

From the Chief Officer

Number 139 - 1 April 2015



Thinking About The Future After Fiskville

Last week the **CFA Board** made the decision to permanently close Fiskville. On the basis of recent water tests, the Board decided that they could no longer guarantee the health and safety of our people and our visitors. The site will be shut permanently. This is a sad time for CFA. In my travels I have felt (and shared) your tears, shock, dismay, anger, frustration and just plain grief. Last Friday afternoon, I looked into the uncertain eyes of Fiskville catering and housekeeping staff and I felt hopeless because, right at that moment, I see no immediate solution for these good people. Elsewhere, I sense the great empathy across the broader CFA and a collective sadness. **Our responsibility is now to care for the staff from Fiskville and define a new future for them.** We need to accept that the Board has made a careful and considered decision and a lawful one. As **Board Chair Claire Higgins and CEO Michael Wootten** emphasise, now is the time to look to the future. Investigations into alternate training sites are under way. We need to consider how and where we deliver training in fire investigation, plantation and forest firefighting, TEWTS and driver training. We need to think about where and how we exhibit our past and present culture – photos, trophies and paintings. The future of the memorial wall must be discussed, not just with CFA members, but with the bereaved families of those members who have lost their lives serving the community through CFA. So many aspects of our culture, our history, our camaraderie and our “feeling of home” are strongly tied to Fiskville. So now it is really important to focus on how we develop a new facility that meets our needs. Sometime soon, we also need to have a respectful and meaningful departure ceremony - an opportunity to celebrate the good times of Fiskville, to remember the memories, to say goodbye and then move onto a new set of arrangements. The past few weeks have been sad and uncertain. We need to design a future that is positive, certain and a place for CFA to feel proud about. This will take some time. Keep talking to your colleagues, friends and families. Stay positive. Focus on supporting those directly affected by this decision. CFA's Leadership Team, through CEO Michael Wootten is committed to keeping you informed as future is considered. CFA's Peers, Chaplains and member assistance program is available to anyone who might be feeling as if they need support through this tough time.

Has your Brigade a connection to the First World War?

With the 100th anniversary of the ANZAC landing at Gallipoli coming up, it is appropriate to think about the relevance of this event to CFA. Whilst CFA was formed in 1945, it was preceded by the Country Fire Brigades Board (from 1890) and prior to that, individual town fire brigades. The official CFA history records that *“After war was declared in August 1914, hundreds of bronzed, fit young Australians downed their tools, rakes and hoes, pens and hammers to enlist in the first Australian Imperial Force (AIF)”*. In December 1914, the CFBB had 2,444 registered volunteers. By 1917 the numbers had fallen to 2,265. By the end of the war, a total of 893 of the then 2,308 registered volunteers had enlisted in the AIF – this is more than one in three. Between 1914 and 1918, 147 CFBB volunteers were killed in action and a further 191 were wounded. The AIF was a largely volunteer force, drawn from people of all walks of life from almost every settlement in the country. There is a striking commonality with CFA (and the then CFBB): just as CFA is a volunteer based service, so too was the AIF. Volunteering was one of the characteristics of our diggers – and it continues to be part of the spirit of Australia. We, as a volunteer based fire and emergency service, should be proud of this connection. **Does your Brigade have connections to or memories of First World War soldiers, sailors, airmen and nurses? Do you know their names? Have you any histories or stories to share?** On this the centenary of the landing of Gallipoli, we should be ready to commemorate their service and our connection with their fire service history.

District 27 Is Now Operational

This morning **Minister Jane Garrett** officially opened the doors at the new District 27 Headquarters at Morwell. Six months in the planning, **ACO Trevor Owen, OM Bill Johnstone and DPC Chair Steve Barling** have led volunteers and staff to a very successful conclusion in a very short time frame. There was a very large crowd from State and Local Government elected representatives, volunteers, collaborating organisations and local industry to reinforce the tremendous relationships that exist between the key players in this area of critical importance to the State. Min Garrett also handed over the keys of two Compressed Air Foam Units (looking resplendent in her newly issued wildfire PPC!).

“You have to accept whatever comes and the only important thing is that you meet it with courage and the best you have to give.” – Eleanor Roosevelt