



Country Fire Service Volunteers Association

Building a strong CFS – 2018 and beyond





**The Country Fire Service
Volunteers Association**
"Representing the interests of CFS Members"

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Country Fire Service Volunteers Association (CFSVA) in consultation with its 13,500 members has developed this positions document which identifies key matters raised by our members and are strategic to the future sustainability of the Country Fire Service.

The Country Fire Service is defined by its volunteer focus and support of local communities which has gained it state wide recognition. Its unique culture enables CFS to be flexible, progressive and highly relevant.

CFS volunteers epitomise the spirit of South Australian communities and are indeed the backbone of these communities, therefore it is imperative that the needs of volunteers are recognised and the ever increasing expectations of the wider community met.

The CFSVA is seeking engagement and commitment from all political groups and individuals in relation to the recommendations contained within this document, as the decisions made over the next term of Government will be paramount to the long term sustainability of volunteering within the Country Fire Service.

Recommendations contained within this document, may require a change of legislative or policy and additional financial support as all are essential for CFS to maintain and enhance its high standard of service delivery.



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INTRODUCTION

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 organisation has matured from a number of small regional volunteer fire services to a 13,500 strong integrated volunteer fire service comprising of 436 brigades located across South Australia.

CFS volunteers respond to a variety of incidents including structure fires, road crash rescue, hazardous material incidents, grass and bushfires.

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 centres are regularly dispatched to incidents within populated areas and work shoulder to shoulder with MFS paid fire fighters and SES volunteers.

The perception that the CFS is predominantly a bushfire brigade is inaccurate as statistics clearly demonstrate.

CFS volunteers generously donate their time, talent and energy to ensure the provision of a viable emergency service, and as such must be afforded solid support by government in recognition of the contribution that volunteers make and the cost efficiencies delivered to Government.

CFS volunteers deliver a first class fire and rescue service to the broader South Australian community and is highly recognised as a trusted and reliable emergency service.

The Country Fire Service "volunteer workforce" has no "Enterprise Agreement" as paid employees have with their employer, which results in underfunding and change by Government made at will, with the expectation that volunteers will simply "cope". Many volunteers feel that their services are being "taken for granted" and or "are not valued" by Government, as it appears that only at election time or at a time of crisis, such as reviews or inquiries that positive funding changes are made to 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, WH&S, and 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 increased productivity and flexibility (multi skilling) requirements placed on volunteers reflecting the changing Government, Community and CFS needs.

Should a mechanism 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, could be addressed, together with other needs outlined in this document.

Volunteer pride and goodwill means that volunteers continue to commit to their community, however volunteers need to be recognised for their efforts by being appropriately funded and supported as they sacrifice family life, leisure time and work to upskill, and given that over the years, community expectation of CFS volunteers has dramatically increased, it is imperative that these increased expectations are appropriately acknowledged by Government and the key matters impacting on volunteers are addressed.



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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), the centralisation of resources into SAFECOM and subsequent staff cuts (loss of dedicated CFS resources) have all impacted on CFS volunteers.

Volunteers seek to ensure that any changes in the future to the CFS framework whether legislative or structural reviews of the fire and emergency services respects the fact that over 13,500 volunteers donate their time willingly to protect South Australian communities.

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

Principles:

- CFS must retain its autonomy;
- Recognise the importance and value of the volunteer "culture" and "identity";
- Be volunteer centric thereby 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 resources to support volunteers;
- CFS must retain and manage its own budget.

Imperatives:

- Have the ability to increase people capacity as needed;
- Require minimal administrative functions of volunteers;
- Provide skills development for volunteers;
- Utilise the skills that volunteers bring with them;
- Be flexible to use people with a range of skills to manage emergencies;
- Adopt best business management practices, including succession planning and mentoring.

These principles and imperatives are vital to ensure the continued delivery of a first class fire and rescue services by a highly recognised as a trusted emergency service to South Australian communities.



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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 continues to achieve its objectives which are to provide a platform through which the consolidated views of all its members are 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 CFS regions.

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 to volunteers which includes; equality for volunteers firefighters on a par with paid firefighters under Return to Work legislation; secured Presumptive (cancer) legislation for volunteers again on a par with paid firefighters; and the development of a Volunteer Charter which is an agreement between the CFSVA, the South Australian Government and the Country Fire Service and secures a commitment by Government to consult with volunteers on all matters that directly impact on volunteers.

The CFSVA also enhances the activities of the CFS, by ensuring a good relationship exists with volunteers, the public, the media and Government.



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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 legislative changes brought to volunteers and staff significant change, with CFS transitioning from principally "rural " fire service, managed locally to an all hazards fire and rescue service, with SOP's, COSO's, AIIMS, CRIIMSON, HS&W, onerous procurement systems, GRN and 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. The shift away from Local Government responsibility has indeed created its own set of issues as the initial CFS funding base was set too low as previous Local Government funding was correctly identified causing CFS to be underfunded right from the start.

Over the years CFS responses have expanded beyond rural firefighting, into road crash rescue and general emergency response, and in many areas of the state is the only emergency service of its kind and has continued to expand over subsequent years.

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 436 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 autonomy, independence and integrity as a community focused, volunteer based organisation. The autonomy 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.

Although the Emergency Services Levy funding provides basic funding for the training, equipment and administration resources required to maintain the operation of the CFS and other emergency services across the state, the CFS still stands fundamentally on the commitment and energy of its volunteers.



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COUNTRY FIRE SERVICE AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE

Background

South Australia currently has 13,500 volunteer members representing 436 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 the dedication and goodwill of its volunteers and it is critical that CFS maintains its autonomy, independence and integrity as a locally focused, volunteer based organisation to foster and retain the goodwill currently being provided by volunteers and their regional communities.

CFS volunteers generously donate their time, talent and energy to ensure the provision of a viable emergency service, and as such must be afforded solid support by government.

The cost efficiencies delivered to Government by CFS volunteers should not be underestimated, nor should the essential role of volunteers in many regions communities be taken for granted.

Over the last few years CFS volunteers have been strong and clear in their message to Government in that the autonomy and independence of the CFS must never be compromised. Any Government attempts to compromise this position will be at its own peril as the direct and irrevocable impact on volunteer numbers and level of commitment will place many regional communities at risk.

Recommendations:

- That Government acknowledges and maintains the autonomy and independence of CFS;
- That Government acknowledges and respects the volunteer culture and identity;
- That CFS volunteers must remain masters of their destiny.



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CONSULTATION WITH VOLUNTEERS

CFS VOLUNTEER CHARTER

Background

The 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 CFS Volunteers recognises the partnership relationship between government and CFS on one hand and the CFS Volunteers and the CFSVA on the other.

Although the Charter is recognised and complied with within SAFECOM and CFS to a reasonable level, there have been instances where decisions made by other government agencies with no volunteer consultation has negatively impacted on volunteers.

Whilst we acknowledged that CFS Volunteers must comply with the intent of any new legislation, due consideration must also be given to the impact on volunteerism.

It is essential that the CFS Volunteer Charter be enshrined in legislation to ensure proper and through consultation occurs at all levels of Government on matter and decisions that impact on CFS Volunteers, with all Cabinet Submissions to include a Volunteer Impact Statement.

Recommendation:

That the CFS Volunteer Charter be enshrined into legislation without further delay;

That Government demonstrates compliance with the Volunteer Charter by reporting to Cabinet on proposal papers when Cabinet is considering legislative change;

That an education programme be established to ensure all agencies and departments are made aware of the impact of their decisions on CFS volunteers;



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WORKERS COMPENSATION FOR VOLUNTEERS

RETURN TO WORK ACT

The CFSVA commends the South Australian government for taking the lead by acknowledging the high risk work carried out by South Australian firefighters and extending Presumptive Legislation to CFS volunteers.

The scope of the work carried out by CFS volunteers and MFS paid firefighters is the same, with both often called upon to stand shoulder to shoulder. The risk exposure encountered by MFS firefighters does not differ to that of CFS volunteers as fires and other hazardous situations do not discriminate.

On this basis the CFSVA strongly supports equality for all South Australian firefighters under Return to Work and anticipates that any identified risk would be managed on behalf of all South Australian firefighters.

Recommendations:

That CFS volunteers be treated as equals to paid staff for the purpose of the Return to Work Act and that any benefits or concessions made available to paid firefighters are equally extended to CFS volunteers.



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REGIONAL GROUP/BRIGADE SUPPORT PERSONNEL (GSP)

Background:

During the 2017 CFSVA state roadshow, the lack of regional group/brigade support for volunteers was a constant and recurring theme. The association has conducted similar consultation processes over a number of years, however aside from Sector Reform, never has a more prominent issue emerged.

In each and every region volunteers were full of praise for current CFS staff, but were quick to highlight the unfair workload currently being placed both on regional staff and volunteers alike, with a number of volunteers indicating that they had taken on additional responsibilities to avoid additional pressure being placed on staff and also to ensure that the task at hand was managed in a timely manner.

CFS members join as volunteers to support, assist and protect their communities, however, aside from these duties, there is an expectation that volunteers in leadership positions must also fulfil reporting requirements to ensure regulatory compliance. This creates increased workloads for volunteers who at times regard themselves as "unpaid public servants", and often is a deterrent for capable and skilled volunteers to take on leadership roles within CFS.

In the past Regional Volunteer Support Officer (VSO) with the key task of providing frontline volunteers support services, were located in each of the six Regions. These positions no longer exist, yet the ever increasing bureaucratic impost continues to impact on CFS volunteers who are left to carry out this work so that statutory obligations are met.

The demands of work health and safety, licensing laws, requirements from the SA Auditor General, CFS and SAFECOM are continually increasing the time commitment required from volunteers and is becoming an ever increasing source of frustration for many volunteers.

In 2004 the CFS received funding to employ regionally based business services officers (BSOs), which at the time reduced some of the administrative workload for volunteers, however over time the tasks required of BSOs have also increased, thereby restricting the BSOs' ability to provide support services to volunteers.

The expectations that regional staff will provide community based services, including preparing community warnings, increased levels of preparedness, upskilling as well as covering ongoing absences has resulted in volunteer services being neglected, and as a consequence support for volunteers involved with the management of volunteer, recruitment, induction and brigade health checks, all of which are critical support services at the local level, are almost non-existent.

Demands placed on volunteers' time to manage these issues has markedly increased thereby placing additional stress on volunteers and taking precious time away from them, their families and in many cases their businesses. Volunteers have been clear in that their purpose for joining CFS is to support, assist and protect their communities during emergencies and not to undertake administrative duties in order to satisfy Government compliance.

The future sustainability of many Brigades and individual volunteers is seriously at jeopardy as volunteers are worn out by these constant demands. The appointment of Group/Brigade Support Personnel (GSP) to each of the six regions would provide a catalyst for the reconnection of Officers and Brigades with CFS as well as much needed real time support services to volunteers.

Summary:

Skilled and capable volunteers must be encouraged to take up leadership position, however this can only be achieved if appropriate and accessible support mechanisms are set in place to support and assist volunteers in management roles.

The CFSVA understands and appreciates the need for regulation however it is not acceptable to expect CFS volunteers to be available 24/7 to respond to emergencies; be required to meet training standards; and also have the expectation that volunteers will undertake administrative tasks associated with the Government's statutory obligations.

The future sustainability of many Groups and Brigades is seriously in jeopardy as volunteers are forced to make choices.

The Association believes that it is essential that GSPs be immediately appointed to all regions to ensure that critical support and guidance to volunteers is provided and that the administrative burden currently being unfairly placed on volunteers is reduced.

Recommendations:

The Association seeks the on-going appointment of a minimum of 2 Group/Brigade Support Personnel (GSP) per region for the sole purpose of providing support services to Brigades in the following areas: reducing the administrative workload currently being placed on volunteers; governance; recruitment; inductions; and human resource, particularly in the areas of conflict resolution, bullying or harassment issues;

That it is essential that GSPOs be regionally based, and work directly with groups and brigades to build rapport and provide on-going and continuous administrative support services to volunteers;

That an allocation of \$2 million per annum must be made available through Treasury to fund this essential volunteer support service;

That funding must be on-going and additional to current CFS budget and funding.



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HEAVY VEHICLE INSPECTION SCHEME

Background:

The Heavy Vehicle Inspection Scheme (HVIS) is due to be introduced in 2018.

The introduction of the HVIS will improve heavy vehicle safety, and whilst the CFSVA strongly supports this and any initiative that will deliver safer work conditions to our volunteers, its implementation will impact on CFS volunteers as CFS holds the largest heavy vehicle fleet within South Australia.

The CFS fleet is not held in one central location, but allocated to CFS Groups and Brigades across the state. Currently Regions, Groups and Brigades are responsible for the maintenance of vehicles which often includes transferring vehicle to locations where maintenance and repairs are carried out. In some regional areas this may require considerable travel as authorised or appropriate service agents are located in major centres or in Adelaide.

CFS is often reliant on the goodwill of volunteers to transfer and collect these vehicles in their own time to point of service or repair, which in some instances can take several days.

The introduction of the HVIS will require CFS vehicles to be inspected annually and has the potential to be a burden on volunteers; which the CFSVA will not accept. Further the CFSVA is yet to see a volunteer impact statement nor has there been any consultation with volunteers.

The CFSVA reiterates that it strongly supports this and any initiative that will deliver safer work conditions to our volunteers, however it will not support the use of volunteers' time to transfer CFS vehicles for inspection. It is therefore imperative that additional and on-going funding be provided to CFS to cover the cost of annual inspections as well as the cost of transferring vehicles to inspection points.

Recommendations:

That the CFSVA will not support volunteers' time being used to transfer vehicles for annual inspection as required under HVIS;

That it is imperative that additional and on-going funding be provided to CFS to cover the cost of transferring vehicles to inspection points and any fees and charges associated with annual inspections;

That the CFSVA strongly recommends the engagement of a CFS vehicle fleet officer in each region who will be tasked with co-ordinating vehicle inspections, maintenance, repairs and transfers thereby removing the burden currently placed on volunteers.



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25 KM EMERGENCY SPEED ZONES

Background:

CFS volunteers have clearly indicated that the 25km speed limit emergency speed zone has without doubt created a safer work environment.

CFS volunteers predominantly respond to emergency incidents in high speed limit areas which undoubtedly places volunteers at risk and was a driving factor for the CFSVA tenacity in securing legislative change to have the Emergency Speed Zone limit reduced to 25kms/hr.

The feedback from volunteers continues to be overwhelmingly in support of the 25kms speed limit, which coupled with the effectiveness of the public education campaign has reduced the speed at which vehicles travel past emergency events thereby making our volunteers safer within their workplace.

Motorist's compliance to the 25km speed limit also permits sections of road that previously closed, due to safety concerns, to remain open thereby avoiding lengthy delays or significant detours for motorists.

The reduced speed may be seen as an inconvenience by some, however it is far less significant than the death or injury of an emergency responder, and far less inconvenient than entire sections of road being closed in order to ensure the safe management of an emergency event.

The CFS motto is "Come Home Safe" and the CFSVA believes that the 25km emergency speed zone works towards delivering this outcome.

Recommendations:

That public education campaigns be conducted on a regular basis to ensure motorists adhere to emergency speed zone thereby ensuring a safer workplace for emergency responders.



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ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

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 robust 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 recommendations from recent catastrophic fire events there has been a move to more detailed prescriptive directions and a marked increase in the provision of community information, including preparedness and emergency forecast warnings and the like, along with increased levels of preparedness for all.

This has created an increase in workload for regional frontline CFS Staff, thereby reducing their ability to provide timely support to volunteers. Recent internal reviews into the CFS regional frontline structures highlight that the current number of volunteers and staff reporting to Regional Commanders is unsustainable.

On this basis it is essential that the number of frontline Regional staff be increased to support the sustainability of volunteering, and ensure that volunteers do not become disenfranchised with the CFS due to a lack of support.

Whilst work has been undertaken to benchmark the ratio of Staff to volunteers in similar organisations, there is no clear methodology. We do however know that in South Australia, there are significant limitations due to the general staff shortage, which has for volunteers and CFS frontline staff who are constantly forced to prioritise rather than complete projects.

Volunteers are then faced with the dilemma of either supporting and assisting Regional Staff where possible to achieve outcomes or having matters just "drop off" the agenda. Either way this adversely impacts volunteers and their ability to carry out their primary roles.

Recommendations:

That funding to CFS be increased to achieve appropriate staffing level;

That a system be established to track issues and report on actions taken or reasons for delays.



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REGIONAL GROUP CONTROL CENTRES

Background:

Recent significant events including the Sampson Flat and Pinery fires have drawn attention to the lack of facilities and urgent funding required to upgrade Group Control Centres, Regional Control Centres and indeed CFS State Co-ordination centre to ensure that CFS has the capacity to respond efficiently and effectively to major incidents.

Currently no Group Control Centres, Regional Control Centres CFS State Co-ordination centre can be truly classed as fit for purpose.

During the 2016 Sampson Flat fire, there were approximately 70 incident management personnel working out of the One Tree Hill Fire station; a station primarily designed to house a single CFS Brigade and limited scope to operate as a Group Control Centre. Limited ability to air condition the facility made working conditions oppressive reducing effective and optimum output. Tents had to be erected to provide for space for team meetings, with high temperatures, high winds and later pouring rain making working conditions extremely difficult. The local Brigade was also displaced for 7 days whilst their station was commandeered as a Group Control Centre.

During the Pinery fire, incident management personnel were working out of the Angaston fire station, once again displacing the local Brigade for 5 days. The station being split over two floors, necessitated walking some distance around the outside of the building every time access to a different level was necessary.

Incident management teams are charged with the efficient and effective management of the incident and should not be frustrated by facilities that are not fit for purpose. It is of concern that these situations are repeated in almost every other major incident across the State.

The 2017 Burns Report identifies an increase in community expectations and the need for a team to manage incidents at lower levels of preparedness. The establishment of Regional Control Centres will ensure that timely information and warnings are provided to the community and that a proper management structure is set place in the event an incident quickly escalates as was the case with both the Sampson Flat and Pinery fires.

Facilities must be fit for purpose and provide effective Command, coordination and management facilities in preparedness for larger incidents to ensure effective and efficient outcomes.

Recommendations:

That fit for purpose Group Control Centres be constructed in appropriate locations to ensure full support of ground crews;

That Group Control Centres be fitted with open work stations and appropriate meeting rooms; be air conditioning; and with effective security management in place to ensure integrity of information and good connectivity to the internet and mobile phone network.



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READY RESERVE BRIGADES

Background

The CFSVA has identified a number of issues in the external environment in which CFS Volunteers operate, which are highly likely to impact 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 outer metropolitan brigades have lengthy waiting lists of volunteers seeking to join. It is critical to harness this interest and capitalise in the areas where interest to join brigades are high.

The notion of "Reserve Brigades" has been considered over a period of time, however to date this has received limited support.

Undeniably the majority of the South Australian population is located within the Adelaide metropolitan area and has the potential to be a wide resource for CFS to recruit.

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 are lost as they move to Adelaide to either further their education or secure employment. Attempts by them to join a peri-urban brigade is often unsuccessful as brigades are at capacity, and like many others are merely added to a waiting list.

Considering the financial cost of training volunteers it is difficult to comprehend why there is no capacity to retain trained volunteers who relocate to Adelaide, and also to make provision for people who reside within the Adelaide metropolitan area and have expressed a desire to serve as a CFS volunteer.

Often there is a need for larger contingents of volunteers to form "strike teams" for emergencies outside of their own local areas. These "strike teams" are becoming harder to fill, however by establishing a "surge capacity" to deal with large or ongoing incidents it will alleviate the pressure currently being placed on volunteers.

Reserve Brigades may be attached to existing peri urban brigades with extended membership specifically targeting bushfire response volunteers, or new brigades set up within an urban environment to specifically respond to major incidents.

This would build on current the "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 regional communities in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Recommendations:

That funds be provided to enable consultation and review options for establishing "Ready Reserve Brigades";

That subsequent on-going funds be provided to support the establishment of "Reserve Brigades" and "surge capacity" within the metropolitan and peri urban areas.



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GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES RELEASED FOR CFS DUTIES

Background

The CFSVA has been made aware that at times of emergency call outs, Government agencies and departments are resisting allowing staff to respond as a CFS volunteer, and in some cases won't release or allow employees to engage in CFS rostered paid work within Incident Management Teams.

Whilst it is understood that staff cutbacks within the Public Service may be a cause of this situation it does not make it acceptable.

It is essential that Government Departments and agencies lead by example and ensure that CFS volunteers employed through the Public Service are permitted to respond to CFS emergency callouts and other needs.

Further, whilst some Local Government agencies strongly support the release of employees to support the CFS, there is no consistency across the State.

There is an expectation that private employers and sole business owners will permit employees and themselves to volunteer with the CFS in support of their community, therefore it is imperative that Government demonstrates leadership on this front.

Recommendation:

That Government shows strong leadership in releasing government employed CFS volunteers during emergency events;

That Government forms a consistent policy for all agencies and departments which will ensure the release of government employed CFS volunteers to respond to emergency situations.



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EMERGENCY SERVICES FUND

Background:

Prior to 1999 emergency services were funded from a combination of local government directly funding brigades in their own areas, insurance premium levies, brigade fundraising and some state government contribution. This created funding inequity around the state caused by the differences in funding levels from local councils and ability to fundraise and attract donations.

Since then, funding is through Emergency Services Levy, which is seen by many people as just another unnecessary government tax, as it is not understood that the ESL directly funds the emergency services which were previously funded through other means.

While the ESL has had the desirable effect of creating equity of funding to CFS brigades across the state, it has had the negative impact of not funding the service adequately, and Government reluctant to raise the ESL to an appropriate level for fear of voter backlash.

The CFSVA strongly supports a public education campaign which clearly identifies the role of CFS volunteers and emphasises the fact that they volunteer their time and therefore their goodwill must not be exploited.

Further Government must desist from using CFS volunteers as justification for ESL or tax increases.

SUMMARY:

- The cost of operating emergency services was underestimated when the ESL was first developed.
- Local governments were aware of the implementation of the ESL 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.
- Fund raising contributions were severely underestimated, and indeed fundraising opportunities have declined as the public questions the need for donations given they pay the ESL.
- The ESL funds a wider range of services than was initially envisaged, creating more competition limited funds.
- Government is reluctant to raise the ESL to an appropriate level for fear of voter backlash.
- The cost of collecting the ESL is very high and takes vital funds available for the emergency services.
- CFS volunteers are concerned that they are "competing" for funds that support wage increases for paid emergency service workers.
- The cost of providing a full time paid fire service predominately within the Adelaide metropolitan area consumes a significant portion of the available funds.
- Once the "emergency" is over, there is no mechanism to recoup costs from the recipients of ancillary services eg. Insurance companies and the like.

Recommendations:

The CFSVA strongly supports a public education campaign that identifies the intent of the ESL;

That Government desists from using CFS volunteers as justification for ESL or tax increases;

That the cost recovery process be reviewed to minimise collection costs;

That a cost recovery mechanism be established on a user pay basis for clean-ups and on-going non-emergency services;

That costs associated with major bushfire or other emergencies events be funded by Treasury and not through General Revenue.



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LOCAL SUPPLIERS

Background:

Currently all major building work is managed from Adelaide, and often local suppliers, who may also be the employers of CFS volunteers, are excluded from the tender process. This is to the detriment of local business and their communities as it limits employment opportunities and provides no incentive for local business to employ CFS volunteers.

Many local regional businesses support CFS Brigades either by releasing employees to attend emergency incidents or by the provision of support services and often donate either by cash or in kind to CFS. In many other cases, self-employed business owners also give up time away from their business and lose business in order to volunteer for the CFS.

The one size fits all method applied to building work has at times resulted in a not entirely fit for purpose building provided, whereas had local knowledge been applied a more optimum outcome would have been achieved.

The decentralising of CFS building contract work valued at under \$1m coupled with the inclusion and involvement of local Groups / Brigades and businesses would generate wider support amongst local volunteers. Local knowledge and ownership of the project, would not only generate a better outcome for Government, but would also encourage and stimulate local employment in areas where employment opportunities are limited.

It is acknowledged that standards do need to be set and compliance achieved, however by encouraging local involvement, the community as whole benefits.

Recommendations:

That all building work under \$1 million be managed by CFS through local sources.



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BUILDING AND BUSINESS FACILITY ALARM RESPONSE

Background:

The requirement for the installation of fire alarm systems to new industrial buildings coupled with the decentralisation of many warehouses and businesses to country areas, has created a marked increase in the number of alarm responses.

In many instances, within CFS response areas, the properties are remote from townships and can take a long time for key holders to respond following the activation of an alarm. In these circumstances volunteers who promptly respond to alarm activations are often kept waiting for long periods until appropriate access is available to check alarm conditions.

Consideration should be given to establish regulations that compels property owners / managers to respond to alarm activations within a specified time to avoid wasting volunteers' time, with a financial penalty applied for delays in obtaining access.

This penalty should be additional to current penalties for false alarms call-outs.

Recommendations:

That regulations be established which compel property owners / managers to respond to alarm activations within a specified time, with the lack of compliance to result in the levying of an additional penalty;

That the use of electronic devices such as camera be encouraged so that an incident can be verified before a Brigade response is activated;



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RECOGNITION OF EMPLOYERS

Background:

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

Many employers support emergency services in South Australia by releasing their staff to respond to emergencies at short notice. These employers consider it as their contribution to the community and have entered into appropriate arrangements with their staff members for this purpose. In many instances employers continue to pay their staff, whilst others allow annual leave to be taken or allow the time off to be "caught up".

South Australia, depends on a "surge capacity" of volunteers to attend large events, which can involve volunteers and appliances travelling many hundreds of kilometres to the emergency. Often this is within the state, however this can also be interstate as we have seen in recent years, with volunteer "taskforces" travelling to fires in NSW and Victoria. These types of deployment obviously require a time commitment of a few days or more.

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

This resistance by employers to release staff is potentially disastrous to the future capacity of the CFS volunteer base, and the Service as a whole, and is especially relevant in a shrinking volunteer base. In this context, the CFS is competing for the time and commitment of a smaller pool of available volunteers. The knowledge that CFS volunteers will need time off creates disincentives for employers and has the potential to be deleterious to volunteers joining or remaining within the Service.

In past efforts have been made at both a State and National level to recognise and encourage employers of emergency service volunteers, however recently these types of initiatives have been abandoned, leaving employers pondering the economic cost to their business.

Payments to employers, who release volunteers for response to significant events requiring absences of three or more days, would be an incentive to employers releasing their staff, and would ensure that the community remains protected from the threat of bushfires and other natural disasters by committed, professional volunteers. Further, volunteers would not have to take annual or unpaid leave to respond to such events.

Recommendations:

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 costs of releasing their volunteers for longer term events; That time out for employees to attend CFS training courses be recognised and form part of the Employers Recognition Scheme.



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LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Background:

Volunteer leaders such as Group Officers, Brigade Captains and Lieutenants hold considerable responsibility not just for operational activities, but also for Group and Brigade Human Resources and administration management. This responsibility is considerable and time consuming and can often be a deterrent to volunteers taking on these roles.

Specific, and sometimes special skills are also required to perform these duties and fulfil these role as defined within CFS doctrine.

The key to the health and wellbeing of a Brigade is to make it function with true leadership which is owned by all members. This creates organisational pride and delivers a sense of value and worth to group and brigade members, whilst an absence of leadership impacts on Brigade morale and may be critical in determining whether a members is retained.

Currently training and support for Group Officers, Brigade Captains and Lieutenants is severely lacking and impact on group or brigade morale.

Volunteer leaders are well trained in performing their operational activities as most training is focussed on the operational side of delivering an emergency service to the community, however it is just as essential to for volunteer leaders to be trained and supported in people management.

Recommendations:

That this supports the urgent need for Group Support Personnel to assist volunteer leader with the people management and basic administration requirements;

That a mentoring program be considered to support and develop our leaders.



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TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS

REPORTING SYSTEMS

Background

The CFS has a number of technological systems, such as AIIRS, CRIIMSON, TAS, IRIS to manage incidents and record personal records, some of which are mandated by national agreement, others such as SACAD are through shared services, whilst others are propriety systems such as FFRS with others developed in house to meet a specific need. This has resulted in a lack of consistency and funds wasted on supporting a number of non-compatible system.

Many Brigades use proprietary systems for crew management such as FFRS to track crew availability, however these provide no ability to manage crew rosters, crew tracking during major incidents, fatigue management, training needs, and vehicle maintenance records.

The CFSVA seeks funding to support a Project Officer for a review of current systems with a view to bringing forward recommendations for the provision of comprehensive system that addresses current inconsistencies.

Recommendations:

That funding be made available funding to support a Project Officer to review of current systems and bring forward recommendations for the provision of a consistent reporting system.

GENERAL TECHNOLOGY

Background

The increase in generally available of technology coupled with decreased costs has created a public expectation of almost immediate access to information and responses.

CFS Volunteers must be provided with the latest technology, much of which is currently already provided to other emergency sector Agencies.

The implementation of 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; provide the community with a more direct response during major incidents; reduce the workload on Adelaide Fire Operators during peak time; and reduce the sole reliance on the GRN.

Some of these technologies were in fact first discussed for use on CFS appliances on recommendations following the Wangary Fire (2005), the Victorian Royal Commission into the Black Saturday fires (2009) and more recently the Pinery Fire (2015) and Blackout / flood event (2016).

The provision of such technologies would further enhance the safety of CFS crews by generating fire prediction map and permitting these maps to be sent electronically to all CFS appliances in real time, as well as having access to real time information throughout the event and would be of significant benefit during fast moving and unpredictable fires.

Some of the current technologies would could be easily applied to CFS appliances and vehicles are as follows:

Data units, with real time capability

- Provide Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL), which will provide real time locations of all CFS appliances and is especially critical issue in ensuring crew safety during large bushfire incidents;
- To provide access chemical data for Hazmat purposes;
- Information of structure of motor vehicles for RCR work;
- Mapping features;
- Operational information and provide instruction to and from appliances;
- Provide information on Safe work procedures; CFS policy documents; CFS Operational Bulletins etc.

The use of these systems would ensure a more efficient use of volunteers' time and improved response to reported events, as the location of each appliance becomes more accurate.

The Burns Report 2017 and the Pinery Report 2015 both make recommendations in this regard, and which to date have not been acted upon.

Recommendations:

That the recommendations of the Wangary Fire (2005); Victorian Royal Commission into the Black Saturday fires (2009); the Pinery Fire Report (2015); and the Blackout / flood event (2016) be immediately acted upon and that funding be made available for the installation of improved technologies and support services for CFS volunteer appliances.