



Volunteer Rural Fire Service Survey

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1989 VRFF Survey

- At this time, 125 VRFFs were thought to exist
- 38 contributed to the survey
- Projections for 125 units suggested:
 - \$508K expenditure
 - 1938 firefighters
 - 214 vehicles
- The average vehicle age was 25 years (oldest 1946)
- The oldest VRFF dated to 1955 (Peel Forest) and 1956 (Mayfield)
- Only 16 of the 125 were registered (with Min. Forestry)



2005 VRFF Survey

- Identified 207 VRFFs, and obtained mail address for most
 - Of these, 194 were registered
 - An additional 5 (3 registered) were found to have folded
- Survey forms were posted to 205 in November 2005
- Sought both statistical information and opinions
- Received 90 forms back
- Not all questions were answered
- [xx] indicates the number of responses to questions
- Unregistered Peel Forest (still exists – not one of 207) is absent, but Mayfield continues (now 1949!)



2006 Member Survey

Following VRFF survey, was decided to poll members with similar questions:

- 53 responses, of which 10 were already entered as VRFF
- 65% IC, 12% SB, 14% CB – senior personnel
- 44% RFA, 19% forestry, 23% DOC

Results are presented in tandem with VRFF results



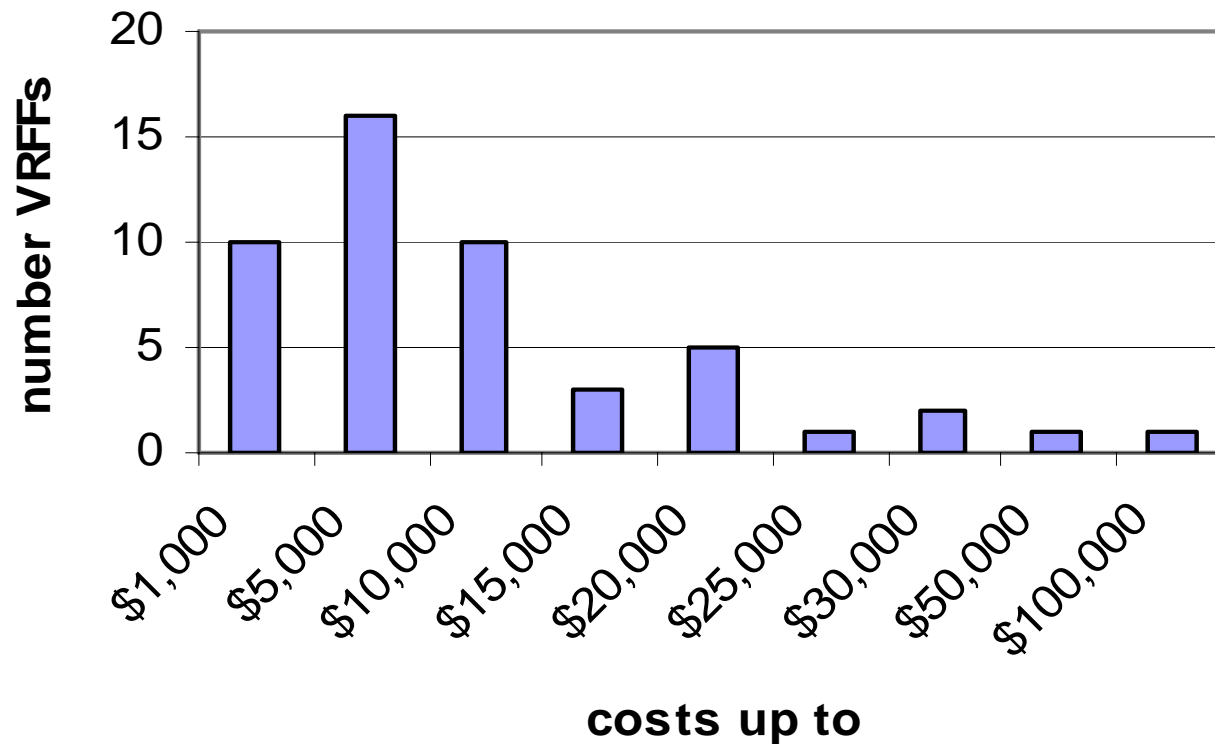
VRFF: funding [49]

- This was poorly answered:
 - Reluctance to divulge?
 - Some said costs met completely by RFA
- From the information given:
 - Total projected costs were \$1.92M
 - RFA funding to this was \$1.27M
 - Suggesting significant fund raising by VRFFs
- Unlikely that costs include Grant Assistance or capital purchases



VRFF: funding [49]

average annual expenditure



Relations with Rural Fire Authorities



*How do you rate the RFA support of your
VRFF?*

Good: 56% Average: 30% Poor: 14% [86]

*How do you rate your level of independence in
running your VRFF?*

High: 70% Moderate: 28% Low: 2% [88]



Do you feel that your RFA would rather not be involved in rural fire?

Yes: 22% No: 78% [74]

Note: this will reflect more about the RFA staff, and is not necessarily the TLA view.

Members - Yes: 14% No: 86% [42]

Are you happy to fight vegetation fires on behalf of your RFA?

Yes: 100% No: 0% [90]



Do you feel that your equipment, vehicles and station are sub-standard for the responsibilities placed on you by your RFA?

Yes: 48% No: 52% [85]

Several commented that a sub-standard estimation applied only to one of the three eg. Station, and that vehicles may be excellent. Overall therefore, an approval rating.



Members - Are you happy with the level of expenditure by your RFA to providing a rural fire service?

Yes: 62% No: 38% [40]



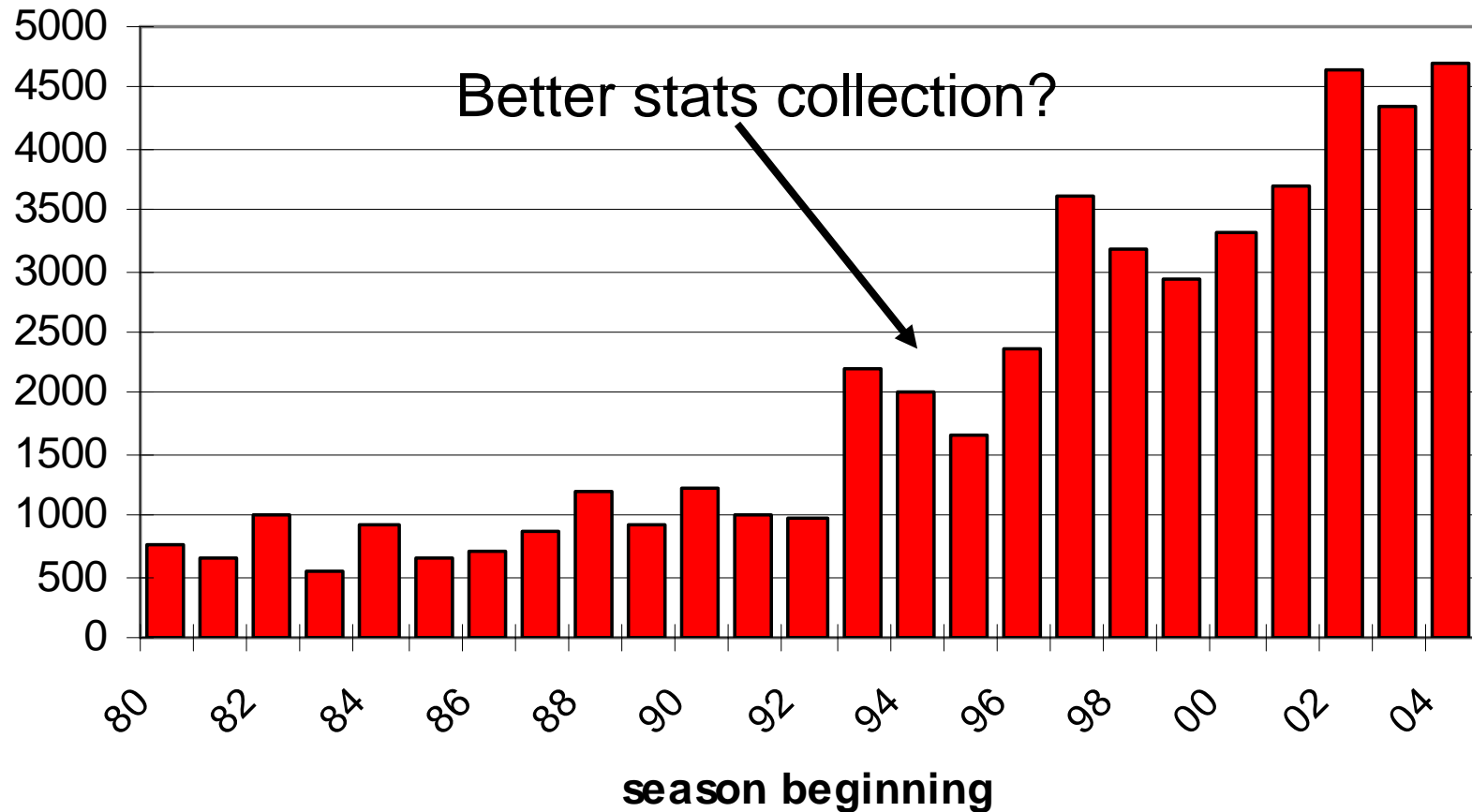
RFA Relations

The conclusion from these questions, is that relations between VRFFs and their RFAs are, in general, very good, and mutually beneficial.

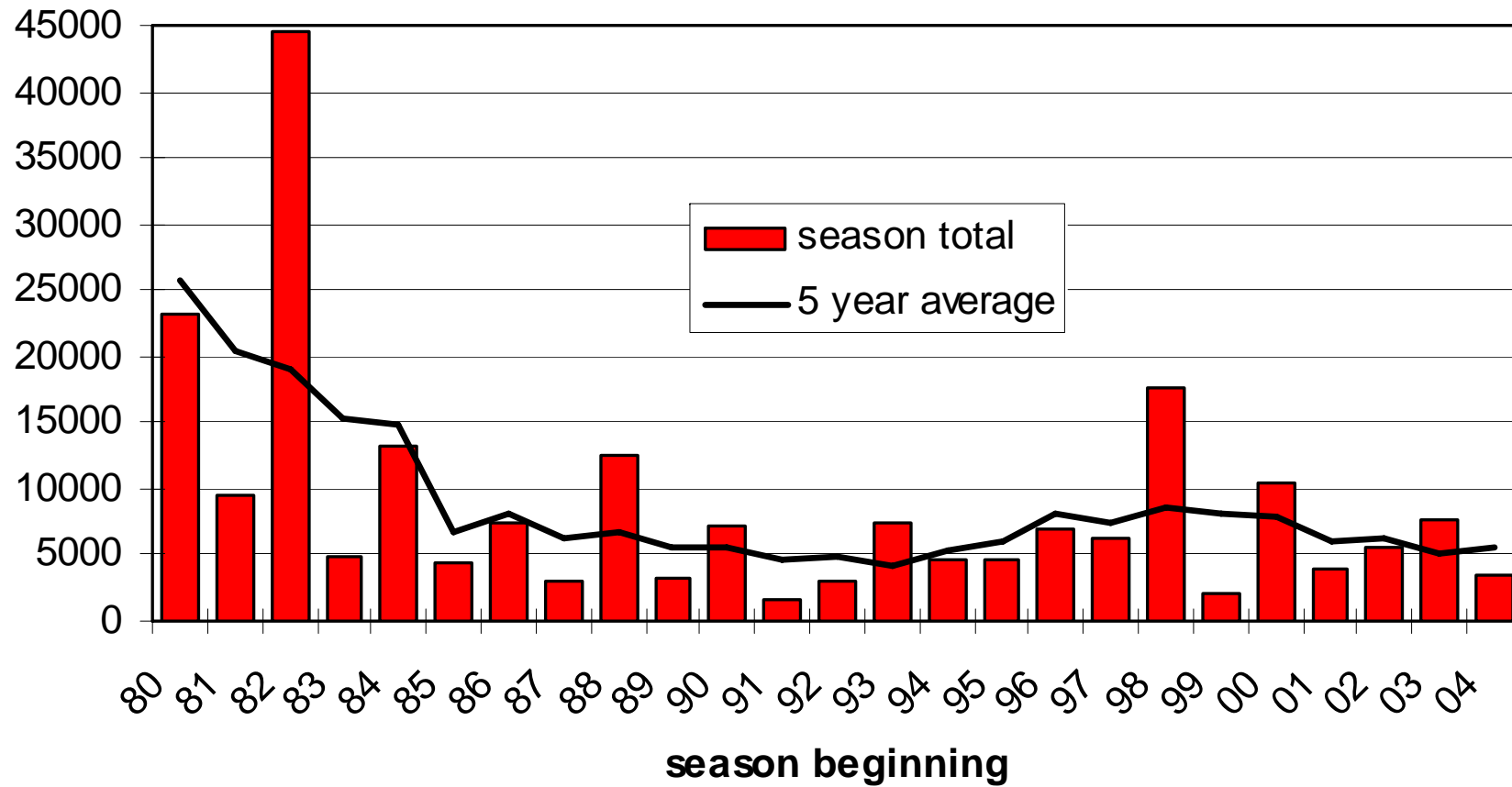
The outcome is in NRFA vegetation fire statistics – the level of fire protection significantly exceeds that of the old Forest Service days.



NRFA records: annual number of vegetation fires



NRFA records: ha burnt each season



Conclusion

Along with other improvements eg. aerial firefighting, the growth in the volunteer rural fire service has had a significant impact in reducing the average area burnt in vegetation fires.



VRFF Resources - Membership

Declared number of firefighters: 1844 [121]

Average/VRFF: 15.2

Projected total for 207 VRFFs: 3155

Covered by NRFA Insurance Scheme: 83% [69]

Turned out by pager?: 65% [92]

An additional 6% had part pager turnout. Some of the country areas are probably not suitable for pager coverage, so uptake is better than indicated. As pager turnout is through NZFS FireCom centres, there is already operational integration.



Membership

Are you having difficulty recruiting new members?

Yes: 63% No: 37% [88]

Are you having difficulty getting sufficient members to turn out during the day?

Yes: 58% No: 42% [86]



Do you feel that Unit Standard based training and accreditation is an impediment to recruitment and retention of members?

Yes: 58% No: 42% [84]

Members - Yes: 43% No: 57% [42]

Are Red Cards used by you or your RFA?

Yes: 16% No: 84% [70]

Members - Yes: 12% No: 88% [40]



Do you have access to a FRSITO Assessor?

Yes: 87% No: 13% [83]

Do you favour the adoption of compulsory fitness testing for volunteer rural firefighters?

Yes: 22% No: 78% [86]

Members - Yes: 21% No: 79% [42]



Are you paid an hourly rate for training?

Yes: 6% No: 94% [90]

Are you paid for firefighting?

Yes: 29% No: 71% [91]

Several of the 'No's indicated that they have received payment for fighting fires outside their RFA district; the question relates only to fires in their own districts.



Do you feel that volunteer firefighters lack representation and are not consulted over changes in rural fire administration?

Yes: 75% No: 25% [80]

Do you feel that rural firefighters lack representation and are not consulted over changes in rural fire administration?

Members - Yes: 75% No: 25% [40]



Are you concerned that the level of service you currently provide will deteriorate if the DIA Review recommends that your VRFF becomes part of a unified national fire service?

Yes: 46% No: 54% [71]

Fairly even split. Several didn't answer, implying that they were unaware of, or undecided about, the Review. It is likely to have the greatest impact on TLAs/VRFFs than any other rural fire sector.



Are you concerned that the level of service provided by your RFA will deteriorate if the DIA Review recommends that all VRFFs become part of a unified national fire service?

Members - Yes: 74% No: 26% [43]

Much more polarised, and indicating real concern by senior officers if volunteer rural firefighters are lost to a national service.



The Inflexible NZFS

Costs containment through inflexibility?

- Leave UFD's fixed.
 - Masks inability to meet Standards of Cover in 'rural' urban sprawl
- Don't rationalise FBs and VRFFs
 - Very little of this has occurred

Result is:

- NZFS appliance first to 92.7% of 'rural' structure fires
- 'Rural' urban dwellers are paying same as UFD dwellers, but getting poorer service:
 - Standards of Cover don't apply
 - 21% greater chance of damage



2003/2004 NZFS Statistics

Structure Fires

	with damage	with no damage	Total
UFD	2285	2499	4784
UFD%	47.8%	52.2%	
rural	526	226	752
rural%	69.9%	30.1%	



The Inflexible NZFS

- The 'urban' rural dwellers get demonstrably poorer service from the NZFS than the communities within urban fire districts
- Because rural fire attendance is swamped by NZFS, it is not possible to assess the effectiveness of VRFFs from published statistics.
- The NZFS counter to the inequity claim by rural dwellers - that the %rural calls represents a fair return of the Fire Service Levy – is not valid.
- Is the merger/takeover of fire services a means burying/masking these deficiencies by the NZFS?



Summary

- Unlike the NZFS, the volunteer rural fire service has grown significantly over the last 20 years
- This growth has been community-driven
- The bulk are there for the same reasons as VFBs
- However, the growth has suited RFAs to help meet their statutory responsibilities in vegetation fire
- Without exception, VRFFs are willing to help
- As a consequence, the level of vegetation fire protection in NZ has greatly improved with the growth of the rural fire service



Summary

- At 3155, RFS represents significant number of experienced emergency volunteers
- The level of activity of the 207 VRFFs is probably little different from the least active 207 NZFS VFBs
- This is a valuable resource for other local authority emergencies – and it is functioning efficiently
- However, their role outside firefighting causes RFA problems, and insurance gaps for volunteers
- There are other issues that the rural fire sector needs to address to improve the volunteer conditions, such as representation and appliance ages.

