

CAVFA Report by David Lindner
(Council of Australian Volunteer Firefighter Associations)

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We struggled to get everyone together this year, finding dates and also with leadership being away or having health issues. Our Secretary Bruce Corbet, had some health issues and also dealt with the passing of his wife.

Even though we did not have any other official meetings apart from the AGM in August, we followed up on a couple matters discussed at last years AGM. The main one being the national concern of the impact of the “downgrading” of rural mobile phone coverage due to 3G shut down. We wrote to the Federal Communications Minister Anika Wells MP. It took a long time to get a reply which was in essence only general government spiel on what they want to do with communications and did not answer our questions. It also was signed by a staffer not the Minister.

CAVFA was present at the AFAC memorial service in Canberra and laid a wreath on behalf of the Volunteer Associations and the volunteers nationally to recognize the ultimate sacrifice some members have made. It had been common practice for many years that the CAVFA Executive would meet with the Federal Emergency Services Minister after the service. In the past few years this has not occurred due to the Minister not allocating any time to achieve this.

Personally, as I analyze what has happened in the past few years with our relationship with Federal Ministers, I believe there has been a change of practice in the political parties on what lobby groups they deal with and how they deal with them. As CAFVA, we will have to discuss what is happening here and may have to look at other ways of creating influence.

We met with AFAC boss Rob Webb to outline some concerns coming from various states on matters that AFAC have control of. Concerns over the lack of function of the numerous AFAC committees. The Learning & development working group, concern that a number of members don't understand volunteering.

I thank Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria for their close watch and updating of the presumptive cancer list across Australia as governments increase the coverage of cancer types. SA has caught up now and most states are covering similar list of cancers.

We had a presentation at the AGM in Melbourne this year from the Chief Financial Officer Greg Leach of the CFA. Key challenges – climate impacts, volunteerism (out of pocket costs), health & safety (mental health claims major increase), training (recognize impacts of time commitment), incident management (failures across the board), technology (time to roll out + cost + so many things), funding pressure (governments only want project based or quick recognition), regulation (trying to shelter volunteers but some flaws such as working with children). Fire issues with roadside wire rope barrier for access and prevention. Too much fuel with too much red tape to burn. CFA – stands for Call For Anything. Young people have different expectations in training, Managing spontaneous volunteering. Small brigades struggling, cost of living, corporate farms which lower local population. One paper they have just released got my attention is a paper on building a contemporary membership model. Shows we all have similar issues.

Again I will highlight that a number of members see CAVFA as an excellent organization to discuss matters and to learn from each other. We may try to influence when we can but with our members also running their own volunteer associations time is a major factor.

David Lindner