

Hon Joe Szakacs MP

23MES0258



Ms Sonia St Alban
Executive Director
County Fire Service Volunteers Association

By email: sonia.stalban@cfsva.org.au

Dear Ms St Alban

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Sonia'.

I am writing to update you and your members on the action that the government is taking in regards to improving disciplinary processes and procedures for South Australia Country Fire Service (CFS) volunteers in South Australia.

I recognise this is an issue that the CFS Volunteers' Association (CFSVA) has been raising for many years, including with the previous Liberal government, without receiving a satisfactory outcome.

Since becoming Minister for Emergency Services in March of 2022, I have been grateful for the passionate and constructive representations made to me by CFSVA on members' issues. These include on matters of resourcing, general support and engagement with government.

I note that the issue of disciplinary procedures has emerged as one of significant urgency for the CFSVA, amid a perception that previous delays created unnecessary anxiety for some volunteers.

On becoming Minister, I was concerned that investigations which commenced under the former government took far too long to resolve. As a result of advocacy by the CFSVA, as well as representations made to me by individual volunteers, our government is now acting.

In August, I announced an examination of disciplinary procedures in the South Australian emergency services sector. This has been led by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment (OCPSE), as the agency within government that has the most experience and expertise in workforce management.

I am pleased to report that this engagement has already produced significant results.

The OCPSE has provided case management expertise and advice to the CFS, which has enabled it to make more rapid decisions about how individual matters should progress. In some cases, complaints can be speedily closed on the grounds that they lack sufficient evidence or legitimacy.

There are also alternative pathways to complaint resolution which can be employed in preference to procedures under the Fire and Emergency Services Regulations 2021, where appropriate.

I am pleased to report that this additional focus has already permitted the CFS to resolve 20 outstanding disciplinary matters, halving the number under consideration. Of the 17 which remain under management, 12 relate to pending criminal charges separate to activity as CFS volunteers.

I consider this to be a very significant improvement to process, achieved in short time. The CFS will continue to have access to case management advice and assistance from OCPSE, as required.

In addition, I am of the view that the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005* and *Fire and Emergency Services Regulations 2021* are placing an unnecessary burden on the timeliness of complaints and investigations.

The Government stands willing to amend the regulations should improvements be identified which can expedite outcomes while maintaining fairness for all parties involved. This assessment will be carried out in close consultation with the CFSVA.

Shortly, the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment, Erma Ranieri, is progressing to a comprehensive evaluation to consider substantive changes to policies, processes, systems or legislation. This is the second phase of the reform plan that started with the provision of additional administrative support to the CFS, as described above. The CFSVA will be invited in writing to provide submissions.


I repeat my gratitude for the CFSVA's assistance in this matter. I am confident that we are now on the path to real and substantive change for members, which is clearly long-overdue.

By working together, we have been able to formulate a considered and constructive solution.

As always, I wish to offer my sincere thanks to all your members for the selfless work they do to defend lives and property across our state. With a return to more normal conditions this fire danger season, I know that all South Australians are grateful for the commitment our volunteers make. But of course, as a multi-hazard fire service, it is not just bushfire season. Every single day CFS members give enormously for their state.

Should there be anything further I can do to support them, do not hesitate to contact my office.

Yours sincerely



Hon Joe Szakacs MP
Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Correctional Services

28 / 11 / 2023