



Volunteerism: Facing the Challenge

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The Bushfire CRC Volunteerism Project:

Carry out research in collaboration with, and on behalf of, Australasian volunteer-based fire services so as to ensure adequate numbers of volunteers to meet community protection needs

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Symptoms of problematic issues?

- Declining brigade memberships in rural communities
- Low brigade memberships in new communities
- Scarcity of volunteers for turnouts 9-5, Monday-Friday

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Underlying causes? Economics, and Demographics!

Economics:

- Globalisation of the economy
- Changes in the Australian economy (decline of the manufacturing and agricultural sectors)
- Changes in the nature of work (privatisation, self-employment, casualisation)

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Demographics:

- Population movements
- An ageing population
- Changes in the compositions of “families”

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BCRC Volunteerism Project Research:

- The NSW “Grain Belt” community survey
- The CFA study of new volunteers
- The surveys of women volunteers in (a) the SA CFS, and (b) the ACT RFS

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A Sermon!



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And the message is that there are four issues needing attention !

Involving:

- **Something old**
- **Something new**
- **Something BORROWED**
- **And something blue**

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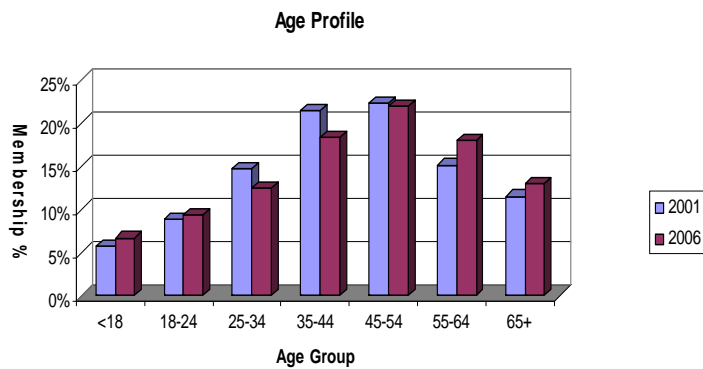
Something old?
--The average age of volunteers is HIGH!



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And probably getting higher!
CFA age data 2001 & 2006

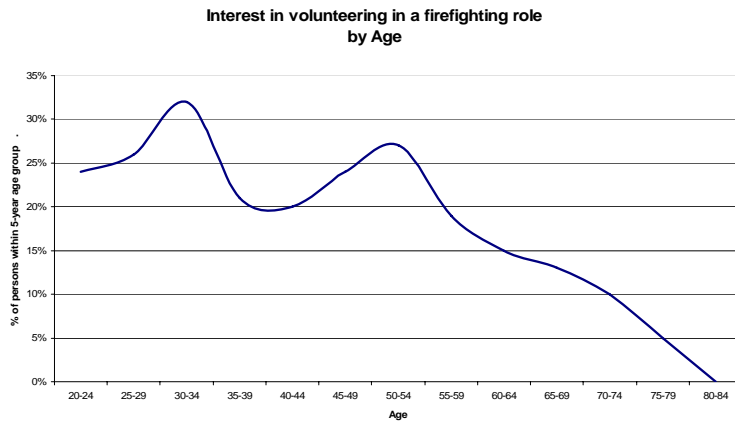


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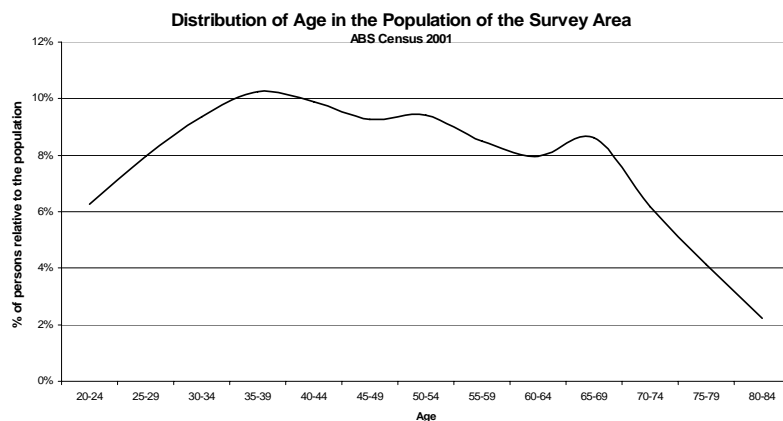
And this is why (in part, at least!) (1) Interest in volunteering by age



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(2) Availability of people, by age



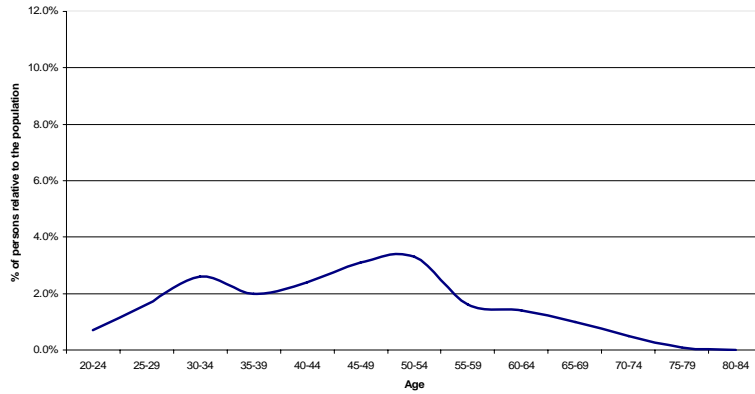
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(3) Interest in volunteering adjusted for the number of people available

Interest in a firefighting role adjusted for people available in each age group

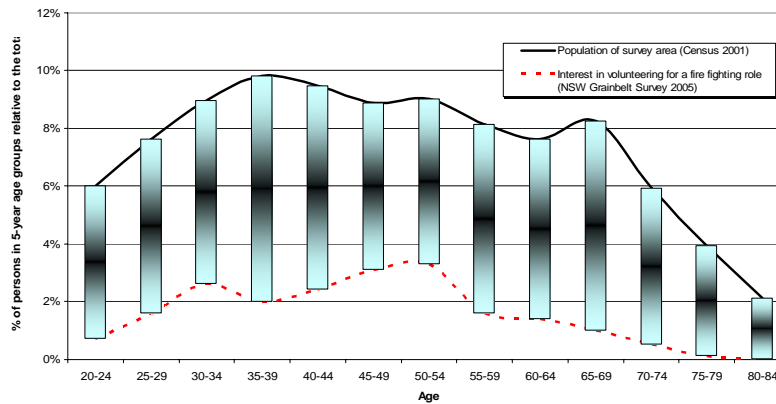


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(4) Interest in volunteering compared with available people

The gap between interest in volunteering and proportion of the population is widest between ages 35 and 44



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WHY?

--Family Life Cycle Factors

People in the 35-45 years age bracket are likely to be:

- **Married**
- **With children of an age requiring high-level parenting**
- **Paying off a hefty mortgage**
- **Consolidating career/business/farm**
- **Doing other volunteering—child/family related**

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So?

- **Review youth activities—Juniors, Cadets**
- **Demands on volunteers**
- **Brigades and families**

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Something new?
Are communities increasingly demanding, unforgiving, and cynical?



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Evidence?

- Threats of litigation
- Criticism of service
- Declining brigade memberships

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Or just a “new world”?

- Corporatised and “professionalised” agencies,
→ alienation from communities?
- Brigades “left behind”

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Something BORROWED? State-of-the-art technology!!!



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But what about volunteer management?

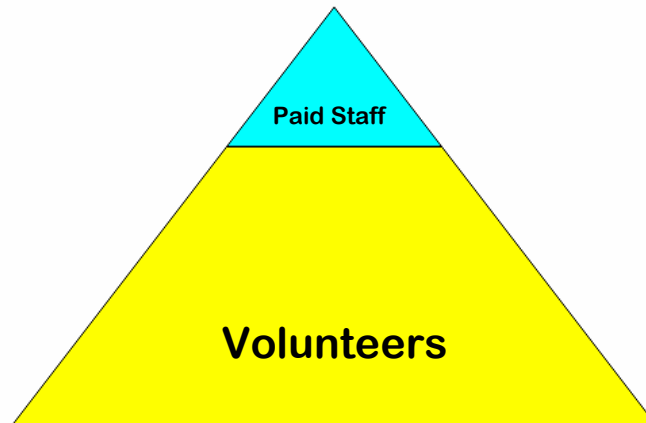


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The Pyramid:

Numbers




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The Upside-down Pyramid?



Resources Devoted



Paid Staff

Volunteers


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Ask:

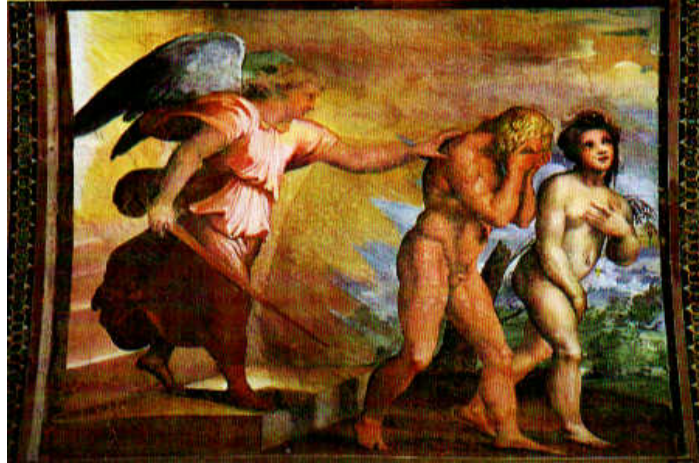
- **Most senior person with responsibilities only for volunteer management?**
- **Content of agenda items at Board meetings?**
- **Percentage of budget devoted to volunteer management?**

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Something blue?
--Some brigades do NOT welcome
“the new and different” volunteer!



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- **Cultural and linguistic diversity?**
- **Women in operational roles?**
- **The dysfunctional brigade?**

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A benediction?



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1. It's a new world
2. The local brigade is the key
3. Brigade managements need help
4. Agencies need to work on how to provide more assistance to Brigades
5. Agencies may need to review the resources they devote to volunteer support and management—including educating communities about their volunteer brigades

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