

Chairman's report 2017/2018:

Dear members, stakeholders and supporters,

The 4th Annual General Meeting of the Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association, or as we liked to be called "goFPA", is upon us. The "go" represent our main aim in that action is required to prevent wildfires in the Overberg.

I would like to thank my board, our FPO and the Operational Team for their dedication and passion for making the Overberg wildfire-safe. Again, the past year has confirmed that the prevention and suppression of wildfires requires social cohesion, committed landowners, good communication and operationally sound fire services.

In general we are satisfied that we have stayed committed to our objectives. Basic services are now well entrenched in our organisation. Mapping, transparent financial management, representation of our landowners in wildfire matters and timeous, trustworthy communication are all part of our day-to-day operations.

I would like to highlight our accomplishments of the past year. Starting with our membership coverage, as at 31 March 2018, we cover 60% of the Overberg district based on land area. 54 new members joined and less than 10 members requested to be deregistered.

Integrated Fire Management is the key to ensure our efforts are focussed on the reduction of the number and the intensity of wildfires, thereby limiting our losses – lives, economic and environmental. I am pleased to report that the efforts of landowners, Fire Services and our Operational team to address identified high risk areas BEFORE the start of the fire season were very successful. To name but a few, Beaumont Wines/Cape Nature (Botrivier), Myddelton (Caledon) and Sondagskloof. Special thanks to Reinard and his team and to the landowners for their participation in the process.

Communication has been identified as a key driver of change, more than 400 members and/or stakeholders attended and participated in various FPA meetings. The support from our Fire Management Units are remarkable, the vigilance and quick response have to be commended. We look forward to build on the cohesion and commitment between the stakeholders and to support landowners with integrated fire management planning and activities.

The operational team will have a special focus on the less organized FMUs to build strong relationships and coordination. With the benefit of time, consistent messaging and operational support the impact of goFPA is tangible and appreciated. I would like to quote a comment from a member *"Louise, I have to tell you that I am so thankful since the FPA has been supporting us. Every Sunday afternoon or on high risks days I worried about how I was going to get hold of the right people, who would support me, what was going to happen if we did not stop this fire. Now I feel reassured in knowing I have help available."*

During the past year we have had several engagements with public entities in the Overberg, generating varied levels of success. Transnet has been actively clearing the identified high risk areas; SANRAL and their neighbours, via the FPA, have worked together on clearing and creating strategies to reduce the risk of wildfires on their land.

We have also seen a major challenge for the Grabouw/Elgin area with the handover of large parts of MTO managed land to DAFF. With the intervention of the Operational team, our FPO and support from the Board we manage to get the appropriate warnings out timeous, readiness plans in place and commitment from DAFF regarding what fire suppression strategy would be followed in the event of a wildfire on their land. DAFF will also become a formal member of the goFPA during the 2018/19 financial year.

Although fire suppression is not a core function of the FPA I have to comment on the past fire season in the Western Cape. A number of lives have been lost in the line of duty, livelihoods have been destroyed and trauma suffered due to devastating wildfires in the Western Cape. This reminds us of our responsibility to be accountable landowners and to practice safe fire fighting – not just for us, but also our workers. This was supported by six Fire Line Safety training courses the past financial year and by active FPA representation at nearly all wildfires the past fire season. goFPA provided assistance with the identification of risks, communication and coordination which was critical to ensure that the all parties were informed when formulating suppression strategies. This support also assisted our members to contribute and be protected.

I would like to thank both the Overberg and Overstrand Fire Services for their support and the cooperation that was given when working with us and our members to prevent and stop wildfires. The support also extended to prevention interventions which is greatly appreciated.

To the volunteers, VWS and Enviro Wildfire Services, the professional teams NCC, Vulcan and Working on Fire, Villiersdorp Privaat Brandweer, our partners CapeNature and Sanparks, and you, our committed members, a heartfelt message of appreciation for your services and support during the past year.

Lastly I would like to acknowledge the contribution and support goFPA received from the Western Cape Provincial Administration, Disaster Management Unit. Their financial assistance for aerial support, wildfire awareness, fire line safety programmes, coordination and fire services support were invaluable to us – thank you. Fire is everybody's fight.

Dr Paul Cluver
Chairman