



## The Country Fire Service Volunteers Association

*"Representing the interests of CFS Members"*

### CFSVA STATE EXECUTIVE REPORT October 2019

Writing this report provides me with the opportunity to reflect on the events of this past year, and whilst I am proud to report that the CFSVA has achieved a substantial gain for our volunteers, by securing the CFS Volunteer Charter into legislation, it leads to question why we are constantly faced with challenges and obstacles before achieving such outcomes.

Volunteers don't always understand why matters take so long to reach conclusion, however it must be understood that at times the CFSVA's work must be kept confidential either due to the sensitive nature of its work, or to ensure that the VA forms the strongest strategic position to achieve outcomes which are in the best interest of volunteers. There does however need to be trust in your elected representative as well as respect for the diversity of thoughts and opinions shared at the CFSVA Board table.

Taking on a position such as the Executive Director, President and to a lesser degree Deputy and Deputy Vice Presidents exposes you to scrutiny and unjustified assaults on not just you professionally, but on your personal integrity which is extremely disappointing and disheartening. When in such a position there is an understanding that there will be frustrations and challenges but perhaps the most disappointing is when these challenges are from the very people you are doing your utmost to support and represent.

At times we are too harsh on ourselves and too critical of others without realising some of the huge impediments we face as your representatives lobbying on your behalf and as a leadership group trying to satisfy such a diverse group of individuals.

The current CFSVA leadership team, President Andy Wood, Vice President David Lindner and recently Deputy Vice President Jeff Clark and I have represented volunteers in an exemplary manner and have remained true and honest to the CFSVA's mantra of representing the interests of CFS volunteers.

An important part of the CFSVA's work is also representing our volunteers nationally through CAVFA, which collectively represents over 250,000 volunteer firefighters nationwide. I am pleased to report that the CFSVA's achievements measure up extremely well in relation to our interstate counterparts, and whilst we are not the largest organisation, nor the best funded we carry considerable influence when it matters. I would also like to congratulate Andy Wood who recently was elected by our interstate peers as the Chair of CAVFA and provides the opportunity for us collectively, as an association, to influence the national agenda both through AFAC and the Federal Government. The CFSVA, through its representatives of Andy Wood, David Lindner and myself is highly respected for its work and the outcomes we achieved on behalf of our volunteers.

This year we sadly farewelled CFS Chief Officer, Greg Nettleton, and look forward to welcoming the next Chief Officer Mark Jones to the role. There has been some conjecture in relation to the appointment of the next Chief Officer and make it clear that the CFSVA's issues on this matter are in relation to the selection process which was contrary to the clear directions of the CFSVA Executive Committee.

The CFSVA has had some success with its strong lobbying in relation to the South Australian Return to Work legislation with a view to ensure parity between volunteers and paid staff within the sector. I have personally met with the Treasurer on several occasions to put forward the associations position, and am pleased to reported that in May, the Treasurer agreed to ex-gratia payments for the 2 CFS volunteers immediately impacted by the change in legislation, with an administrative scheme to be formed for volunteers in the future. Contrary to recent advice from the Minister the CFSVA does not oppose the proposal put forward by the Treasurer in principle, but is seeking information in relation to the funding of the scheme and reassurance that any scheme set in place for volunteers will be equal to that available to paid staff within the sector.

The CFSVA has been instrumental in securing the future of the SAFECOM Sector Advisory Committee, as we view this Committee as a vital connection between key stakeholders within the sector. This Committee which includes all Chief Officers and representatives from the associations and unions is the voice of the sector and the vehicle for communication and discussion of sector and agency specific issues. Further this Committee sends a clear message to Government that the sector can and will work together without being forced down a path of reform. The Chair for this Committee is appointed on a rotational basis, with Andy Wood as the current Chair, and will be followed by each of the other associations and unions assuming the chair.

The CFSVA is very proud to announce that the CFS Volunteer Charter is finally enshrined into legislation, (Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005: Section 58A) and acknowledge the support of The Hon Tammy Franks MLC and Troy Bell MP in carrying the legislation through Parliament. Jeff Clark and I have been appointed on behalf of the CFSVA to a SAFECOM working group that will shortly meet to formulate the regulations to support the legislation. This is a significant victory for volunteers and will ensure that the voice of the CFS Volunteer is recognised, heard and considered in the Government decision making process.

Aside from political distractions the CFSVA remains focussed on the health and wellbeing of volunteers with particular focus on support services available to volunteers injured in the line of duty, and will progress this important matter in time to come.

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

I would also like to acknowledge and thank President Andy Wood, Vice President David Lindner and more recently Deputy Vice President Jeff Clark all of whom have been truly loyal to their commitment to the CFSVA and our volunteers and who have worked tirelessly on your behalf, and to Kirsti Oliver, without whose support I would not have enough hours in the day to complete all tasks on hand.

Thank you

Sonia St Alban  
Executive Director