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## **Emergency management volunteers: local heroes the new normal in Australia's response arsenal**

*The vital role emergency management volunteers play in emergency and disaster relief to be highlighted at AFAC19*

Volunteers from across Australia's emergency services will drive a surge in attendance for this year's AFAC19 powered by INTERSCHUTZ conference, to be held in conjunction with the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference (ADRC) in Melbourne at the end of August.

An estimated 87 per cent of the Australian emergency management sector is made up of volunteers, with AFAC reporting that of their 296,000 members, made up of fire, SES and land management agencies, 254,000 of these members are volunteers, and 100,000 of these are based in Victoria<sup>1</sup>.

The **Country Fire Authority (CFA)** and the **Victorian State Emergency Services (SES)**, along with the **Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB)**, **Emergency Management Victoria (EMV)** and the **Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning** will be in attendance at the largest event of its kind to date.

In AFAC19's host state of Victoria, the CFA alone is comprised of over 60,000 volunteers, across 1,200 brigades, who provide the state with emergency services valued at \$1billion<sup>2</sup> annually, as well as untold millions in property, environment, and natural resources across the state. They also assist to prepare, educate and support prevention in local communities, as well as build resilience and recovery, therefore, playing a key role in protecting the state economy.

Similarly, 95 per cent of the Victorian SES is made up of volunteers, with a team of 5,000 in 149 units spread across the state.

Dr Faye Bendrups, Vice-chair, National SES Volunteers Association says, that the average age of volunteers is going up, as fewer young people are coming through the ranks to replace them.

"The average age of an emergency services volunteer firefighter is 48 years<sup>3</sup> and we aren't seeing them being replaced at the rate we need. This is partly due to the perceived lack of flexibility that is offered and the changing nature of the younger workforce, with many young people on casual contracts which means they are not regularly available for training and frontline response work.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.volunteer.vic.gov.au/become-emergency-services-volunteer>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vfbv.com.au/index.php/about/ourvolunteers/aboutvolunteers>

<sup>3</sup> <https://volunteerfirefighters.org.au/future-volunteering-fire-emergency-services-australia-wide>

“Other reasons cited for the ageing volunteer population are potentially a lack of gender and cultural diversity in the sector, especially when compared to other non-emergency service volunteer sectors,” said Dr Bendrups.

These challenges will be discussed at AFAC19, with the overall theme for the conference *riding the wave of change* and how the sector is transitioning to a new normal in response to factors creating significant change within communities, and the issues impacting the volunteer emergency management sector.

Local and international speakers will explore big topics including:

- **Andrew McCullough & Katie Moulton** NSW State Emergency Service and NSW Department of Justice, *Harnessing Community Spirit in Berowra – Redefining how NSW SES use community resources during disasters*
- **Jill Downard** Department of Fire and Emergency Services Western Australia *Virtual Operations Support Team: harnessing corporate volunteering to create social media response surge capacity during incidents*
- **Jon Kneebone** Encourage, maintain, and strengthen the capability of volunteers *Fire and Emergency New Zealand*
- **Anastasia Bougesis** Team Rubicon Australia *Team Rubicon Australia: Empowering Communities to Recover through the Management of Spontaneous Volunteers in Disaster Relief Operations*

Stuart Ellis, CEO, AFAC said emergency management volunteers not only help in disasters but help to build more resilient communities.

“Volunteers are trained to be able to prevent, prepare for and respond to natural disasters and emergencies. They are highly skilled and are trained to provide first aid, navigation, administration, communication, incident management, support and leadership and marine rescue, as well as playing a leading role in community engagement and education, incident prevention and mitigation.

“AFAC19 is an important opportunity to bring together staff and volunteers from across the many segments of the emergency management sector, to discuss important issues specific to them and the vital role they play in crisis response and day-to-day in their local communities,” said Mr Ellis.

AFAC19 will also feature the largest exhibition to date including an Expo Stage program with 30 practical presentations, and a show floor with nearly 200 companies showcasing the latest in emergency management products and services.

AFAC19 powered by INTERSHUTZ is being held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) from 27-30 August 2019. The Australian Disaster Resilience Conference and the Institution of Fire Engineers Australia National Conference will be held alongside AFAC19.

Further information is available at [www.afaconference.com.au](http://www.afaconference.com.au)

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### Notes to Editors:

- All keynote speakers are **available for interview** on request via media contacts below
- Available for interview on request via media contacts below:
  - Stuart Ellis, CEO, Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authority Council (AFAC)
  - Dr Richard Thornton, CEO, Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC)
  - Harvey Stockbridge, Managing Director, Deutsche Messe
- Accredited media are **invited to attend** AFAC19 and will be hosted in the media room. Additional support for live-cross, broadcast and interviews with stakeholders can be arranged. Limited broadcast vans can be accommodated onsite. Please register for your media pass by sending your name, position and publication title to [elizabeth@zadroagency.com.au](mailto:elizabeth@zadroagency.com.au)

### Media contacts:

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Images: All images can be found on the [AFAC Flickr page](#) and can be used royalty free.

#### About AFAC19

**27-30 August | Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre**  
***A shift to the new norm: riding the wave of change***

Returning to Melbourne for four action-packed days, AFAC19 powered by INTERSCHUTZ will attract delegates and visitors from emergency and security services agencies, all levels of government, non-government organisations, the private sector, research and education institutions and community groups from Australia and worldwide.

The AFAC19 program will incorporate the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC Research Forum, the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference and The Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE) National Conference.

Themed “*A shift to the new norm: riding the wave of change*” AFAC19 explores how the sector is transitioning to a new normal in a rapidly changing world.

AFAC19 powered by INTERSCHUTZ is a joint venture between Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) and Deutsche Messe, trading in Australia as Hannover Fairs Pty Ltd.

### **Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC)**

Website: [www.afaconference.com.au/](http://www.afaconference.com.au/)

Facebook: [@AFACnews](https://www.facebook.com/AFACnews)

Twitter: [@AFACnews](https://twitter.com/AFACnews)

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/australasian-fire-and-emergency-service-authorities-council>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCu18YmKgFcL27XBKFI7Klw>

Hashtag: #AFAC19

### **Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC**

Facebook: [@bnhcrc](https://www.facebook.com/bnhcrc)

Twitter: [@bnhcrc](https://twitter.com/bnhcrc)

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/bushfire-and-natural-hazards-crc-a0919043/>

YouTube: [www.youtube.com/user/bnhcrc](http://www.youtube.com/user/bnhcrc)

### **Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience**

Website: [www.aidr.org.au/adrc](http://www.aidr.org.au/adrc)

Facebook: [@AIDRnews](https://www.facebook.com/AIDRnews)

Twitter: [@AIDR\\_news](https://twitter.com/AIDR_news)

LinkedIn: <https://au.linkedin.com/company/aidr>

Hashtag: #ADRC2019

### **Institution of Fire Engineers**

Website: <https://www.afaconference.com.au/ife/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/InstitutionOfFireEngineersAustraliaBranch/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/institution-of-fire-engineers/>