

# The NSW SES VA & SES Roadshow

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VA Answers

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NSW SES VA Board of  
Directors

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## Chairman's Forward

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the NSW SES VA, please find attached the Volunteers Association responses to the NSW SES VA & NSW SES Roadshow.

Three and a half months after the final Roadshow, 91 questions, a convention and countless meeting hours and we are here- at the release of the Roadshow Answers.

I thought I would look back over the year to date- including the Roadshow process, but not limiting my views to that process, to see where we are now versus where we were in January.

I must admit, I'm pretty impressed.

As a company, we have been reflecting on your feedback. We have been reviewing and debriefing after every project regardless of the size and the words that I am hearing and saying to myself constantly are to the effect of "we heard at the Roadshows" or "our members have told us..." and it makes me really happy to hear, because it means that our focus is where it needs to be- on you.

I don't for a second think that we have reached our final destination with the release of the answers. Far from it in fact. The Roadshow was a catalyst for us. It made us stop and rethink everything we have been doing and start asking more questions. Since the completion of the Roadshow, we have been observing the way we do things, trying different options and collecting feedback from our members and trying to incorporate that into our processes for continual improvement.

My personal experiences have been that members are being more open and direct in their feedback and I am hopeful that this is a true indication that our members feel they do have a say in the way we do things and feel comfortable and safe in talking frankly and openly- even if what they have to say may not be what people want to hear.

I am also happy to see that a lot of the conversations that members are having are focused on the issues at hand and the personality is being left at the door.

Happy reading, please keep the conversations coming so we can all be a part of the rebuilding process.

Charlie Moir ESM

Chairman of the Board of Directors

NSW SES VA

## Questions List

#/91	RS Q #	Question	Response
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7	226	When will the responses to the issues raised at the Roadshows be made available, and through what methods?	SES/VA
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16	240	Why have previous Controllers that have applied for a VA grant been knocked back due to amount of money in the unit account?	VA
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18	247	VIS- how have they actually helped volunteers?	SES/VA
19	248	The Auditor General's Report mentions a Volunteer Charter. What is it and what is the real timeframe for its implementation?	VA
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25	254	Why is the SES SHQ located in Wollongong?	VA
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30	259	What services does the VA make available to its members versus SES members?	VA
31	264	Do we have an assurance that we will not only get answers but see action as a result of the Roadshows?	SES/VA
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37	278	How can the VA provide more support to the rural units?	VA
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40	283	What is the future direction of the VA?	VA
41	284	Is the funding from the VA to become a set amount?	VA
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<b>78</b>	<b>348</b>	Does the VA have its own agenda?	VA
<b>79</b>	<b>349</b>	Why was the Roadshow so 'secret squirrel' in its planning?	VA
<b>80</b>	<b>350</b>	Why was more consultation not entered into in the planning of the Roadshows to identify best times, dates and locations?	VA
<b>81</b>	<b>355</b>	What will the VA do about representatives that are found to be not fulfilling their role as part of this Roadshow process?	VA
<b>82</b>	<b>356</b>	What are the VA's plans for the next 2, 3, 5 10 years?	VA
<b>83</b>	<b>357</b>	The VA raises money to support the members, what happens if the VA raffles should fall over tomorrow?	VA
<b>84</b>	<b>358</b>	How is this Roadshow process going to be any different to any other process that has been undertaken in the past?	SES/VA
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<b>89</b>	<b>417</b>	What process is available for volunteers to be able to speak freely about management- in a structured, controlled way- without fear of reprisals?	SES/VA
<b>90</b>	<b>587</b>	Why can't DMP sell polo shirts when the VA can?	SES/VA
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## Answers

### **Q12. What plans are in place to reduce the volume of emails coming to members and units?**

The NSW SES VA is looking at alternate methods of communication for certain processes to reduce the amount of emails that we are sending out. This includes:

- hard copy ballot papers for nominations for elections where members have identified they prefer hard copy documents
- a monthly newsletter from the Chairman to cover off on the major things the VA is working on, or has achieved over each month- rather than multiple emails about every project etc.

We are also reviewing our internal processes and this will include the roles and responsibilities of the Representatives and how they can deliver information to you.

On the horizon are alternate technology options where you will be able to get information when you want it, in what we hope will be an easy to use platform. We will keep you updated on that project as it develops.

### **Q39. What processes will be implemented to stop 12th hour notices to units and members?**

The biggest step in preventing this from happening will be through the development of our 2, 5, 10 and 15 year strategic plan.

This document will be the fundamental basis for our section business plans, meaning that we know where we are going, when we need to get there and the options we have at our disposal to get our business there.

Having this forecasting ability, the majority of our projects will have been thought out and planned months in advance- meaning more notification time for you. This will be a two-pronged attack as well.

We will be offering more training for our representatives so that they have the necessary tools to undertake their roles and this includes methods for communication with members effectively.

The second part of this is tapping into our knowledge of how the SES actually works and understanding the demands on your time as volunteers as well as workers, family members and friends in your lives outside of the SES.

Having this understanding, and applying it to everything we do, we are hoping that we will be able to start providing you with enough time for events etc. that will allow you to plan around training and life

**Q52. Will the VA website be updated to make it more user-friendly? Will the feedback be implemented and when?**

We are looking at a process right now as to how we can improve the service to members through the VA website.

We have just had our 12 month anniversary of the new-look website and are going to be undertaking a content and functionality review over the next three months. This review will be to identify what needs to be changed and what functionality is available through the current site that we have not yet tapped into.

We will then be researching what our members need and want from the site as well as reviewing the SES results from their recent survey to see if there is anything that may be applicable to us as well.

These results will feed into a redesign but until we know the full extent of what we can do and what our member want, we won't know the full scope of the project. We do however; anticipate that the review stage of the project will be in late 2014.

Your feedback and suggestions are always welcome via [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au) but there will also be official channels for feedback through phase two of the project.

**Q140. The NSW SES VA raffles generate money for members, units, welfare funds, equipment, scholarships, training etc. With the downturn of income due to ICAC and the poor publicity surrounding it, will the NSW SES VA be seeking compensation or damages?**

In order to answer this question fully, we sought legal advice on what our options would be, but the short answer is no.

While there was reported kickback from some of our donors regarding the ICAC and other investigations surrounding the SES when they were approached about donations, there is a silver lining to every cloud.

For us, it was a not so gentle highlight that we needed to investigate alternate income streams for the VA so that we would remain solvent if there was a major downturn in community support through the raffle.

Without government funding, we are aware just how vulnerable we are as an organisation to public opinion and that too, is something we are working on through the building of our profile.

**Q194. What improvements will be made to the Commissioners newsletter and VA magazine to meet the member's needs?**

A survey was completed on the VA magazine- the Volunteer- and we have been using those reports to refocus some of the areas of the Volunteer.

Internally, we have had a slight restructure on the management process of the Volunteer, and with that will come strict guidelines on the process needed to be undertaking in order to have the magazine produced and lead the future direction of the magazine.

Your feedback and suggestions are always welcome via [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au)

**Q196. How will the Roadshow feedback be communicated? What will happen with the feedback?**

Both organisations will submit separate responses to the questions allocated to them. In some instances, there may be an answer that is provided to a question that is directed at one party, but could be applicable to both. This is in the interest of ensuring we are both providing as much information to our members as possible to be as open and transparent as possible in everything we do.

**Q226. When will the responses to the issues raised at the Roadshows be made available, and through what methods?**

Ultimately, all of the Roadshow answers will be communicated back through the same channels through which the report was released, with 2 hard copies for each SES Unit, a RHQ and SHQ

**Q227. What is the role of the VA?**

The main role of the VA is to support VA members and represent the interest of SES Volunteers generally.

This has been done through:

- unit grants
- scholarships
- the welfare fund
- member benefits (these have been limited in the past but are currently under review and growing)
- promotion of what the volunteers are doing through the Volunteer magazine
- production of a free-of-charge calendar for members annually
- member support

However the VA is expanding.

We have a role specifically allocated to looking after member advocacy- meaning as a VA member you can get advice, support or information if you have any questions regarding support or advocacy.

We are also negotiating more and better member benefits with different suppliers- Kathmandu are a great example of this with their 65% off sale exclusive to SES members.

Our special projects role is also developing- which will provide ongoing and different professional development opportunities to VA members who wish to get involved.

**Q228. Why are (did) they hold the Roadshow in this town (Tomaree) as it is not a central location within the region therefore minimising possible attendance from the whole region members?**

A matrix was developed to determine the best locations for the Roadshows based on a number of factors.

Originally, a Roadshow was scheduled for Singleton based on these figures, but after a feedback workshop with Representatives, it was highlighted to the Roadshow Project Team that Singleton was not the best location.

Tomaree was suggested based on feedback received after consultation by the Regional Representative with each of the units in the region.

Please refer to the Appendix A for locations justifications.

**Q232. Why is the VA conducting the Roadshows?**

The VA was approached with the idea of a Roadshow by two of the VA's members as a response to the original reports of an ICAC enquiry and the information gap that was developing.

It was always known that the Roadshow idea would not necessarily be a popular one due to deteriorating relationships between both parties- the VA and the SES.

However, Acting Commissioner Smith supported the idea, as did the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and after a lot of meetings and negotiation; a format, timeframe and logistics of the running of the event were agreed upon.

Because the VA is not a government entity, we were able to fund the Roadshow in its entirety without the restrictions that are imposed on government agencies. With the VA running the Roadshows, it also gave members assurances that their information and feedback would not be changed, altered or left out of the final report.

**Q233. Why do I hear from disgruntled people who have bought SES VA raffle tickets thinking they are supporting the SES?**

The NSW SES brand is much more prominent than the NSW SES Volunteers Association brand.

This means that when people hear the introduction, they're more likely to remember the parts that are familiar.

There is also a lack of understanding that the VA is a separate entity to the NSW SES. Part of this is definitely on us.

We are working on increasing our brand awareness, but at the moment, our main focus is on doing that internally. The Roadshow highlighted that there are members who do not know that the VA exists, do not know what the VA does or have an incorrect understanding of the VA.

We have made the decision that it is more important for us to have our members know what we can offer them, and be aware of our existence than promoting it to the public in the immediate future.

We will expand our awareness campaigns in the future, but right now our members are in the need of this information the most.

#### **Q234. Why are we not permitted to display any SES insignia at the Roadshows?**

During the Roadshows, the Project Team was very cautious of rank influencing people's comfort levels to speak freely and openly.

The event was also a NSW SES VA event, endorsed by the SES only- not run by the SES. This is an important distinction as uniform should only be worn as per the NSW SES Uniform Policy.

The stipulation for not wearing uniform also removed any 'rank' from the room. The idea of a Roadshow was to create a level playing field, where members were members regardless of their rank in a unit or a region.

#### **Q235. I think you have covered most of the state, but what happened to Albury?**

A matrix was developed to determine the best locations for the Roadshows based on a number of factors.

These included catchment of the most members, limiting travel time to a maximum of 2.5 hours (there were a few exceptions to this that we attempted to overcome through unit Visits) and not holding Roadshows in Region Headquarters locations where possible.

Albury was mapped as having two options for Roadshows, with the first option being located 1.5 hours away in Wagga Wagga.

#### **Q236. Why is this so-called event not coming to Grafton?**

A matrix was developed to determine the best locations for the Roadshows based on a number of factors.

These included catchment of the most members, limiting travel time to a maximum of 2.5 hours (there were a few exceptions to this that we attempted to overcome through unit Visits) and not holding Roadshows in Region Headquarters locations where possible.

This was especially made evident to us through feedback that there were a number of issues within the Clarence Nambucca Region where volunteers expressed concerns about the Roadshow being held in the same location as the RHQ.

**Q237. Is this just a show for the bigger units?**

No.

The Roadshow was designed for all members, from every unit and region within the state to have their say.

In some instances, the smaller units in the State were the most vocal in their feedback and ideas.

The ability to submit feedback anonymously- online, through telephone and via Australia Post to make it as accessible as possible- also removed any bias towards larger units across the state.

Every member's feedback is as important as the next- regardless of what unit you are from or how many members you have.

**Q240. Why have previous Controllers that have applied for a VA grant been knocked back due to amount of money in the unit account?**

The funding structure of the SES was different, as many of you are aware, before the centralisation of budgets.

This meant that there were instances of very 'wealthy' units around the state, and some of their counterparts were surviving week to week on the generosity of donations from the public and council support.

When bank statements were requested for submission with the application, this was taken into account in an attempt to make this more equal across the board. Now that funding has been standardised across the state, and applicants are able to supply more information- in particular when funds are sitting in an account but have been allocated to a specific project and just not spent yet- applications are judged on their own merit within the Zone by the Zone Council members.

**Q241. What processes will be put in place to ensure Glengarry will receive information, publications and resources from the VA?**

Updates to distribution lists for publications have been changed by the Editor of the Volunteer magazine and with the database cleanse being undertaken; Glengarry members should find they are on the NSW SES VA distribution lists for internal communications.

Changes to the way the regional Representatives do business will also mean that they will receive a face-to-face visit from their Representative at least once a year, and all units are encouraged to submit a nomination for a unit representative if they do not already have one.

Enquire through office @nswsesva.org.au or through your VA Region representative.



**Q247. VIS- how have they actually helped volunteers?**

The Volunteer Impact Statement (VIS) was introduced by the then Commissioner Murray Kear at the 2010 State Controllers Conference where he stated that no new policy, procedure or decision that had the potential to impact the Service of volunteers would be made without first completing a Volunteer Impact Statement (VIS).

The original arrangement was that the owner or sponsor of the VIS would complete the VIS and forward it to the Commissioner to sign off, the VIS was then forwarded onto the VA Chairman for further comment.

The VA Chairman sought permission from the Commissioner to include the other VA Representatives in the feedback process and eventually this process was extended by the VA Representatives to all units in their regions.

As a result of this extra feedback the process became cumbersome and flawed; however, a Working Group chaired by Greg Newton is currently reviewing the VIS concept and processes that will hopefully address any short comings found with the VIS.

Basically the VIS has been used in informing the volunteers what SES management believed could impact on volunteers; its true effectiveness is very much debatable hence the current review process.

**Q248. The Auditor General's Report mentions a Volunteer Charter. What is it and what is the real timeframe for its implementation?**

The Volunteer Charter is an agreement between the NSW SES the NSW SES VA and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

*This is to 'provide a documented commitment between the NSW State Government, the NSW SES, the NSW SES Volunteers and the NSW SES Volunteers Association to enhance the objective and outcomes of the NSW SES Corporate Plan, ensuring the protection of the needs and interests of volunteers.'*

The Charter is in the final stages of review and it is anticipated that it will be signed by all parties and hanging on the walls of units around the state no later than Christmas 2014.

**Q249. Why were there only three Roadshows in the Sydney metropolitan area?**

There were only three locations booked for Roadshows for the Sydney Metropolitan area- however these locations were booked for 12 hours each.

The reasoning behind this was the premise of 'go big, go early'.

We then had the ability to run additional sessions should it be required based on the numbers we were getting back. Regional Representatives were asked to get an indication of numbers for each of the events so that the Project Team would be able to plan effectively.

As numbers started to come back, it became apparent that additional sessions were not going to be required based on the numbers. Some units were being represented by one or two individuals only and other units made the decision not to attend.

**Q250. Are the hierarchy of the SES really interested in volunteer's suggestions?**

This question is open to conjecture, however, my opinion as the VA Chairman is in the affirmative.

The various reports and investigation along with the Roadshow highlighted to SES Management that they needed to listen more to their volunteers and improve in the area of Volunteer Management, I have been encouraged by discussions with the top level SES Management on this topic and the soon to be signed Volunteer Charter will highlight SES Management's commitment to this matter.

**Q251. Is the cost for doing the Roadshows the best use of time, money and resources?**

Given the current issues that were taking place in both the NSW SES and the NSW SES VA, the Roadshow came at a time where members' having the ability to talk openly, honestly and frankly about where they saw the Service and the VA sitting was long overdue.

The Roadshow was designed so that it was transportable at minimal cost and designed so that there was no requirement for assistance from the VA office staff or the NSW SES employees to ensure that business continuity was not affected for either organisation.

The data that was collected from the Roadshow has also helped the VA start to look at the issues surrounding our members more closely, as well as where we can improve in our support to members.

**Why did we stop paying \$2 for VA membership?**

When the VA was first formed back in the late 1990's the intention was to register the VA as an association and not a union.

Part of the model rules of being an 'association' required a membership fee and that was the only income the early VA had.

In 2000, the VA became incorporated and was registered as the NSW SES VA Incorporated, however, back then the model rule of an incorporated association stated the membership fee was a requirement, however the membership fee was only a "nominal fee", and because the VA had negotiated a deal with the then Director General Philip McNamara for the Service to support the VA financially to the value of \$5K per calendar year the VA decided to make membership of the VA free to all SES Volunteers, something the VA still practices today.

**Q254. Why is the SES SHQ located in Wollongong?**

When the headquarters moved to Wollongong, we were told it was a part of the decentralisation process.

**Why, when you tick the box on the SES membership form, why do you not automatically become a VA member?**

This is a privacy issue that is beyond the control of the NSW SES VA. We are currently in negotiations with the NSW SES to have that removed from the membership forms to ensure that there is no confusion and no presumption of membership based on unclear instructions.

If you are unsure if you are a VA member or not, you can contact the office on 1300 073 782 or [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au)

**Q255. Did the SES pay an outside source to ring/contact volunteers? What is wrong with region, don't they have our details?**

No

The NSW SES VA used Contact Centres Australia- the company that provides call centre assistance for the raffles- to call all members who were on our old database to update member details.

During the call process, the script that was provided specifically detailed that the calls were being made from the NSW SES VA.

There was a survey that was completed by the NSW SES at a similar time and there was some confusion regarding both processes running very close to each other.

**Q256. Can the VA put out messages about what it does and how to join?**

In short-Yes.

The roadshow highlighted just how poorly we have been communicating to our members.

What we are doing now is working on reviewing all of our communication channels and identifying gaps and weaknesses in the process.

One of the big things we have found is that we weren't aware a lot of the time that we weren't reaching our people, and because we weren't reaching them, they didn't know how to get in contact with us to tell us it wasn't working. For us the Roadshow has been a great tool to lift our profile within the Service- to get it to the point where more people know who we are and what we do. We are using that new found knowledge to better promote everything we can offer and how and talk to our members about how and why they like communication.

**Q257. How are you going to arrange to have a VA representative in every unit?**

At present, the set up for unit representatives is a bit ad hoc.

The big issue we have faced in the past is that the awareness of the VA has been low, and generally the people who have known about us have not had a terribly high opinion of what we can and do offer.

The busiest time traditionally for the VA has been around grants and scholarship applications however we are now starting to see a shift into other areas of the business. With this growth in awareness, and a more structured approach to the way we do business, Region representatives will be responsible for advertising vacancies in Unit Representative Positions and explaining the benefits, rights and responsibilities of the roles.

The VA will be providing training to all new Representatives to ensure they have the appropriate tools to do the position they are applying for.

**Q258. What is the VA doing for its members and what can we expect from them?**

We are increasingly getting enquiries on advocacy and member support and to support our own business practices, we are rolling out contact Officer Training for all Region Representatives.

But we acknowledge that this is not the only area where we can and do support our members. Funding schemes will continue to grow and develop and with the VA Strategic Plan, we will have a better understanding of the areas where we can increase member support and benefits.

**Q259. What services does the VA make available to its members versus SES members?**

The VA recently changed its policies regarding VA Scholarships, Unit Grants and Volunteer Support Funding whereby we would favour VA Members over non VA members when considering the disbursement of VA funding.

The VA is also looking at other ways to enhance VA membership with such things as Members Cards; these membership cards will provide discounted prices of a range of goods.

We will also be sourcing sponsorship deals with large corporate bodies that will hopefully provide other incentive for the SES volunteers to become a member of the VA.

**Q264. Do we have an assurance that we will not only get answers but see action as a result of the Roadshows?**

Yes.

There has been a significant shift in both organisations since the Roadshows in the sense that we both have a very clear understanding of what our members want, need and are feeling.

The feedback that was gathered at the Roadshows, for the VA, is feeding in to the development of our 2,5,10 and 15 year strategic plan.

The answers that are coming out of the Roadshow Report and the subsequent answers that we are providing are being worked into the Strategic Plan to ensure that the actions we promise here are the actions you will see over the coming years.

**Q265. How come we never heard anything about the Roadshows?**

The notice given to the members who were in the first two catchment areas for the Roadshow had very short notice- in some cases only 2 weeks- before the Roadshow arrived.

There were a number of factors that fed into this- an agreement between the NSW SES and the NSW SES VA was only signed just over two weeks from the first Roadshow, this meant that there was no approval to advertise the Roadshow until this was signed off.

**Q268. How was the Roadshow publicised?**

The Roadshow Project Team sent a hard copy poster and email of the schedule of Roadshows to every NSW SES unit and regional representatives were requested to promote the events in their regions.

The NSW SES VA and NSW SES Facebook sites were used to promote the events, as well as the internal Member's Communication Facebook page.

Information was posted on the NSW SES VA website as well as the NSW SES website- both public facing and EOS as well as in each edition of the Volunteer while the Roadshow was running.

The NSW SES VA Chairman's Newsletter- a monthly publication- was also used to publicise the event.

Media releases were sent to local media outlets; however the story was only picked up by a few small outlets.

Regular emails were also sent out via SES and VA email accounts.

We acknowledge that there was a heavy emphasis on online options for publicising the event.

**Q274. What is the relevance of the VA?**

The NSW SES VA was established to represent the views and concerns of NSW SES volunteers to SES Management and the State Government.

Paid staff members of the NSW SES have the protection of an award and the Public Servants Association where the Service's Volunteers have no such body to represent their interests and the NSW SES VA affords similar protection for the volunteers.

The relevance of it is that it can act as an advocacy service for members who need advice or assistance with investigations, complaints and grievances within the NSW SES.

The VA also provides scholarships and unit grants annually- a process they have done since 2002.

There is a Welfare Fund that members can approach if they are suffering from financial hardship and we have some member benefits, albeit not many historically.

One of the major things that gets left out when people talk about the relevance of the VA is the work that is done quietly in the background, like the negotiations to get a VJCC and VRCCs up and running- the intention there being forums where volunteers have a say in the processes employed by the SES.

The Volunteer Charter has also been a work in progress for many years with the NSW SES. We are currently looking at areas where we can share resources more efficiently with the SES to better serve our members; one of these is the Exit Interview procedure where members can elect to have that interview done by a recognised and trained member of the VA so they can provide honest feedback about their experiences in a safe environment.

As we move forward into an age that is driven by budgets and the bottom line, an organisation advocating for the people will become increasingly relevant.

If you believe you have suffered adverse treatment from any member of the VA as a result of providing feedback, please notify the office on 13000 737 82 or [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au) and we will follow up with you.

**Q275. Why were the staff allowed to attend the Roadshows? There are concerns members may not speak up or some, how will you address this?**

When the Roadshow idea was originally floated, it was a volunteer only forum.

As discussions took place between the NSW SES VA and the NSW SES, it was decided that it would be a joint project.

The inclusion of staff at the events meant that there was no divide- as was highlighted as being a concern for many members during the Roadshows- between the volunteer members and the staff members of the NSW SES.

The process, much like removing rank from the room, meant that every member had equal say and equal right to be present. Where there was a concern about speaking openly in front of others, there were numerous confidential methods for delivering feedback.

**Q277. What will the Roadshow process do to protect us (the members) from retribution?**

The Roadshow Project team and the VA have had the assurances from the Minister of Police and Emergency Services and Acting Commissioner Smith that retribution as a result of providing feedback will not be tolerated.

We also want to make it very clear that the VA will also not tolerate any retribution on members for providing feedback on the VA.

Both organisations have a Code of Conduct that all members are required to act in accordance with, as well as the NSW SES Values- TARPS.

If you believe you have suffered adverse treatment as a result of providing feedback, please use the NSW SES chain-of-command to report any issues.

As always, the NSW SES VA is able to provide you with advice and support through any grievance process.

If you believe you have suffered adverse treatment from any member of the VA as a result of providing feedback, please notify the office on 13000 737 82 or [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au) and we will follow up with you.

**Q278. How can the VA provide more support to the rural units?**

It is our belief that we will be in a better position to increase support to not only rural units, but all units with increased communication from our representatives.

This direct contact means that members will have an increased access to representatives and as such, better knowledge of what support is available to the VA Members.

If you do have any questions or concerns, you can always contact the VA office on 13000 737 82 or [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au) and you will be directed to the most appropriate person to help you.

**Q279. Why wasn't the VA more publicly defending the image of the volunteer during the ICAC investigation of paid staff?**

The initial media release issued by the NSW SE SVA in response to the ICAC enquiry (before it became an investigation) was the first of its kind for the VA.

It was picked up and run with in the media outlets who had not put the distinction on the fact that it was only certain members in the Wollongong State Headquarters who were involved, and no volunteers or more specifically, members from the Wollongong City Unit, were in any way implicated.

Further media releases were sent out and picked up by major media, however, the name SES is synonymous with the orange overalls and volunteers. We were also conscious that this wasn't a witch-hunt against the staff.

It is our belief that we will be in a better position to increase support to not only rural units, but all units with increased communication from our representatives.

Through this, we mean having a unit representative in each unit- who is supported by their Regional representative.

This direct contact means that members will have an increased access to representatives and as such, better knowledge of what support is available to the VA Members.

If you do have any questions or concerns, you can always contact the VA office on 13000 737 82 or [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au) and you will be directed to the most appropriate person to help you.

## **Q282. Should the VA be scrapped and does it over estimate its importance?**

In our opinion, no and no.

While we admit that there have been times where the VA has not performed to its potential, changes are afoot.

We have noticed a significant increase in membership since the beginning of the Roadshow- from about 30% to 50% and we are increasing our sustainability- financially- so that we can continue to offer member benefits, scholarships and grants as well as the welfare fund and other support schemes.

A lot of the work the VA does for members is not discussed openly- and we intend to keep it that way, particularly with the Advocacy role that we have.

What we will be working at doing much better is communicating the things we do offer to members, so while we may not be discussing the specifics, all of our members are aware of what assistance is available to them should they ever need it.

## **Q283. What is the future direction of the VA?**

The whole point of the VA was to provide support and a voice for the volunteers of the NSW SES

This is still our guiding principle; however we are looking at other areas where we can either increase the support we offer, or other areas that we can move into.

At present, we are working on our Strategic Plan. This is going to be broken in to 2, 5, 10 and 15 year goals and objectives that we can work towards.

The key areas we will be looking at include:

- training for members
- increasing the support we offer to representatives to provide them with the tools they need to undertake their work
- identifying areas where we can work more effectively with the SES on projects and initiatives
- sustainability of the VA
- professional development opportunities
- alternate income streams so we can increase our financial options for members
- increase structure and governance for the company
- publicity and promotion campaigns
- increased effective communication



- better profiling of our members and representatives
- expansion of merchandising

The full extent of our future direction will be clearer when the strategic plan is finalised- something we are hoping to achieve by the end of 2014.

Q284. Is the funding from the VA to become a set amount?

No.

Funding from the VA covers a lot of different areas.

There are the Personal Scholarships, Unit Grants, Welfare Fund and Support Schemes as the most well-known funding that is available.

And then we have Member Sponsorship and Special Projects that are probably our least known funding schemes (something we know we have to work on publicising better- there is a plan in place!).

But while we have these different funding options, we don't want to put a 'hard and fast' ruling around them. This is because some years we get a flood of amazing, innovative and unique requests, whereas other years are a bit slower or everyone seems to be applying for the same thing.

We don't want to limit creative opportunity by being inflexible in this space, but there is increased governance around the schemes.

**Q285. How frequently are VA representatives meant to visit units?**

At least once every 12 months.

However, it needs to be noted that this was passed at the August 2014 BoD meeting, so this is a target moving forward.

Previously, there was no minimum requirement and it was just an expectation that representatives were out and about in their regions. We understand that our representatives are volunteers, so time can be an issue which is why we have

- a) put a requirement on expectations so people know what they are up for when they apply
- b) the ability to have more than one Region Representative per region to help with workload distribution and
- c) The requirement for region representatives to recruit unit representatives- who will be a direct source of information constantly at a unit level.

## **Q290. How have changes in the VA been affected by legislation?**

In 2000, when the VA became an Incorporated Association they were registered, as per legislation, with NSW Fair Trading.

Incorporated Associations have a ceiling on income and assets and once you reach that ceiling you then need to dissolve the Incorporated Association and register as a Not for Profit Company.

This company then is registered with ASIC and is obligated to federal law. There has been no change to the name of the VA, however, as a not for profit company we had to change the constitution and the organisational structure to fit in with the new model rules etc.

The VA has gone from a State Council with 17 VA Region Delegates to a Board of Directors and three Zone Councils, consisting of 17 VA Region Representatives, a Company Secretary, a Company Treasurer (currently Vacant) and the VA Chairman.

Although the organisational structure is based around a flatter management structure the original 17 VA Region Delegates, now VA Region Representatives still form the deliberate body of the VA along with the Company Secretary, Company Treasurer and VA Chairman.

## **Q293. How is the VA going to increase its interaction with the members?**

This was a major issue at quite a number of the Roadshows and came through in the anonymous data quite clearly.

We also found when we were out and about with the Roadshow Project Team, that there were members who had not met and who were unaware of whom their Region Representatives were. What we are trying to do is create a multi-step approach to this issue.

The first step is communicating out who is who in the zoo and what they can do for you. There are provisions in place for Representatives to visit the units within their areas at least once per calendar year.

We are also going to be putting out more material advertising who your reps are and what they can do for you.

The second step will be to analyse the feedback that came in from the 2014 Convention and look at ways to interact more efficiently.

While the comments about the convention were, for the most part, positive, it was still an event that only touched a small percentage of our members.

We want to look at options that provide a lot of benefit to a lot of our members.

The third step will be to advertise some of the options that we have thought about to let you have a think about them and provide us with some additional feedback.

Step four will be to book something in and start planning it while looking at other opportunities for interactions at the same time.

We will be using our Response Time idea on Facebook- where you have an hour to listen to a subject matter expert discuss a topical area and have the opportunity to ask some questions- these could be VA, industry or general interest related as well as getting our Board members more actively out there so you can meet them, ask them questions and find out more information.

### **Q301. What is the role of a VA representative and how do they get that position?**

From the VA Representative Position description:

#### **Position Purpose**

The position purpose is primarily to act as the focal point to receive and represent to the Zone Council, the opinions, views, concerns and suggestions of the NSW SES Volunteers within the respective Region.

The NSW SES VA Regional Representative has responsibility for implementing the Board of Directors and Zone Council decisions as well as promoting the objectives and policies of the NSW SES VA. They will be expected to establish a working relationship with the Region Controller and other RHQ staff in their Region in order to be able to effectively carry out the duties of this role.

#### **Key Functions and Responsibilities**

Key functions, responsibilities and accountabilities may change from time to time and should be reviewed regularly at a Zone level with the respective Zone Council Chairperson.

Key performance indicators or other quantifiable measures should be determined on an annual basis with regular assessment against such goals to ensure the company's overall goals as set by the Board of Directors, are achievable.

- As requested and agreed with the respective Zone Council Chairperson:
- Assist to recruit new VA members in line with targets set by the respective Zone Council.
- Assist where, and when required by the Zone Council, to process particular issues as delegated including such things as gathering feedback from members on VIS's or other matters.
- Assist VA in the communication process (where required) of VA information.
- Recruit VA Unit Representatives in each NSW SES Unit located in the NSW SES Region they represent.
- Required to meet with VA Unit Representatives on a regular basis.
- Represent their Region by attending and participating at Zone Council meetings and reporting on respective Regional activities and issues.
- Visit and present a VA information presentation at each SES Unit in their Region at least annually during each elected term.
- Present a VA information presentation/session at each annual Region Controllers Conference including reporting on current issues involving the VA and collect and transmit concerns raised.
- Attend training courses as determined by the Board of Directors.
- Represent the VA on NSW SES Volunteer Regional Consultative Committee (VRCC).
- Represent the VA on selected NSW SES Working Groups.
- Complete standard template for Regional issues requiring review and follow up by respective Zone Council Chairperson at Board meetings.
- Attend VA Management, Regional or Unit meetings if available.
- Coordinate and manage events and activities as directed. Events could include raffle prize handovers, awarding Unit Grants and other local Region activities, etc.
- Communicate on a regular basis with the VA Unit Representatives ensuring that VA issues are promptly communicated gaining feedback where necessary.
- Act responsibly in order to minimise VA's risk exposure and liabilities.

When the Zone is up for re-election, ballot details are sent out to the VA members (from our database) in that area and nominations and election details are provided.

The VA members are the ones who pick their Representatives.

**Q302. Why do the majority of VA representatives who attend VA meetings not report back to their Controller in their region?**

The reporting processes of a VA representative are to report back to the VA membership, not a Controller specifically.

**Q303. Why does the VA, like State, rely on electronic means for communication?**

We believe that we fell into the same trap that so many organisations have, in believing that email and online communications are the silver bullet to all of our communication problems.

It wasn't until we started getting feedback from the Roadshow Project Team that we began to get a real picture of just how high the instance was of low computer literacy, low or no literacy or a combination of the two.

At some point, we have lost the focus on face-to-face communication and more traditional means for getting messages across.

We are taking a step back and looking at the responses we received from the Roadshow Absentee Pack survey where members specified how they like to be communicated with and we will be focusing more and more on different and varied ways to getting our message across- one of the most important being getting region and Unit Representatives out there so you know who they are and what they do so that they are able to build a relationship with you whereby they pass on a lot of the information that is being spread through online/electronic means.

That does not mean that we won't continue to send some information through email or other online mechanisms though, it just means that we won't be relying on these solely.

**Q304. Can VA representative get out more and talk to members and is there a calendar for this?**

We have just approved a new job description for the VA Region Representatives and a part of their role will be to get out and see the units in their region at least once every 12 months.

**Q305. Are Unit/Local Controllers too busy to be taking on the role of VA representatives as well?**

This is a decision that is left up to the individual.

While we are aware that there are responsibilities that go with each role, we are also aware that it is not our place to determine how someone chooses to spend their time.

There are position descriptions for unit and regional Representatives that have been approved by our BoD and will be implemented, this will mean that while anyone is encouraged to apply for the position of a unit or a regional rep, there are set criteria that need to be met and roles and responsibilities that have to be maintained at a certain level.

This is all a new process by the VA, so there will be some learning curves and refinements that will need to happen while we get this process perfect. Your feedback and suggestions are always welcome via [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au)

**Q306. Why aren't the VA representatives held accountable to report back to their Controllers in their region to advise them what the VA is doing and alleviate half of the rumours in the SES?**

The reporting processes of a VA representative are to report back to the VA membership, not the Unit Controller specifically.

**Q307. Is there going to be a site set-up with all of the issues from the Roadshows listed and a completion against each answer recorded? Where we will be able to access the answers?**

There will be a page set up within the NSW SES VA website, as well as on the NSW SES EOS site and also through the NSW SES website.

**Q308. Why do some paid staff and some Local Controllers view the SES VA as the enemy?**

People's perceptions are their reality and as such people will form their own views on how they perceive things.

Although it would be near on impossible to provide an exact answer to this question my experience in traveling around the state and visiting many SES Units is that many volunteers believe that the NSW SES VA is a union, however, I can assure everyone that the NSW SES VA is not a union.

I am not sure how that perception came into play but it is the role and responsibility of each and every VA Representative to make regular visits to each SES unit in their Region and attempt to dispel that perception.

The role of the NSW SES VA is to represent the interest of its members and it is worth repeating the first of our three objectives here: "Provide a means for consolidation and representation of the views and concerns of NSW SES Volunteers via such mechanisms as may be appropriate".

**Q309. How are the SES and the VA going to work together to ensure that the rebuilding of the SES is successful?**

The Roadshow was the biggest step towards this.

Not only was it the largest joint project that either organisation has undertaken alone, it was a great leveller for us all. We were able to sit together and see what members were thinking, both the good and the bad of both organisations.

It was a massive exercise in trust and respect and personally, we think it was carried off really well.

There were a couple of instances where individuals may have not represented either organisation in the way we would have hoped, but overall, it was a very insightful process for us and we think that it has actually created the best platform for developing great working relationships with the SES. We also understand that there will be times where there is friction between both organisations, but we see that as an opportunity for growth. Without the friction, there would be no challenging of ideas and ideals, and it is through those challenges that processes are improved and new ideas are encouraged.

In a more basic sense, we are looking at options where we can work together at a more grass-roots level. This is not just through Unit Grants, but also looking at projects where we can support our members through supporting the SES- and not just financial assistance.

The policy and procedure review that has been implemented means that we are given the opportunity to provide feedback from our members.

This feedback is collated at our office and sent back to the SES for consideration. While this seems like a small process, it is through these policies and procedures that your work conditions are determined.

A presence of working groups and through the VRCC and VJCC also provide continual forums for the VA to bring up member concerns and talk with the SES on how we can all overcome any issues that are raised.

A major factor that came through the Roadshow was the miscommunication and misinformation that is out there.

In order to rebuild effectively, we need to work closely with the SES to make sure that the right information- popular or not- is being communicated. This removes the damage that rumours and innuendo can create.

**Q311. What measures are in place to ensure members do not get unspecific and flowery answers to these Roadshow issues?**

The word of the Acting Commissioner and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and for us, that is good enough.

However, if you are unhappy with the quality of a response then we encourage you to contact the SES or the VA and let us know. Both organisations have made a public commitment through the Roadshow process that your questions would be answered and answered fully.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact us on 1300 073 782 or [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au)

**Q313. Why does the VA do phone sales?**

The VA does the phone sales for the raffle to raise money so it can give back to its members.

Raffles are used by many major NFPs to raise money because they are easily outsourced (the VA has only had staff support for the last 12 months, previously it was all volunteers running every aspect of the VA) and they are a reliable source of income.

As we are expanding our capability, we are looking in to alternate income streams, but the reality is the raffles work. They raise money and are sustainable so we will continue to use them, but hopefully supplement them with other income streams.

**Q315. How does the VA manage information flow within the organisation from members up through local and regional representatives to the board and the Chairman as well as the information flow back down to members on the ground?**

**What training and accountabilities do the representatives have for understanding this flow and passing information up and down as required?**

Historically- poorly.

Now- getting better.

Tomorrow and the day after- much better.

Our aim is to create multiple methods for getting communication out as well as back in.

The process for getting this right is to first make sure we implement the options that were given to us, by members through the Absentee Pack Survey. This is to get the information that is going out right. We are looking at a suite of different methods that include face-to-face, hard copy and electronic.

In order to get information back, we are creating new processes and formalising reporting structures.

Communication will be a managed dedicated position within the VA , meaning that there will be not only increased structure, but also a strategic business plan for that sector to ensure we are on the right track and meeting the needs of our people.

You can provide feedback at [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au)

**Q316. Rural NSW faces unique challenges across a variety of areas. What strategies is the VA putting in place to assist country members with the additional challenges of operating in rural areas?**

The VA will continue to negotiate with SES Management on any and all issues that have the potential to impact SES volunteers whether they are urban or rural based.

The VA acknowledges that there is a view out there that NSW equates to Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong, however the VA is aware of the unique challenges facing rural NSW SES volunteers and will continue to work with your VA Region Representatives in identifying and addressing those challenges.

**Q317. Why do we never hear from the VA and what they actually do for us?**

As VA Chairman this is a concerning question.

We have 17 VA Region Representatives across NSW and the role of the VA Region Representatives is to visit each SES unit regularly to keep our members informed of what the VA is and can do for them.



The Roadshow indicated that this is not happening as regularly as was expected and we have now implemented a job description for this role that each VA Region Representative will be expected to perform to.

More training is being provided for the volunteers currently holding those positions and an induction program has also been implemented to forewarn or prepare potential or future VA Region Representatives for the role and responsibilities of the position.

**Q320. What actual power does the VA have to do anything with information that is passed through from members where the member/s requires assistance?**

The VA has a very good working relationship with both SES Management and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services where regular meetings are conducted and many volunteer issues and matters are discussed and resolved. The VA will also assist SES volunteers with advocacy issues that become bogged down or are exhausted through the SES Chain of Command resulting in a stale mate. The soon to be signed Volunteer Charter will also highlight not only the process, but also giving every SES volunteer the assurance that they will be treated fairly with due process and procedural fairness at all times.

**Q322. What is the service level agreement for the SES & VA to return phone calls?**

While the NSW SES VA does not currently have a documented SLA for phone call return, we would expect that for a corporate call (one that is directed to our office staff) then the call would be returned within 2 business days where not urgent and a same day call back if it is urgent, where it is an advocacy issues- contact would be made with you within 12 hours of your request being received and for contact made to your Representatives, this would also be no longer than a 2 day return.

**Q324. What is the consultation process for changes in policy with the VA?**

The VA has a process for new and amended policies that involves every member having input in to that amended or new policy process.

Basically a draft policy is produced and sent to all VA Members (Region Representatives), this should not be confused with 'Associate Members' (members of the VA who did not hold a Region Representative or Board of Directors position), the feedback is then included in the draft policy and it is then sent to the Board of Directors to officially adopt the policy.

All VA Policies and Procedures are living documents and can be reviewed at any time or stage; however, they are evaluated after the first six months of implementation to ascertain their effectiveness and currency.

**Q325. Who at the VA looks at the VIS' that are sent to volunteers to comment on?**

The VIS's are distributed by VA paid staff to all VA Region Representatives who in turn forward them onto the SES Units within their Regions.

The feedback is then collated into a useable format that is sent back to SHQ for their consideration before the finished product is then posted on EOS.

Any VA Region Representative or Board Member can avail themselves to the feedback, however, the rule is we submit the feedback to SHQ as it is submitted to the VA. We remove any duplication or any non-relevant feedback before forwarding it onto SHQ.

**Q326. How is the VA going to address the ever-increasing demand on non-essential demands on volunteers?**

The problem of ever increasing demand on non-essential demands is an inherited problem that continues to evolve and unfortunately that is progress.

With the ever increasing responsibilities being placed on volunteers because of changes in legislation, laws, rules along with policy and procedure updates, the non-essential demands are a real concern to the VA.

The VA will raise this matter with the new SES Commissioner upon their appointment and request a complete review on volunteer roles and responsibilities and work on ways to identify and reduce those non-essential demands being placed on SES volunteers.

**Q328. Where was the anonymous survey that was advertised as being online?**

The survey that was advertised was hosted on Survey Monkey, and was run by the independent facilitator.

This ensured that he was the only one with access to any identifiers for respondents.

The link was decommissioned at the conclusion of the Roadshow.

**Q335. Why were the Roadshows capped at 2.5 hours?**

It was a fine line between too long and too short.

What we aimed for was something that allowed for people to have a bit of a networking, relax into the room time as well as the actual getting down to business session.

We were trying to balance people's travel with their actual attendance time as well as not taking too much additional time of the volunteers.

The Roadshows were great to get the face-to-face interaction happening, and quite a few people chose to submit more detailed feedback in the Absentee Packs.

In retrospect, we would structure them a little differently if we did it again but we would probably keep the time limit about the same. It is a long time to stay 'switched on' particularly if you have a long drive at the other end of it.

Again, if you have feedback, please let us know at [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au)

**Q336. Why were region officers allowed to be present at the Roadshows?**

Regardless of what position you hold in the SES, you are still a member with the same rights as any other member.

The Roadshow was open to all members to ensure that every person in the NSW SES was provided with the opportunity to have their say. It was then each individual's choice if they wished to have a say in the future of their organisations.

**Q337. Why weren't guides as to how we could prepare for a Roadshow provided so there would not be a duplication of issues if they had already been raised at another location?**

We didn't want anyone coming with a pre-determined outcome for the Roadshows.

After a lot of consideration, it was decided that if people were not prompted by the themes emerging from other Roadshows, then we would get a more rounded picture of what was happening around the state. We had a better view of emerging trends- i.e. was an issue locally based or state wide and everyone had the opportunity to raise what was important to them.

**Q338. Surely there could be more than one session for all of Sydney Northern Region?**

The venue at Chatswood- for the Northern Sydney Roadshow- was selected based on availability of venues within the area and available parking.

Chatswood was highlighted as it had rail access as well as a Westfield Shopping Centre car park and council car park within walking distance of the venue. It was booked for the entirety of the Saturday scheduled for the Roadshow, however, when the Roadshow Project Team were sourcing numbers to determine if additional Roadshows would be required, feedback was that the expected numbers would not exceed the maximum allowable capacity for the venue.

**Q339. Why was Chatswood selected, as it is quite unreasonable to expect people from the Central Coast to come all the way to Chatswood into a venue whose capacity I think may not hold the number of likely participants?**

Chatswood was selected due to the availability of venues, concentration of members and availability of parking and alternate transportation. Feedback was requested on the venue locations during planning from Region Representatives.

**Q340. What is the timeframe for answers on the questions raised?**

Answers for the VA component of the Roadshow will be released on the 17th October as per the NSW SES timeline

**Q341. How were the locations and times selected for the Roadshows?**

The locations and times were determined through the use of a matrix that enabled the Roadshow Project Team to select locations that were no more than 3 hours from different units- where there was no way around this, a unit visit was offered.

The timings between the Roadshows was then based on physical constraints such as driving time between venues, availability of venues, and the preference of holding Roadshows on weekends- particularly for areas where they had long travel times.

The initial locations were then presented to the Regional Representatives as well as a representative from the NSW SES and feedback was asked for. Based on this feedback, locations and times were tweaked to ensure it all still worked logistically.

**Q342. I thought we had a regional representative for this (feedback)?**

As VA Chairman this is a concerning question.

We have 17 VA Region Representatives across NSW, the role of the VA Region Representatives is to visit each SES unit regularly to keep our members informed of what the VA is and can do for them.

The Roadshow indicated that this is not happening as regularly as was expected and we have now implemented a job description for this role that each VA Region Representative will be expected to perform to.

More training is being provided for the volunteers currently holding those positions and an induction program has also been implemented to forewarn or prepare potential or future VA Region Representatives for the role and responsibilities of the position.

**Q343. Is this another 'junket' and a complete waste of taxpayers' money?**

No, this wasn't a 'junket'.

The Roadshow was completed in the shortest physical timeframe it could be, and costs were kept to a minimum wherever possible.

The Roadshow was funded 100% by the NSW SES VA, not through the NSW SES budget of using tax payer's money.

**Q344. Should I email the Minister for clarification (to ensure it is not another 'junket')?**

The Minister was aware of the funding arrangements for the Roadshow i.e. that it was funded 100% by the VA and not the SES and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services endorsed the project

### **Q345. How was the format of the Roadshows determined?**

The format of the Roadshows was determined after interviews with six different facilitators.

We were looking for the 'best fit' option for our organisations- someone who would get who we are, what we do and where we were at the time.

Originally, the Roadshow Project Team proposed more of an open forum concept, where people could raise an issue, the issue would be logged on a projected screen so everyone in the room would be able to ensure it was recorded accurately, and then discussion around that issue would be moderated by the facilitator.

After lengthy discussion on the pros and cons of the concept with each of the facilitators, every one of them suggested a concept similar to the small group method that was eventually decided on and used.

Given their experience and expertise, we were happy to be guided by what would produce the most effective results for the process.

The idea was to make it possible for every person to have their say and not just the more dominant people in the group- that was also one of the reasons behind the multiple methods for feedback.

### **Q346. How are we going to break down the 'them and us' attitude together?**

The answer here is in the 'we' part of the question.

Attitudes are formed based on experiences from the past and present, but they are also a blend of conscious and sub conscious beliefs.

Why the lesson in psychology? Because we are the ones who form the conscious part of our attitudes to people, things, places and events.

Change your attitude, change the outcome.

This is something that we all need to be committed to and take an active part in changing. If we are committed to this Service and want to see change in attitude, then we have to take responsibility for that change.

We need to take the phrases out of our vocabulary that undermine where we want to go, including ones like 'we have always done it that way', 'you know what they are like', 'here we go again', 'nothing ever changes'. Because, much like positive self-affirmations, the negative ones gain power too when we say them or think them.

Internally, in the VA we are actively working more closely with the SES on a number of projects, and will continue to source opportunities where both organisations can work actively together for the benefit of our members.

**Q347. Will these Roadshows actually resolve anything?**

Yes they will.

I am extremely confident and proud of the way we have worked together, using a process developed by some volunteers and working together with the SES and the Minister to move our Service forward.

From the initial roadshow in Broken Hill, A/Commissioner Jim Smith set about fixing and changing issues he would find out about.

By the middle of the roadshows, the VA and the SES had good evidence and indicators of areas that needed attention, change or funding.

There were many issues that were concurrent throughout every roadshow, and then there were some specific issues to a region or unit. All got heard and documented.

Resolution takes activity, and to resolve anything, someone must stand and identify the issue.

We, the VA cannot expect the SES to fix an issue it does not know about.

We need to act, make processes better and safer, and for this to occur, the members need to be a part of this process. We need to provide constructive feedback through appropriate channels to identify areas.

We have seen resolution in many areas already. The Roadshows have highlighted areas and change has occurred.

Just look at the rollout of vehicles, changes to recording of data and jobs etc., all these issues were highlighted during Roadshows and now change has occurred.

This is thanks to those members who took part, who brought feedback and thought of ideas to make this Service better and safer.

**Q348. Does the VA have its own agenda?**

Yes.

The VA is a separate entity to the NSW SES and was established to represent the views and concerns of the members.

By those very distinctions alone, our agenda is going to be different to the NSW SES's at times.

We are not looking at member wellbeing and support from a budgetary perspective, we are looking at it from a people perspective. And while we acknowledge that the SES makes its decisions with this in mind too, they are trying to keep a different set of balls in the air to the ones the VA is juggling.

We are however, cracking down on people having *personal agendas* within the VA. These are not what the VA is about and will not be tolerated in the future. Our agenda is and will continue to be to

provide member support and benefits, and anyone who is not on board with that is not going to be an asset within the VA and will be made aware of that.

**Q349. Why was the Roadshow so 'secret squirrel' in its planning?**

It was never intended to be. Unfortunately, this did not always translate as we do sincerely apologise for the short notice some members received that it was happening. There were discussions taking place at a much higher level than the Roadshow Project Team, and as such they were not able to publicise the Roadshow until those discussions had played out.

**Q350. Why was more consultation not entered into in the planning of the Roadshows to identify best times, dates and locations?**

Again, we have to apologise for this. We were operating on the premise of member's views being represented through the VA representatives. We understand that in some cases, the member's views were conveyed accurately, and we thank those representatives for the work that they have and are doing in their regions to keep their member's represented. However, there were some instances where the member's views were not represented as fully as we would have liked.

**Q355. What will the VA do about representatives that are found to be not fulfilling their role as part of this Roadshow process?**

VA representatives are there to represent the VA at local areas and units. This includes supporting VA activities in their areas and assisting local members.

Should there be reason why VA representatives have not fulfilled their obligations during the Roadshow process, or any other process, the VA would like to know.

Please contact the VA Chairman directly if you have feedback on this issue.

**Q356. What are the VA's plans for the next 2, 3, 5 10 years?**

The VA is currently developing its own Strategic Plan. This will ensure better business services and support to members.

It will outline pathways for the VA to enhance its business models.

The VA is developing policy and procedure across all of its processes as well as focusing on building its profile, communicating member benefits available, continually sourcing additional member benefits and looking at ways it can support members better through its advocacy process.

Merchandise is also becoming a bigger part of the VA and of course scholarships and funding schemes.

Specifically though:

In two years we:

- Are aiming to be in a position where we are self-sustainable if our income streams should stop for a minimum of 3 years
- Will have a complete set of policies and procedures for our business
- Will have review processes actively in place for all of our internal processes
- Will have signed 2 business sponsors
- Will have 1 member benefit partner

In 3 years we:

- Will have increased our income by 10%
- Will have increased our membership to 80%

Our 5 and 10 year goals are a work in progress as we develop our strategic plan. We will keep you posted on this one but you can always ask questions through 1300 073 782 or

[office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au)

**Q357. VA raises money to support the members, what happens if the VA raffles should fall over tomorrow?**

The VA does have the raffles as the main income stream.

The VA is working together and along with business experts to develop alternate income streams.

Some of these have already been launched such as merchandise marketing; however it is still early days.

A number of alternate mechanisms are being considered to ensure a steady income for the VA and the members it supports.

The VA chairman has a 15 Year Strategic Plan.

This plan details methods to ensure that there is enough money invested to ensure that, should the raffles cease, the VA has enough investment to continue in its current state of operations for 3 years.

In that time alternate income processes will also be established.

**Q358. How is this Roadshow process going to be any different to any other process that has been undertaken in the past?**

The Roadshow process will be different because the Roadshow was different.



It was not a region-based, one-off collection of feedback. The Roadshow went to every region in the state, offered an online Roadshow and alternate means for members who wanted to provide feedback so that we would all be able to more accurately see what was happening throughout our Service and within the VA- a snapshot in time.

From all of this feedback, guarantees were provided by both the NSW SES and the NSW SES VA that answers and actions would be forthcoming.

We have already seen the SES has implemented changes across the Service to directly address some of the concerns that were raised at Roadshows- quick wins.

The VA has also taken the feedback on board that was provided and has started to implement a more structure approach to the way we do business, future business planning and communication.

These are all direct results from the Roadshow feedback, so we are convinced that this process will continue to translate into actual answers and actions that members will benefit from.

If you ever feel that this process is not happening, we encourage you to contact us on 1300 073 782 or [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au)

**Q359. What strategy and plans does the VA have to develop its representatives to better support the members?**

The VA will be developing its VA reps through in house and external training to better support its members. Apart from the 'normal' training such as induction and awareness training

**Q360. How will the VA support and develop proactive representatives to undertake unit visits, where can I access this calendar?**

VA representatives now work under a VA Representative Position Description, position purpose, key functions and responsibilities and key competencies.

We will be asking a lot more from our reps in future. We did receive a lot of feedback regarding our services to members and our representatives.

From this we will be developing further structure and communication around many of our practises, including the support and visits given to members from our representatives. The update of our website will include an area that members will be able to see a calendar for many VA events including visits by VA representatives.

**Q363. Why did the VA choose to undertake the Roadshows at such a poor time and in poor taste?**

We disagree that the Roadshows were done at such a poor time.

We do agree with the A/Commissioner when he stated to all members that 'there has never been a better time'.

It was time to go out to our members and hear directly from them what they wanted to say. We invited past members and staff, a total 'One SES' process.

The Roadshows did not lecture or state anything, it was a feedback forum with a guarantee that every member, every feedback will be heard. We ensured many avenues for feedback from SES members, and these were used greatly.

We ensured that we travelled to the four corners of the State and many areas in between. Everyone who requested a unit visit was visited in some way, be it 11pm at night.

The kilometres travelled are testament to this process. We disagree that the Roadshows were conducted in poor taste.

Again, they were an avenue provided to members, all members to listen to their concerns. From this we have a very real and clear picture of the realities of the concerns and requests of our members. This gives the VA the tools to structure ourselves better to serve our membership. We are making improvements to scholarships, grants, welfare fund, advocacy, support, media and training.

We have implemented further support for our reps such as position descriptions to guide them on what is required. Our Board of Directors has engaged in more governance and our office staff is increasing their training to further assist our members.

For us to find the right pathways and direction, we too had to have the tough questions asked of us.

There was some scathing feedback, and we acknowledge that and take it on board to develop a better VA.

We do not feel the difficult conversations were undertaken in poor taste, however, we continue to welcome feedback at [office@nswsesva.org](mailto:office@nswsesva.org).

### **Q364. What support is available for suspended members?**

The VA has always supported the members of the NSW SES.

The VA is looking to formalising an advocacy section within the VA which will allow members to receive confidential advice and assistance regarding many matters.

Members should always go through the appropriate chain of command and SES procedures in the first instance. However, at times, members may seek independent advice and guidance from fellow members.

This support from the VA, provided by members of the SES with an intricate knowledge and understanding of the policies, procedures and culture of the SES remains available to members in a very strict and confidential manner.

**Q417. What process is available for volunteers to be able to speak freely about management- in a structured, controlled way- without fear of reprisals?**

Many processes were put into place for the Roadshows.

The VA monitored the Roadshows to ensure fair communications for everyone, as outlined by the A/Commissioner, the Chairman and the Minister. If you feel you incurred reprisals or unfair attention due to the Roadshows, please contact the VA.

**Q587. Why can't DMP sell polo shirts when the VA can?**

The VA sells NSW SES VA branded polo shirts- not NSW SES branded polo shirts. These are available through the VA office.

**Q680. I think the VA raffles are degrading SES and VA. Why do you use them?**

The Raffles used by the VA are run by an independent marketing specialist to generate income for the VA to be used in its member services such as unit grants, scholarships, welfare fund etc.

The VA ensures that the company it uses abides by all required government regulations. The VA also conducts its own quality control and compliance with this company.

This method of raising money is used widely by such other agencies such as the Cancer Council, Rural Fire Service Association and Care Flight. In fact, those mentioned also use the same company the VA uses. The VA is currently sourcing alternate income streams for best business practices and safeguards for the services provided to members.

Any suggestions on how to provide income streams for the VA is welcome at

[office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au)

## Appendix A

# REASONINGS FOR ROADSHOW LOCATION POSITIONS

Many criteria were adopted for the positioning tools utilised to plan the roadshow locations.

The initial scope went from a single roadshow to six roadshows. This was quickly altered to make more accessible roadshows available throughout the state.

For change to occur, every project requires an end date. Thus, a three month limit was placed on the roadshows. This allows a timeframe for collation of all the data, compilation of the report, and consideration by NSW SES and Minister's office as well as keeping momentum in the project and member's interest high.

Consideration was given to completion of the roadshows before end of financial year, for both planning purposes of the NSW SES VA and the NSW SES.

The 'One SES' Plan was adopted as well as geographic common sense. That is, region boundaries were not considered as a boundary. Priority criteria were given to shortest distance travelled and shortest time travelled. This means that some units may go to roadshows out of their region, because of their geographic location.

As it turned out there is at least one roadshow in each region of the NSW SES **CHECK!!!!**

Roadshows are planned with a 'catchment area'. An effective catchment area is generally the centre (distance and/or time) of the area you are attempting to support.

The roadshows are planned that every unit has an opportunity to attend a physical roadshow where possible.

The geographic nature, size and shape of NSW will see that there may be some units whom have to travel a sizable distance if they wish to attend a roadshow in person.

If a member is unable to attend any roadshow, they can still contribute by the following means;

1. Absentee pack. VA Reps, VA Office and Roadshow Project team will all have access to these. Prepaid registered overnight post pack.
2. Email. [roadshow@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:roadshow@nswsesva.org.au)
3. Facebook. **INSERT** Roadshow site and private messaging facilities
4. Text. Roadshow mobile phone. **Awaiting approval**
5. Feedback and Roadshow Hotline. **Awaiting approval**
6. Virtual Roadshow

Issues from these sources can be brought up at the local roadshow if the persons requests, anonymously if required. It will be presented by a Member Advocate- Independent Facilitator allows Project Team to be Member Advocate.

All of these options are available at all times throughout the roadshow to ALL MEMBERS, even if they have or will attend a roadshow.

The information collected from these sources can be anonymous and will be added to the Issues Register.

Roadshows may be supplemented by unit visits where gaps or issues have been identified. You do not have to be a member of the unit to attend that visit.

The roadshow team will be travelling to the four corners of the state. That is Tweed Heads, Eden, Wentworth and Tibooburra.

Other factors considered for the Roadshow and units visit locations were;

1. Units that may not be able to release members due to RCR, VR, CFR and Alpine responsibilities
2. Input from the VA Representatives within that area
3. Distances travelled
4. Members travelling at night
5. Weekends where possible
6. Other event on in that town/city at that time
7. Transport facilities (road, rail etc.)
8. Support for townships (Project team will, where possible be using local caterers, halls etc.)
9. Unit visits to promote work or people within a unit
10. Requests to visit an area or unit
11. Requests by Minister
12. Physical time to undertake the roadshows
13. Closure date for roadshow and report

Evidence-based planning.

Information used for the roadshow matrix was gathered from the following locations:

1. NSW SES supplied units
2. Google maps were used for distances and timings

We may find that members will question our rationale for certain locations and we need to be able to provide evidence-based information and sources that prove this plan is the best available to serve our members.