support and mental health services for volunteers, which given the events of the past 12 months have become more significant and critical. The association continues to carry a Life Insurance policy on all volunteers injured in the line of duty, which is over and above normal WorkCover entitlements, which this year also includes a limited benefit for diagnosed cases of PTSD.

In closing, the CFSVA continues to remain refocused on its core business and plans for the future: a future that recognises and appreciates volunteers; a future that accepts that the risks to volunteers are no different to the risks to paid firefighters; a future that provides support to volunteers and acknowledges the enormous contribution CFS volunteers make to South Australian communities.

The diversity of our CFS volunteers is indeed unique and the CFSVA will continue to drive the message to Government to embrace this uniqueness and harness the skills that volunteers bring to CFS, and not to dismiss these skills because they do not fit 'the mould' but to find ways to capitalise on the enormous value of CFS volunteers and the huge contribution our volunteers make to South Australia.

Finally, I would personally like to acknowledge and thank President Andy Wood, Vice President David Lindner and Deputy Vice President Jeff Clark all of whom have been truly passionate and loyal in their commitment to the CFSVA and our volunteers, and to Kirsti Oliver, without whose support I would not have enough hours in the day to complete all tasks on hand. Thank you also to all the volunteers who have put themselves forward to represent the CFSVA in many ways, the association does recognise and appreciates your skills and generous commitment.

Sonia St Alban  
Executive Director