



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Bravery and commitment of firefighters recognised on St Florian's Day

**\*\*EMBARGOED until 4 May 2023\*\***

The RFS will today honour nearly 80 volunteers, staff and teams for their bravery and exceptional service across a wide and varied array of emergencies, including bushfires, floods and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commissioner of the RFS, Rob Rogers, will be joined by Minister for Emergency Services Jihad Dib at the RFS State Training Academy in Dubbo.

Held on the fourth of May each year, the award ceremony coincides with the Feast Day of St Florian, Patron Saint of Firefighters and International Firefighters' Day.

"Today we say thank you to the RFS volunteers and staff who selflessly respond to all manner of fire and emergencies, often leaving their own families behind to help others." Minister Dib said.

"I am incredibly proud of the men and women who have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to protecting NSW communities in times of crisis."

Commissioner Rogers paid special tribute to Operational Officer Philip Blackmore, who will be awarded the highest NSW RFS commendation, the Commissioner's Award for Valour.

Officer Blackmore was nearby when a car explosion, caused by an acetylene cylinder, rocked the township of Gwandalan on Father's Day 2020.

Assisted by an off-duty paramedic, Mr Matthew Wilson, Officer Blackmore rushed to assist and began resuscitation on a man found lying beside the vehicle with significant burns and injuries.

"The pair worked in extremely volatile and dangerous conditions to give the man every chance of survival, providing CPR while the car was still burning nearby," Commissioner Rogers said.

"Officer Blackmore put himself in harm's way to try and save someone's life."

Officer Blackmore's fellow Gwandalan Brigade members, alongside members of the Lake Munmorah Bush Fire Brigade, will receive a Commissioner's Citation for Service (Unit) for their courageous response to this major incident.

Commissioner Rogers also recognised the efforts of RFS Aviation Rescue crews, who since February 2022 have performed more than 180 rescues to save people trapped by rising floodwaters.

"On 14 November, Aviation Rescue Crew members confronted complex and challenging conditions to undertake 67 rescues by helicopter in the township of Eugowra," Commissioner Rogers said.

"This is the largest number of successive rescues performed by rescue aircraft on any single day in Australian history."

Commissioner Rogers praised all of this year's recipients for their dedication and professionalism.

"Every single one of these members should be proud of their commitment to protecting communities across the state," he said.

**For more information contact the State Duty Media Officer on 9898 1855**  
**For current incidents or major fire updates visit [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au)**

The full list of recipients of the 2023 St Florian's Day Awards is available here:  
<http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/news-and-media/st-florians-day-2023>

Three of this year's recipients discuss their achievements below.

➤ **Group Captain Craig Robertson, Illawarra/Sutherland**

**Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery**

After days of substantial rainfall and flooding, conditions were extremely dangerous when Otford Rural Fire Brigade and Illawarra Group 1 responded to a concern for welfare report on 2 July 2022.

Upon arrival at the Otford Railway Station, the crews could hear screams from the Hacking River below. In torrential rain and poor light, the crews made their way to the river bank.

Group Captain Robertson located a man wedged in a tree surrounded by the rapidly rising river and, deciding immediate intervention was required, secured a rope to himself and a member of the Otford crew before moving into the floodwater.

He was in almost 1.5 metres of fast-moving water by the time he reached the man, whom he secured to his line before the pair was assisted from the water by the Otford crew.

"I was the first on site and it was pointed out to me that there was a gentleman hanging onto a tree about 25 metres off the side of the trail. He had been in there probably about 15 to 20 minutes," Group Captain Robertson said.

"When you're put in that situation where you hear someone screaming for help and hanging onto a tree, it was a split-second decision I had to make and that was to get the rope and get out there to try and help that person.

"I've been a member for 40 years, and I joined the service because it was a great place and you did it for the community. I'm honoured to be receiving the award and it is nice to be recognised, but I'm not really an awards person."

➤ **Aviation Officer Tim Perry  
Commissioner's Unit Citation for Service**

Record breaking rainfall across northern NSW during February and March 2022 resulted in devastating flooding and widespread destruction in numerous communities.

RFS Aviation Rescue Crews successfully performed 71 rescues, often in dangerous and challenging weather conditions, to rescue people trapped by rising floodwaters.

Over the following 18 months, communities across large areas of the state were impacted by major and protracted flooding.

The Aviation Rescue Crew performed a further 118 rescue and 1,003 operational standby shifts to support the NSW State Emergency Service flood response.

In the early hours of the morning of 14 November 2022, the township of Eugowra in the Central West was struck by rapidly moving flash flooding with little warning, forcing residents to seek refuge on the rooftops of their homes and other buildings.

Aviation Rescue Crew members conducted 67 rescues by helicopter in highly complex and challenging conditions. This is the largest number of successive rescues performed by RFS rescue aircraft on any single day.

Tim Perry, an aviation crew officer raised in Eugowra, worked to save trapped residents in his home town.



---

**For more information contact the State Duty Media Officer on 9898 1855**  
**For current incidents or major fire updates visit [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au)**

---

In total, Officer Perry's appliance rescued 24 people and one dog on November 14.

"Once we crested the hills on the north western side of Eugowra and I saw the water, which was basically an inland sea, I knew it was a big flood. I grew up in Eugowra and have seen floods but this was nothing like I had ever seen before," Officer Perry said.

"Each rescue we did was unique in its own way. A lot were from rooftops so we had to negotiate solar panels, chimneys and power lines going into houses. At one point I had to winch down, disconnect from the cable and actually search inside a house through waist deep water because there were reports someone was still inside.

"I think it's a great thing for all of the crew to be recognised with this award."

### ➤ **Firefighter Rosanna Joshua, Back Creek Brigade**

#### **Commissioner's Commendation for Service**

Deployed as part of a Lake George/Monaro/Southern Tablelands taskforce, Firefighter Joshua displayed initiative well beyond expectations of a newly-qualified member on their first active duty.

On their last day, the crew was tasked with filling water tanks at a property near Coraki, where the residents had needed to be rescued from their rooftop by helicopter in previous days.

With great insight, Firefighter Joshua identified the female resident's distress, drawing her aside to talk. Her compassion provided comfort to this woman, who had experienced significant trauma. Firefighter Joshua, aged just 21 and this year's youngest individual recipient, demonstrated maturity beyond her years.

"The people had just gotten back to their house and were having to face what was left," Firefighter Joshua said.

"The woman broke down to me and it gives me shivers even just thinking about it. She told me their story and what they had gone through. I just stood with her and held her and we cried together. I really wanted to make sure they got the help they needed, because they needed much more than water."

Enquiring about additional support for the residents, Firefighter Joshua followed up on return to Base Camp and verified that help had been provided before leaving for home the following day.

"I was absolutely shocked to receive a St Florian's award, especially since it was my first deployment, but I really appreciate it," she said.

Deputy Captain Marty Boyce, who worked with Rosanna during their deployment and subsequently nominated her for this award, said he was amazed with the young firefighter's intuition and compassion.

"Her thoughtfulness and understanding of how it all works was well above what you would expect because this was her first-ever deployment. For her to have those thought patterns was outstanding.

"Everyone looks at the excitement of raging flood waters and rescues, they look at the big flames and the helicopters and fire trucks, but there's a lot that the volunteers do that is above and beyond that and probably doesn't get recognised as much. Sometimes you just need to be there and give people a shoulder to cry on."

