

MINUTES OF VFFA ORDINARY MEETING 2016
HELD ON
SATURDAY 6 AUGUST 2016
PARKES SERVICES CLUB
9-17 SHORT STREET PARKES NSW 2870

Meeting commenced 1140 hours.

Attendees; as per the attendance list.

1. **Welcome by Chairman:** President Mr Michael Holton welcomed all to the meeting and looked forward to working with the Executive and members over the next 12 months. Special thanks for our guest's Cr Ken Keith OAM, Cr Phyllis Miller OAM, Mr Ben Shields, The Hon Robert Brown MLC and Mr Scott Barrett for attending the meeting.
2. Cr Phyllis Miller OAM Forbes Shire Council Mayor was invited to address the meeting. Cr Miller expressed her gratitude to the RFS volunteer and the work they do across the community. Cr Miller related some of her experiences with the RFS and supporting the formation of the advisory committee many years ago.
3. Cr Ken Keith OAM Parkes Shire Council Mayor was invited to address the meeting. Cr Keith congratulated the elected executive and the congratulated Peter Cannon on his efforts on establishing the VFFA and being awarded the OAM. Cr Keith spoke with the Minister and the Commissioner yesterday (Friday) at the West Parkes RFB station opening and handing over of two new vehicles. It was apparent from this conversation that the RFS HQ will not be moved west of the Blue Mountains and will remain in the Sydney basin. The Local Government will still lobby and push the issue of putting Rural back into the RFS but cannot see a likely outcome in this favour. Some other issues discussed with the Minister was that the NSWFR have been allocated funding to build a new station in Parkes, Parkes RFS HQ brigade has out grown its existing site in the industrial complex and a greenfield site is currently being looked for and support for funding to build the new station has been requested. Due to good number of females in the brigade and the cadet course there are no change room facilities for the women. Cr Keith requested any support from the VFFA in this area would be appreciated.
4. General discussion around the room took place with an example of the Dept of Primary Industries (DPI) being moved to Orange many years ago with no adverse disadvantage to the work they do. Cr Miller stated that a Local Government conference is being held in October and she will mention the issue of the decentralisation of the RFS.

5. Mr Scott Barrett Nationals member for Orange was asked to address the meeting. Mr Barrett related his experience as a volunteer with firefighting and his current relationship with the RFS. Mr Barrett stated that we may not get all the RFS HQ moved to the bush but we should push for functions of the RFS to be relocated out west and the DPI is a great example of what can be achieved.

6. The Hon Robert Brown, Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party was asked to address the meeting. Mr Brown spoke on the recommendations from the report on the Wambelong Fires and how some of them were totally disregarded. Two of the issues not addressed was that the VFFA should be recognised as an industrial body to support the volunteers and secondly that the RFS should be decentralised. Many western councils would want the RFS in their area due to the financial benefits but also it is where the rural is in the RFS. First and foremost the Government must be convinced to decentralise, Parramatta is not decentralising. With technology has come a long way and there is nothing stopping the RFS moving the HQ out west. One recommendation taken up was that the NPWLS, State Forest and Crown Land are secondary fire responders. This is one small step and the issue of decentralisation must be explored fully and given a wide variety of options.
Mr Brown expressed the need for the VFFA to push its self out across the volunteer membership and the VFFA needs to communicate with all other volunteer organisations and the NSWFR and support each other to increase and maintain a good membership.
Questions were raised from the floor to Mr Robert Brown such as 'what is happening now with the recommendations from the Wambelong Fire?' Robert gave a brief explanation of the process and where it is up to.
The issue of membership numbers was raised. The President stated that until the RFS conducted an audit on their membership enrolment of the members who have actually completed a membership form and not a new RFS member under the Opt Out system then we will be on a level playing field.

Lunch.

7. Mr Ben Shields Ex Deputy Mayor Dubbo City Council was asked to address the meeting. Mr Shields spoke of the excellent opportunities that are available in Dubbo if the RFS HQ was decentralised to western NSW. The availability of the airport 5 mins from Dubbo centre with daily services to Sydney nearly hourly, flights to Melbourne, Brisbane and Newcastle. Intersected by three major highways and geography the centre of the state of NSW. A good example of this was the move to Orange of the Dept of Agriculture and the Dept of Local Government to Nowra which has set a good precedent that decentralisation does work. It's time our elected representatives within the NSW Government and make decisions which are based on what is good for the state and stop following the vested interest of bureaucrat's who are simply more worried about keeping their Sydney life style and not the vested interests of the volunteer organisation. Today with the support of your organisation the VFFA we need to more than ever push this issue and be a thorn in the side of the government of both parties for the benefit of the RFS and its members. I urge all the members of the VFFA to fight hard along with Local Government Councils to bring this change which will benefit everyone in the state.
Questions and discussion were field from the members present with Ben Shields. Rod Young recommended that a copy of the Environmental Code to Ben.

President Mick Holton thanked Ben for his presentation.

8. **Apologies:** As per AGM minutes.

Moved Don Tarlington

Second Jon Russell

Carried

9. **Previous minutes of 2015 Ordinary meeting:** The secretary presented the minutes of the 2015 Ordinary meeting.

Greg Godde moved that the minutes of the 2014 Ordinary meeting were a true and accurate copy of the meeting. Second Brian Williams

Carried

10. **Business arising:** National Fire Experts Group funding. The grant money received from the Minister for Emergency Services Office will be utilised as part of this project to inform local communities on sustainable environmental hazard reduction. Mr Victor Stevenson has indicated he is interested in joining the group as an aboriginal elder in native bush regeneration after low intensity hazard reduction.

11. **Correspondence:** The correspondence report was presented as per the AGM.

12. **Financial Report:** The financial report was presented as per the AGM.

Michael spoke on the current interest on the VFFA account. We need to look at trying to get the money to work for the VFFA and look at diversifying some of the funds in the account.

Discussion with some suggestions was fielded amongst the meeting. Brian Williams recommended that the Executive gather the ideas and discuss over a phone hook-up and make the decision that would be best suit the VFFA needs.

Michael also spoke on the Electoral Fund account that was formed prior to the last election due to the VFFA campaign strategy. The account must be audited every 12 months for the Electoral Commission which takes a bit of time for a nil return. It is recommended that the account be closed and advise the Electoral Commission that the VFFA will not continue with the application.

After questions and discussion, it was proposed that any decision be deferred until Michael Scholz does some research into what is required financially and administrative to maintain the account.

Moved M. Scholz

Seconded A. Scholz

Carried.

13. **President's report:** Michael Holton spoke on the following points;

- New direction within the VFFA.
 - Existing programs such as magazine, bullying and harassment, RFSA raffle monies to be spent.
 - Improved communications, webpage, social media, cloud based networks.
 - Promotion of the NFEG.
 - Policies and procedures
 - VFFA constitution

Brian Williams congratulated all involved whilst he was President and it was an honour and privilege to work with the executive during the last 12 months and looks forward to continue working as the Senior Vice President.

14. **Media Officer report:** Jon Russell gave a report on the following points;

- VFFA magazine and content from members is all included.
- Trundle ABBA festival.
- New advertisers in the magazine
- Attended the 50th Anniversary of the Tumbledown Dick RFB and handed a plaque on behalf of the VFFA
- Presentation of VFFA plaque to Barry Mac 2ST radio station
- Council of Emergency Volunteers – established in 2011. No meeting since late 2014 and did not achieve a single thing.
- General media
- Some special thanks goes to the Hon Robert Borsak, SFFP who has given the VFFA immense support over the last 12 months and the only NSW State political party to support the affected people of the Wambalong Fires.
- Recommendation #19 of the enquiry into the fire was not supported by the Emergency Services minister Mr David Elliott.
- The merger of the CFA Metropolitan and volunteer CFA which could have ramifications across the border.
- History on Emergency Services ministers in NSW
- Invitations to the meeting of prominent NSW ministers and did not attend this meeting.

15. **WHS report:** Greg Godde gave a brief report on some of the issues that have been reported throughout the year.

- Bullying still receiving complaints
- PTSD in amongst some of the volunteers who are seeing legal team for further action
- Shane Bryant gave a report on Health and Safety Representatives (HSR's) that are required under the WHS Act 2011 in all workgroups within an organisation. Shane has attended some hearings with Industrial Relations Commission on some of the decisions made by RFS staff that were above the law which did not comply with the Act. The RFS, PSA and RFSA have met and decided on how HSR's would be elected without any consultation with the volunteers. A Service Standard is currently being drafted and waiting for its consultative process.

16. **Web master report:** Michael Holton covered the following topics;

- Email addresses for executive positions
- New shop ware for the magazine online
- Software purchases
- Newsletter each week
- Weekly phone conference trial for better communications within the executive.

17. General Business:

- Jon Russell displayed the new shirts that he had made up to give the executive a high-profile image when attending meetings. Cost would be \$35.00 per shirt.
- Magazine distribution – was everyone getting a copy and hopefully the problem with duplicate posting has been rectified.

18. Set a permanent pre-arranged time for future Ordinary Meetings - as per the AGM outcome 1st Saturday August each year.

19. Meeting closed 4.15pm.

Greg Godde
Secretary
VFFA

Mick Holton
President
VFFA