

Volunteer Ambulance Officers Association, History

VAOAT Achievements 1996 -2000

In Feb-March 1996, Colin Dell Coordinator from Nubeena rang around the state to get volunteers to meet up and talk about their challenges. At that point in time there were Tas Ambulance Service VAO's, hospital ambulance officers -Scottsdale and Oatlands country hospitals and some St John Ambulance units. These units have all become AT units, retaining many of the original VAO's.

A large group of volunteers had initially met at Tarraleah on 30 March 1996. When they meet up again in May 1996 at Tarraleah, they then formed the VAOAT. It was a real benefit and nice that we had met up beforehand. We knew the volunteers then and we were able to talk to and support them. It was then we really appreciated the importance of what we were about to start. We formed many friendships from around the state that are still current today.

Association founded May 1996, one week after the Port Arthur massacre. Although planning for the inaugural meeting had been underway for months, the massacre had given impetus and camaraderie to the meeting the following Sunday. Foundation President and Treasurer Colin and Robyn Dell had attended to cases at the Port Arthur site the week before. Founding members still on the Board at the 25th Anniversary included Wayne Doran, Cheryl Wilson, and Lorraine Gardiner.

"In late May 1996, a group of Tasmanian Volunteer Ambulance Officers assembled in the small Central Highlands Hydro town of Tarraleah. The meeting was emotionally charged. The previous weekend, the first three ambulances to attend the Port Arthur tragedy were operated by volunteers. In a state of grief and shock, and determined to support one another and their communities, the group sat down to business. It was the inaugural meeting of the VAOAT". Laura Leworthy, 15/07/1996

The Annual General Meeting for 1997 occurred at Campbelltown.



First Response newsletter to all Volunteer Ambulance Officers was created. The first one was mailed to all members and stakeholders in August 1996, and has been produced quarterly, ever since, without fail. Foundation editor, Margaret Dennis continues to provide extraordinary service in this capacity.

Website established

In 1998, **Policy Statement** adopted by the VAOAT focused on representing VAOs, promoting the Association, encouraging a standard of excellence, supporting principles of equality and representing that all ambulance officers – both paramedic and volunteer be identified with the wording Ambulance.

First ongoing Educator for volunteers funded by Ambulance Tasmania (1999). By 2011 there were four Educators.

The Annual General Meeting for 1999 was held at Dunalley. The President at the time was Dianne Coon who is still unsure why she was a “dying fly” in this photo.



VAOAT has representatives on Ambulance Tasmania committees, such as fleet, equipment, uniform and OH&S

More than a Band-Aid project – a partnership between UTAS, VAOAT and TAS (now AT) defined strategies training, uniform, vehicles and support in recruiting and retaining volunteers that was funded by Emergency Management Australia. It was nation leading research, and continues to be quoted two decades later

Ambulance Tasmania strategic planning invites volunteer’s participation

Input – in writing and in person - to **Parliamentary Inquiry into Ambulance Services**

Development by TAS of a national, ongoing, accredited training course for volunteers, including standardised, protocol training packages

VAOAT is the accepted & ongoing voice for volunteers by Ambulance Tasmania management and the Tasmanian Government

VAOAT Achievements 2001 -2006

Part of *Stand Up and Be Counted* national research on factors affecting Australian and New Zealand ambulance volunteers. This was a flow-on from the *More Than a Band-Aid* project.

Direct representation on the *Australia Emergency Management Volunteer Forum*, which looked at issues common to all emergency service volunteers

Driver training for all volunteers, was a volunteer initiative achieved through a Tasmanian Community Funds Grant and facilitated by VAOAT.

In 2002, a MegaCode Kelly manikin provided to each region, with funds from several volunteer units, VAOAT, and Tasmanian and Australian Government funding.

Recruitment booklets developed for use by local volunteer groups

Ongoing improvements to vehicles and equipment, including automatic external defibrillators for all volunteer groups

Improvements to Uniforms, second jumpsuits available; two piece suits are an alternative for female volunteers.

Standardised reimbursement process for out-of-pocket expenses.

Access to Computers& e-learning for all volunteer groups

In 2004, volunteers gathered for the Annual General Meeting at Oatlands.



In 2005, Volunteers gathered for the AGM in Hobart.



Two Training Seminars at Archers Manor - these preceded the Gatherings and were organised by the VAOAT, with some help from AT (formerly TAS). They were the first time that VAOs from all areas of the state were together in one room, and the sharing and networking were as valuable as the medical/ambulance information presented. These were funded through a \$3,000 Emergency Services funding from Grant Lennox CEO of Tasmanian Ambulance Service.

VAOAT Achievements 2007 -2012

Annual VAO 'Gatherings' commence, so volunteers can spend a funded weekend sharing experiences and learning from one another, and participate in the VAOAT AGM and General meeting. These have been held in all regions and remote parts of the state– including King Island – providing hundreds of volunteers with a free weekend of fun, laughter, learning and networking. In 2008, 2009 and 2011 these Gatherings were held twice in those years. Gatherings were held at Gowrie Park, the Lea, Camp Banksia, Gum Leaves, Coles Bay, King Island, Queenstown and Camp Clayton.

The 2008 Gathering were held at Gowrie Park and The Lea. Gowrie Park which may have been called 'Weindorfers' at that time was the old workman's village and to say it was rustic could be taken as an understatement.

The 2009 Gatherings were held at Camp Banksia and Gum Leaves. Camp Banksia, 2009 was the first themed dinner when they had the Emergency Services Blood Drive. Minister for Health (Lara Giddings) was present and voted on the winners.

The 2011 Gathering at King Island was the result of the then President, Pam Fanning, ASM lobbying the Premier of Tasmania to allow the annual gathering to occur on the remote island.

Agfest attendance for over eleven years, where the VAOAT members volunteered to take blood pressures. In 2007, the group scenario won the Best Use of the Agfest Arena.

First ambulance volunteer on the national Volunteer Leadership Program (Wayne Doran, 2007).

This is run by the Australian Emergency Management Institute with emergency services volunteers applying to attend from all over Australia



In February 2008, First Response announced that TAS had asked the University Department of Rural health to **update the Volunteer Ambulance officer Handbook**. It also displayed a picture of the Port Sorell First Response car that had been funded by Port Sorell Lions club and went on to say that a course for First Responders was being prepared.

Keynote speech by Dianne Coon at Forum by *Ambulance 2020*, a grouping of the Australian College of Ambulance Professionals, Health and Community Services Union and the VAOAT

Recruitment website to make it easier for prospective VAOs to access information and make contact with Ambulance Tasmania.

In December 2013, the **Recruitment DVD “Making a Difference”**, VAOAT helped develop this resource and support volunteer participation in the filming. It was produced by Rosny college VET Television Production Unit. Organised the launch to media

VAOAT Professional Association Badge is free to members, and has official approval for it to be worn on volunteer uniform

vGate website - developed by a volunteer for volunteers- for access to rosters, training, e-learning & protocols. Also provides information and reports to Ambulance Tasmania. VAOAT championed the development and adoption of this system by TAS.

Gathering Information Booklet for volunteer units wishing to host an annual Gathering, including Gathering policies & procedures.

First Response moves to being an e-magazine, allowing longer editions and high quality pictures. However, to ensure equity of access, hard copies are still distributed to strategic locations. Thanks to the offices of Dick Adams, MP, and Tania Rattray MLC for their support in photocopying the magazine.

Coordinator Volunteer Strategy, assisted in the creation of an Ambulance Tasmania position dedicated to the support of volunteers. This was a key moment in the development of volunteer management and support in TAS/AT. In November 2010, *First Response* announced that David Godfrey-Smith had been appointed. This position came about through the VAOAT being heavily involved in the creation and appointment.

Recruitment Vehicle, is a high profile year-round recruitment tool. VAOAT gained ongoing sponsorship for running costs from MAIB, RACT and Searoad Shipping

Two VAOAT volunteers (Cheryl Wilson and Pat Taylor) are part of a team delivering the Australian Emergency Management Institute’s Volunteer Leadership Program. This is a national program with emergency services volunteers applying to attend from all over Australia.



Assisted with the development of the novel *The Volunteer* written by Tasmanian resident Ro Evelyn, and organised and hosted the book's launches. All financial proceeds are directed to the VAOAT. Although set in a fictional town, the book strives for accuracy in the depiction of the roles, activities and behaviours of rural/remote Volunteer Ambulance Officers.

VAOAT Achievements 2013 – 2017

The Ambulance Services Act

The Ambulance Service Act 1982 was amended in 2013. On the last day of Parliament in November 2013, this amendment was up for parliamentary discussion. The Ambulance Service Amendment Act 2013 received Royal Assent on 19 December 2013. The VAOAT were there in full force to offer support to Ambulance Tasmania as the Ambulance Services Amendment Act went through Parliament.

The most significant provision was the protection of the title paramedic and ambulance. In this Act, honorary ambulance officers (as appointed under Section 16 of the Act) would now be volunteer ambulance officers.

VAOAT Board member / Life Member Cheryl Wilson, ASM reminisced

"We sat in on the parliamentary discussion when the Ambulance Service Act was being reviewed. It finished around 11.30pm.

It was said that if we hadn't persevered and stayed all day and the evening it would have been deferred for another year. It was the last parliamentary sitting for the year.

It worked well that we had our VAOAT meeting that day so the pollies had VAO's from around the state present. Dominic Morgan CEO, Ambulance Tasmania then took us out for a champagne drink. Trying to find a bar open at that time of night was difficult but we hung in there until we had achieved our goal, a well deserved drink."



In 2014, the VAOAT were the first signatories on a joint statement with Ambulance Tasmania and the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) on the **Joint Statement on Promoting a Positive Workplace Culture**.

Joint Statement on Promoting a Positive Workplace Culture

Ambulance Tasmania (AT), Volunteer Ambulance Officers Association of Tasmania (VAOAT) and Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) recognise a joint responsibility for promoting a positive workplace culture.

AT, VAOAT and HACSU commit to a cooperative approach to support and protect our staff and members by informing everyone who works here of the positive behaviours we collectively seek to uphold.

AT, VAOAT and HACSU support:

- A positive workplace culture
- A workplace that is free from any form of Bullying and Harassment
- A workplace that is safe
- A workplace that is representative of the Community that it serves
- A workplace where there are consequences to inappropriate workplace behaviours

AT will educate those who work here in maintaining a positive workplace culture. VAOAT and HACSU acknowledge the benefits of maintaining a positive workplace culture that is free from inappropriate behaviours.

AT will provide staff with a framework to raise workplace issues and concerns. If an issue is raised it will be managed according to AT and Departmental policy and procedure and applicable legislation.

VAOAT and HACSU support AT in ensuring processes are fair and transparent when managing workplace issues according to the above.

Staff raising grievances will be treated with respect and in a non judgemental manner. The impact on individuals who are genuinely the subject of inappropriate workplace behaviours is profound and can be life changing, these people will be supported.

Complaints that have been determined to be vexatious will be viewed in the strongest terms as it trivialises the impact on genuine people and is contrary to maintaining a positive workplace culture.

AT, VAOAT and HACSU make this Joint Statement in a spirit of cooperation and commitment to support, represent and protect our staff and members.

AT will actively manage those who do not adhere to the standards we require, whether that be a salaried or volunteer staff member.



Mr Dominic Morgan
CEO, Ambulance Tasmania



Ms Pam Fanning
President
Volunteer Ambulance Officers
Association of Tasmania



Mr Chris Brown
Secretary
Health and Community Services
Union

Gatherings occurred annually through 2013 -2017, with volunteers meeting at Nubeena, New Norfolk, George Town and Strahan. In 2017, an Annual General Meeting was only held at Campbell Town.



At the Nubeena Gathering in 2013, the weather cleared at the last minute so we were able to go ahead with the Rescue helicopter demonstration & familiarisation. There were some very relieved, ecstatic committee members.



The George Town Gathering in 2015 had a “nautical” theme. One of the highlights was the catering was done by a dance group who then put on a performance at the end of the night. Cheryl Wilson received her VAOAT Life Membership at this event.

In 2016, the VAOAT celebrated 20 years of its Association.



VAOAT Achievements 2017 to 2021

Gatherings were held at Scamander 2018, Beaconsfield 2019, but in 2020 the challenge of holding a Gathering in a pandemic situation was not possible and an Annual General Meeting was held at Campbell Town.



The First Response reported on the success of the G19 Gathering at Beaconsfield in November 2019. The dinner theme was Beaconsfield Bling.



Continuing to represent volunteer ambulance officers on the Australian Emergency Management Volunteers Forum.

In large part due to our lobbying, the Coordinator Volunteer Strategy position was updated to Director level, as **Director, Statewide Volunteer Services**, and three regional **Volunteer Support and Training Coordinators** have been appointed, and been very active in recruiting and supporting volunteers.

Developed **regular meetings** with Ambulance Tasmania senior management, including Director Statewide Services and Chief Executive.

The Board continues to meet quarterly, (electronically during COVID) and has paid particular attention to governance and strategic planning.

In 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the VAOAT donated fob watches to every volunteer and paramedic to enable “bare below the elbows”.

The VAOAT also developed a Statement of Inclusion and Equality which was released in 2021.

The website has been redeveloped and initiatives commenced to offer free training opportunities are being explored through that medium.

The VAOAT developed a Facebook page as a means of communication to members.

VAOAT Ongoing Support and Action

VAOAT is the accepted, ongoing, external voice for volunteers by Ambulance Tasmania management and the Tasmanian Government

Providing a combined and united voice for all volunteer units, countering prior isolation or ‘squeak wheel’ issues

Involvement in reviewing, negotiating and updating all Ambulance Tasmania policies and procedures which impact on volunteers (e.g. Volunteer Ambulance Officers Procedures Manual, Financial Policy, Statement of Duties, and many others)

Promoting opportunities for volunteers to attend Leadership courses and Conferences

Ongoing activities to increase profile of volunteers at Statewide events / rural shows where volunteers demonstrate their skills

Proactive in securing grants and gaining on-going sponsorships

Our Honour Boards:

VAOAT Honour Roll				
<p>President</p> <p>1996 Colin Dell 1997 Colin Dell 1998 Colin Dell 1999 Dianne Coon 2000 Dianne Coon 2001 Mary Knowles 2002 Mary Knowles 2003 Mary Knowles 2004 Mary Knowles 2005 Mary Knowles 2006 Wayne Doran 2007 Wayne Doran 2008 Wayne Doran 2009 Pam Fanning 2010 Pam Fanning 2011 Pam Fanning 2012 Pam Fanning 2013 Pam Fanning 2014 Pam Fanning 2015 Pat Taylor 2016 P Taylor / Wayne Doran 2017 Leith <u>McHarry</u> 2018 Leith <u>McHarry</u> 2019 Jack Van Tatenhove 2020 Pam Heiermann</p>	<p>Vice President</p> <p>1996 Dianne Coon 1997 Dianne Coon 1998 Leonie Stubbs 1999 Mary Knowles 2000 Mary Knowles 2001 Lorraine Gardiner 2002 E <u>Pridmore</u> /M Rundle 2003 Cheryl Wilson 2004 Wayne Doran 2005 Wayne Doran 2006 Cheryl Wilson 2007 Cheryl Wilson 2008 Cheryl Wilson 2009 Cheryl Wilson 2010 Cheryl Wilson 2011 Cheryl Wilson 2012 Pat Taylor 2013 Pat Taylor 2014 Wayne Doran 2015 Wayne Doran 2016 Wayne Doran 2017 W Doran / Jack <u>Spinks</u> 2018 Shane Forbes 2019 Jane Green 2020 Jane Green</p>	<p>Secretary</p> <p>1996 Margaret Dennis 1997 Margaret Dennis 1998 Margaret Dennis 1999 Margaret Dennis 2000 Margaret Dennis 2001 Margaret Dennis 2002 Margaret Dennis 2003 Margaret Dennis 2004 Margaret Dennis 2005 Margaret Dennis 2006 Margaret Dennis 2007 Dianne Coon 2008 Dianne Coon 2009 Dianne Coon 2010 Dianne Coon 2011 Dianne Coon 2012 Dianne Coon 2013 Dianne Coon 2014 Dianne Coon 2015 Dianne Coon 2016 Dianne Coon 2017 Phil Dickinson 2018 Wayne Doran 2019 Helen Jenkinson 2020 Helen Jenkinson</p>	<p>Treasurer</p> <p>1996 Robyn Dell 1997 Robyn Dell 1998 Neville Peake 1999 Neville Peake 2000 Neville Peake 2001 Neville Peake 2002 Neville Peake 2003 Neville Peake 2004 Shirley Squires 2005 Shirley Squires 2006 Greg <u>Kunkler</u> 2007 Margaret Dennis 2008 Margaret Dennis 2009 Margaret Dennis 2010 Lesley Green 2011 Lesley Green 2012 Lesley Green 2013 Lesley Green 2014 Lesley Green 2015 L Green /J Van Tatenhove 2016 Jack Van Tatenhove 2017 Jack Van Tatenhove 2018 Jack Van Tatenhove 2019 Margaret Chilcott 2020 Margaret Chilcott</p>	<p>Life Membership</p> <p>Mary Knowles Colin Dell Robyn Dell Margaret Dennis Trevor Glover-Smith John <u>Prewer</u> George Hudson ☺ Dianne Coon Wayne Doran Cheryl Wilson Lorraine Gardiner</p>

The Ambulance Service Medal was instituted in 1999 to recognise those who have rendered distinguished service as a member of an Australian ambulance service.



The **Ambulance Service Medal (ASM)** recognises distinguished service as a member of an Australian ambulance service

2000 – Albert Morris (Glamorgan)
 2000 – Ian Nielsen (Smithton)
 2001 – Philip Pyke
 2001 – Ivy Rooks
 2002 – Gary Alexander (Nubeena)
 2004 – Dianne Coon (Strahan)
 2005 – Neville Peake (St Marys)
 2006 - Margaret Dennis (Avoca)
 2007 – Robert Jordan (King Island)
 2009 - Wayne Doran (Bothwell)
 2010 - Cheryl Wilson (Sorell)
 2010 – Brian Knowles (Strahan)
 2010 – Vicki Knowles (Strahan)
 2011 – David Godfrey-Smith

2014 – Leigh Higgins (Bruny Island)
 2014 – Jack Van Dalen (Tullah)
 2016 – Pam Fanning (King Island)
 2017 – Kaye Fox (Nubeena)
 2020 - Lorraine Gardiner (Beaconsfield)
 2021 – Pam Heiermann (Sorell)

Life members

- Phillip Dennis
- Margaret Dennis
- Edward Preshaw
- Grant Lennox
- Dianne Coon
- George Hudson
- Wayne Doran
- Lorraine Gardiner
- Cheryl Wilson
- Michael Polley