



Country Fire Service Volunteers Association

Building a strong CFS – 2014 and beyond – partnership objectives between the CFSVA, CFS and Government



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Country Fire Service Volunteers (CFSVA) comprises 13,500 members and following consultation has developed partnership objectives as a framework which identifies key issues raised by its members which are of strategic importance to the sustainability of the Country Fire Service.

The Country Fire Service is defined by its volunteer focus, local community support and state wide recognition.

The Country Fire Service Volunteers Association is seeking commitment from political parties in relation to the recommendations contained within this document. The CFSVA believes that the decisions made over the next term of Government are paramount to the long term sustainability of volunteering for the Country Fire Service into the future. Partnership objectives within this document, will require either additional financial support, legislative or policy changes for implementation, as all are considered critical to ensure that the CFS not only maintains its current high standard, but the needs of CFS volunteers are recognised better placing the CFS to meet these and the ever increasing expectations of the wider community, and create a more equitably funded and supported blueprint for the future of the Country Fire Service.

INTRODUCTION

CFS VOLUNTEERS

CFS volunteers play an integral role in the protection of life and property in South Australia, and over the years the role of CFS volunteers has shifted in line with the changing needs of their local and the wider community.

The CFS organisation has matured from a number of small regional volunteer fire services to a 13,500 strong integrated volunteer fire service comprising of 493 brigades located across South Australia.

CFS volunteers respond to a great variety of incidents including structure fires, road crash rescue, hazardous material incidents, grass and bushfires and assisting other Agencies. These responses can be either within their own pre-determined response area, within their CFS region or as part of a strike team to intrastate or interstate deployments. Peri-urban brigades located close to the Adelaide CBD and regional brigades located close to larger regional areas are regularly dispatched to incidents within populated areas and work side by side with MFS career fire fighters and SES volunteers. The perception that the CFS is predominantly a bushfire brigade is false as statistics demonstrate.

CFS volunteers generously donate their time, talent and energy to ensure the provision of a viable emergency service, and as such should be afforded solid support by government in recognition of the contribution that volunteers make and bearing in mind the cost effectiveness which results in the financial viability of CFS volunteers providing a first class fire and rescue service to the broader South Australian economy.

The Country Fire Service "volunteer workforce" has no "Enterprise Agreement" as paid employees have with their employer, which results in underfunding and changes made at will by Government with the expectation that volunteers will simply "cope". Many volunteers feel that their services are being "taken for granted" and or not "valued" by Government, as it appears that only at election time or at a time of crisis, such as a Coronial inquiry that positive funding changes are made to the CFS.

There have been a number of changes brought to volunteers by Government which has seen the CFS change from principally a locally managed "rural" service to a multi-faceted all hazards fire and rescue service underpinned by SOP's, COSO's AIIMS, CRIIMSON, AIIRS, and WH&S. If CFS volunteers were a "paid" workforce there would have been a series of "Enterprise Agreements" which would have rewarded volunteers with annual increases in remuneration, as there has been the requirement for increase productivity (multi skilling) and flexibility by volunteers which reflects the changing Government, Community and CFS needs over time.

If a mechanism could be introduced whereby the CFS was funded over and above normal budget requirements and this additional funding was linked to a similar sized Agency workforce for an annual "wage increase", negotiated with the CFSVA on how it was spent, then such things as the ratio of paid staff to support CFS volunteers which is lower than any other state in Australia, and which impacts on support work to volunteers as CFS staff are required to either pick up the work or the support to volunteers does not occur, could be addressed, along with other needs as outlined herein.

Volunteer pride and goodwill means that Volunteers continue to commit to providing their community with an improved and enhanced service at the time of an emergency, but seriously strains the relationship.

Volunteers need more recognition for their efforts, as they sacrifice family life, leisure time and work to up skill and be more productive.

The community expectation of the service provided by CFS volunteers has dramatically increased over time and it is imperative that these increased expectations are supported by Government and the key areas impacting on volunteers addressed.

DELIVERY OF EMERGENCY SERVICES BY VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers have in the past seen a number of proposals and indeed many changes that have affected the very essence of the volunteering ethos.

The abandonment of a dedicated CFS Headquarters (loss of identity), proposals to establish one fire service (loss of culture) and the centralisation of resources into SAFECOM and subsequent staff cuts (loss of dedicated CFS resources). Volunteers seek to ensure that any changes in the future to the CFS framework, legislation or structural reviews of the fire and emergency services respects the fact that over 13,500 volunteers give their time willingly to protect South Australian communities.

Whilst it is acknowledged that things change, the following principles and imperatives are non-negotiable when contemplating any legislative or structural change to the current method of fire and emergency service delivery by volunteers.

Paramount is the “culture” and “identity” of the organisation and no change or re-structure should be contemplated until the volunteer “culture” is sound and the “identity” is solid. Any future proposal must consider the effect on the organisation’s volunteer culture and identity and be supported by a comprehensive risk analysis and a meaningful volunteer consultation process.

Principles:

- Be volunteering centric; by ensuring that service delivery includes a strong “identity” with the organisation by volunteers and their “culture”.
- Be Flexible; by recognising that “one size” does not fit all.
- Have sound operating principles for recruitment, training, resources, infrastructure and retention of volunteers.
- Be sufficiently funded, staffed and resourced to support volunteers.

Imperatives:

- Have the ability to increase people capacity as needed
- Require minimal administrative functions by volunteers
- Define agreed core activities for volunteers in fire and emergency response
- Provide for skill development for volunteers
- Utilise the skills that volunteers bring with them
- Be flexible to use people with a range of skills to manage emergencies
- Allow CFS managers to manage, not simply be strong operationally
- Have flexibility of legislation which is currently too prescriptive in some cases
- Adopt best business management practices, including succession planning and mentoring.

The principles and imperatives outlined above should be adhered to with any proposed change in the method of delivery of fire and emergency services in South Australia.

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE VOLUNTEERS ASSOCIATION (CFSVA)

The Country Fire Service Volunteers Association (CFSVA) was established in 1984 to represent the interest and protect the welfare of Country Fire Service (CFS) volunteer members. It is established in legislation and has become a significant stakeholder within CFS and the South Australian volunteer community. The SA Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005, recognises the CFSVA as the association that represents the interests of the CFS and as such is empowered to take such steps as may be reasonably available to promote and advance the best interests of CFS Volunteers. All CFS Volunteers are members of the Association by power of this legislation.

The CFSVA is a professional organisation with its own staff to support its membership and achieve its objectives which is to provide a platform through which the consolidated views of all its members can be presented and included in the CFS decision making process.

The CFSVA has a strong and effective state wide structure with a Management Committee comprising of an elected Chairperson supported by elected delegates from each of the six regions from across the State.

The CFSVA has representation on all Statutory and Advisory Committees relevant to the Country Fire Service including the SAFECOM Board and State Bushfire Co-ordination Committee and operates in consultation with the CFS in the following areas:

- Community engagement
- Membership Services
- Infrastructure Services
- Operational Services
- Strategic Services

The CFSVA has delivered a number of impressive achievements which includes the development of a Volunteer Charter; an agreement between the CFSVA, the South Australian Government and the Country Fire Service to ensure a commitment to consult with volunteers on all matters that directly impact on volunteers.

The CFSVA is able to enhance the activities of the CFS, by ensuring a good relationship exists with volunteers, the public, the media and government.

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE (CFS)

The Country Fire Service (CFS) is a community based organisation that evolved from a partnership between volunteers, local government and the South Australian government to meet community safety needs.

The partnership began as an attempt to deal with fires in rural areas around 1939 with the formation of the Emergency Fire Service (funded principally by Local Government with some funding from Insurance companies and the State Government) and in 1976, with the passing of the Country Fires Act, the SA Country Fire Service (CFS) was established. Further amendments in 1989 to the SA Country Fires Act enabled the introduction of a standardised emergency response service across South Australia.

The result of these Legislative changes has brought onto the CFS paid staff and volunteers, a significant change from a principally "rural " fire service, managed locally to now an all hazards fire and rescue service, with SOP's, COSO's, AIIMS, CRIIMSON, WH&S, more onerous procurement systems, GRN and more recently the introduction of SACAD, now all managed centrally from Adelaide.

To support these changes, in the late 1990's funding through the Emergency Services Levy was established to ensure that all CFS Brigades were more properly equipped and standardised. However, it should be noted that with the shift away from Local Government responsibility at the time, it is considered that the CFS started from an incorrect and very low funding base, as all measures funded previously by Local Government were never properly identified and considered at the time. So now, that CFS responses have expanded beyond rural fire-fighting, into road accident rescue and general emergency response, especially in isolated areas where no other emergency service existed, and has continued to expand over subsequent years, additional funding is required.

The SA Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 was proclaimed on 1 October 2005 and supersedes the Country Fires Act as the governing legislation for the SA Country Fire Service. South Australia currently has 13,500 volunteer members representing 493 CFS brigades whose functions and responsibilities are managed by the South Australian Country Fire Service.

The state wide capacity of the CFS is reliant on maintaining its independence and integrity as a locally focused, volunteer based organisation. The independence of the CFS must never be compromised as this will create a direct and irrevocable impact on volunteer numbers and level of commitment thereby minimising the CFS' capacity to protect local communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE FUNDING, BUILDINGS, APPLIANCES AND EQUIPMENT

RECOMMENDATION 1 - PO0037 - pg 16

- 1) That appropriate funds of an initial injection of \$14M is allocated to the building and maintenance programs to ensure that both these building replacement and property maintenance brought back up to date and on track
- 2) Sufficient funds estimated at a further \$30million allocated into the future over 10 years to allow for the continuance of an effective building programme and maintenance of buildings.

RECOMMENDATION 2 - PO0042 - pg 16

- 1) That additional funding of \$2.5M per annum be provided to the CFS from 1 July 2015 for the provision of additional BWC's, QRV's and replacement of Logistics vehicles.
- 2) Additional funding provision to the CFS of \$1.1M per annum be made for the upgrading and provision of additional equipment from 1 July 2015.
- 3) That one additional FTE be provided to the CFS from 1 July 2014 to establish a purchase programme for the above.

RECOMMENDATION 3 - PO0038 - pg 17

- 1) That a review be made of existing business cases that have been prepared, with a view to establishing a fit for purpose business case, allowing rollout of technologies to all CFS appliances. This review and recommendations be ready by September 2014 at an estimated cost of \$7.7M.
- 2) Funding provision be made to start trialling technologies by November 2014, with the complete fleet of CFS appliances fitted out by October 2017, with additional recurrent funding of one FTE at \$130K and material costs of \$1.1M per annum be provided .

RECOMMENDATION 4 - PO0025 - pg 18

- 1) That the safety of volunteers and the public be considered as a priority and that without further delay suitable solutions are found and implemented to ensure that the SAGRN provides coverage to current identified "black spot" areas and network capacity is increased to cope with large incidents.
- 2) That this recommendation be supported by a working party comprising representatives from each CFS Region and identify the "black spots" with an undertaking to address same with a funded programme, anticipated to be in the order of \$24M to be in place by December 2015.
- 3) That additional funding in the order of \$154M is planned for the upgrade and introduction of a GRN digital next gen system.

RECOMMENDATION 5 - PO0027 - pg 18

- 1) Funds of \$50K be provided to establish at least one "Reserve Brigade" and provide for existing brigades to establish "surge capacity" based in the metropolitan and peri urban areas.
- 2) Review CFS membership categories to facilitate 'Reserve Brigades' and "surge capacity" in existing brigades by 30 June 2015.
- 3) That recurrent funding is increased by \$40K per annum to fund "surge capacity" for existing Brigades.

RECOMMENDATION 6 - PO 0036 - pg 19

- 1) Utilise the full potential of the E-Connect program by funding the delivery of training and accreditation courses through e-learning programs.
- 2) Decentralise training and increase funding to provide sufficient training courses so as to attract and stimulate volunteers and increase volunteer retention.
- 3) Provide future funding from 1 July 2015 of one FTE at \$100K per annum and \$300K capital per annum for replacement equipment in support and maintenance of the E-Connect network.

RECOMMENDATION 7 - PO 0022 - pg 20

- 1) The CFSVA calls for a thorough review by December 2014 of the ESL to ensure the proper funding of the CFS.
- 2) That the cost of the collection process be reviewed to minimize cost of collection of same.

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE VOLUNTEER TRAINING SUPPORT

RECOMMENDATION 8 - PO0014 - pg 21

- 1) That CFS move to a position of providing more training in regional areas
- 2) That the CFS supports the use of qualified CFS volunteer trainers who live in the regions to provide the training, and pay those trainers on an hourly rate.
- 3) The CFS be funded for an additional 23 full time trainers at an annual cost of \$2.5M.

RECOMMENDATION 9 - PO0028 - pg21

- 1) Funding estimated to be \$750K per annum is made available for all CFS volunteers wishing to undertake relevant lifesaving / support training is provided.

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE SUPPORT SERVICES

RECOMMENDATION 10 - PO0015 - pg 22

- 1) That the Business Support Officer program be expanded to assist CFS volunteers with the increasing bureaucratic impost;
- 2) That this support be provided directly to volunteers by the provision of an administrative officer working to a number of groups and brigades.
- 3) That these recommendations be implemented by July 2015, at an estimated cost of \$850K per annum for 7 FTE positions.

RECOMMENDATION 11 - PO0007 - pg 22

- 1) That a Working Party be established supported by a project officer at a cost of \$35K by December 2014 to develop strategies for support to volunteers for child minding or carer services or the like.
- 2) That the Working Party be required to provide a report for the Minister for emergency Services within six months of establishment and funding for implementation of the Working Party recommendations is made available after.

RECOMMENDATION 12 - PO0035 - pg 23

- 1) Undertake a detailed comparison analysis with like interstate organisations, to establish a business case for a more equitable support ratio of staff to volunteers, particularly staff leave relief coverage. Estimated to be in the order of 18 FTE.
- 2) This analysis be established in consultation with the CFSVA and be completed by April 2015, with appropriate funding to support the implementation of any recommendations.
- 3) Increase funding to CFS so as to achieve equitable staffing levels.
- 4) Establish an effective performance management system which includes direct feedback from volunteers for those supporting volunteers
- 5) Establish a system to track issues and report on actions taken or reasons for delays.

RECOMMENDATION 13 - PO0016 - pg 23

- 1) That the CFS is relocated to an appropriate site outside Adelaide Central business District to allow easier accessibility to its paid workforce and volunteer members
- 2) That any new location be purpose built at a cost of around \$3M and funded for \$100K per annum recurrent costs and consider the need for ample free parking and other operational logistical space.

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE VOLUNTEERS

RECOMMENDATION 14 - PO0002 - pg 24

- 1) That the Volunteer Charter be enshrined into legislation by December 2015 to ensure appropriate consultation with CFS volunteers to avoid legislative imposts being foisted upon volunteers
- 2) That government decisions consider the nature CFS work
- 3) That government demonstrate compliance with the Volunteer Charter by reporting to Cabinet on proposal papers and by preparing an impact statement at the time Cabinet is considering legislative or other changes.
- 4) An education programme is established by June 2015 to ensure all Departments / Agencies are made aware of the impact of their decisions on CFS volunteers.

RECOMMENDATION 15 - PO0003 - pg 25

- 1) That direct payments to CFS Volunteers should not be implemented
- 2) That a working party be established with the support of a project officer at a cost of \$45K, to identify other options involving offsets to the personal financial costs of volunteering and decreasing the bureaucratic impost on volunteer involvement should be put in place to assist the recruitment and retention of CFS Volunteers.
- 3) This working party to be established in agreement with the CFSVA by September 30 2014 and a report prepared for consideration by April 30 2015.
- 4) Funding for any proposal be provided by July 2015.

RECOMMENDATION 16 - PO0005 - pg25

- 1) That Section 127 of the Fire and Emergency Services Act be amended to ensure that it provides the best possible protection from liability, by reversing the burden of proof in showing that a particular member did not act honestly;
- 2) That this protection be publicised to overcome the fear of such liability discouraging prospective recruits.

RECOMMENDATION 17 - PO0001 - pg 26

- 1) That the SA Government changes the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (1986) to allow for compensation payments of 100% of nominal average weekly earnings for injured CFS volunteers until they are fit to return to work.
- 2) That the CFS Chief Officer is provided with the discretion to ensure that volunteers are not disadvantaged by the compensation system.

RECOMMENDATION 18 - PO0010 - pg 26

- 1) That Section 127 of the SA Fire and Emergency Services Act (2005) is amended to provide CFS volunteers with the statutory right of legal advice at the Crown's expense in cases where members are called as witnesses at inquiries.

RECOMMENDATION 19 - PO0004 - pg 27

- 1) That the initiatives of "industry brigades" and contract staffing of CFS appliances be supported for the future of the CFS.
- 2) The CFS is funded for \$140K to develop and purchase computer based crewing technology by 30 September 2014.

RECOMMENDATION 20 - PO0008 - pg 27

- 1) That a Working Party supported by a project officer at a cost of \$6K be established by the end of May 2014 to report and make recommendations on dealing with emergencies, including the role and functionality of the CFS, other emergency services, government agencies and appropriate private contractors, including a revamped CFS Operational Bulletin pertaining to this matter by end October 2014.
- 2) That the government instruct other agencies that a cost shifting / avoidance approach to management of ongoing incidents after the emergency is over is unacceptable.
- 3) That an ability to charge a fee for clean-up following an incident be enacted, as it is currently part of the FES Act.

RECOMMENDATION 21 - PO0009 - pg 28

- 1) That the CFS policy of reimbursement of out of pocket expenses be reviewed to ensure that all practicable expenses are either paid upfront or are directly reimbursed and CFS is funded accordingly once identified;
- 2) That the Government of South Australia support a review of the income tax assessment provisions or Centrelink benefits to recognise and compensate for the out of pocket expenses of CFS volunteers;
- 3) That the Government of South Australia considers the exemption of the Emergency Services Levy for CFS volunteers for their home property.

RECOMMENDATION 22 - PO0018 - pg 29

- 1) That new recurrent funding be allocated to allow for the employment of two part time CFS cadet coordinators throughout the state at a cost of \$120K per annum, and for the equipping same at a cost of \$35K per annum.
- 2) That secondary schools throughout the State be funded to run CFS or emergency service cadet programs, including schools in the metropolitan Adelaide.
- 3) That CFS cadet programs delivered by secondary schools be incorporated into the SACE program, with SACE point allocation for CFS cadets who complete Bushfire Fighter 1 (BFF1) training.

RECOMMENDATION 23 - PO0019 - pg 29

- 1) That six FTE 's be funded at an annual cost of \$600K to establish a recruitment campaign funded for \$320K per annum aimed at women, young people and those from non-English speaking backgrounds be developed to attract new members to the CFS.
- 2) That training is given to CFS brigades to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by minority groups in either joining a brigade or in aspiring to leadership positions.

RECOMMENDATION 24 - PO0034 - pg 30

- 1) That Government forms a policy for all departments and agencies that permits government employed CFS volunteers to respond to emergency situations as and when required.
- 2) That Government leads by example to other business and agencies to free up CFS volunteers from duties to respond to emergency call-outs.
- 3) That the Government engage the Local Government Association in establishing a position whereby all Local Government areas allow staff to be released in support of the CFS volunteer responses.

RECOMMENDATION 25 - PO0017 - pg 30

- 1) The CFSVA recommends that a national Employer Recognition Scheme be established for employers of emergency services volunteers, which would incorporate direct employer support payments to offset the costs of releasing their volunteers for longer term incidents.
- 2) Time out for employees to attend CFS training courses be recognised and form part of the Employers Recognition Scheme
- 3) Further that the South Australian Government should advocate for a national approach in this regard directly to the relevant Federal Ministers and agencies, as well as via the relevant Ministerial Councils, with a view to establishing legislation modelled on the Army Reservist scheme in support of Emergency Service volunteering
- 4) The CFS is funded for one FTE at \$130K per annum and \$50K per annum budget to promote employer support.

RECOMMENDATION 26 -PO0021 - pg 31

- 1) That a campaign aimed at enhancing the CFS image and educating the community on role and volunteer nature of the CFS be developed, as well as how the Emergency Services levy is spent.
- 2) That consideration be given to engaging a public relations expert who would act as a spokesperson for CFS and assist in conveying the CFS message to the public in a consistent manner
- 3) Provide additional funding of \$750K per annum for product and media, from 1 July 2014 with support from an existing CFS person.

RECOMMENDATION 27 - PO0041 - pg 32

- 1) That the SA Government make available at no cost, by July 2014 the identified block of land for the purpose of establishing a SA Volunteer Fire Fighting Museum.

RECOMMENDATION 28 -PO0011 - pg 32

- 1) That the Free Entry to National Parks for CFS Volunteers be continued to recognise the commitment of our members to keeping the parks safe.
- 2) That the Pass be extended to cover camping fees.

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE FRONTLINE SUPPORT SERVICES STAFFING

RECOMMENDATION 29 PO0024 -pg 33

- 1) The SACAD system be managed by SAFECOM and be non-agency specific.
- 2) That two FTE's be appointed to SACAD as support staff and be made permanent appointments with funding of \$260K per annum.

RECOMMENDATION 30 - PO0023 - pg 33

- 1) Allocate a Volunteer Support Branch person to CFS to work "in house" to provide specific support and accountability for CFS volunteering.
- 2) Establish a recruitment and retention Advisory Group to assist the Volunteer Services Branch Re-introduce seven Volunteer Support Officers to regions and Head Office at a cost of \$ 1.3M per annum and whose time is dedicated to support volunteers, brigades and groups.

RECOMMENDATION 31 - PO0039 - pg 34

- 1) That the SA Government make available funding of \$600K per annum from July 2014 until and including July 2017 for the purpose of enabling the CFS to undertake effective and responsible Bushfire Planning for the community.
- 2) That the SA Government approve the appointment of 2 full time permanent positions to CFS to continue the development and maintenance of the bushfire management planning program.

RECOMMENDATION 32 - PO0026 - pg 35

- 1) That a business case be prepared for funding, estimated to need 6 FTE's at a cost per annum of \$1.1M to establish and resource a CFS specific 24/7 operational "help desk" which includes full SACAD viewing functionality to assist and support volunteers during emergency response, whilst maintaining aircraft dispatch functionality, by October 2014.

RECOMMENDATION 33 - PO0012 - pg 35

- 1) That all CFS operational staff vacancies are advertised and available to all CFS volunteers at the same time as other public sector employees.

RECOMMENDATION 34 - PO0013 -pg 36

- 1) That some volunteers are trained for and have appropriate input in all relevant emergency sector vacancy appointments.

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES IN SUPPORT OF CFS VOLUNTEERS

RECOMMENDATION 35 - PO0029 - pg 37

- 1) The CFSVA is of the opinion that there is a lack of justification for the exclusion of CFS volunteers to the proposed presumptive legislation (cancer) and asks that the government's position be reconsidered to encompass all fire fighters regardless of whether they are paid or volunteers.

RECOMMENDATION 36 - PO0040 - pg 37

- 1) That the SA Fire and Emergency Services Act be amended such that owners of forest plantations are required to provide certain minimum levels of fire detection / protection resources in support of local communities and their asset.
- 2) That these legislative changes reflect at least the current level resource and of community support that Forestry SA has provided.

RECOMMENDATION 37 - PO0006 - pg 38

- 1) That the CFS legislation be made more flexible to recognise other operational support roles within the CFS
- 2) That the CFS enables broader membership functionality within brigades.
- 3) That additional funding be provided, recognising the changing needs of the community and CFS volunteers in the establishment of "Operational Support" brigades and the like.

RECOMMENDATION 38 - PO0032 - pg 38

- 1) That the South Australian Government considers the nature of CFS work and the impact on CFS volunteers when faced with proposed Federal Legislative changes and ensure their Federal counterparts demonstrate compliance with the Volunteer Charter by reporting and consulting with the CFSVA on proposal papers.

RECOMMENDATION 39 - PO0033 - pg 39

- 1) That an independent presiding Chair be appointed to SAFECOM to ensure transparency and remove the potential for conflict of interest.

CONCLUSION

By adopting the above recommendations, details of which are contained in the attached Policy Objectives, the CFSVA firmly believes that many constraints to volunteering will be addressed. Indeed, there will be enhanced incentives to volunteering in the CFS. This will ensure the Building of a Strong CFS – 2014 and beyond in a partnership with major Stakeholders.

PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE FUNDING, BUILDINGS, APPLIANCES AND EQUIPMENT

BUILDING AND MAINTENCE PROGRAM – PO0037

Background

In December 2008 an independent Building Replacement Review commissioned by SAFECOM and conducted by GHD consultants that indicated that funding for CFS building and maintenance programs fell well below the appropriate level to sustain the current program.

The reports states as follows:

“The Capital budget for building replacement at \$2 million appears to be well below an appropriate level for a sustained building replacement program. Reports from SAFECOM/CFS/SES indicate that there are approximately 310 buildings that should be replaced (based on known age and useful life) over the next 10 years. Allowing for an average of \$100,000 per facility, this would indicate a 2008 cost of \$30,000,000 compared to the \$20,000,000 10 year budget forecast, a shortfall in the order of \$10,000,000.”

And continues...

\$120,000 property maintenance for a full portfolio of 400 stations is considered too low to maintain stations at a sustainable condition level and should be increased to an appropriate level. Property maintenance benchmarking would suggest that maintenance should be between 1.5% and 4% of the replacement value, which in this instance would suggest that the maintenance budget should be in the order of \$1,500,000 to \$4,000,000, although the complexity of the majority of buildings would suggest the lower end would be more appropriate. We recommend that maintenance budgets be reviewed with an aim to increasing to a more appropriate level.”

The recommendations of the GHD report have not been acted upon, resulting in the CFS building replacement and maintenance programs continuing to fall further in arrears.

Lease agreements between the Minister and Local Government clearly identifies that the Minister is required to adequately maintain CFS stations, and is quite specific in that it nominates that the Minister will provide the funds to re-paint each station once every 10 years as well as ensuring regular maintenance and upkeep on the property. The current CFS capital budget places the Minister in default of lease agreements.

RECOMMENDATION 1

- 1) That appropriate funds of an initial injection of \$14M is allocated to the building and maintenance programs to ensure that both these building replacement and property maintenance brought back up to date and on track
- 2) Sufficient funds estimated at a further \$30million allocated into the future over 10 years to allow for the continuance of an effective building programme and maintenance of buildings.

VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT - PO0042

Background

Most funding for vehicles, is currently taken up in the provision of appliances for volunteers, which has resulted in a shortfall in funding for;

- command vehicles, for use by volunteer Incident Controllers),
- logistics vehicles for use by volunteer operational support persons,
- Quick Response Vehicles (QRV) for use by volunteers to respond in hilly terrain and where there are lesser numbers of volunteer crews, particularly within remote communities,
- Bulk Water Carriers (BWC), in support of volunteer crewed appliances.

One off funding has previously been provided for the purchase and ownership by the CFS of command and logistic vehicles, but no provision for replacement or additional vehicles has been made.

For operational support of volunteers, each CFS Group and there are some 55 Groups across the State comprising a number of CFS Brigades in each, should be supported by a modern Bulk Water Carrier (BWC). Many Groups do not have a BWC, whilst others have very aged ones.

Even the length of time appliance are being kept is now being stretched to 25 years from 20 years to ensure funding of new appliances is available. It is acknowledged that some appliances are still fit for purpose beyond their 20 year life, but not all are.

With regard to equipment, the provision and replacement of emergency services equipment, such as Road Crash Rescue, portable pumps, chainsaws, Hazmat equipment, Thermal Imaging Cameras and provision of latest technology equipment requires additional funding to be provided, to ensure that volunteers have access to the best, most up to date equipment in the correct quantum.

This is seen as a critical factor in maintaining volunteer interest in the CFS and in attracting new volunteers by the provision of the best and most modern equipment available.

RECOMMENDATION 2

- 1) That additional funding of \$2.5M per annum be provided to the CFS from 1 July 2015 for the provision of additional BWC's, QRV's and replacement of Logistics vehicles.
- 2) Additional funding provision to the CFS of \$1.1M per annum be made for the upgrading and provision of additional equipment from 1 July 2015.
- 3) That one additional FTE be provided to the CFS from 1 July 2014 to establish a purchase programme for the above.

TECHNOLOGIES – PO0038

Background

With introduction and high investment in technology and significant investment in SACAD by Government, a number of business cases have been prepared and submitted to Government for funding of further technology, to complement the investment in SACAD and provide CFS Volunteers with the latest technology that is currently generally already enjoyed by other emergency sector Agencies.

These technologies would result in more efficient use of volunteers' time, ensure greater safety on the fire ground by pinpointing appliance location accurately in real time, allow greater assurance of direct response, reduce the workload on Adelaide Fire Operators in busy times and reduce reliance on the current capacity of the GRN.

A number of technologies are available in some form currently and could be easily applied to CFS appliances / vehicles.

These include for example,

- Data units, which can access chemical data for Hazmat purposes, latest information of motor vehicles for RCR work, mapping features, written information / instruction to and from appliances, safe work procedures, CSF policy documents, CFS Operational Bulletins etc, thus ensuring more reliable and accurate information flow, along with a written record of same, which could be achieved outside the GRN network, thus reducing the load on same.
- Automatic Vehicle Location, which will provide real time locations of all CFS appliances, a critical issue in ensuring crew safety in large bushfire incidents, more efficient use of volunteers time, by better incident management when the location of each appliance is known accurately.
- Button Boxes, with the provision of these, responding CFS appliances can simply push a button, thus automatically acknowledging response to an incident with Adelaide Fire and also upon return from an incident, to go back "online". Currently these are done by having to select a specific GRN frequency or ring AF, in both instances, there are often delays in establishing communication and there is no automatic record of these calls being made.

Given the differing need of CFS volunteers across the State, it not anticipated that all appliances would need all the above technology and fit for purpose technology be developed for fitment to CFS appliances as required.

RECOMMENDATION 3

- 1) That a review be made of existing business cases that have been prepared, with a view to establishing a fit for purpose business case, allowing rollout of technologies to all CFS appliances. This review and recommendations be ready by September 2014 at an estimated cost of \$7.7M.
- 2) Funding provision be made to start trialling technologies by November 2014, with the complete fleet of CFS appliances fitted out by October 2017, with additional recurrent funding of one FTE at \$130K and material costs of \$1.1M per annum be provided from September 2014.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RADIO NETWORK – PO0025

Background

The SA Government Radio Network (SAGRN) provides reasonable coverage across the state, but has limitations within known “black spot” areas. These “black spots” hold considerable safety issues for members of the public and CFS volunteers who fear that the outbreak of a major fire would certainly place lives at risk.

The Gilbert Valley is an example of a significant black spot area, with volunteers raising a number of serious safety concerns in relation to lack of communications at critical times. The communication problems within this area have been under discussion for a number of years, however as yet an acceptable remedy has not been found.

Further, concerns have been also been raised as to the ability of the SAGRN system to withstand high volumes of radio traffic during a major multi-agency response. Situations have already occurred when appliances were unable to access the network due to high usage and the CFSVA has concerns that the potential for a serious problem exists should a major fire of the magnitude of Ash Wednesday recur.

RECOMMENDATION 4

- 1) That the safety of volunteers and the public be considered as a priority and that without further delay suitable solutions are found and implemented to ensure that the SAGRN provides coverage to current identified “black spot” areas and network capacity is increased to cope with large incidents.
- 2) That this recommendation be supported by a working party comprising representatives from each CFS Region and identify the "black spots" with an undertaking to address same with a funded programme, anticipated to be in the order of \$24M to be in place by July 2015.
- 3) That additional funding in the order of \$154M be planned for the upgrade and introduction of a GRN digital next gen system.

READY RESERVES - PO0027

Background

The CFSVA has identified a number of issues in the external environment in which CFS Volunteers operate, which are highly likely to impact on the future of CFS volunteering.

Issues such as an ageing population; rural decline and consolidation of farms; and other industries such as mining attracting people away all greatly impact on the future sustainability of the CFS.

These factors place increasing pressure to maintain and increase CFS Volunteer numbers, and in some areas it is becoming harder to retain trained volunteers with some brigades experiencing difficulties in recruiting, particularly for day time crewing.

Conversely, whilst volunteer numbers in some rural areas are on the decline, some of the outer metropolitan brigades have lengthy waiting lists of volunteers seeking to join.

It is important to harness this interest and capitalise in the areas where interest to join a brigade is shown, and as these brigades reach their capacity an alternate potentially in the form of a ready “Reserve Brigade” should be on offer to capture the overflow and compensate for the areas of the state with declining numbers.

Undeniably the majority of the South Australian population is located within the Adelaide metropolitan area and therefore provides a vast resource from which to capture CFS volunteers.

Rural youths also enter the CFS as cadets and progress through training to become competent fire fighter, however all too often their services to the CFS is lost as they move to Adelaide to either further their education or secure employment, with attempts by them to join a outer metropolitan brigade unsuccessful as brigades are at capacity, and like many others are added to a waiting list.

Given the financial cost of training volunteers it is difficult to comprehend why there is no ability to retain trained volunteers who relocate to Adelaide, as well as why there are provisions made for people who reside within the Adelaide metropolitan area and have expressed a desire to serve as a CFS volunteer.

In some cases there is a need for larger contingents of volunteers to form "strike teams" to cope with the magnitude of bushfires and other emergencies outside of their own local areas. These "strike teams" are becoming harder to fill as there is a greater reluctance to take time off from work and other responsibilities.

By establishing a "surge capacity" from "reserve Brigades" of volunteers or as now provided for in the CFS Standards of Fire and Emergency Cover for Brigades to increase membership to deal with large or ongoing incidents, particularly within brigades that are located near or within large population bases.

These may be existing peri urban brigades who have extended membership specifically targeting bushfire response volunteers, or new brigades set up within an urban environment to specifically to respond to large rural fires on a seasonal basis.

Both these initiatives would build on the current "task force" and "strike team" operational model for large incidents and would need a review of membership categories and increased funding to facilitate this;

Again, these "new" sources of volunteers from the metropolitan areas can support the country communities in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Note that a "ready reserve" group has been trialled at the Salisbury Brigade and seemed to work successfully and could form the basis for wider adoption.

RECOMMENDATION 5

- 1) Funds of \$50K be provided to establish at least one "Reserve Brigade" and provide for existing brigades to establish "surge capacity" based in the metropolitan and peri urban areas.
- 2) Review CFS membership categories to facilitate 'Reserve Brigades' and "surge capacity" in existing brigades by 30 June 2015.
- 3) That recurrent funding is increased by \$40K per annum to fund "surge capacity" for existing Brigades.

E-CONNECT FUTURE SUPPORT – PO0036

Background

The E-Connect program which is currently in its final stages has the capacity to become the catalyst for e-learning. Through the volunteer computer network currently being implemented across South Australia, the opportunity exists for the extension of training to all volunteers, however unless funding is available for "on-line training facilitators" the full potential of the E-Connect project will not be realised.

Consideration also needs to be given to the time commitment made by volunteers and the distance travelled to attend training course.

The flexibility of training is vital to ensure that volunteers from all areas of the state are considered and including in training programs and that the on time travel distances for volunteers is considered.

Funding deficiencies which limits the number of volunteers trained to current Standards of Fire and Emergency Cover (SFECs) causes great frustration amongst volunteers across the state, and has the potential to place communities at risk.

Further there has been no future plan for the maintenance and expansion of the E-Connect program once Federal Government funding has been extinguished. At completion the project will be handed over to each participating agency for self-administration without support funding.

RECOMMENDATION 6

- 1) Utilise the full potential of the E-Connect program by funding the delivery of training and accreditation courses through e-learning programs.
- 2) Decentralise training and increase funding to provide sufficient training courses so as to attract and stimulate volunteers and increase volunteer retention.
- 3) Provide future funding from 1 July 2015 of one FTE at \$100K per annum and \$300K capital per annum for replacement equipment in support and maintenance of the E-Connect network.

THE EMERGENCY SERVICES LEVY – PO0022

Emergency Services in South Australia are funded through the Community Emergency Services Fund (CESF). This fund is contributed to from the proceeds of the Emergency Services Levy (ESL) and from general government revenue. The ESL is a levy on all fixed and mobile property such as motor vehicles and boat registrations, and contributes to around fifty percent of the Community Emergency Services Fund (CESF). The Association calls for the ESL to be raised to more properly fund the emergency services in this state.

Background

Prior to 1999 emergency services were funded from a mix of local government bodies (which directly funded brigades in their own areas), insurance premium levies, brigade fundraising and some state government contribution, and lead to an inequity of funding around the state due to differences in funding levels from local councils and abilities to attract donations and fundraised funds.

Since then, funding is through ESL and State Government. The ESL is seen by many people as just another unnecessary government tax, and do not understand that it provides funding for emergency services which were previously funded through other means. This position is understandable given that they have not seen their insurance premiums decrease or local government rates discounted by similar amounts.

While the ESL has had the desirable effect of creating equity of funding to the 493 brigades around the state, it has had a negative effect of not funding the service appropriately to the required amount.

The CFSVA believes this is due to three main reasons:

1. The cost of operating emergency services was underestimated when the ESL was first developed. Local governments saw that the ESL would be coming in well before 1999, and commenced cutting back on maintenance and capital works in anticipation. Consequently the CFS is many years behind on its capital replacement program for stations, with station maintenance funding almost non-existent. In addition the Association believes that the fund raising contributions were severely underestimated, and indeed fundraising has declined as the public questions the need for donations as they pay their ESL which should properly provide for the services;
2. The ESL funds a wider range of services than was initially envisaged, creating further competition for the resources.
3. Government is reluctant to raise ESL to the necessary level for fear of voter backlash against taxation rises.

The Association believes that insurance companies should be contributing to the CEFS as they are a beneficiary of the services.

The Association calls for a thorough review of the ESL to ensure the proper funding of the CFS.

Note; for example it is estimated that the CFS requires a once off capital expenditure of \$14M and catch-up capital funding of an additional \$30M over 10 years, details of this expenditure is contained in these partnership objectives.

RECOMMENDATION 7

- 1) The CFSVA calls for a thorough review by December 2014 of the ESL to ensure the proper funding of the CFS.
- 2) That the cost of the collection process be reviewed to minimize cost of collection of same.

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE VOLUNTEER TRAINING SUPPORT

REGIONAL BASED TRAINING – PO0014

Background

There is not sufficient training including local training available. CFS volunteers often have to travel to the CFS State Training Centre at Brukunga in the Adelaide Hills for training. This necessitates up to one day of travel either side of the course. CFS volunteers are not paid for their time when attending training or for travel time, and are out of pocket in terms of their wages.

Volunteer trainers are used to some extent, but the numbers of those available on a volunteer basis is declining. This is mainly due to time available on a voluntary basis, with these trainers sometimes devoting up to 12 weekends per year on top of their normal volunteer response duties. The Association advocates that it is "above and beyond" the normal duties of a CFS volunteer, and that these trainers should be recognised as part time instructors and paid an hourly rate.

This would increase the number of available trainers in regional areas and if the CFS was also be funded to provide more Regional staff based paid trainers to reduce the pressure on volunteers generally and would provide more flexibility for volunteers to attend training courses. It is estimated that an additional 23 paid full time trainers are required to properly provide volunteers with effective flexibility to attend training and meet all local training requirements for volunteers.

RECOMMENDATION 8

- 1) That CFS move to a position of providing more training in regional areas
- 2) That the CFS supports the use of qualified CFS volunteer trainers who live in the regions to provide the training, and pay those trainers on an hourly rate. CFS to receive additional funding estimated to be \$30K pa.
- 3) The CFS be funded for an additional 23 full time trainers at an annual cost of \$2.5M

FIRST AID POLICY - PO0028

Background

First Aid training has primarily been made available to Road Crash Rescue Brigade members and is linked to the SFEC's for numbers of volunteers that can be trained within a Brigade.

There is also a need under Work Health and Safety legislation to ensure that a trained first aider is available at any time to crew an appliance.

Given the varied and high risk nature of duties that CFS volunteers undertake, it is recommend that all CFS members who wish to undertake first aid training should be provided with the training, along with defibrillator and oxygen therapy equipment training, where this equipment is carried.

RECOMMENDATION 9

- 1) Additional funding estimated to be \$750K per annum is made available for all CFS volunteers wishing to undertake relevant lifesaving / support training is provided.

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE SUPPORT SERVICES

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FOR GROUPS AND BRIGADES – PO0015

Background

An increasing bureaucratic impost has impacted on CFS volunteers in recent years. The demands of occupational health and safety, traffic and licensing laws, requirements from the SA Auditor General, CFS and SAFECOM requirements as examples, are increasing the time commitment and levels of frustration in being a CFS volunteer. CFS members joined to help protect their communities in times of need, but as they are seen as employees for many purposes, they must comply with much of the required reporting and regulation. For this reason they often feel that they are considered as unpaid public servants.

Much of this impost cannot be removed from CFS. However it can be removed from the volunteers and be undertaken by paid administrative support.

In 2004 the CFS received funding to employ six regionally based Business Services Officers (BSOs). These officers have been well accepted by volunteers and they have relieved some of the load on volunteers in terms of such things as purchasing and station audits, particularly at regional and group level. The Association believes that this program should be expanded to provide further support to groups and to brigades. This could be done by providing an administrative officer to work directly with a number of groups and brigades.

RECOMMENDATION 10

- 1) That the Business Support Officer program be expanded to assist CFS volunteers with the increasing bureaucratic impost;
- 2) That this support be provided directly to volunteers by the provision of an administrative officer working to a number of groups and brigades.
- 3) That these recommendations be implemented by July 2015, at an estimated cost of \$850K per annum for 7 FTE positions.

CFS VOLUNTEER SUPPORT – PO0007

There are a number of support functions required for volunteers to be able to volunteer.

Background

Family support for volunteers in being able to respond and participate in general CFS activities, including training is absolutely essential.

This is particularly relevant for child minding and family carer situations.

With an ageing volunteer base, many volunteers are now carers for their ageing partners or grandchildren and their ability to respond and participate in CFS activities is curtailed.

The provision of support services in these circumstances would ensure ongoing participation for experienced volunteers. Such provision may also assist in the recruitment of new younger volunteers who would be confident that their children were being cared for appropriately.

CFS currently has a policy for limited support for volunteers when on the fire ground, with advice to family members about the deployment, but this has been understaffed for some time and additional funding is required to enable proper support for families when volunteers are deployed.

RECOMMENDATION 11

- 1) That a Working Party be established supported by a project officer at a cost of \$35K by December 2014 to develop strategies for support to volunteers for child minding or carer services or the like.
- 2) That the Working Party be required to provide a report for the Minister for emergency Services within six months of establishment and funding for implementation of the Working Party recommendations is made available after.

ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT – PO0035

Background

CFS volunteers generously dedicate their services to protect South Australia and do not wish to be paid for their time, but seek to be properly equipped and trained with good management support systems in place.

Volunteers seek effective leadership and assistance with paperwork and bureaucratic imposts which have become a factor of a modern emergency response organisation, and require more effective consultation on issues that affect them directly in their role as volunteers.

Following recent catastrophic fire events there has been a move to more detailed prescriptive directions and a risk adverse approach to almost everything, which is creating barriers and causing a disabling effect for moving forward. Royal Commissions and Coronial enquiries appear to be the catalyst for gaining attention to issues of funding and resourcing, however this reactive approach is not conducive in allowing the CFS to move forward as an organisation. A pro-active approach is necessary to allow the CFS to grow and satisfy the needs of both volunteers and CFS paid staff.

Indications are that the ratio of paid staff to volunteers is well below the national average which creates a stifling effect on productivity.

This is most evident when staff go on leave and there is no ability to provide any relief staff to cover planned or unplanned leave absences.

The lack of ability to achieve due to the general staff shortage creates overworked volunteers and the constant need to prioritise rather than complete projects, and causes volunteers the dilemma of either choosing to support and assist Regional Staff where possible to ensure that outcomes are achieved, or having issues “drop off” the agenda. Either way the lack of numbers of quality paid staff adversely impacts volunteers and their ability to carry out their primary roles.

Volunteers also perceive that the CFS is attempting to manage a volunteer workforce in an administrative capacity as a government department with a "paid" workforce of 13,500. The volume of work combined with training and incident response required of volunteers at time is unmanageable.

RECOMMENDATION 12

- 1) Undertake a detailed comparison analysis with like interstate organisations, to establish a business case for a more equitable support ratio of staff to volunteers, particularly staff leave relief coverage. Estimated to be in the order of 18 FTE.
- 2) This analysis be established in consultation with the CFSVA and be completed by April 2015, with appropriate funding to support the implementation of any recommendations.
- 3) Increase funding to CFS so as to achieve equitable staffing levels.
- 4) Establish an effective performance management system which includes direct feedback from volunteers for those supporting volunteers
- 5) Establish a system to track issues and report on actions taken or reasons for delays.

CFS HEADQUARTERS IN ADELAIDE CBD – PO0016

Background

The Country Fire Service Headquarters has been located in Waymouth St in the Adelaide CBD for the past 13 years. Previously it was located at Richmond Rd Keswick. The move from the purpose built building at Keswick to the CBD was seen as detrimental by CFS volunteers, who have difficulty with parking and accessing CFS and loss of identifying with a CFS HQ. This has led to a disconnection between headquarters' staff and its volunteer workforce, with volunteers disinclined to meet in a high rise office building in the city centre.

No other state rural fire service in Australia has its headquarters in the CBD. Whilst it appears to be government policy to have its government departments in the city, the CFS should not be seen as just another government department. The CFS has 13,500 volunteers and a staff in the city of just 65.

The CFS Headquarters should therefore be in a location that;

- is more accessible to its workforce and volunteer members
- provides ample free parking
- provides more appropriate capacity for operational support of large bushfires and other emergencies
- provides a strong "identity" for volunteers
- provides a more cohesive administrative, logistical, training capacity arrangement

RECOMMENDATION 13

- 1) That the CFS is relocated to an appropriate site outside Adelaide Central business District to allow easier accessibility to its paid workforce and volunteer members
- 2) That any new location be purpose built at a cost of around \$3M and funded for \$100K per annum recurrent costs and consider the need for ample free parking and other operational logistical space.

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE VOLUNTEERS

CONSULTATION WITH VOLUNTEERS – PO0002

Volunteers should always be consulted with on matters that affect them as volunteers. There have been instances of a lack of consultation when introducing or changing legislation, regulations and other CFS and government policies that affect CFS Volunteers. This contributes to volunteer frustration and is a negative impact on recruitment and retention.

Background

A CFS Volunteer Charter signed by the Premier, the Minister for Emergency Services, the CFS Chief Officer, the SAFECOM CEO and the President of the CFSVA on behalf of Volunteers is in place that:

- commits the government and CFS to consult with volunteers; *and*
- recognises the partnership relationship between government and CFS on one hand and the CFS Volunteers and the CFSVA on the other.

This Charter has been recognised and complied with within SAFECOM and CFS to a reasonable level, although there have been instances where this has not been effective. In addition there have been decisions made by other government departments that have impacted negatively on volunteers.

Examples include:

- The need to carry a drivers licence when driving a heavy vehicle, which is not always practical when responding to an incident and difficult to carry whilst wearing personal protective clothing (yellow uniform); *and*
- The need to comply with heavy vehicle log book requirements. While we now have a total exemption from the administrative requirements around the State legislation, it was hard fought and difficult to achieve. We now face imposition of this onerous compliance when Federal legislation comes into effect in 2013.

Whilst it is acknowledged that CFS Volunteers should comply with the intent of any new legislation, regulation or policy changes, proper consultation and the effect on volunteerism should be mandated to occur every time.

Seeking an exemption to legislation is a lengthy and time consuming process, which creates stress for volunteers and can only be granted at Ministerial level; making exemptions difficult to obtain and applications not always successful proper legislated consultation is seen as the best way to address these concerns.

The CFSVA seeks the Charter to be put into the SA Fire and Emergency Services Act to ensure proper consultation occurs on all government decisions affecting CFS Volunteers (as has happened in Victoria for CFA Volunteers), and that all Cabinet Papers include an assessment of the affect on CFS volunteers of all new legislation.

RECOMMENDATION 14

- 5) 1)That the Volunteer Charter be enshrined into legislation by December 2015 to ensure appropriate consultation with CFS volunteers to avoid legislative imposts being foisted upon volunteers
- 6) 2)That government decisions consider the nature CFS work
- 7) 3)That government demonstrate compliance with the Volunteer Charter by reporting to Cabinet on proposal papers and by preparing an impact statement at the time Cabinet is considering legislative or other changes.
- 8) 4)An education programme is established by June 2015 to ensure all Departments / Agencies are made aware of the impact of their decisions on CFS volunteers.

PAYMENTS TO VOLUNTEERS – PO0003

The volunteer culture of the Country Fire Service is central to its service delivery capacity. Whilst the cost to the volunteer of being a member of the CFS must be recognised, the prospect of paying CFS Volunteers for their time is likely to degrade and eventually destroy the core culture of the Service, and should not be considered.

Background

The delivery capacity of the CFS is drawn entirely from its volunteer base. This volunteer base is representative of the communities from which it comes. This ensures that the CFS remains at its core a community based and focused organisation, with a State level administrative and leadership function to coordinate its activities, and funded by the community through the Emergency Services Levy and local fundraising.

In this context, any threat to the volunteer base is a threat to the delivery of essential fire and emergency services to the communities of South Australia.

There is great pressure on the recruitment and retention of volunteers, exacerbated by the decreasing population and an ageing demographic in rural areas. In response to this pressure, it has been suggested that the volunteer workforce should be replaced with a paid fulltime service or that volunteers be paid a stipend or retainer to ensure their continued involvement.

It is the position of the CFSVA that the former proposition is unrealistic as the cost to the State would be unaffordable.

The second proposition of the retainer appears more feasible. However it is one that has been discussed extensively by the CFSVA and our membership and has been soundly rejected. The perception of the large majority of CFS Volunteers is that direct payment would destroy the volunteer, community based ethos which is the core building block of the organisation, and would lead to a loss of volunteer support from the CFS.

The CFSVA's members believe that other options involving offsets to the personal financial costs of volunteering and decreasing the bureaucratic impost on volunteer involvement would be a better approach to recruiting and retaining volunteers.

RECOMMENDATION 15

- 5) 1) That direct payments to CFS Volunteers should not be implemented
- 6) 2) That a working party be established with the support of a project officer at a cost of \$45K, to identify other options involving offsets to the personal financial costs of volunteering and decreasing the bureaucratic impost on volunteer involvement should be put in place to assist the recruitment and retention of CFS Volunteers.
- 7) 3) This working party to be established in agreement with the CFSVA by September 30 2014 and a report prepared for consideration by April 30 2015.
- 8) 4) Funding for any proposal be provided by July 2015.

LIABILITY PROTECTION FOR VOLUNTEERS – PO0005

CFS Volunteers should be afforded the strongest possible protection from criminal or civil liability for decisions made in good faith when exercising a power or function under the Fire and emergency Services Act.

Background

Current CFS volunteers and prospective new members are concerned about the possibility of incurring liability as a result of decisions made as a CFS member. They are fearful of suffering a loss of assets if sued by a member of the public, or being criminally charged for decisions made in good faith.

It has been reported to the Association that farmers who are asked why they are not members of CFS reply "I don't want to lose my farm. If the Chief Officer could guarantee that I would not be at risk of that happening, I would join". Section 127 of the Fire and Emergency Services Act provides members of ESOs protection from civil or criminal liability for any honest act or omission when exercising a power or function under the Act.

It is the Association's understanding that this protection has never been tested in a court of law either in South Australia, or in the other states where similar protection exists. However, we believe that it is only a matter of time before it is, and we want to see the best possible wording written into the legislation.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Services Act 1990 appear to give stronger protection. Section 129 (3) of that Act places the burden of proof of negligence and the absence of good faith upon the person alleging to the contrary. Mr Damian Bugg QC, former Commonwealth DPP spoke to an Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) Conference on this issue. He stated that it was his opinion that the Queensland protection from liability legislation was superior to that of the other states as a result of the burden of proof clause.

The CFSVA has sought a legal advice opinion which states that our protection would be strengthened if the plaintiff bore the burden of proof.

In addition, the Association believes that a statement from the Government publicising this protection would assist in the recruitment of new recruits to CFS. Such a statement was issued to NSW volunteers in 2001 and made it clear that the law would protect them. The Association recommends a similar statement.

RECOMMENDATION 16

- 1) That Section 127 of the Fire and Emergency Services Act be amended to ensure that it provides the best possible protection from liability, by reversing the burden of proof in showing that a particular member did not act honestly;
- 2) That this protection be publicised to overcome the fear of such liability discouraging prospective recruits.

WORKERS COMPENSATION FOR VOLUNTEERS – PO0001

CFS Volunteers are considered as employees under the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (1986). The Act limits the time period in which income compensation of 100% of average weekly earnings can be paid. In addition there is sometimes difficulty in assessing weekly benefits for self-employed volunteers when injured. These factors are a disincentive to volunteering for the CFS.

BACKGROUND

Volunteers give freely of their skills, experience and time to assist the state by training for and responding to emergency incidents. They do this for no financial return. They face a risk to their income from injury incurred that prevents them from earning their living. Volunteers see the "step down" of weekly earnings as a disincentive to continue membership of the CFS, as they cannot afford that cut in wages. They are increasingly asking why they should undertake dangerous and time consuming service for the state while placing their family income at jeopardy. Benefits payable are prescribed in the Act with no allowance for discretion on the part of the CFS Chief Officer to determine weekly benefits in special circumstances, such as for self employed volunteers.

The CFSVA is of the view that 100% of nominal average weekly earnings should apply to injured CFS volunteers until they are fit to resume work, and that the CFS Chief Officer should be provided with the discretion to ensure that volunteers are not disadvantaged by the compensation system at an annual cost of approximately \$150K per annum.

RECOMMENDATION 17

- 1) That the SA Government changes the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act (1986) to allow for compensation payments of 100% of nominal average weekly earnings for injured CFS volunteers until they are fit to return to work.
- 2) That the CFS Chief Officer is provided with the discretion to ensure that volunteers are not disadvantaged by the compensation system.

ASSISTANCE FOR VOLUNTEERS CALLED AS WITNESSES TO INQUIRIES – PO0010

CFS Volunteers are concerned about the risk to their reputations, livelihoods and assets when called to appear to give evidence at various Courts of Inquiries. Such appearances are also quite stressful to witnesses who are often asked to give reason for their decisions at the incident in question. Volunteers should be afforded every possible support throughout this process, including access to a lawyer to explain the process and protect where possible their interests.

Background

January 9 2005 saw a tragic bushfire devastate parts of the lower Eyre Peninsula. Nine lives were lost, including those of two CFS volunteers. The ensuing Coronial Inquiry ran for eighteen months and called on some 84 CFS volunteers to give evidence. Some of those volunteers were on the stand for between one and two weeks.

The State Government was very supportive of volunteers throughout that process. This support included:

- All volunteers were given access to a lawyer, whether from Crown Law or private legal firms, to provide support and advice as to the court processes. This support was very much appreciated by the volunteers. The CFSVA managed the legal representation process for those volunteers not represented by Crown law, and received funding for this purpose.
- The CFS Stress Prevention and Management Team (SPAM) was most helpful to volunteers, both to those suffering from the trauma of the fire and to those asked to appear at witnesses.
- The CFSVA was funded to provide other assistance as required by volunteers.

- The Association believes that this assistance reduced the stress caused by having to appear as a witness as much as it possibly could. This level of assistance should serve as a model for any future Inquiry which calls on CFS volunteers to give evidence.
- The Association believes that the Fire and Emergency Services Act (2005) should be amended to provide a statutory right for legal advice at the Crown's expense in cases where members are called as witnesses at inquiries.

RECOMMENDATION 18

- 1) That Section 127 of the SA Fire and Emergency Services Act (2005) is amended to provide CFS volunteers with the statutory right of legal advice at the Crown's expense in cases where members are called as witnesses at inquiries.

STAFFING OF CFS APPLIANCES – PO0004

The CFS is experiencing a both a reduction in volunteer numbers and a decline in the availability of volunteers to respond to incidents during day time working hours and to fill strike teams.

Background

There is a need to review how the staffing of CFS appliances can be managed in the future, where there is a lack of locally based volunteers to respond in a timely and ongoing manner. Reasons for the lack of available volunteers are many and varied, but include declining population in some parts of rural South Australia, the development of the mining industry, an ageing demography and a growing reluctance on behalf of employers to release their workers for emergency volunteering.

This may occur for initial response particularly during daytime working hour.

The following are initiatives that the CFSVA believe should be considered for crewing of CFS appliances:

- With the development of significant mining infrastructure around the state, there is a case for the establishment of industry brigades as part of their business approval process. These industry brigades comprising of crews and appliances would be available under the auspices of the CFS to respond in support of their own businesses and to provide support to the surrounding community;
- Although the CFS should remain principally a volunteer based organisation for response crews, it is recognised that the use of paid of CFS fire fighters to meet any volunteer shortfall at specific times may be required, and as such a contract model is preferred;

Existing CFS volunteers who want to work as paid contractual fire fighters should be given preference in the first instance for these positions as currently happens in NSW:

- Investigate use of computer based crewing technology, whereby volunteers can use mobile phones or other to indicate availability for crewing purposes. This would ensure that a crew was available at any point in time and fatigue of volunteers is managed more appropriately;

Such a system would provide an ability at Group / Regional level to manage crewing as a whole Group / Region crewing can be managed, down to individual availability in real time. The main benefit of this is that individual members are able attend incidents appropriately, don't become discouraged and consequently lost as volunteers.

The use of higher level interactive technology may also attract younger people to the CFS;

- Develop more fully the use of equipment designed to be used by minimal human resources

RECOMMENDATION 19

- 1) That the initiatives of "industry brigades" and contract staffing of CFS appliances be supported for the future of the CFS.
- 2) The CFS is funded for \$140K to develop and purchase computer based crewing technology by 30 September 2014.

CFS VOLUNTEER HOURS AND TYPES OF DUTY – PO0008

Currently, there is no understanding (apart from some heavy vehicle driving and fatigue management Code of Practice) around the hours and type of duty (legislation relation to an emergency) that can be expected of a CFS volunteer.

BACKGROUND

There is much anecdotal and other evidence of CFS volunteers spending many hours managing traffic at an accident scene, or being responded to clean up after an accident. In many instances, the rural based volunteers are the only

ready resource available to give immediate assistance. However there are indications that CFS volunteers are less able or more reluctant to be involved in longer duration incidents once the immediate risk to life and property is addressed.

In each of these cases there are responsible agencies or suitably qualified contractors who can quite ably and in some cases are more appropriate to tackle the task.

The CFSVA surveyed its members in 2011, to ascertain volunteer views on the matter. The majority view was that, while recognising that we provide an essential emergency service to the community, we should not be considered as a source of free labour by those agencies responsible for the traffic control or clean up once the incident has been made safe.

As a result of this survey, the CFS issued Operational Bulletin 28/2011 which states the definition of an emergency and the CFS responsibilities under the SA Fire and Emergency Services Act (2005). It leaves the responsibility with, in most cases the volunteer Incident Controller to decide at what point the emergency is over and the incident should be handed over. However, there were no clear guidelines provided in the bulletin as to how that decision should be reached.

We know that other responding resources, eg, tow trucks, often rely of CFS volunteers to provide a safe worksite environment for them to undertake the removal of vehicles, when it is clearly the responsibility of the tow truck operator under WH&S legislation to ensure that they have a safe workplace.

It should be made clear to the responsible agencies and their contractors, that CFS volunteers are not available to undertake duty beyond that of the true "emergency response".

CFS volunteers would still be part of community recovery following a large disaster.

RECOMMENDATION 20

- 1) That a Working Party supported by a project officer at a cost of \$6K be established by the end of May 2014 to report and make recommendations on dealing with emergencies, including the role and functionality of the CFS, other emergency services, government agencies and appropriate private contractors, including a revamped CFS Operational Bulletin pertaining to this matter by end October 2014.;
- 2) That the government instruct other agencies that a cost shifting / avoidance approach to management of ongoing incidents after the emergency is over is unacceptable.
- 3) That an ability to charge a fee for clean-up following an incident be enacted, as it is currently part of the FES Act.

OFFSETTING COSTS OF VOLUNTEERING – PO0009

CFS Volunteers incur direct costs as a result of their volunteering activities. Consideration should be given to the options available for offsetting these costs of volunteering.

Background

CFS members donate their time in providing vital fire and emergency services to 97% of the geographic area of South Australia. This time includes attendance at incidents; brigade training and meeting nights, centralised training courses and many other CFS, CFSVA and community meetings and events.

CFS policy states that "no volunteer should be out of pocket as a result of their volunteering". Many types of expense can be claimed, including travel and accommodation costs to attend courses and the cost of medical examinations that are prerequisites for certain CFS incident types. However, there are many day to day expenses such a telephone calls, mileage to and from the station attending to call outs, brigade training nights and meetings, and home computer and printing costs that are not reimbursable.

These costs are hard to quantify, but where it can be clearly identified that expenses have been incurred in this regard, offsetting options should be considered. These options could include eligibility to claim out of pocket expenses as either part of their annual taxation assessment process or as a payment through Centrelink. These options have been considered in the past and rejected by federal governments, but the South Australian Government should advocate for a national approach in this regard directly with the relevant Federal Minister, Ministerial Councils and agencies.

Another option would be the exemption of the Emergency Services Levy for CFS volunteers, again as an offset for incurred expenses.

The CFSVA supports the direct reimbursement or upfront payment of expenses wherever possible, and further believes that a review of the types of expenses incurred and reimbursement procedures should be undertaken to ensure that all practicable claims are recognised. For those other claims which are difficult to quantify or administer,

and yet when totalled are significant, the options of taxation claims or Centrelink payments should be considered again by the Federal Government, and the exemption of the ESL for CFS volunteers by the State Government.

RECOMMENDATION 21

- 1) That the CFS policy of reimbursement of out of pocket expenses be reviewed to ensure that all practicable expenses are either paid upfront or are directly reimbursed and CFS is funded accordingly once identified;
- 2) That the Government of South Australia support a review of the income tax assessment provisions or Centrelink benefits to recognise and compensate for the out of pocket expenses of CFS volunteers;
- 3) That the Government of South Australia considers the exemption of the Emergency Services Levy for CFS volunteers for their home property.

CFS CADETS - PO0018

The commitment and professionalism of the 13,500 volunteers of the Country Fire Service is central to its service delivery capacity. In order to ensure that this continues and grows into the future, the existing CFS Cadet Program must be further supported.

Background

The delivery capacity of the CFS is linked directly to its volunteer base. In an environment of declining rural populations, increasing work hours and significant competition for volunteers, there exists a genuine threat to the future capacity of communities to protect themselves through their local volunteer brigade. This threat, were it to be realised, would decrease community safety and increase costs to the taxpayer.

The CFS Cadet program provides a common and successful route for new young members experiencing their first exposure to the Service.

The CFSVA believes the Cadet Program helps develop such qualities as initiative, cooperation, self-esteem, community responsibility and service within young people, whilst also assisting the future of CFS. It is indeed a "win-win" program for the participants and their communities.

The Program has, however, been delivered to date largely through the enthusiasm and dedication of CFS volunteers and staff and relies significantly on fundraising and one off grants. There has been little in the way of dedicated resourcing allocated to the Program, meaning that its success, whilst outstanding, has not been consistent across the State.

The CFSVA believes that a significant, new commitment is needed to grow the CFS Cadet Program to the extent that it can feasibly be delivered by CFS through every secondary school in South Australia, where it is seen as desirable by the school and local communities. This could include schools on the metropolitan areas of Adelaide, to create a potential "ready reserve" of volunteers when the cadets reach adulthood.

RECOMMENDATION 22

- 1) That new recurrent funding be allocated to allow for the employment of two part time CFS cadet coordinators throughout the state at a cost of \$120K per annum, and for the equipping same at a cost of \$35K per annum.
- 2) That secondary schools throughout the State be funded to run CFS or emergency service cadet programs, including schools in the metropolitan Adelaide.
- 3) That CFS cadet programs delivered by secondary schools be incorporated into the SACE program, with SACE point allocation for CFS cadets who complete Bushfire Fighter 1 (BFF1) training.

DIVERSITY OF MEMBERSHIP – PO0019

CFS Volunteers come from all areas of the state and from many walks of life. Many rural brigades are comprised of farmers who commit to their areas by volunteering not just to CFS, but to other local community groups such as the local sporting sides and to the area schools. In the more peri -urban brigades, the commitment to CFS can be quite focussed on emergency response and their brigades.

Whilst recognising diversity within our membership as to the reasons why they volunteer for CFS, the actual diversity of membership by gender, age and ethnicity is not high.

Background

South Australia has a proud history of emergency service volunteering, with local brigades commencing some 75 years ago as communities saw the need to protect themselves from bushfires and other emergencies.

At that time, membership of brigades was comprised mainly of the menfolk of the community, with females assisting in catering and other support roles. The gender balance has improved a little over time, with 22% of all CFS

volunteers now female and many women taking up operational fire fighter roles. However the percentage of women in brigade and group leadership roles is only a mere 5%.

Although statistics are not collected as to ethnicity, anecdotally there are few CFS members from non-English speaking backgrounds.

It must be recognised that membership numbers remain relatively stable in the outer metropolitan brigades, with waiting lists for some brigades being quite lengthy. However, only a little further out, some brigades are experiencing difficulties in attracting new members, particularly for day time crewing, despite holding regular recruitment drives.

There remains potential for attracting new female and young members, as well as new members from other ethnic groups, with a well-targeted recruitment campaign, along with training for brigades in making those members feel welcome.

RECOMMENDATION 23

- 1) That six FTE 's be funded at an annual cost of \$600K to establish a recruitment campaign funded for \$320K per annum aimed at women, young people and those from non-English speaking backgrounds be developed to attract new members to the CFS.
- 2) That training is given to CFS brigades to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by minority groups in either joining a brigade or in aspiring to leadership positions.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES – RELEASE FOR CFS DUTIES - PO0034

Background

The CFSVA has been made aware that at times of emergency call outs, Government departments and Agencies are resisting in allowing staff to respond.

Whilst it is understood that this situation has been created by staff cutbacks within the Public Service, it is not acceptable. It is essential that Government Departments and agencies lead by example and ensure that CFS volunteers employed through the Public Services are permitted to respond to CFS emergency callouts.

In addition, whilst some Local Government bodies are very supportive of releasing employees to support the CFS, there is no consistency across the State.

RECOMMENDATION 24

- 1) That Government forms a policy for all departments and agencies that permits government employed CFS volunteers to respond to emergency situations as and when required.
- 2) That Government leads by example to other business and agencies to free up CFS volunteers from duties to respond to emergency call-outs.
- 3) That the Government engage the Local Government Association in establishing a position whereby all Local Government areas allow staff to be released in support of the CFS volunteer responses.

RECOGNITION OF EMPLOYERS – PO0017

As the CFS is a volunteer based organisation, its capacity to mitigate bushfire risk and respond to emergencies is reliant on the availability of its volunteers who are in turn, reliant on the goodwill of their employers to release them. In the case of self-employed volunteers, flexibility of their own business arrangements is necessary.

Background

Many employers support emergency services in South Australia by releasing their staff to respond to emergencies at short notice. Those employers consider it as their contribution to the community and welfare of others and have entered into appropriate arrangements with those staff members for that purpose. Some employers continue to pay their staff, others allow annual leave to be taken and others allow the time off to be "caught up".

South Australia, as do other states, depends on the "surge capacity" of volunteers to attend large events. This involves the use of volunteers and appliances travelling many hundreds of kilometres to the emergency. This is mainly within the state, but can also be interstate as we have seen in recent years, with volunteer "taskforces" travelling to fires in NSW and Victoria. Obviously this means a time commitment of a few days or more.

There is increasing evidence of employers resisting releasing staff for such purposes, especially where those staff are key to the operation of the business. This situation can be more complicated in the case of self-employed volunteers such as farmers and tradesmen, where their business income is dependent upon themselves.

This inflexibility is potentially disastrous to the future capacity of the CFS volunteer base, and therefore to the Service as a whole. This is especially so in an environment of a shrinking volunteer pool across Australian society.

In this context, the CFS is competing for the time and commitment of a smaller pool of available volunteers, and the relative unattractiveness to employers of CFS volunteer need to have time off will, over time, be deleterious to volunteers becoming or remaining within the Service.

Efforts have been made at the State and National level to recognise and encourage employers of emergency service volunteers, and although well received, do not help the economic situation of the employers.

Nationally the best example of a support scheme to employers is that of the Defence Force Reservists. Whilst that scheme involves public awards, thanks and recognition of employers, it also incorporates the Employer Support Payment scheme (ESP) and is legislated accordingly.

Payments to employers, which may be applied to releasing volunteers for responses to significant events requiring absences of three or more days, would compensate employers for releasing their staff, and help ensure that the community remains protected from the threat of bushfires and other natural disasters by a committed, professional and available cadre of volunteers. This would have a further advantage of meaning that volunteers would not have to take annual or unpaid leave to attend.

RECOMMENDATION 25

- 1) The CFSVA recommends that a national Employer Recognition Scheme be established for employers of emergency services volunteers, which would incorporate direct employer support payments to offset the costs of releasing their volunteers for longer term incidents.
- 2) Time out for employees to attend CFS training courses be recognised and form part of the Employers Recognition Scheme
- 3) Further that the South Australian Government should advocate for a national approach in this regard directly to the relevant Federal Ministers and agencies, as well as via the relevant Ministerial Councils, with a view to establishing legislation modelled on the Army Reservist scheme in support of Emergency Service volunteering
- 4) The CFS is funded for one FTE at \$130K per annum and \$50K per annum budget to promote employer support.

RE-ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY – PO0021

The CFS enjoys a reasonably high profile within the South Australian Community. However, since the advent of the Emergency Services Levy there has been a shift in the perception of how CFS operates and the services that it provides.

Background

Since 1999 there has been a shift in community perception and understanding of the Country Fire Service. Whilst it was once funded through local government bodies, and with a levy on insurance policies which was largely unseen, it is now funded through a state government levy which comes as a separate household bill and is seen as just another government tax.

As a result, many people in the community believe that the levy pays for the wages of CFS fire fighters. They do not understand the difference between paid MFS, retained MFS, paid CFS staff and volunteer CFS members.

In addition, many people believe that CFS volunteers only respond to bushfires, even though CFS brigades are featured attending road crashes, structure fires and other incident types almost every evening on news programmes.

The CFSVA believes there needs to be a campaign to improve the understanding of the CFS and its volunteer workforce and thereby re-engage the community. This will have the affects of improving CFS volunteer morale, volunteer recruitment and retention, as well as gaining a better acceptance of the need for the Emergency Services Levy.

The Army Reserve advertising campaign was a good example of lifting the profile and therefore community understanding of that organisation. It showed ordinary people in their places of work, who then became defence force volunteers outside of work in an exciting and image enhancing way, and highlighted the benefits of their volunteering to the community.

In addition, there is a need for an identifiable spokesperson - someone the community recognises as the CFS.

An image campaign with an identifiable spokesperson would have a considerable positive effect on CFS and CFS volunteering, and help ensure the future sustainability of CFS into the Future.

RECOMMENDATION 26

- 1) That a campaign aimed at enhancing the CFS image and educating the community on role and volunteer nature of the CFS be developed, as well as how the Emergency Services levy is spent.

- 2) That consideration be given to engaging a public relations expert who would act as a spokesperson for CFS and assist in conveying the CFS message to the public in a consistent manner
- 3) Provide additional funding of \$750K per annum for product and media, from 1 July 2014 with support from an existing CFS person.

CFS VOLUNTEERING MUSEUM – PO0041

CFS volunteers are very proud of their heritage of volunteer fire fighting in South Australia, including specifically the early development of equipment and appliances developed by volunteers and wish to ensure the heritage of CFS volunteering is retained and passed to future generations.

Background

Since the very early days of bush fire activity in the State, the many and varied development of equipment, appliances, methodologies of dealing with bushfires fell largely to local community groups of interested volunteers, with support from Local Government, community fundraising and more recently the Emergency Services Levy. A group of volunteers at Naracoorte have collected a significant cross section of equipment, appliances, photographs and other memorabilia, to ensure that the heritage of the fire-fighting volunteering of several thousand of South Australians who have given so freely of their time over the last 75 years or so is retained and their efforts recognised in a museum of artefacts.

This is ongoing, as future artefacts can also be retained in proper manner to continue to reflect the changing face of volunteering in a now world class fire and rescue service.

To this end, the SA VOLUNTEER FIRE FIGHTING MUSEUM Inc. has been established and several attempts to find a suitable facility in Naracoorte and other locations have been pursued over the last six or seven years.

A piece of SA Government owned ex railway land has been identified in Naracoorte, which has lain vacant for many years and is now being sought for transfer to the CFS for the purpose of establishing a museum.

The SA VOLUNTEER FIRE FIGHTING MUSEUM Inc has funds available to immediately draw up plans and establish a small building to house the memorabilia, with ongoing fund raising for a larger building to house appliances in the future.

In establishing such a museum, this will add value to the town of Naracoorte in tourism as visitors to the museum.

RECOMMENDATION 27

- 1) That the SA Government make available at no cost, by July 2014 the identified block of land for the purpose of establishing a SA Volunteer Fire Fighting Museum.

FREE ENTRY TO SA NATIONAL PARKS FOR CFS VOLUNTEERS – PO0011

CFS Volunteers help protect the State's National Parks by fighting bushfires and by assisting with prescribed burning. Often they are on duty for many days after a fire ensuring that the fire ground is safe. As a reward for effort, the CFSVA has negotiated with DENR for a free entry pass for volunteers.

Background

CFS Volunteers currently enjoy a free annual pass to most of the State's parks. The Pass has been greatly appreciated by those volunteers who take up the offer, which is in its fourth year. Some 1200 volunteers took advantage of the offer in 2012.

The Pass recognises the partnership between CFS Volunteers and National Parks employees in keeping the parks safe, and enables volunteers to visit the parks more often and thus have a better knowledge of the topography and fire trails.

The pass is limited to the entry fee for a car and discounts for desert parks and Kangaroo Island. It does not include camping fees. Volunteers have indicated that they would like to have the pass include camping fees.

The CFSVA administers this program on behalf of DENR. Similar programs exist in NSW and Victoria.

RECOMMENDATION 28

- 1) That the Free Entry to National Parks for CFS Volunteers be continued to recognise the commitment of our members to keeping the parks safe.
- 2) That the Pass be extended to cover camping fees.

COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE FRONTLINE SUPPORT SERVICES STAFFING

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CALL AND DISPATCH - PON0024

Background

SAFECOM implemented the South Australian Call and Dispatch (SACAD) system in 2010. The SACAD system is considered a 'state of the art' emergency call and dispatch service, with the primary functions of the SACAD system was implemented during the phase in stage, with full potential and functionality of the system to be rolled out in stages.

The CFSVA was of the understanding that the SACAD system was to be co-ordinated by SAFECOM and would not be agency specific, providing equal coverage to CFS, MFS and SES. It has since emerged that the SACAD system is staffed by MFS with CFS reliant on call and dispatch instructions from MFS trained staff.

The MFS management of the SACAD system has at times created issues for CFS volunteers as varying SOPs between agencies has resulted in emergency situations being either over resourced whilst others are not provided with adequate coverage. In some cases, volunteers' time does not seem to be "valued" by the MFS, resulting in unnecessary responses.

Initial funding was provided to establish the SACAD system, however no additional funding was made available to provide on-going support services to ensure the continued efficiencies of the SACAD system is maintained. Current funding for on-going support services is currently back charged to each agency and is paid out of their general budget thereby reducing funding to other areas.

SACAD support staff is employed on a contract basis through secondment from the Attorney General's department, resulting in the potential threat that support staff may be lost either due to recall to the Attorney General's department or through termination of contract.

RECOMMENDATION 29

- 1) The SACAD system be managed by SAFECOM and be non-agency specific.
- 2) That two FTE's be appointed to SACAD as support staff and be made permanent appointments with funding of \$260K per annum from 1 July 2014.

SHARED SERVICES FOR CFS - PO0023

Background

Many services to CFS and CFS volunteers are provided through shared services by the South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM). These services include occupational health and safety, workers compensation and rehabilitation, information technology and volunteer strategy recruitment and retention. The services are currently shared with MFS and SES, but believe that CFS volunteers would be better served by particularly the Volunteer Strategy Branch (VSB) being placed within CFS itself.

The SAFECOM Volunteer Strategy and Support Unit has responsibility for CFS recruitment, and whilst the Unit has some dedicated people who do great work, over time CFS has seemed to have absolved itself in all aspects of recruiting, retention of numbers and addressing the issue of its ageing volunteer membership.

Whilst it is recognised that the recruitment resources are not held within CFS, the Volunteer Support Branch (VSB) requires the active support and advice of staff and volunteers within the Service.

The initiative of CFS / SAFECOM to establish the CFS Youth Advisory Committee to advise the Chief Officer on issues pertaining to young people in the CFS is an excellent initiative to attract and retain younger people.

Coupled with the severe reduction of staff from SAFECOM over recent times, the overall support for frontline services in support of CFS volunteers had dwindled alarmingly.

RECOMMENDATION 30

- 1) Allocate a Volunteer Support Branch person to CFS to work "in house" to provide specific support and accountability for CFS volunteering.
- 2) Establish a recruitment and retention Advisory Group to assist the Volunteer Services Branch
- 3) Re-introduce seven Volunteer Support Officers to regions and Head Office at a cost of \$ 1.3M per annum and whose time is dedicated to support volunteers, brigades and groups.

BUSHFIRE MITIGATION PLANNING – PO0039

CFS volunteers are concerned that greater progress has not been made to date on Bushfire Management Planning, particularly the identification and analysis of risks in the community and enabling mitigating treatments to be identified and applied. It is of concern that CFS volunteers are being called upon to provide greater level of response and will be exposed to unnecessary higher level of risks in combating bushfires, on account of the lack of funding support to undertake this Bushfire Management Planning work in building community resilience to bushfires.

Background

The CFS has established a Bushfire Management Planning Unit, staffed by three (3) persons, who have undertaken great work in developing further a Bushfire Risk Register Software programme, based upon a NSW model. The enhancement of this programme has now meant that NSW and other eastern states are keen to use the updated version.

This programme will allow the identification of community assets at risk and then allow a series of treatments to mitigate the risk from bushfires, thus building community resilience across the State and reducing the level of intensity of bushfires that CFS volunteers will be called upon to combat in the event of a bushfire threatening community assets.

To undertake this bushfire planning work in identifying assets at risk and establishing mitigation strategies for implementation by others, eg landowners, Local Government, building owners etc, it is estimated that a total of six additional (6) persons will need to be employed for a period of four (4) years at an estimated annual cost of \$2.7m to complete the planning work for the State. Once the Bushfire Management Area Plans have been written for the State there will be the need for an ongoing development and maintenance program which will require the appointment of 2 fulltime permanent CFS employees at a cost of approximately \$170k per annum.

The provision of these funds for this staffing level will ensure that CFS volunteers are not faced with unnecessarily high bushfire intensity when responding to asset protection and the community will have a higher level of resilience to bushfires.

RECOMMENDATION 31

- 1) That the SA Government make available funding of \$600K per annum from July 2014 until and including July 2017 for the purpose of enabling the CFS to undertake effective and responsible Bushfire Planning for the community.
- 2) That the SA Government approve the appointment of 2 full time permanent positions to CFS to continue the development and maintenance of the bushfire management planning program.

24/7 CFS HELP DESK - PO0026

Background

Since the introduction of the South Australian Call and Dispatch (SACAD) the amalgamation of CFS Operations Centre with Metropolitan Fire Service delivery has not always complimented CFS in operational issues, and although initial "teething problems" have now mostly been resolved; MFS operational methodology translated to CFS methodology has at times created issues.

Whilst it is recognised that the introduction of the SACAD system has improved call and dispatch systems it has taken time to address some of the systemic issues and these relate solely to call receipt and despatch.

It was never intended that the move of the CRD function to the Metropolitan Fire Service was to provide operational support to volunteer CFS brigades.

Volunteers have expressed concerns that outside of "normal hours", there is no CFS operational support at a state level for minor incidents.

The only "out of hours" operational resource available to CFS volunteers is Adelaide Fire however Adelaide Fire is a Call Receipt Despatch centre, not a CFS operational support centre base and is a less than favourable option.

There are rostered across the State CFS Regional duty officers, but these personnel are then called upon at all hours and have to keep themselves available out of hours.

The desired option for volunteers is access to a 24/7 CFS air desk with SACAD viewing capability to assist with incident management and support and provides operational support to volunteers to across the State in special circumstances and can be supplemented by Regions when required.

There may be opportunity to establish a business case utilising the current Air Desk functionality to provide a 24/7 Help Desk.

RECOMMENDATION 32

- 1) That a business case be prepared for funding, estimated to need 6 FTE's at a cost per annum of \$1.1M to establish and resource a CFS specific 24/7 operational "help desk" which includes full SACAD viewing functionality to assist and support volunteers during emergency response, whilst maintaining aircraft dispatch functionality, by October 2014.

RECRUITMENT OF CFS OPERATIONAL STAFF – PO0012

Currently non State Government employed volunteers are unable to apply for paid staff vacancies within the CFS in the initial internal government advertising process. They are required to wait until the position is advertised publically. This disadvantages both the CFS and CFS volunteers, as volunteers are often the best, most experienced persons for the positions.

Background

CFS volunteers provide an "all hazards" emergency service to the communities of South Australia. They must comply with most government policies as do other paid employees, and must undertake a variety of CFS mandated and voluntary training courses to allow them to respond. In addition they bring to the Service their own work experience and qualifications.

CFS Volunteers are considered as employees under a number of State Government Acts, as well as in the CFS workforce plan.

Many volunteers gain the knowledge and experience in emergency response and management that would qualify them to be the suitable candidates for vacant CFS operational staff positions. The Public Service Management Act, however, often does not allow those volunteers to apply for vacancies until internal government processes permit the position to be advertised publically.

CFS Volunteers who devote many hours to the Service for no financial reward are understandably disgruntled that the State Government is happy to accept the very high standard of service provision from volunteers, and mandates that they must comply with a huge amount of bureaucratic impost that applies to other state government employees, yet does not recognise them as employees for the purpose of staff recruitment. The CFS is compelled to take less qualified applicants because the more qualified CFS "employees in all but salary" are not allowed to be considered.

The Association believes that if government insists on treating CFS as just another government department, yet depends on volunteers as the sole provider of fire and emergency services to most of the state, it must recognise the unique position of CFS volunteers as qualified applicants for CFS operational positions and they are deemed employees under the WH&S Act.

RECOMMENDATION 33

- 1) That all CFS operational staff vacancies are advertised and available to all CFS volunteers at the same time as other public sector employees.

CFS VOLUNTEERS ON SELECTION PANELS – PO0013

Background

Given that the paid CFS staff and other Emergency sector staff manage, or are responsible for a large volunteer base, exceeding 13500 persons, it is reasonable for the “workforce” to have appropriate input into the selection of persons who manage them both in an administrative and operational capacity.

This occurs now but it appears to be more of an ad hoc decision to include volunteers on a selection panel, rather than a CFS policy.

In all this, there needs to be transparency and confidence in the appointment process, particularly given that there is a close working relationship between the paid staff and volunteers at all levels and across all administrative and operational functions.

Accordingly, the Association believes that appropriately trained volunteers, representative of the CFS membership, are part of the selection and appointment process for certain positions both at headquarters and regional levels.

This may be achieved by either participating directly in the interview and selection panel process, or as part of a sub group providing advice for consideration by the selection panel and would ensure that the candidate had a strong understanding of volunteering.

RECOMMENDATION 34

- 1) That some volunteers are trained for and have appropriate input in all relevant emergency sector vacancy appointments.

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES IN SUPPORT OF CFS VOLUNTEERS

PRESUMPTIVE LEGISLATION - PO0029

Background

The CFSVA commends the South Australian government for taking the lead by acknowledging the high risk work carried out by South Australian fire fighters and proposing legislative changes to the Workers Rehabilitation Act 1986 to reflect the hazardous position fire fighters are exposed to on a regular basis.

International scientific studies from across the world identify the fact that fire fighters are at a greater risk of contracting certain types of cancers through direct exposure to dangerous chemicals and fire hazards which are encountered as part of fire-fighting duties. Under the proposed amendment, the burden of proof will no longer be with the fire fighter, but those diagnosed with a specified cancer after the commencement date of the Bill will automatically be eligible to seek compensation.

The November 2012 announcement by the Premier, whilst commendable, is limited to MFS fire fighters only, and fails to extend to volunteer fire-fighters.

The CFSVA is extremely disappointed with the limitations of the proposed legislation, as dedicated CFS volunteer fire-fighters who give their time generously to protect communities across South Australia and who are also called upon to assist the MFS at times of high demand are excluded. Volunteers serving in the CFS contribute not only their time, but also the expense of travelling to stations, phone calls and many other incidentals for which they receive no compensation and it is extremely insensitive of Government to announce this legislative change for "paid" fire fighters whilst volunteers who are not recompensed for their time or labour are disregarded.

The scope of the work carried out by CFS volunteers and MFS is the same, with both called upon to support each other. The exposure risks encountered by MFS fire-fighters does not differ to that of CFS volunteers as fires and other hazardous situations do not discriminate between fire-fighters.

The CFSVA has strongly lobbied since the government's announcement in November 2012 for the scheme to be extended to include CFS volunteer fire fighters who currently are covered under the Workers Rehabilitation Act 1986 equally as their MFS counterparts.

RECOMMENDATION 35

- 1) The CFSVA is of the opinion that there is a lack of justification for the exclusion of CFS volunteers to the proposed legislation and asks that the government's position be reconsidered to encompass all fire fighters regardless of whether they are paid or volunteers.

FOREST INDUSTRY BRIGADES – PO0040

To ensure that an appropriate legislated level of fire-fighting detection/protection resources are available to communities where significant forest plantations exist.

Background

As a result of the sale of SA forests and a limited time frame of retention of SA Forestry fire detection / fire-fighting resources, there is concern the after the expiration of this part of the sale agreement , that communities will be faced with ever more need for volunteers to commit to fire-fighting protection of forests and nearby communities, as Forestry SA is a good community neighbour in providing support to CFS volunteers in locations apart from their forest reserves and have done so for many years.

The ability for Forestry SA to support local volunteer crews is diminishing given the sale of heavy machinery previously managed by Forestry SA, and utilised in fire-fighting activities. It is essential that the new owners of these former State forest assets and other forest plantations be made accountable and responsible for the ongoing community detection of and protection from fires and continue to provide on-going fire-fighting support to the community and the greater community as Forestry SA had done in the past.

The custom and practice of fire-fighting support and capacity previously provided by Forestry SA, which had been established over the years, be enshrined in legislation so that the community of South Australia adjacent to these assets and other plantations continues to receive the same level of protection and support without the need to further impose on a volunteer fire fighting resource and additional Government funding.

The Victorian Country Fire Authority Act and Regulations has provision for the establishment and maintenance of "Industry brigades", covering designated areas of the State, which could be used as a model in these circumstances.

RECOMMENDATION 36

- 1) That the SA Fire and Emergency Services Act be amended such that owners of forest plantations are required to provide certain minimum levels of fire detection / protection resources in support of local communities and their asset.
- 2) That these legislative changes reflect at least the current level resource and of community support that Forestry SA provided.

CFS SCOPE OF FUNCTIONS – PO0006

Currently, the CFS is primarily focussed on fire and rescue operations and this is in part reflected in enabling Legislation.

In recent years, there is a greater need to provide more support to volunteers in the field, the provision of increased timely information to the community and improved incident management, increased integration of emergency services and others, all of which has led to a broadening of operational support activities.

All of these changed, increased functions have not necessarily given the same recognition, administrative and funding support by Government.

Background

When CFS (formerly EFS) brigades were originally established they were very community focussed at the local level. This ensured a strong community fabric in all aspects of responding to an incident, from first responders primarily to bushfires, to ladies making sandwiches and everything in between.

Now much of this functionality is more removed from the local community and brigade and has resulted in a change in “culture”, as it now seen as some else’s responsibility to get some things done. Brigades in many cases are now simply first responders to all hazards, including Road Crash Rescue, bush and structure fires, hazardous material spillages and storm related events.

While these things are recognised as being necessary and an improved way of doing business, the “culture” of a local basis for self-help and determination has diminished.

In an effort to build on this local culture, it is necessary to broaden the roles that persons can volunteer easily within the CFS, particularly where the role may be other than a first responder in an all hazards response service.

There are now a number of established Operational Support Brigades and preformed State Incident Management Teams both provide a critical function. However much of their functionality is encompassed within brigades thus providing further support and more broad functionality of membership at brigade level in maintaining a local culture of self-help and increasing the scope for volunteering.

RECOMMENDATION 37

- 1) That the CFS legislation be made more flexible to recognise other operational support roles within the CFS
- 2) That the CFS enables broader membership functionality within brigades.
- 3) That additional funding be provided, recognising the changing needs of the community and CFS volunteers in the establishment of "Operational Support" brigades and the like.

FEDERAL LEGISLATION IMPACTING ON VOLUNTEERS - PO0032

Background

The shift to national legislation with specific industries as target groups is of prime concern to volunteers who are encapsulated by this type of legislation. Whether the inclusion of CFS volunteers is intentional or not, the fact remains that this legislation has the potential to create issues for volunteers when operating under emergency conditions.

Whilst it is recognised that it may be in the interests of volunteers to comply with the intent of these various items of legislation, the very nature of volunteering in an emergency response environment places an unnecessary impost on volunteers and may be seen as a disincentive for volunteering.

Seeking an exemption to legislation is a lengthy and time consuming process, which creates stress for volunteers and can only be granted at Ministerial level; making exemptions difficult to obtain and applications not always successful.

RECOMMENDATION 38

- 2) 1) That the South Australian Government considers the nature of CFS work and the impact on CFS volunteers when faced with proposed Federal Legislative changes and ensure their Federal counterparts demonstrate compliance with the Volunteer Charter by reporting and consulting with the CFSVA on proposal papers.

SAFECOM – Independent Chair - PO0033

Background

South Australian Fire and Emergency Commission(SAFECOM) is an agency of the Crown and holds its property on behalf of the Crown and is subject to the control and direction of the Minister, with wide reaching functions and powers to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of emergency services within South Australia.

SAFECOM is administered by a Board which, under the Act, is established as the governing body of the Commission and comprises of the Chief Executive of the Commission as the presiding members, the Chief Officers of the SACFS, SAMFS and SASES as well as 5 members appointed by the Governor on nomination for the Country Fire Service Volunteers Association, SASES Volunteers Association, the UFU, with 2 persons who qualify under the Act appointed by the Minister.

The CFSVA understands and supports the structure of the SAFECOM Board, but questions whether the presiding member should not be an independently appointed person as opposed to the ministerially appointed Chief Executive Officer. The CFSVA raises the issue of transparency and the potential for conflict of interest which could place the presiding officer in a difficult and invidious position.

The ability for the Chief Officer to follow Ministerial direction as well as bring forth the direction of the Board has the potential to create serious issues, and on this basis the CFSVA seeks that the Act be amended to reflect the appointment of an independent person as the presiding officer of the Commission.

RECOMMENDATION 39

- 1) That an independent presiding Chair be appointed to SAFECOM to ensure transparency and remove the potential for conflict of interest.