## WAFA NEWSLETTER

WWW.WAFA.ASN.AU



2nd Quarter - 2025



# A word from the President



#### **Why You Should Attend WAFA25**

There has never been a more important time for us to come together. WAFA25, delivered as part of the AFAC25 conference, isn't just a series of presentations, it's a space for powerful conversations, shared momentum, and genuine connection. This year's theme, "If not now, then when?", is more than a call to action. It's a collective challenge to all of us who care deeply about safety, inclusion, and respect in our sector. At WAFA25, you'll hear from bold leaders like Silena Silva, Allison Donovan, Penelope Twemlow, and frontline practitioners shaping change from Arnhem Land to urban fire stations. But more than that, you'll meet people who understand your world. This conference is where energy meets purpose. Where the spark of an idea becomes a new collaboration. Where your story finds power in the stories of others. Whether you're new to the sector or a seasoned professional, you'll leave with insight, support, and the inspiration to keep pushing forward, for yourself and for others.

We can't wait to welcome you.

Quinn Cramer

President

Women and Firefighting Australasia

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## WAFA25 Conference



The program for WAFA25 has been released and we are very excited to showcase a brilliant array of talented women and men in the sector.

To view the two day of conference presentations please click <u>HERE</u>.

As a not for profit, volunteer run board, WAFA would not be able to host it's biennial conference without strong agency support. This year we would like to thank the support we have received from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (WA), the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (WA), NSW Fire and Rescue, Fire Rescue Victoria, the Country Fire Service (SA) and the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service, who jumped on board early as partners and committed to buying tickets to WAFA to make it a viable operation.

We are also very grateful to other agencies who have opted to buy a portion of their AFAC tickets through WAFA to help support the work we do.

We'd also like to extend a special thank you to FlamePro who have come onboard as our official Lanyard sponsor for the conference. FlamePro approached the WAFA booth at AFAC24 and we were delighted when we reached out to them this year they jumped on board with formal support.

FlamePro make PPC for firefighters and other frontline responders. FlamePros mission includes driving positive change in sector, including through sustainable practices in manufacturing. If you'd like to learn more about FlamePro or check out their gear, please see their website

https://flamo-pro.com.au/about

FLAME PRO

#### **WAFA Stand**

If you're attending AFAC/WAFA this year, please drop by the trade hall and you'll find the WAFA stand at stand #156 opposite AFAC.

We'll be there to chat about all things Women in Firefighting and also have some merch for sale for those who want to represent and a few sneaky give aways too!

Come and meet WAFA board members from across the country and find out how you can sign up as a member or become more involved.



## **Buy Tickets**

Early bird sales have now closed, but there is still a chance to buy tickets to the WAFA conference.

Two day tickets are currently available at \$1300 + GST. In that you will receive free access to the WAFA PD day.

https://www.afacconference.com.au/2025pricing-registration

Check out the full WAFA/AFAC program online at:

https://www.afacconference.com.au/afac25 -conference-program



26 - 29 August 2025

Perth Convention & Exhibition Centre

# Professional Development Day

We're excited to announce a new addition to the WAFA Conference program, our first ever WAFA Professional Development Day.

The PD day will be held on the afternoon of Tuesday 26 August at the Perth Convention Centre, prior to the formal conference kick off.

This development session aims to provide a safe and inclusive space for WAFA delegates to connect and learn from inspirational speakers.

Access to our professional development day is **FREE and exclusive** to all WAFA two and three day conference ticket holders.

The professional Development Day will comprise of a presentation from Cassie Lindsey, Program Director from Champions of Change.



There will also be a networking afternoon tea for attendees to meet each other and the WAFA board and chat all things females in fire.

The PD day will finish with an inspiring presentation from our Key Note speaker Rabia Siddique.

Rabia is an international criminal and human rights lawyer, former senior British Army officer, hostage and abuse survivor, global change maker and trail blazer.



Rabia was decorated by the late Queen Elizabeth II for her humanitarian work in the Middle East as well as in Asia, South America and Europe, and became well known for having successfully sued the British Armed Forces and Government for discrimination in a landmark case in 2008.

Rabia is the author of the best selling book "Equal Justice – My Journey as a Woman, a Soldier and a Muslim" and more recently has become a multi award winning story teller, professional speaker, leadership, resilience and diversity consultant, non-executive board member, philanthropist, media commentator and advocate for women, children and our most marginalised communities.

Through her professional experience as an international lawyer, senior executive, military leader, board director and trusted mentor, and her lived experience as a humanitarian worker and trauma survivor, Rabia brings unique perspectives to her work like no other.

Her core purpose is the pursuit of multi-sector reform, cultural change, and leadership transformation, in order to combat one of the biggest crises of our time – the erosion of trust – in our institutions, organisations and leaders. Rabia is driven to serve, empower and inspire leaders to earn and build trust; by fostering greater resilience, integrity, inclusion and belonging. This is the key to enhancing leadership and organisational credibility and ensuring sustainable success.

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#### **WAFA Awards**

With the conference just around the corner, WAFA is seeking nominees across four categories for it's biennial awards, presented in Perth at the opening night of AFAC.

#### Why Enter?

The WAFA Awards are a way of acknowledging a colleague, staff member, organisation or initiative that is demonstrating leadership in the effort to increase support for women in fire.

Use the submission process to nominate your colleague, organisation or an initiative to highlight what success through strong leadership looks like. The nominees and winners alike will benefit from the exposure generated by the Awards, boosting their profile as well as highlighting best practice approaches.

There are four categories of award.

## Outstanding Contribution by a Female in the fire sector

This award is designed to show the appreciation, dedication and congratulations to a woman working in the Fire and Emergency Services industry who has:

- demonstrated consistent leadership;
- encouraged and supported the development of women;
- been an inspirational role model;
- given selflessly of themselves in support of their community; or
- shown unwavering dedication to our industry.

#### **Youth Leadership Award**

This award recognises a young woman (16-20 years) who is a volunteer in the fire and emergency services industry who has demonstrated strong and consistent leadership and a commitment to the safety of their community.

#### **Champion of change Award**

Without our colleagues supporting and encouraging us, our ability to influence the industry would be a lot harder. This award recognises a change champion within our industry who has:

- consistently mentored and coached women;
- created, provided and actively promoted a work environment that supports the inclusion of women; or
- consistently advocated for diversity and inclusion within their organisation or the industry as a whole.

## Member Organisation 'Diversity, Fairness and Inclusion' award

WAFA recognises that all organisations are striving to be proactive in the Diversity and Inclusion space. This award recognises an organisation's effort and dedication to diversity and inclusion through programs and initiatives which have produced tangible results.

Please note organisations must be current organisational members of WAFA to be eligible for this award.

#### How to nominate:

Please jump on the WAFA website to find out more about the Awards and how to nominate Nominations close Friday the 1<sup>st</sup> of August.

## https://www.wafa.asn.au/wafa-awards-2025-information



Peta Miller-Rose for being awarded the WAFA
Champion of Change Award in 2023



Nancy Boura getting ger OUtstanding Contribution by a female in the fire sect award at her home brigade in Victoria in 2023

# Feature Piece: Same Fire, Different Paths - How Women Experience Firefighting Across Agencies

The fireline doesn't discriminate, but the systems behind it often do.

Women in the Australasian region work across a myriad of firefighting streams, including land management agencies, career fire and rescue services, and volunteer brigades. Each pathway offers distinct experiences shaped by organizational culture, leadership opportunities, and systemic support, or lack thereof. Though united by purpose, these differences shape how women enter, stay, and advance within the sector.

#### **Land Management Agencies**

**Examples:** Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic), Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania (PWS), Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (WA), NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)

Land management agencies across the region carry considerable responsibility in the prevention preparedness of and response to bushfire across their estate. For many women, they offer early operational exposure and broad, multidisciplinary work, but entry and advancement have historically been constrained by structural and cultural barriers.

A 2016 survey conducted by FFMVic found that 32% of respondents had experienced gender-based discrimination, and 20% reported sexual harassment. Career progression was seen as opaque, and women with caregiving responsibilities faced particular challenges in accessing leadership development.1

Since then, several agencies have adopted internal equity strategies. FFMVic's 2023 Gender in Fire report documented improvements in operational representation and crew culture, with many women reporting a sense of trust and inclusion at base-level and intermediate ranks.2

However, women remain under-represented in senior operational leadership, and qualifications acquired in land management are still not consistently recognised across agency lines.

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has taken a notably systematic approach to improving representation. In 2018, NPWS identified low numbers of women in field officer roles and a range of barriers — including male-coded job advertisements, poor visibility of women in operational roles, workplace culture, and infrastructure.

In response, they launched multiple initiatives, including:

- Establishing a Female Field Officer Network with regional coordinators and executive-level sponsorship
- Reviewing and updating job advertisements and role descriptions for inclusive language
- Participating in "Girls on Fire" events and hosting an all-women hazard reduction burn
- Releasing a tailored women's uniform range and workplace design principles to support safety, flexibility and inclusion
- Implementing the Culture Priorities Program, with modules on gender, collaboration and respectful behaviour

Between 2019 and 2022, the number of women in NPWS field officer roles grew from 58 to 131 - a 225% increase. As of September 2022, women made up 17.3% of NPWS's total field officer workforce.3

Land management agencies outperform many career fire services in the proportion of women in operational roles, but representation continues to thin with seniority — and many pathways remain informal or unclear.

Efforts to create inclusive careers now focus not only on recruitment, but retention: ensuring women have visible role models, career development support, equitable access to leadership, and infrastructure that reflects their needs and contributions.

Key Challenges:

- Career development beyond intermediate levels
- Visibility of women in senior field and technical leadership
- Retention in isolated and under-resourced regional workplaces





#### **Career Fire and Rescue Services**

**Examples:** Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ), Fire and Rescue NSW, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES), Tasmania Fire Service (TFS).

Career fire services offer structured employment: shift-based rosters, nationally recognised qualifications, union protections, and formal promotion pathways. In theory, these elements should provide a stable foundation for inclusive workplaces.

In practice, however, systemic barriers persist, particularly in frontline operations and leadership. A series of independent cultural reviews led by Elizabeth Broderick & Co. have revealed recurring patterns across jurisdictions: exclusionary cultures, informal male networks, and inconsistent enforcement of behavioural standards.

In Fire Rescue Victoria (2023), women described being overlooked for acting roles, subjected to excessive scrutiny during incidents, and undermined by "banter" that reinforced exclusion. Cultural change was seen as slow and often symbolic.<sup>1</sup>

In Fire and Emergency New Zealand (2022), female firefighters reported a stark disconnect between corporate inclusion messaging and day-to-day experience. Many described being treated as outsiders and lacking access to meaningful development opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

In the 2025 Tasmania Fire Service and SES review, informal networks were found to dominate workplace culture, where poor behaviour was tolerated and complaints often led to isolation or career disadvantage.<sup>3</sup>

These findings are echoed in workforce data: women make up only 13–16% of paid firefighters in most career agencies, with significantly lower representation in senior operational roles, particularly those involving incident command. Formal equality exists on paper, but informal gatekeeping, via assumptions about team fit, reliability, and physical capacity, continues to shape outcomes.

Encouragingly, some agencies are responding with structural reform. The South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service (SAMFS), for example, redesigned its recruitment process after recognising that high-cost prerequisites (such as a Medium Rigid driver's licence and first aid certification) were excluding under-represented applicants. These are now required only after merit-based assessments are complete, reducing financial barriers without lowering standards.

SAMFS also implemented staged "lifecycles" for physical assessments, allowing applicants who initially fall short to return for reassessment within 6–12 months, a shift from the previous system where one failed attempt meant restarting the entire process. As of 2022. The impact has been immediate and as of 2022, sustained:

- Women's representation in the applicant pool rose from 4.7% (2015) to 12% (2016), and has remained steady
- CALD applications increased from 1% to 10%
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in applications rose to approximately 1.4%<sup>4</sup>

These targeted adjustments show how well-designed policy can broaden access without compromising capability, a model with relevance across the sector.

#### **Key Challenges:**

- Persistent cultural resistance in some stations
- Gendered assumptions about capability and leadership
- Under enforcement of behavioural standards
- Representation thin at senior operational levels

#### References:

- 1. Elizabeth Broderick & Co. (2023). Independent Review into the Culture at Fire Rescue Victoria.
- 2. Elizabeth Broderick & Co. (2022). Independent Review into Fire and Emergency New Zealand's Workplace Culture.
- 3. Elizabeth Broderick & Co. (2025). Tasmania Fire Service and SES Culture Review.
- 4. Champions of Change Coalition Fire and Emergency Group. (2022). Progress Report. <a href="https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Fire-Emergency-2022-Progress-Report.pdf">https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Fire-Emergency-2022-Progress-Report.pdf</a>



#### **Volunteer Brigades**

**Examples:** Country Fire Authority (VIC), Rural Fire Service (NSW), Country Fire Service (SA), Queensland Rural Fire Service.

Volunteer brigades are the backbone of fire response in regional and rural areas across Australasia. They provide a critical workforce deeply embedded in the communities they serve. However, the experiences of women volunteers remain shaped by highly localised brigade cultures, which can either foster inclusion or reinforce exclusion.

A 2009 Edith Cowan University study found that while many women gained confidence and a sense of purpose through volunteering, they also reported exclusion from leadership roles, limited access to training, and cultural norms that questioned their legitimacy as firefighters<sup>1</sup>.

Similarly, Bushfire CRC's Fire Note 23, which drew on research from four Australian states, identified key obstacles to women's recruitment and retention: inflexible training schedules, lack of basic facilities (such as female toilets and changerooms), and a limited number of female role models or mentors. The report recommended practical measures including tailored mentoring, revised training structures, and targeted leadership development<sup>2</sup>.

Volunteer leadership pathways often depend on holding operational qualifications, yet women remain underrepresented in these roles, partly due to inconsistent access to training and a lack of structured development support. This pattern was identified in a 2021 review of volunteer data by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Victoria, which found lower participation rates by women in operational training and consequently in volunteer officer roles.3

In response the CFA introduced several initiatives aimed at reducing barriers and encouraging leadership development for women:

- The Women's Challenge Camps offer immersive operational skills training and leadership discussions designed to increase confidence and build peer networks.
- Women's Burn Days provide opportunities for hands-on involvement in planning and conducting planned burns in a safe, inclusive setting.
- The Women in Leadership Mentoring Program connects aspiring leaders with experienced volunteers to support professional development and engagement within brigade structures.

Between 2020 and 2022, the proportion of women in CFA volunteer leadership roles increased from 6% to 17.3%, though the long-term sustainability of this growth will depend on continued resourcing and cultural support at the brigade level.

While these developments mark progress, both historical research and more recent data suggest that systemic barriers persist. Many of the challenges identified more than a decade ago — such as uneven access to training, informal power structures, and perceptions about capability — remain relevant today.

#### **Key Challenges:**

- Inconsistent culture across brigades and districts
- Limited access to operational training for underrepresented groups
- Underrepresentation of women in volunteer officer roles
- Informal networks shaping advancement more than policy

#### References:

- 1. Bird, D. (2009). Firefighting and Femininity: The Experience of Women in the Western Australian Volunteer Bushfire Service. Honours Thesis, Edith Cowan University.
- 2. Bushfire CRC. (2010). Fire Note 23 –
  Recruitment and Retention of Women
  Volunteers.
  <a href="https://www.bushfirecrc.com/sites/default/files/managed/resource/fire-note-23-">https://www.bushfirecrc.com/sites/default/files/managed/resource/fire-note-23-</a>

volunteers-women.pdf

3. <u>Champions of Change Coalition – Fire and Emergency Group.</u> (2022). <u>Progress Report.</u> <u>https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Fire-Emergency-2022-Progress-Report.pdf</u>



## An interview with a Board Member Min McDonald



#### Melinda (Min) McDonald Vice President (WAFA)

#### Tell us your name, Agency and Role?

Senior Firefighter Melinda McDonald CF, Fire and Rescue NSW, Senior Organisational Development Advisor.

#### How did you get into fire management?

I began my firefighting journey as a retained firefighter in my hometown of Tamworth. Stepping onto the truck, I quickly realised it combined so many elements of who I am and who I aspire to be-community service, teamwork, problem-solving, fitness, collaboration, and continuous learning and improvement. My background in strategic communications and project management gave me a strong foundation in solving problems under pressure - but I was also someone who spent weekends running marathons, cycling, and lifting weights for fun. So, in many ways, joining the fire service felt like a natural fit, bringing together my passion for community and my drive for personal challenge and growth.

#### What are your favourite things about your job?

I think like most firefighters, I enjoy using my operational skills - but I also deeply feel that when we do that, it means it is the worst day of someone else's life. So what I value most is the opportunity to drive meaningful change on a bigger scale. Working alongside dedicated professionals who are committed to protecting communities before the worst happens inspires every day. I particularly enjoy the collaborative nature of my role-whether it's developing strategies for respectful workplaces, designing leadership programs, or engaging with diverse communities to promote inclusion. Every project contributes to a safer, more supportive environment for both our teams and the communities we serve.



#### What has surprised you about your career?

The biggest surprise has been the depth of cultural complexity within fire services and how influential organisational culture is in shaping experiences, behaviours, and outcomes. It's also been surprising—and motivating—to see how leadership practices can make a significant difference in fostering inclusion and respect. Another unexpected but rewarding aspect has been the opportunity to present and share learnings at conferences, both locally and internationally.

## What tips would you provide to other women/nonbinary people consider a similar career to you?

Be confident in your skills and perspective—diverse experiences are valuable and needed in fire services. Seek out mentors and networks that can support you, and don't be afraid to ask questions or challenge assumptions. It's also important to look after your wellbeing and to find allies who champion respectful and inclusive workplaces. Your voice can drive change, and your contribution will help shape the future of the sector.



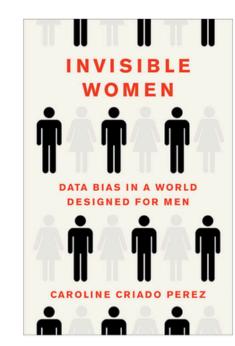
Post Script: After this piece was written Min has transferred her amazing skill set to another section of FR NSW and has just passed her Operator Communications Course - Congrats MIn

## Recommended Read

**Title:** *Invisible Women:* Data bias in a world designed for men

**Author:** Caroline Criado Perez

'A book that changes the way you see the world' Sunday Times





Imagine a world where...

- Your phone is too big for your hand
- Your doctor prescribes a drug that is wrong for your body
- In a car accident you are 47% more likely to be injured.

If any of that sounds familiar, chances are you're a woman.

From government policy and medical research, to technology, workplaces, and the media. Invisible Women reveals how in a world built for and by men we are systematically ignoring half of the population, often with disastrous consequences. Caroline Criado Perez brings together an impressive range of case studies, stories and new research from across the world that illustrate the hidden ways in which women are forgotten, and the profound impact this has on us all.

Caroline Criado Perez is a writer, broadcaster and award-winning feminist campaigner. She was the 2013 recipient of the Liberty Human Rights Campaigner of the Year Award, and was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2015. Invisible Women has won the FT & McKinsey Business Book of the Year Award, the Books Are My Bag Readers' Choice Award and the Royal Society Science Book Prize.

## **Shop WAFA**

Visit the WAFA Redbubble site to browse through a range of WAFA branded products.

Whether it's a gift for your favourite female firey, or something for yourself, Redbubble has a huge range to select from, so you'll be sure to find something that suits.

https://www.redbubble.com/people/WAFAInc/shop

## REDBUBBLE



'My mum is a firefighter' tshirt \$22.38

**WAFA Mouse** Pad \$18.45



All clothing comes in a range of sizes and colours.



**WAFA Classic** Logo Lge - Black writing. Classic T-Shirt \$26.43



**WAFA Classic** sticker \$3.78

## Podcast Recommendations

#### **Future Firefighter Podcast Series.**

Presented by the UK's Women in the Fire Service this six podcast episodes providing tips and advice for those who dream of being a firefighter.

Although targeted at a UK audience, we're sure Australasian listeners will take interest in hearing about topics including the role of the firefighter, what the Fire and Rescue Service does, application and interview techniques, different careers/roles, fitness and strength, and HR (maternity, work life balance, inclusion policies).

https://wfs.org. uk/futurefirefighterpodcast/ember Benefits

# Smart Firefighting Podcast: Building Inclusive Fire Services with WAFA's Quinn Cramer

As the AFAC Conference approaches, now is the perfect time to explore how we can build a more diverse and inclusive fire service.

In a powerful episode of the Smart Firefighting Podcast, Quinn Cramer, President of Women and Firefighting Australasia (WAFA), shares her insights on advancing gender balance, equal opportunity, and collaboration across the sector.

So take a listen Apple Podcasts:

https://lnkd.in/g\_NF34WD

Spotify: <a href="https://lnkd.in/gauuXtHG">https://lnkd.in/gauuXtHG</a>

## **PhD Study**

Are you a firefighter who eats at work? Holly Ranson want to hear from you!

Whether you're full-time, part-time, on-call or volunteer, working in metro, rural, aviation or defence - if you eat during your firefighting shifts, your experiences matter.

I'm doing PhD research on how firefighters eat at work, and I'd love to hear your story.

It takes about one hour of your time and could help shape future workplace nutrition strategies for fire services.

Click <u>here</u> to start or scan the QR code or enter the URL in the image below.

Bond University Human Research Ethics Committee approval no: HR03188



## Sign Up Today

Sign up for an individual membership for \$25 and receive:

- A newsletter direct to your preferred email address
- Direct invites to our online speaker series
- Access to the members only portal of our website.
- And be eligible for member scholarships

## Job Opportunities

#### Join Ventia's Fire & Rescue Team



#### **About Ventia**

With over 35 years of Defence experience and 26 years delivering Fire Services, Ventia is proud to lead the way in inclusive, high-performance emergency response. Our new contract offers long-term career stability and growth.

Are you ready to make a real impact in your community? Join one of Australia and New Zealand's largest essential services providers and be part of a team that values diversity, inclusion, and professional growth.

#### Why Join Us?

- Supportive & Inclusive Culture We're committed to increasing female representation across all levels, including leadership.
- Career Growth Access structured training, development programs, and leadership pathways.
- Excellent Wages & Conditions Enjoy great EA rates and benefits under a long-term Defence contract.
- Work-Life Balance Rosters perfect for balancing career and personal life.

#### **About the Role**

You'll work as part of a close-knit team responding to fire and rescue incidents. You'll also:

- Maintain operational readiness and safety standards
- Participate in regular training and drills
- Contribute to a positive, team-oriented station culture

#### Locations:

- 3 positions in Albury/Wodonga (VIC/NSW) region
- 4 positions in Toowoomba (QLD) region
- 1 position in Bullsbrook (WA) region
- 2 positions in Gingin (WA) area
- 1 position in Western Port Bay (VIC) region
- 1 position in Jervis Bay (VIC) region

#### Roster:

- 4 on | 4 off roster 2 x10-hr day shifts, 2 x 14-hr night shift
- Early: Mon-Fri, 7:00am-2:00pm | Late: Mon-Fri, 2:00pm-11:30pm

#### What We're Looking For

We welcome applications from women and individuals of all backgrounds who meet the following:

- PUA20622 Certificate II & PUA30619 Certificate III in Public Safety (Firefighting & Emergency Ops)
- Current HR driver's licence
- Australian Citizenship (required for Defence clearance)

#### What You'll Get

- Access to health & wellbeing programs (EAP, Healthy Minds & Bodies)
- Corporate discounts (travel, health, finance & more)
- 12-weeks company funded paid parental leave
- A workplace that celebrates and supports women in emergency services

Find out more about Firefighting & Rescue at Ventia's website: <a href="https://www.ventia.com/what-we-do/capabilities/firefighting-rescue">https://www.ventia.com/what-we-do/capabilities/firefighting-rescue</a>

#### All jobs at Ventia are advertised on Seek:

https://www.seek.com.au/Ventia-jobs/at-this-company

Do you want to target female recruits? Advertising on WAFAs social media platforms and in our newsletter is free for all Organisational Members of WAFA. Contact secretary@wafa.asn.au if you want us to help you find new talent.