

media release

SA Metropolitan Fire Service



Reshaping the MFS – EOC report released

Wednesday, 13 March 2019

The Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) has released the findings of an Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) report that it commissioned into organisational culture.

After commencing discussions with the EOC in 2017, the MFS commissioned the report to gain a current organisational snapshot and identify initiatives to enhance equality, diversity and inclusion.

The EOC conducted in-depth workshops with 103 current staff members and key external partners.

The report found an organisational culture characterised by shared values of professionalism, integrity, respect for each other and authority, responsibility and accountability – but identified a male-dominated, hierarchical culture with barriers to diversity.

While multiple and significant barriers to diversity were found by the EOC, the report also identified that many are willing speak up to foster and lead change.

The report found that some personnel had reported experiences of sex discrimination, intimidation, harassment and bullying although not widespread.

MFS Chief Officer Michael Morgan said all MFS staff have been provided with access to the report, which he said signalled a watershed moment for the organisation.

“The MFS is one of the oldest legislated fire services in the world. And, like most fire services across the globe, we are actively seeking to modernise and diversify our workforce, so that it better reflects the community we serve.”

MFS Chief Officer Morgan said the EOC report provides the MFS with a current view of the organisation, while identifying opportunities to progress its culture.

“The MFS is actively working to attract and retain a diverse workforce. This report helps us to create a better workplace culture for all and prioritise areas to progress our culture to one that is moving beyond stereotypes and embracing of differences. This will benefit the current workforce and those recruited into the organisation in future.”

“The MFS has already taken significant steps to progress organisational culture, but we still have a journey ahead,” MFS Chief Officer Morgan said.

The EOC report contains four recommendations that the MFS is working to implement, and a draft diversity and inclusion vision statement shaped from workforce consultation.

Equal Opportunity Commissioner Dr Niki Vincent said, “I commend the MFS for taking this important step in becoming a more inclusive, respectful and safe organisation that better reflects the community it serves.”

“Although we found there were some significant barriers to developing greater diversity and inclusion in the MFS, we also found a strong body of a staff at all levels who expressed a willingness to find innovative and flexible ways to overcome these barriers.”

“As a prominent and proud government emergency services agency in South Australia, the MFS must be a role model for other organisations and the broader community – actively addressing structural and cultural barriers to diversity and inclusion and holding themselves and their people publicly accountable for this,” EOC Commissioner Dr Vincent said.

The MFS recognises that diversity enriches workforce culture, bringing different ideas, communication methods and approaches to problem solving – and welcomes the report’s content as a guide for further cultural enhancement.

For media enquiries please telephone the MFS Media Line on (08) 8204 3770

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MFS Diversity and Inclusion initiatives

The MFS is committed to diversity and inclusion and has implemented the following initiatives:

- The establishment of the MFS Female Firefighters Forum in 2010 to provide female firefighters with a forum to progress issues such as uniform and maternity/paternity leave
- In 2015, the MFS announced its intention to actively pursue greater diversity in recruitment, with a focus on gender and cultural diversity
- In 2016, the MFS launched its first diversity in recruitment campaign, leading to increased applications from and recruitment of women and people with diverse cultural backgrounds
- Joining the Male Champions of Change group in 2017 to support the national movement to progress gender equality within Australian industries, sectors and society
- Joining the Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC national Diversity Project in 2017
- Becoming a White Ribbon accredited workplace in March 2017 to assist international efforts to eliminate violence men's violence against women and children
- Commencing discussions with the EOC in 2017 to enhance diversity and inclusion within the MFS, culminating in the commissioning of the EOC's report
- Establishing and implementing an Organisational Doctrine in 2017 to guide and manage employee behaviour
- Establishing an MFS Operational Support Staff Network (for MFS personnel who aren't firefighters) in November 2018, to assist staff with sharing information, training, knowledge, skills, learning and career development
- Developing an MFS policy to enhance management of employee behaviour, complementing the existing South Australian Public Sector's Code of Ethics and the MFS Code of Conduct.

The way forward

The MFS remains committed to progressing diversity and inclusion within the organisation, to enhance culture and so that its workforce increasingly reflects the diversity within the community it serves.

Going forward, the MFS aims to:

- Establish a Diversity and Inclusion Leadership Group
- Develop an organisational Diversity and Inclusion Framework
- Provide inclusive leadership training for all leaders
- Develop a Gender Equality and Respect Action Plan
- Participate in a Workplace Equity and Respect self-assessment workshop
- Participate in specific training sessions, such as 'unconscious biases' and 'bystander intervention', for leaders and HR personnel
- Audit communication and engagement materials and policies.

The organisation will continue to collaborate with, learn from and support other emergency services agencies within Australia and internationally regarding diversity, inclusion and equity initiatives.

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