



Country Fire Service Volunteers Association

Building on Strong Foundations
2022 and beyond





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

Building on Strong Foundations – 2022 and beyond

EXECUTIVE STATEMENT

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

The Country Fire Service (CFS) is defined by its volunteer focus and support of local communities for which it has gained state-wide and national recognition.

Its unique culture enables CFS to be flexible, progressive, cost effective and highly relevant.

Through this document, the CFSVA is seeking political commitment to encourage and support the long-term sustainability of volunteering within the Country Fire Service.

The economic benefit CFS volunteers provide to the South Australian economy each year exceeds \$100 million, and without the dedication and commitment of these volunteers a state-wide emergency service would not be sustainable nor achievable.

Every review over the past decade has only served to create negativity and doubt in the minds of CFS volunteers, yet there has been no focus on the disruption and harm these reviews cause to the 'people' of CFS.

Objectives of this document is to outline why additional financial support is critical to the long-term sustainability of CFS, which in comparison to the return for investment is negligible but considered crucial by CFS volunteers to ensure that CFS can maintain its current high standard of service delivery; is able to meet the ever-increasing expectations of the wider community; addresses external challenges: whilst meeting the often overlooked needs of CFS volunteers.

CFS volunteers epitomise the spirit of South Australian communities and are indeed the backbone of these communities, and it is imperative that the needs of the 'people' of CFS are acknowledged and supported which in turn will ensure the future sustainability and longevity of the Country Fire Service.



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CFS VOLUNTEERS

CFS volunteers play an integral role in the defence 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 positive contribution volunteers make to local communities through saving property tallies into the hundreds of million dollars each year, whilst the human element of saving lives and property by CFS is immeasurable.

The CFS organisation has evolved from several small regional volunteer fire services to an integrated 24/7 volunteer fire service comprising 13,500 committed volunteers strategically responding through 428 brigades located across South Australia.

CFS volunteers respond to numerous and diverse incidents including structure fires, road crash rescue, hazardous material incidents, grass and bushfires and provide back up and support to other emergency service agencies including the South Australian Ambulance Service (SAAS), South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service (SAMFS) and South Australian State Emergency Service (SASES).

CFS responses, be it in a truck, managing activities on the fireground or in an incident management team can be either within their own pre-determined response area; their CFS region; or as part of a strike team on intrastate or interstate deployments. Peri-urban brigades located close to the Adelaide CBD and regional brigades located close to larger regional areas are frequently dispatched to incidents within populated areas and work shoulder to shoulder with SAMFS paid fire fighters and SASES volunteers.

CFS volunteers deliver emergency services to over 90% of South Australia with statistic clearly identifying the significant role of CFS volunteers within the emergency services sector.

In 2020-2021 CFS volunteers delivered the following emergency responses:

Responded to:

- 8,920 primary response incident
- 7,980 support service responses

Total: 16,900 responses

Responses included:

- 26.3% special services (structure fire / hazmat / storms & flooding)
- 24.95% vehicle responses (road crash rescue)
- 21.4% rural fire (bushfires)

CFS Volunteers Gifted:

- **1.3 million hours emergency response time to South Australia**

TOTAL: \$58,630,000 (Volunteering Australia: volunteer dollar rate of \$45.10 per hour)

- It should further be noted that each hour of response time, there are about **3 hours of training per volunteer (2,106,000 hours) + additional administration work, meetings etc** which CFS records indicates tallies to an additional **10 million hours / annum**

TOTAL: 10,000,000 hours = \$45,100,000

TOTAL: \$103,730,000 – CFS Volunteers gift to the South Australian economy.

CFS volunteers generously donate their time, talent, and energy to ensure that South Australians are supported by a professional emergency service, and as such should be afforded solid and unconditional support by government. The personal contribution that volunteers make to the South Australian economy, results in the provision of a cost-effective, world-class fire and rescue service to the broader South Australian community.

Without doubt, volunteers have adapted to the change which has seen the CFS move from principally a locally managed “rural” fire service to a multi-faceted all hazards fire and rescue service underpinned by SOP’s, COSO’s AIIMS, CRIIMSON, AIIRS, and WH&S.

Volunteer pride and goodwill means that CFS volunteers continue to commit, however concerns have been raised 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, that positive funding commitments are made to the CFS, and often this funding commitment is towards resources and equipment whilst the ‘people’ (the volunteers and staff) element of CFS is neglected.

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



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DELIVERY OF EMERGENCY SERVICES BY VOLUNTEERS

CFS Volunteers have over the last decade been respondents to no less than 14 reviews, reforms, analysis, and proposals which have impacted on them as volunteers, and affected the very essence of the volunteering ethos.

These reviews, driven by a variety of agenda, and in some instances with pre-determined and targeted outcomes, have undoubtedly impacted on CFS; its volunteers; its staff and its core business, by creating unwarranted distraction and diverting precious sector funds to purposes other than the delivery of emergency services.

This continual affront on CFS has **not** improved service delivery, has **not** delivered cost saving but has been detrimental to volunteer morale, engagement, and retention.

The clear message from volunteers is that these distractions **must** cease and that CFS must maintain focus on its core business of supporting its volunteers and staff to ensure the efficient delivery of emergency services throughout South Australia.

Points of contention for volunteers include:

Major Incidents

After every major fire event, Government has this penchant for calling a review.

This occurred following the Wangary fire (2005), Sampson Flat fire (2013), Pinery fire (2014) and the Adelaide Hills and Kangaroo Island fires (2019-2020).

No other emergency service neither within South Australia, nor in fact Australia, has been subjected to this number of reviews or scrutiny. CFS volunteers take these reviews as a personal affront on their skills, commitment, and dedication, particularly when the reviews are reactionary and politically motivated.

Volunteers have expressed their disdain at reliving harrowing experiences under the guise of a 'review' which then results in the Minister of the day publicly endorsing the recommendations emanating from the review but failing to provide appropriate funding to support their implementation, whilst failing to consider the human aspect of the event and present and future impact on CFS responders.

Currently there are a sizeable number of 'politically endorsed' recommendations that cannot be implemented by CFS due to lack of funding support, and therefore remain outstanding until they are no longer relevant. This leads volunteers to question the purpose of these review and the true commitment of Government towards CFS and the value government places on volunteer lives, which are placed at risk, each time a volunteer responds to an incident.

As an example, a recommendation stemming from the Wangary fire (2005) was that Automatic Vehicle Locators (AVL) be fitted to all CFS vehicles. In 2009, following the handing down of the Coronial findings into the death of two CFS volunteers at Wangary, the Minister of the day made a commitment that Government would immediately fund the fitment of AVL to CFS vehicles, but was not funded. The same commitment was made following the Sampson Flat fire (2013), Pinery fire (2014) and the Adelaide Hills and Kangaroo Island fires (2019-2020), and only now in late 2021 will the first CFS vehicle be fitted with AVL. How many more volunteers were potentially placed at risk whilst Government procrastinated?

CFS volunteers are emphatic that no Minister must publicly endorse recommendations pertinent to CFS without the appropriate funding allocation and will be challenging this in the future.

Government driven attempts at Reforms / Analysis

CFS volunteers take issue with Government rhetoric as was the case during Tony Piccolo's attempt at sector reform and Corey Wingard's attempt at sector reform under the guise of an Analysis of the emergency services.

Volunteers find it insulting that precious sector funds are diverted to drive personal and political agendas, whilst the delivery of the emergency services relies on the benevolence of 13,500 volunteers. CFS Volunteers take umbrage at having to 'beg' for the necessary tools to respond and defend South Australian communities in their time of need, whilst ESL funds are flittered away on reviews which seek to cut costs - what irony!

Often there are discussions relating to volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention, yet the root cause of declining volunteer numbers is often ignored. CFS volunteers clearly indicate that CFS, and the identity and culture of CFS, is important to them and that any future proposal must be supported by a comprehensive risk analysis and a meaningful volunteer consultation and engagement process.

The upheaval caused over the last decade by the barrage of reviews et al. has created a great deal of scepticism amongst volunteers and created an unsettled environment within the emergency services sector. Volunteers are clear that it is time to take back CFS back, and for CFS, to be led by its Chief Officer and be supported by the CFSVA, to turn its focus solely to its core business of supporting its people and the delivery of emergency service. Further, any future legislative or structural reviews of the fire and emergency services must respect the fact that over 13,500 CFS volunteers give their time willingly to defend South Australian communities, and that they as people are equally, if not more important than the tools to perform the work.



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CFS INTO THE FUTURE – CFS STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025 [\(click here\)](#)

The CFSVA strongly endorses the CFS Strategic Plan and views this as the necessary recovery and progression tool for CFS, and therefore seeks government funding to support and implement the Plan.

The Plan outlines our collective vision for CFS into the future and ensures that CFS continues providing a robust emergency service underpinned by a unique volunteer ethos. The CFSVA commends the thorough and consultative approach used to prepare the Plan and looks to the future journey of implementation.

The lack of respect and consideration shown towards volunteers during and after each review, proposal, or reform has had significant ramifications, with the drivers of these reviews failing to understand that regardless of whether their proposals are implemented or not, each have an impact and creates havoc for the sector, particularly volunteers.

It is unconscionable and disrespectful for any government to impinge on the goodwill of volunteers by creating diversions and distractions that detract from the delivery of emergency services, and once these actions are aborted offer no remedy.

This lack remedial action is the catalyst for CFS volunteers seeking to define their own future and view the Plan as the opportunity to promulgate the significant parts of the CFS business which were considered irrelevant or overlooked during the reform agendas.

Volunteers are firm that CFS' strength is the diversity, talent, skills, and commitment of its 13,500 professional volunteer firefighters, and by embracing the diversity and talent volunteers bring to CFS and recognising and using these skills brings significant advantage to CFS. Financial investment by government is essential to ensure skill enhancement and support services for volunteers.

Volunteers have indicated dismay that recommendations will often impact on volunteers or require additional volunteer input, however, seldom is consideration given to the additional burden on volunteers or the need for volunteers to achieve outcome on limited or no budget.

Overview:

The CFS Strategic Plan 2021-2025 relates to all key areas of CFS business and establishes the foundations for a strong emergency service moving into the future:

- Building Safer Communities
- Advancing Service Delivery
- Ensuring a Sustainable Workforce
- Improving Governance
- Achieving Focus Driven Outcomes

The above are of equal importance and indeed necessary foundations for the delivery of a modern and efficient emergency services which instils confidence and provides reassurance that South Australian are supported and defended at the most critical and challenging times.

CFS volunteers have identified the following as critical components for CFS' future direction

CFS must:

- Remain volunteer centric; by ensuring a strong volunteer focus within the organisation.
- Flexible; by recognising that "one size" does not fit all.
- Have sound operating principles for recruitment, training, resources, infrastructure, and retention of volunteers.
- Seek diverse sourcing option to secure volunteers (reserve brigades/strike teams)
- Encourage youth participation, inclusion, and diversity
- Be sufficiently funded, staffed, and resourced to support volunteers.
- Define agreed core activities for volunteers in fire and emergency response
- Provide for skill development for volunteers
- Recognise and use the skills that volunteers bring with them
- Be flexible to use people with a range of skills to manage emergencies
- Require minimal administrative functions by volunteers
- Allow CFS managers to manage, not simply be strong operationally
- Adopt best business management practices, including succession planning and mentoring.

Key areas such as: volunteer engagement, youth engagement, community engagement, diversity, inclusion, retention, and recruitment are the key to a maintaining a strong and effective volunteer fire service into the future, and any future strategy must be all encompassing and inclusive.

Challenges to CFS into the future:

- Increase in public expectation
- Budget constraints
- Changing demographics in regional areas
- Politicising CFS
- External pressures creating unrest / dissatisfaction amongst volunteers
- Worldwide trend in declining volunteerism
- COVID 19 – ongoing effect
- Climate Change

Futurism:

Futurism and future planning are critical to CFS particularly given the severity and ferocity of recent bushfires, the on-going ramifications of the COVID pandemic and the impact of climate change.

Often, discussions relating to volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention, fail to address the true cause of declining volunteer numbers and are often ignored. CFS volunteers clearly indicate that CFS, and the identity and culture of CFS, is important to them and that any future proposal must be supported by a comprehensive risk analysis and a meaningful volunteer consultation process.

The youth are the future of CFS therefore it is essential that cadet and youth programs are welcoming and instil a sense in pride and purpose. Mentoring programs and succession planning are also critical component to retain interest and long-term engagement.

The notion of Reserve brigades is sound, and has its place within the CFS Strategic Plan, however reserve brigades should not be seen as a substitute or replacement for current brigades, but complimentary to the current system.

It is the CFSVA's view that the CFS Strategic Plan is well balanced and encompassing of matters raised by CFS volunteers, it also provides the scope and establishes the foundations for CFS to manage its business into the future. The CFSVA endorses the Plan and seeks the financial support from Government to build on these foundations and create the CFS of the future.

RECOMMENDATION:

- That the CFS Strategic Plan 2021-2025 be endorsed by Government
- That funding of \$10 million over 4 years be provided to CFS to build and implement the CFS Strategic Plan 2021-2025



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Country Fire Service Volunteers Association (CFSVA)

SUCCESSION PLANNING / FUTURE DIRECTION

Overview:

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 is a respected stakeholder within the South Australian emergency services, Government, 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 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 1.5 FTEs to support its 13,500 members and achieves 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 State President supported by elected delegates representing all CFSVA Branches across the State. All of whom are CFS volunteers and donate their time to the association.

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 impressive achievements which includes the enshrining of the CFS Volunteer Charter into legislation; parity under Return to Work legislation for all CFS volunteers; access to presumptive cancer legislation for CFS volunteers; has secured funding for numerous project and initiatives including: a second set of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for all volunteers; and consistently secures consultation for volunteers on all matters that directly impact them.

In recent years the Association, which volunteers know is an independent incorporated body, has given considerable time into supporting volunteers on the ground during major fires, this ensures that impacted volunteers receive appropriate support to assist them in their recovery and transition back to their CFS role.

The CFSVA is well respected and enhance the activities of the CFS, by ensuring a good relationship exists with sector partners, the public, the media, and government, but is not afraid to speak out and take necessary action when challenges to the volunteer ethos are made.

The role of the CFSVA has over the years changed in line with the changing expectations of its members and their role within CFS. The association operates on a grant agreement with the Minister for Emergency Services and provides a cost effective and efficient service to all 13,500 CFS volunteers.

The CFSVA is currently in the process of reviewing its own structure as it is very cognisant of the fact that it can no longer sustain its current operating model.

The ratio of 1.5 FTEs to 13,500 volunteers is not sustainable and places unfair workload on CFSVA staff and the volunteers who are regularly approached to represent the CFSVA on various committees and working groups. Without the support of these volunteers the association would not be able to ensure that the volunteer voice is heard, and that all volunteers are well represented.

The CFSVA is also looking to succession planning, but is restricted by budgetary constraints, and therefore is seeks a one-off grant, over and above its current funding agreement, to alleviate current staff and volunteer pressures.

RECOMMENDATION:

- That a \$2 million one off grant be allocated to the CFSVA to allow the association to support its 13,500 members during the implementation of the CFS Strategic Plan 2021-2025
- To support the review and modernisation of the association current structure and the implementation of a succession plan
- To support the employment of additional staff to alleviate current staff and volunteer pressures, and ensure that volunteers continue to be supported by the CFSVA



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PROJECT RENEW

Overview:

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

The GHD 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 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.”

Subsequently, in 2018/19/20/21 CFS has received a total of \$7 million over the 4 years for CFS station maintenance and upgrade. This funding has been extremely well received by CFS volunteers; however, the level of funding has not been sufficient to meet ongoing needs, with priority given to the removal of asbestos, rectifying electrical issues, installing toilet facilities. This has also identified a need for ongoing, realistic, and consistent funding as stations age and needs community change.

Lease agreements between the Minister and Local Government clearly identifies that the Minister is required to maintain CFS stations and is quite specific in that it nominates that the Minister will provide the funds to ensure regular maintenance and upkeep on the property. Further, each CFS Station is the property of the South Australian Government and therefore as a government asset must be maintained in good repair.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- That funding of \$10 million over 4 years be allocated for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of CFS stations across South Australia.



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SUMMARY

CFS volunteers are the face of CFS and viewed by the media and the public as ‘heroes’ a term which volunteers do not comfortably accept. Volunteers view themselves as good citizens; citizens who at times of need step up to support and defend their neighbours, their community, and the wider South Australian community.

The economic benefit CFS volunteers provide to the South Australian economy runs into the hundreds of millions of dollars per year, and without the dedication and commitment of these volunteers a state-wide emergency service would not be sustainable nor achievable.

The altruistic nature of CFS volunteers creates a unique culture which enables CFS to be flexible, progressive, cost effective and highly relevant, but also vulnerable with an increasing number of volunteers feeling that their service to the state is being taken for granted and indeed exploited.

CFS volunteers bring to CFS a plethora of talent, expertise and skills which must be harnessed and not dismissed as “just volunteers”.

Budgetary constraints and the constant pressure to do more with less; the persistent assault over the last decade on the volunteer ethos; and unfunded promises by government, are all taking their toll on volunteers, with volunteers reaching the point where they are unable or not prepared to give more than they already give.

For many years now the focus of funding has been on equipment, and this must not diminish, however this has meant that the ‘people’ aspect of CFS has been left behind. The CFS staff to volunteer ratio is the highest in Australia and if government is serious in its support of CFS and genuinely appreciates the immense contribution CFS volunteers make in the delivery of emergency services, then additional funds will be invested into the ‘people’ of CFS with the clear focus of sustaining volunteers into the future.

The notion of Reserve brigades is sound, and has its place within the CFS Strategic Plan, however reserve brigades should not be seen as a substitute or replacement for current brigades, but complimentary to the current system. Further, volunteers would take great umbrage at funds being diverted to support an additional cohort of volunteers when current volunteers are not being adequately funded nor supported by government.

Objectives of this document will require additional financial support, which totals **\$22 million (\$7 million in the first year, with \$5 million each of the following 3 years)**, but in comparison to the return for investment is negligible to government, but crucial to CFS volunteers and will ensure that CFS maintains its high standard of service delivery and meet the ever-increasing expectations of the wider community, whilst addressing external challenges, capitalising on volunteer skills and fulfilling volunteer needs.

The CFSVA is seeking political endorsement and financial support of the recommendation contain herein and cautions government that to ignore these recommendations it does so at its own peril, as CFS volunteers are adamant that they will no longer tolerate the constant intrusions, distractions and waste of time and resources that have occurred over the past decade.

Volunteers are firm in that CFS belongs to the 'people' of South Australia as it is the 'people' who make CFS the iconic service that it is today, and it is the same people who will make that key decision in March 2022.

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