



AUSTRALASIAN ASSEMBLY OF VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADE ASSOCIATIONS INC.

PRESIDENTS REPORT AGM SEPTEMBER 2007

Invitation to join AFAC

I have negotiated a simple form of agreement for the Assembly to work with the Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC).

It is a memorandum of understanding in which both parties agree to work on a broad range of objectives. The objectives being considered are wide enough to embrace any issues which might arise.

The wording is still under discussion and I hope to bring a final copy to the Annual Meeting for consideration and agreement.

AFAC recognises that we are a large component of the fire fighting services and that we bring numbers, skills and experiences to AFAC.

This approach helps AFAC recognise and involve the volunteers without creating a parallel for unions.

I have invited AFAC CEO Namoi Brown to the AGM on the Friday night

The issues I presented to be incorporated within the agreement are as follows

- Consultation with volunteers on issues affecting them prior to implementation
- Training
- Leadership , management , people skills
- Equity and diversity
- Involvement with CALD communities
- Volunteerism recognition, retention , recruitment, support
- Support and recognition to employers of volunteers
- Health and well being issues
- Welfare of volunteers
- Compensation
- Community links
- Effects of coronial and other inquiries on volunteers.
- AEMVF review composition, operation and assistance to volunteers
- Compatible radio communications ,
- Common standard equipment
- Common fire ground practices
- Support to associations
- Exchange of views
- Funding of the assembly and suggestion that AFAC might assist by directing corporate sponsorship to the assembly.
- Protocols to work together

AFAC have recently appointed a new director of HR, Judy Gouldburn, who I have met and attended one AEMVF meeting in Sydney with her.

She is the volunteer liaison person at AFAC. Judy has not a lot of experience with volunteers so I have commenced a rapid education course. The relationship is backed by Namoi's experience with both WA and Victorian volunteers.



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It has taken most of the year for AFAC to replace their HR director, which delayed discussions on joining.

I have requested that Namoi and AFC facilitate corporate sponsorship of the Assembly. Apparently a number of corporate bodies often want to be associated with volunteer's fire-fighters especially after major fires and incidents. However most corporate bodies want to their names on equipment used by volunteers, or a similar tangible display of their logos. Convincing corporate sponsors of highly successful programs such as the AFAC leadership program at AIPM Manly have concerns their presence is not promoted highly.

To be successful in obtaining a sponsorship to support the assembly we need to identify how we might be able to expose a corporate sponsor's logo to out 220,000 members. How far are we prepared to go with branding?

Are the member associations prepared to actively seek corporate sponsorship?

Executive Activities

The executive consists of president, Secretary Bruce Corbett, Vice president Terry Hunter and members Ken Schulz and Richard Davidson.

The executive have met twice during the year to further the work of the assembly

The first in December at Tullamarine, and the second in Mudgee NSW at the RSFA annual Conference in June. I thank the RSFA for their support and commend their conference

The executive have found the need to met face to face during the year to work through issues

The constitution and Strategic plan have been worked through and are presented for adoption.

To enhance working relationships Bob Horner VRFBA has been co-opted to serve as non executive treasurer, which has enhanced our financial management.

The executive has endorsed Richard Davidson to develop the Assembly website which will be presented at the AGM.

I have tried to assist the ACT volunteers during their struggle with the ACT government. I wrote to the ACT chief minister and had a telephone discussion with the emergency services commissioner. I have urged them both to value their volunteers and consult with them prior to introducing changes.

Emergency Management Australia

I believe that EMA as the highly respected Australian emergency response organisation nationally and internationally has done little to support the emergency services volunteers and fire fighters in particular.

The Australian Emergency management Volunteers forum came out of the initial national volunteer's forum in Canberra about 2000; it unfortunately has not progressed under Major General Hori Howard who was a director of NSW SES for a period.

The second National volunteer's forum held in Canberra 4 years after the first forum showed little had been done in 4 years. That conference showed that combating agencies especially fire fighters was more advanced, better organised than the recovery agencies and that little could be taken from a conference where the level of discussion was at the lowest common denominator.



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**The Australasian Assembly
of Volunteer Fire Brigade
Associations Inc.**

The AEMVF continues to operate but achieves nothing and its chairman tries to speak on behalf of all volunteers when there is no such mandate.

Having found that the Canadian national government funds one third of the CIFFC Budget to coordinate forest fire fighting, I believe there is role for the federal government and that we must get EMA to review the AEMVF, and the funding programs it runs each year. The funding program attracted many more applications than could be funded however the program lacks proper guidelines and directions. The funding of national programs saw many non-government organisations operating in recovery sector getting funding for administration and management rather than direct support for volunteers.

CALD

I have attended workshops on Culturally and Diverse Linguistically Communities organise by EMA. This issue is being pursued by most governments trying to link to the new comers to our country. The emergency services need to in the first instance be able to make the CALD community aware of our environment, our weather, and the threats of fire. In delivering awareness sessions we may be able to build bridges to get CALD groups to understand volunteering and come and join us. The success of incorporating Moslem lifesavers (both male and female) into Maroubra Surf Lifesaving Club in Sydney , came out of making them aware of the dangers of water and in particular the surf. Many of the people had never seen the sea or surf.

I am to attend a CALD conference in Melbourne at the end of October organised by MFESB and UFU.

Study Tour

I was successful in obtaining a study tour grant from the Victorian Emergency Services Commissioner which allowed me to travel to Canada during their summer to investigate the resource management systems which allow a body with federal funding arrange the sharing of fire fighting aircraft , crews and equipment across the dominion of Canada. The provinces of Canada the equivalent of our states are responsible for forest fires, equipment and crews. For 25 years they have shared equipment crews and managements systems to combat fires.

I visited British Columbia Forest Services Protection Branch in Victoria, Vancouver Island, and then onto the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) in Winnipeg Manitoba (the centre of Canada) this centre coordinates and effects transfer of resources across the nation.

I was also able to visit;

The Office of the Fire Commissioner Manitoba, who oversees general fire fighting in the province,

The Fire Program section of Manitoba Conservation Department which is responsible for forest fires, and

The Manitoba Emergency Measures Organisation. Which manages all emergencies.

The study tour was most informative, and I have produced a report on my finding which was a requirement of the grant.

The reception my wife and I received from the Canadians was overwhelming; they were so friendly and helpful.

I hope to be able to make a presentation at a future meeting.



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Thanks

I must pay tribute to the hard work of our secretary Bruce Corbett. It has been his hard work that has really produced results. The support from other members of the executive has been inspiring. Even the sheep jokes to try and counter the drive of our kiwi mate have made a good working team.

Where to from here?

I would like to set some targets for the future.

Developing a close working arrangement with AFAC

Achieving independent funding for the assembly

A more responsive contribution by EMA to fire fighters

Greater commitment and consultation and support to volunteers by all levels of government

Greater volunteer involvement in the Bushfire CRC and in Standards Australia.

Bruce Conboy
September 2007