



The Country Fire Service Volunteers Association

"Representing the interests of CFS Members"

Annual General Meeting

EXECUTIVE REPORT

October 2015

As I write this report, I reflect on events that have transpired over the past 12 months in what can best be described as a difficult year for CFS volunteers.

Early in fire season the CFS family suffered the tragic loss of Andrew Harrison and Brian Johnston. Our constant thoughts have been with Kellie Harrison and Cathie Johnston and their families as we all come to terms with the tragedy of losing two truly dedicated volunteers.

The constant pressure from the political arena has caused the CFSVA to focus much of its attention in that direction placing considerable strain on CFSVA and Executive members, stretching our resources and finances to the limit. It seems that just as we conclude one matter other matters appear on the radar.

The CFSVA's success at gaining presumptive legislation for all CFS volunteers must be considered one of the few high points of this year. To the Government's credit they honoured their pre-election commitment of a review which ultimately culminated in CFS volunteers being recognised under presumptive legislation and the return to equitable WorkCover provisions for all firefighters. Until recently South Australia had the best presumptive legislation within Australia, with several other states holding up the South Australian model to their Governments as the example. The CFSVA has been working closely with other states to assist them in this regard.

By far, the matter that has been most consuming for the CFSVA over the past 12 months has been the Emergency Services Sector Reform.

The Minister's sector reform process first introduced in June 2014, could at best be described as seriously flawed and at worst extremely dangerous, with Government interference into operational matters outside of their legislative bounds seriously concerning. The ambiguities and lack of details in the Government driven agenda coupled with a lack of tolerance by Government towards anyone with differing views only served to marginalise and exclude concerned volunteers and organisations.

The message clearly delivered to Minister by the CFSVA was that the CFSVA would only support change that provided greater protection to South Australian communities and an improved level of support to volunteers. The CFSVA also made it clear that volunteers will not accept change for the sake of change, nor to suit a Government or union driven agenda.

Once it became apparent that the Government agenda failed to address genuine concerns raised by CFS volunteers, the CFSVA lobbied for the establishment of the Select Committee, which commenced taking evidence in April 2015 and has been instrumental in stopping the Sector Reform process and a re-think and change of approach by Government.

The recent appointment of Mr Malcolm Jackman to the role Chief Executive Officer by the Premier hopefully will reinstate openness and transparency within the sector, which combined with the release of "Project Darwin" - a 10 year Strategic Plan for the South Australian Emergency Services will enable stability to return to the sector.

The CFSVA cannot stress enough the critical need for CFS volunteers to remain vigilant and focussed on all aspects of "Project Darwin". It is important for CFS volunteers to remain part of this journey, and masters of their own destiny.

The CFSVA 2014 Election policy booklet continues to be a reference tool used by all political persuasion, and has proven to be a valuable asset. The CFSVA has recently commenced work on the 2018 Election booklet which will again be distributed to politicians in the lead up to the next State election.

The CFSVA continues to enjoy a good working relationship with the CFS Chief Officer and staff and whilst at time we have differing opinions, this relationship is important as both the CFSVA and the CFS strive towards the same goal: the safety and protection of CFS volunteers and their communities.

I would like to congratulate Andy Wood who has recently become the CFSVA President; Roger Flavell who has recently become the CFSVA nominee to the SAFECOM Board; and also to Roger Flavell for his recent appointment as the Chair of CAVFA.

I would also personally like to thank Roger Flavell and Andy Wood for their dedication, passion, and untiring efforts and Kirsti Oliver for her great effort and flexibility in providing much needed back up support.

Thank you also to all the CFS members who have worked on numerous CFSVA committees throughout the year, and who have given their time and support to ensure that the CFSVA continues to represent CFS volunteers at all levels.

I would also like to personally thank Jeff Clark who has decided not to nominate for a position this year. Jeff's passion, commitment and generosity to the CFSVA has been exemplary, and I wish him every success in the future.

CFSVA members, you are truly fortunate to have such a dedicated team carrying forward matters on your behalf, and I encourage you all to support your elected representatives to ensure that your thoughts and opinions are truly represented at all levels.

I would also like to acknowledge all CFS volunteers and their families without whose dedication, passion and generosity a strong emergency service response across South Australia would not exist.

In conclusion I ask myself - What do I take from this year?:

- immense respect for CFS volunteers
- a firm understanding of the extraordinary commitment CFS volunteers make to South Australian communities
- failure to understand the reluctance by Government to accept the volunteer culture, and the need for volunteers to be the masters of their destiny.
- the stubbornness of Government to accept and acknowledge the obvious

Thank you.