



# Volunteer Charter

NOVEMBER 2013



## Preamble

Volunteers of the ACT Emergency Services Agency are fundamental to emergency management in the Australian Capital Territory and their value and importance is recognised. Volunteers and the commitment they bring to the protection of the ACT Community remain part of the core strength of the Emergency Services Agency. The individual and collective interests and needs of Volunteers must be protected if they are to deliver their services safely and effectively. They must always be consulted about issues that affect them as Volunteers.

This Charter recognises that the Volunteers of the ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT State Emergency Service, Mapping and Planning Support Group and ACT Fire & Rescue operate under the ACT *Emergencies Act 2004*. This Charter is a statement of principle that will apply to the relationship between the Government, the Emergency Services Agency and these Volunteers.

## This Volunteer Charter:

- is an agreed commitment by the ACT Government, the Emergency Services Agency and the Volunteers from the ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT State Emergency Service, Mapping and Planning Support Group and ACT Fire & Rescue, to each other;
- it ensures that the ACT Government and the Emergency Services Agency will commit to consultation with all Volunteers about all matters that could affect Volunteers;
- it provides the framework for the inter-relationship between the parties, requiring the conduct of the parties in carrying out their commitments under the Charter to be judged against the following principles:
  - is it fair?
  - is it just?
  - is it reasonable?
  - does it discriminate against Volunteers?
  - is the outcome practicable and sustainable?
  - is it in the best interest of the safety of the Community?
- is an enduring commitment between the parties. The Charter shall be reviewed as required by the parties or at the end of three years from its date of signing.

## Volunteers in the Emergency Services Agency:

- are drawn from both suburban and rural areas throughout the ACT Region to ensure that community safety needs are met to the best of their collective abilities;
- depend on the goodwill and practical support of their families, friends and employers to enable them to serve as Volunteers. The time available to them is limited by the needs and demands of their employment, families and other obligations;
- do not contribute their time for financial reward but do expect to gain satisfaction from service, achievement, personal development, camaraderie and recognition by the Government.

## Volunteers in the ACT Rural Fire Service:

- selflessly bring time and life skills to protect life and property, prevent and suppress fires and thus to create a safer community;
- actively promote fire prevention works and provide fire, emergency and community services across the ACT.

## Volunteers in the ACT State Emergency Service:

- selflessly bring time and life skills to assist and protect the community in times of emergency, to alleviate the impact of incidents on life, property and the environment;
- actively work with other emergency, Government and community organisations to promote and support emergency preparedness, prevention, and mitigation strategies across the ACT to help ensure a safer and more resilient community.

## Volunteers in the Mapping and Planning Support Group:

- selflessly bring time and professional skills to protect life and property through the application of Geographic Information System, mapping and other services;
- are drawn from spatial information professionals employed or living in the ACT region.

## Volunteers in the ACT Community Fire Units:

- selflessly bring time and life skills to protect life and property, assist with prevention and suppression of fires and thus create a safer and more resilient community as a necessary adjunct to the ACT Fire & Rescue. With the strong support of the ACT Fire & Rescue, they actively minimise risk, promote fire prevention works and provide fire, emergency and community services across the urban and urban/rural interface areas of the Australian Capital Territory particularly in identifiable risk areas;
- are drawn mainly from suburban areas throughout the ACT to ensure that community safety needs are met to the best of their collective abilities.

## The Volunteers provide their services to the best of their abilities consistent with the following principles:

- to provide their services for the protection of life and property, and the environment and undertake other relevant duties to create a safer and more resilient community in a mutual, respectful and active partnership with the ACT Government, other organisations and the community;
- to operate safely and undertake appropriate training and planning to ensure their personal safety and enhance the delivery of services in creating a safer community;

- to exercise the powers vested in them by the ACT *Emergencies Act 2004*, Commissioner's Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures in the best interests of the community;
- to recognise and support the ACT Volunteer Brigades Association, the ACT State Emergency Service Volunteers Association, the Mapping and Planning Support Group and the Community Fire Unit Consultative Committee, and the consultative mechanisms as agreed with Emergency Services Agency; and
- to be committed to working in harmony and consultation with the ACT Government, including the Emergency Services Agency and seek to resolve differences of opinion internally in the first instance.

## The Emergency Services Agency recognises the commitment of Volunteers and shall provide its services and support to Volunteers consistent with the following principles:

- to recognise, value, respect and promote ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT State Emergency Service, Mapping and Planning Support Group and ACT Fire & Rescue Volunteers who come from widely divergent communities with differing needs and characteristics, as core partners with people employed by the Emergency Services Agency;
- to recognise and acknowledge that a primary responsibility of the Emergency Services Agency, and people employed by the Emergency Services Agency, is to nurture and encourage Volunteers and to facilitate and develop their skills and competencies;
- to recognise and acknowledge the value of the time that Volunteers provide to Emergency Services Agency and ensure that Volunteer time is used to maximum advantage;
- to acknowledge that policy development and change should always be considered in terms of its potential to support and facilitate the Volunteer contribution and the particular situation of local brigades and units;
- to recognise that the ACT Volunteer Brigades Association, ACT State Emergency Service Volunteers Association, Mapping and Planning Support Group and Community Fire Unit Consultative Committee, represent Volunteers in general and ensure there is meaningful consultation, allowing enough time for real involvement, with the elected representatives of Volunteers on all matters which may impact upon Volunteers before the adoption or implementation of any new or changed policies, procedures or approaches;
- to ensure that Volunteer views, opinions and concerns are fully considered before adopting any new or changed policies, procedures or approaches which impact on them as ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT State Emergency Service, Mapping and Planning Support Group and ACT Fire & Rescue Volunteers;
- to provide the resources necessary to enable new or changed policies, procedures or approaches which impact on ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT State Emergency Service, Mapping and Planning Support Group and ACT Fire & Rescue Volunteers to be implemented efficiently and effectively;
- to provide adequate resources to enable ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT State Emergency Service, Mapping and Planning Support Group and Community Fire Unit Volunteers to deliver agreed services;
- to provide administrative, operational and infrastructure support to enable Volunteers to perform their roles safely and effectively within available resources;
- recognise and respect the needs of Volunteers which are derived from their Volunteer service and provide effective and comprehensive support services within available resources including but not limited to:
  - where appropriate providing protection against the financial consequences of extended litigation and arranging adequate legal representation with respect to proceedings involving ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT State Emergency Service, Mapping and Planning Support Group and Community Fire Units Volunteers arising out of their activities;
  - Work Health & Safety (WH&S) support and development of the safest possible working environment for Volunteers;
  - procedures to address issues of discrimination in a fair, just and timely manner;
  - counselling and welfare support;
  - training;
  - support and assistance for Volunteers in applying for employment as permanent Emergency Services Agency employees; and
  - compensation for accidents, injuries and losses.

## The Government recognises and acknowledges the Volunteers commitment. The Territory shall provide support to the Volunteers subject to the following principles:

- recognise, value, respect and promote ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT State Emergency Service, Mapping and Planning Support Group and Community Fire Units Volunteers, their families and employers for their contributions to the well-being and safety of the people of the ACT;
- ensure that legislation appropriately recognises the needs and interests of Volunteers who provide their services in good faith in the delivery of services and that the legislation and its administration adequately protects Volunteers and their dependants from financial losses and other liabilities; and
- consult with the elected representatives of Volunteers on all matters which may impact upon Volunteers including changes to current applicable legislation, proposed new legislation and the adequacy of resources to enable Volunteers to deliver the agreed services.

## The commitment:

The parties commit themselves to use and apply the Charter in a spirit of mutual respect and goodwill and to work together in that spirit to resolve any disputes that may arise between the ACT Government, the Emergency Services Agency and the Volunteers by reference to the key principles set down in this Volunteer Charter.

This Charter is dated the **Day of November 2013.**

Katy Gallagher MLA  
Chief Minister

Simon Corbell MLA  
Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Dominic Lane  
Commissioner, Emergency Services Agency