



**Australasian Assembly of
Volunteer Fire Brigades Association
Strategic Plan
2006-2011**

Australasian Assembly of Volunteer Fire Brigade Associations Strategic Plan 2006-2011

Background

Volunteer fire brigades continue to deliver the vast majority of emergency response across Australasia to local communities. This follows a proud tradition and cultural heritage within Australasia of local people banding together, to assist one another primarily in the face of bushfires, but today for many other forms of support and emergency response. This spirit of altruism lives on today and together with Government support and organisational structure, provides a vast emergency response capability that is flexible, disciplined, well equipped and able to face a broad range of risks.

However, volunteers do not automatically appear. Membership of volunteer fire brigades is declining in many rural areas while generally remaining stable in near metropolitan areas. Even where numbers are essentially constant, there is considerable churn of individual membership leading to ongoing demands on training, equipping and developing capability.

Each jurisdiction has an Association to formally represent volunteer interests to fire brigade agencies and to Governments. The existence of many of these volunteer Associations is enshrined in legislation and is an important element of the volunteer fire brigade structure. Their strength lies in volunteers representing volunteers – not paid staff representing volunteers. As the demands on these Associations has increased, some are employing executive officers not to represent volunteers but to administrate what are large and diverse organisations usually with branches located across each country, state or territory.

The average age of rural volunteers reflects the average age of the rural population. In some jurisdictions the average age is over 50. The demands on these volunteers continue to increase. Apart from the expectations that they will attend an increasingly broad range of emergency responses, demands also include increased administration, training commitments and compliance with OHS legislation. Some brigades feel uncomfortable about being asked to focus on preparing for major regional emergency events, when they volunteered to assist their local community.

It is within this context that the volunteer Associations throughout Australasia are striving to develop a national voice and draw strength through national networks. The representation of volunteers remains a responsibility within each jurisdiction. However, the volunteer Associations are seeking to provide a structure and platform for them to be heard and to lobby nationally to raise their profile and highlight the concerns of individual volunteer firefighters across Australasia. Through developing an Australasian profile of volunteer firefighters, the Assembly seeks to provide volunteers with greater recognition and support and thereby encourage more to volunteer.

Purpose

This Strategic Plan has been created to provide leadership and structure to the future of the AAVFBA through a shared vision, a framework for consultation and cooperation and as a basis for strategic direction through to 2011. The development of this Plan reflects the Assembly's commitment to consultation, cooperation, a more strategic approach to future activities together with the identification of specific goals that can be identified, measured and achieved.

The future viability of volunteer firefighting in Australasia is reliant to some degree on the strength and success of this the AAVFBA. While individual Associations will continue to lobby and represent the interests of their volunteers in their jurisdictions, it is at a national level in both Australia and New Zealand where significant change, improvement and increased capability will be achieved. National representation in both countries requires a united voice that is focussed on strategic aims. That is the purpose of this Plan.

Parameters of the Plan

This Strategic Plan projects over the period 2006 to 2011. Its intent is to map out the preferred future of the AAVFBA – a vision that is shared by all volunteer Associations. Strategic planning provides for informed decision-making regarding resource allocation, priority of effort and long-term results. It is part of a continuous cycle of planning, monitoring, evaluation and improvement. The Plan proposes a phased approach to developing the capability of this Australasian Assembly.

Operating Framework

The AAVFBA does not operate within a legislative framework, rather, a constitution exists that has been approved by the Assembly members and a copy should be read in conjunction with this Plan.¹ The Assembly exists to develop strong networks across Associations and to represent the interests of those Associations when requested.

Description

The AAVFBA includes New Zealand and all Australian State and Territory volunteer Associations who choose to join. In New South Wales and Tasmania, these Associations could include retained firefighters. The Assembly provides the opportunity for networking, a channel for national and international comment, a point of contact for Australasian representation and an alternative lobby group within a jurisdiction should a particular, member Association seek support nationally. It is organised with the following elected officers:

AAVFBA President
Vice President
Honorary Secretary

Executive Officer [when appointed]

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Volunteer Associations are the membership
(not individual volunteers)

¹ This is the same basis on which AFAC operates. It has no legislative base and operates through cooperative arrangement between agencies.

The AAVFBA has historically provided the following:

- an opportunity to meet annually at a formal conference and share papers, exchange ideas, discuss and explore national and Australasian issues
- an opportunity to network and gain an awareness of national and international trends in volunteer firefighting
- an opportunity to learn from one another
- represent volunteer Associations at Australian and New Zealand Standards meetings
- represent volunteer Associations during the COAG National Bushfire Inquiry
- make representations to AFAC

Benefits

The AAVFBA intends to provide the following in the future:

- representation in New Zealand and all Australian State and Territories volunteer fire services
- a credible, volunteer based, independently funded Assembly
- a united voice for volunteer firefighter Associations on agreed issues.
- a national and/or Australasian voice on volunteer firefighter issues to the media and to Governments
- provide a forum and structure for information sharing
- representation to national ministers and members of parliament in Australia and New Zealand and when invited, to State members of parliament
- representation to corporate, business and industry leaders
- facilitation of national/Australasian sponsorship for volunteer firefighters
- set and monitor standards for volunteer firefighting Associations
- provide support and assistance to smaller volunteer firefighter Associations
- meeting the expectations of volunteer firefighters
- raising the awareness in communities of the role and service delivery by volunteer firefighters

Stakeholders

Internal

- All Australian State, Territory and New Zealand volunteer firefighter Associations

External

- Fire Agencies
- AFAC
- EMA
- Standards Association
- Emergency service volunteer Associations
- Volunteering Australia
- Australian and New Zealand Governments

While both internal and external stakeholders are identified, this Plan reflects the intention of the Association to initially concentrate on internal stakeholders only, and as the Assembly matures, extend the focus to external stakeholders.

Mission and Values

Mission – *what the AAVFBA does.*

The mission of the AAVFBA is to:

‘Represent volunteer firefighting Associations throughout Australia and New Zealand at a national level in each country through networking and promoting the interests of volunteer firefighters.

Values – *what is most important to the AAVFBA.*

The AAVFBA is a volunteer organisation – answering to volunteer Associations. Its values are:

- **Volunteer ethic and community service.** Australian State & territory, and New Zealand Associations are founded on the volunteer ethic. Community service remains a major motive for volunteering and volunteer agencies are often the fabric of rural communities.
- **Leadership.** The Assembly seeks and values leadership. It strives to identify a vision for volunteer firefighting in Australasia and map out a path to achieve it. The Assembly encourages volunteer leadership at every level.
- **Consultation.** The Assembly relies on the support and guidance of member Associations and therefore consultation with those Associations is fundamental.
- **Equity.** The Assembly considers all Association members equal.
- **Acknowledging diversity.** The Assembly accepts and desires diversity amongst its member Associations, volunteers and communities.
- **Respect for the autonomy of constituent Associations.** Each Country State and Territory Association represents the volunteers within its jurisdiction. As such, the Assembly acknowledges their role and that they are independent entities.

Vision and Goals

Vision – *what the AAVFBA is aiming to achieve.*

The AAVFBA vision is:

‘To be recognised and respected as the national/Australasian voice of volunteer firefighter Associations’.

Goals – strategic intentions to achieve the AAVFBA vision. Goals identified are:

- Advocacy on behalf of its volunteer firefighter Associations on national/Australasian issues
- Representation of the views of volunteers within AFAC
- Provide opportunities for volunteers to meet at national/Australasian forums/conferences
- Consult and communicate with member Associations
- Encourage the development of future Australasian volunteer leaders
- Promote best practice in community firefighting

Goal 1 - Advocacy on behalf of its volunteer firefighter Associations on national/Australasian issues

Objectives

- Promote the role of volunteer (and where represented retained) firefighters
- Raise issues with National Governments (and where invited State Governments), Members of Parliament and departmental staff
- Raise issues in the national media that promote the role and well being of volunteer firefighters

Performance monitoring and evaluation

- Identify issues of national/Australasian concern and actively seek to raise them with relevant Ministers, Members of Parliament and departmental staff
- Monitor current media issues and exploit opportunities in the media as they arise, particularly over the summer months

Goal 2 - Representation of the views of volunteers within AFAC, EMA, Australian and New Zealand Standards and other national forums

Objectives

- Attend AFAC conferences and appropriate meetings
- Attend EMA volunteer forums and be appropriately represented
- Be represented on the AFAC Volunteer and Employees working group
- Provide speakers annually at AFAC Conferences

Performance monitoring and evaluation

- Be invited to AFAC/EMA conferences/forums/ meetings
- Propose papers for presentation at AFAC and CRC conferences

Goal 3 – Provide opportunities for volunteers to network at national/Australasian forums/conferences

Objectives

- Volunteers to network and develop individual relationships with volunteers in other Associations
- Seek representation at national/Australasian forums
- Liaise with Volunteering Australia
- Remain represented at national volunteer summit

Performance monitoring and evaluation

- Organise an Australasian conference annually
- Contact stakeholders at least annually
- Ensure the AAVFBA is represented at all relevant national conferences in Australia and New Zealand

Goal 4 - Consult and communicate with member Associations

Objectives

- Establish and maintain a website promoting AAVFBA
- Conduct telephone conferences as required and make electronic contact to update member Associations on relevant issues
- Publish AAVFBA position papers on key issues

Performance monitoring and evaluation

- Website is online, maintained and current
- Teleconferences conducted or electronic updates
- Ensure AAVFBA position papers once generated are on the website

Goal 5 - Encourage the development of future Association volunteer leaders

Objectives

- Mentor future volunteer leaders through sponsoring opportunities for development
- Encourage future leaders to become involved in AAVFBA
- Demonstrate leadership through the work of AAVFBA

Performance monitoring and evaluation

- Encourage future leaders to attend AAVFBA events
- Identify succession options within the AAVFBA to maintain strong leadership within the Assembly
- Lead by example
- Lobby to ensure leadership development is offered to volunteers

Goal 6– Promote best practice in community safety

Objectives

- Provide opportunities for sharing information on operational practice
- Provide opportunities to visit agencies and gain a broader appreciation of existing practices
- Actively support 'lessons learnt' initiatives
- Support initiatives towards implementing common equipment standards

Performance monitoring and evaluation

- Create a webpage that allows volunteers to comment on operational practices and share knowledge and experiences
- Facilitate visits between member Associations to gain a broader understanding of procedures in other Countries, States and Territories
- Develop a summary of any 'lessons learnt' by member agencies and circulate to all Associations

Accountability

Accountability regarding the Strategic Plan is primarily through the development and actioning of an Annual Business Plan for the Assembly. The Annual Business Plan is to identify specific tasks related to each Strategic Goal that are to be achieved in any given year. This annual task effectively becomes a performance measurement for that strategic goal. Costs and responsible officers are identified for each task in the Annual Plan.

Funding

Each member Association will pay an annual subscription fee, laid out in the constitution. However, for the Assembly to be truly effective and achieve the vision of this Plan, additional funding will be required beyond what Associations will be able to contribute. This will need to be independently sourced directly from Government and through private sector sponsorships that recognise the value of volunteer firefighters and the Assembly that represents and promotes their interests.

Office Administration

Administration of the Assembly will be ultimately achieved by a full time Executive Officer but until there is sufficient funding for that appointment, the burden of administration will be shared amongst the member Associations.

Development

The priority of development is identified as:

- Independent funding to develop the Assembly as a viable national body
- The appointment of an executive officer and Australasian office
- Specific lobbying where required to meet Assembly goals

Concurrently, the Assembly will develop a series of national policy statements on issues such as media comment, volunteer involvement and individual development.

Conclusion

Volunteer firefighters make up over half of all volunteer emergency workers in Australasia. They have evolved from local community members assisting neighbours, to become professional emergency service workers committed to serving communities. Throughout this evolution, their pride and enthusiasm for volunteering has remained. The Assembly recognises the social capital invested in volunteer fire fighters. It is focussed on promoting their role and well being, for the benefit and safety of all communities across Australasia.

Approved at the AAVFBA Executive Meeting in Melbourne on the 2nd & 3rd December 2006 as per the recommendations from the Assembly Annual Meetings in Auckland 2005 and Fiskville 2006.