

CAVFA Report
to
CFS Volunteer Association AGM
October 2024

Last year I was elected to be a Director of CAVFA, which by function is essentially the Executive Group who drives the outcomes similar to what happens in our own organisation. I have attended the general meeting and AGM in Sydney early September and 3 online meetings.

Last year we developed a small strategic plan to help give us direction and something to reflect on as we progress through the year. The couple points in this plan are that CAVFA wants to have more contact and influence with the Federal Government through the Emergency Management Minister. CAVFA has signed MOUs with AFAC and the National body of SES in the past 12 months. One of the other key points in the plan is for the member Associations to share experiences, what is working or changes achieved, what is changing in their state or what pitfalls do others need to look out for as we often see trends of change slowly sweep across the nation.

As we have recently found out, getting DGR status for our Association is extremely difficult. This is one thing CAVFA is raising with the Minister to request that all Associations be granted this status. Funding for most of the Associations is minimal, very tight or exceptionally low.

The Presumptive Cancer legislation across Australia greatly differs in each state, especially with what types of cancers are recognised or if PTSD is included. There are a couple states that have accepted all cancers and PTSD but SA is equal bottom with having the lowest number accepted. We are also questioning if the service time in an organisation can be transferred between states. Some of these points we are asking the Federal Minister to drive consistency across all states to recognise and support volunteers. We also have to understand that only active fire fighter categories are able to claim this compensation, Operations Support does not qualify.

Some of the key points from Association updates, volunteer numbers are all going backwards, question if retention and recruitment should still be lumped together or have each with their own campaigns or strategies, are training requirements getting too much and is WHS too much of the driver, one state has a small basic online course to induct a member so they can get on the truck to be mentored, health standards are starting to be used and Nationally Accredited certificates should be able to be transferred between states.

Rob Webb and Emma Conway from AFAC gave one of the best outlines of what AFAC is doing I have heard. Volunteers are the basis of the fire and rescue organisations providing the core capacity and AFAC are driving to make aspects occur to support that function. Aspects include; first responder mental health for members and their families for years to follow, how to support, maintain or rebuild failing Brigades and understand implications of probable increased public deaths and loss of assets / structures, don't create a new defence body so we need to better invest in the volunteers and the current system, nationally how do we recruit females, what are barriers to recruitment, is training a barrier but we still require it and whilst staff is a revolving

door which impacts on stable leadership the volunteer is the constant which is the main driver of culture.

AFAC is aiming to be the national voice to Federal Government. They have been able to get government to recognise and support the direction of national emergency management and now trying to get a consistent national direction through having a number of government departments looking at all aspects but taking into consideration all the types of major emergencies with fire still likely to kill the most people. They recognise that communities are at more risk, more vulnerable, have changing local demographics and we need to plan and understand how to empower locals to be resilient, know local networks to send out warnings, and inform volunteers so they can adapt and use new technology. Globally, no one has yet worked out how to deal with a volunteer that works all day and all night in essentially two jobs.

Whilst the above has many things that are not new to our Association members, it does show that CFS is not alone in its challenges and that these challenges are found across the nation but I do take heart that these challenges are recognised, on the table for discussion and at some point we as an Association will be involved in discussions either as a driver or partner to get the best for our Volunteers. Being a member of CAVFA gives us another avenue to be informed and to instigate change.

David Lindner