

AFAC – the National Council for Fire and Emergency Services

Statement on Workforce Diversity

Introduction

In acknowledgement of the unacceptably low levels of diversity, particularly in urban fire and rescue services, and approaching International Women's Day on 8 March 2016, AFAC Council has identified changes required to increase attraction, recruitment and inclusion levels across gender, racial and cultural diversity. This statement outlines a commitment to leverage best practice from across and outside our sector, to increase our national standing against this key element of workforce development and effectiveness.

AFAC Member agencies acknowledge that:

- All AFAC member agencies are committed to increasing workforce diversity.
- Low levels of diversity can result in problematic organisational cultures, a lack of innovation and lateral thinking and resistance to positive change.
- Traditional approaches to attracting urban firefighters have been unsuccessful in developing workforces that reflect their communities, and new approaches are needed.
- Any efforts to increase diversity must include strong internal inclusion strategies, so that differences are welcomed and celebrated rather than resisted and feared.
- Diverse workforces:
 - Better reflect the communities we serve;
 - Assist in better understanding and effectively dealing with community risks, as well as community capabilities;
 - Are a source of diverse skills and new ideas, which are essential to all phases of emergency and land management; and
 - Improve organisational culture through inclusion and more open communication, which in turn can enhance mental health and well-being.

AFAC CEOs, Commissioners, Chief Officers and Fire Managers:

- Acknowledge the progress made in all sectors of the industry but accept that much more needs to be done.
 - Commit to diversity strategies that will not result in a lowering or compromising of performance or safety.
 - Acknowledge that in order to build a more diverse workforce, strategies are needed to achieve a critical mass from varied backgrounds and genders.
 - Acknowledge that without positive actions that are proactively implemented by industry leaders, there will be negligible progress.
 - Agree to improving the internal cultures and behaviours within our organisations to be more supportive and inclusive of a more diverse group of people.
 - Commit to understanding unconscious bias and addressing this within agencies.
 - Commit to cooperatively developing and sharing best practice strategies to increase diversity.
 - Welcome that diversity is a key theme of the annual AFAC Conference for the second successive year in 2016 and that it is being held in partnership with 'Women and Firefighting Australasia'.
 - Task the Workforce Management Group with developing recommendations and commit to reviewing issues of diversity twice yearly when meeting as AFAC Council.
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