

To: The Commissioner,  
NSW RFS,  
Murray Rose Avenue,  
Sydney Olympic Park,  
NSW 2127



Cc. see list below.

19<sup>th</sup> November 2023

**Ref: OPEN LETTER REGARDING RFS RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN**

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your 'Letter from the Commissioner', dated 8<sup>th</sup> of November 2023 and am frankly in disbelief at what you are espousing. Whilst I am sure most will shake their head and move on, I am compelled to reply to your correspondence with this open letter.

Despite my maternal grandfather having Aboriginal heritage, my first reaction to your letter was that I could not support the RAP and should resign from the RFS. While this action would not affect the RFS as a whole, I am currently reserving that decision, as being a member of a small brigade, this action would only affect the small rural community in which I live.

Not only 1 month ago, Australians went to the polls to vote on the very subject you, through this document are subscribing to. The overwhelming majority of voters voted **NO** in this referendum, for what was a number of reasons, most popularly, not wanting to discriminate and segregate a small proportion of Australia's population from the remainder.

I can recall, I think earlier this year, you calling for those with aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage to nominate for a working group, however I am sure, like most of the RFS members, I was unaware of the full ramifications of what the outcome of this working group would be. I am also sure that as a grass roots organisation the general membership should have been advised on the outcomes and asked to ratify those outcomes before being endorsed and published by the executive as the final document.

The outcome of a majority Aboriginal working group in conjunction with an Aboriginal Consultancy company (Stonecrab) to produce a submission which is then endorsed by another Aboriginal body (Reconciliation Australia) is predictable and I believe does not reflect the true sentiments of the majority of volunteers in the RFS.

It would probably be timely to remind you that we already have a document covering this very subject. Over many years the RFS has strived to become a fully inclusive, equal opportunity organisation as reflected in our Code of Conduct (see attached abridged targeted version below). Australians have an expectation that we live in a country without discrimination and prejudice, both positive or negative. This document reeks of positive discrimination and so would contradict this code of conduct. Is the Code of Conduct to be re-written as it will be now outdated? It seems that the Uluru Statement from the Heart defeated at the October referendum is still alive and well, although in a new guise.

As volunteers we joined the RFS to contribute to our communities in time of need. We did not join to become a pawn in the politically correct world of Macquarie Street (or indeed Murray Rose Avenue). We **ALL** expect your support, for with no volunteers, you would be a Commissioner without portfolio. Under our current Code of Conduct you have an obligation to treat **ALL** volunteers equally, without favour. This RAC document does not fulfill that obligation.

Are you seriously expecting the 70,912 of the 72,000 RFS members who do not identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being railroaded on this journey?

While the initial objective of might have had merit, the Reconciliation Action Plan (November 2023-April 2025) is so wrong on every level. Every sentence in the document raises a question, the answers to which are not palatable.

Sir, by supporting this document you are about to turn what is a proud organisation of volunteers, responsible for the prevention and suppression of fires in rural areas as its sole role, into an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocacy group as its primary objective and a fire safety organisation as a secondary function. I am reminded of a line from somewhere "That we are one and free" and again say, I cannot support this folly.

Yours sincerely,



Cc: Minister for Emergency Services  
NSW Parliament,  
52 Martin Place,  
Sydney,  
NSW 2000

Shadow Minister for Emergency Services,  
NSW Parliament,  
52 Martin Place,  
Sydney,  
NSW 2000

Secretary/Members of Volunteer Firefighters Association of NSW

## **CODE OF CONDUCT (salient points)**

### Mutual Respect:

Bullet point 1. We actively seek and value everyone's contribution.

Bullet Point 2. We acknowledge differences in people.

Bullet Point 5. We respect the dignity of each and every person in all our communications.

### Adaptability and Resourcefulness:

Bullet Point 3. We encourage open mindedness.

### One Team, Many Players, One Purpose:

Bullet Point 1. We encourage diversity: our organisation is reflective of our communities.

Bullet Point 2. We encourage contribution from all areas.

Bullet Point 3. Consultation and engagement of stakeholders are essential to the success of the NSW RFS.

Bullet Point 4. We target a diverse range of groups in our communications and the promotion of our organisation.

### Integrity and Trust:

Bullet Point 3. We are both respectful and open with each other.

### Support, Friendship and Camaraderie:

Bullet Point 1. We provide a welcome atmosphere for all.

Bullet Point 2. We support each other in all activities.

Bullet Point 3. We foster a sense of belonging, purpose, enjoyment and involvement.

### Community and Our Environment:

Bullet Point 2. We undertake our roles and behave in a way that is inspiring to others.

Bullet Point 5. We are mindful of the ecological and environmental impact of our activities.

### Knowledge and Learning:

Bullet Point 2. We encourage self-reflection and personal growth.