

BUSH FIRE bulletin



The journal of the
NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



FLOODS, CYCLONES AND LOCKDOWNS



- ONCE-IN-100-YEAR FLOODING HAMMERS NSW
- NEW PLANES AND TECH BOOST AERIAL CAPACITY
- FULL LIST OF ST FLORIAN'S DAY AWARDS

LIFTOUT: NEW FIRE TRAIL
SIGNS EXPLAINED

SMALL CREEK FIT 

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BUSH FIRE bulletin

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FOREWORD

As I write this foreword in August 2021, our state is again grappling with a fresh wave of COVID-19 cases and restrictions. While this is a difficult time for many, it is vitally important that we all do our part and cooperate with the public health guidelines to ensure the Service can continue to safely respond to emergencies.

Get tested if you feel unwell, stay up to date with the current health advice and, where possible, get vaccinated. All NSW RFS members are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination, regardless of age, as part of the Phase 1B vaccine rollout. While vaccination is not mandatory, I encourage all of our members to consider vaccination and discuss any concerns with their doctor.

July 2021 also marked one year since I announced the nine priorities for the NSW RFS. I am pleased to report that after much hard work, many of these priority projects are nearing completion or already completed.

Our rollout of new BR9 helmets to all members is well underway, we have launched the RFS ACTIV member availability app and rolled out Computer-Aided Dispatch to all districts on Centralised Dispatch. We will be launching the new One NSW RFS member website and eMembership portal in August 2021, and have made significant progress on Farm Fire Unit integration and our review of respiratory protection, both of which you can read about in this edition.

As we wrap up our work on many of these projects, we are in the process of developing a new set of priorities for the future of the NSW RFS. I look forward to sharing these with you soon.

On St Florian's Day in May 2021, the Service was able to provide much overdue recognition of the brave and selfless efforts of our members during the devastating 2019/20 fire season. It was a great honour to personally present commendations to some of our members on the day.

Another opportunity for our members to come together is on the horizon in the form of Get Ready Weekend. After many brigades went with online activities for Get Ready Weekend in 2020, we have made that option available again in 2021. But I also encourage brigades to hold face-to-face events, where possible if COVID-19 restrictions allow, as Get Ready Weekend can have a huge impact in preparing communities for the coming bush fire season.

This could be especially important as we head towards what could potentially be a very active 2021/22 bush fire season. After a quiet fire season last summer and with steady rain falling over autumn and winter 2021, increased grass and crop growth across the state will bring fresh challenges for our firefighters.

Finally, in May 2021 we said farewell to Deputy Commissioner Bruce McDonald who retired after 41 years of service. There are few people as loyal to the NSW RFS as Bruce and we will miss his calm, level-headed approach to problem solving and his positive attitude. I want to personally wish him all the best for a long and happy retirement.

I also extend a very warm welcome to our new Deputy Commissioner Preparedness and Capability, Kyle Stewart. Kyle comes to the NSW RFS after a long career with NSW Police and I am certain he will be a valuable asset to the NSW RFS team.

Regards,

Rob Rogers AFSM
Commissioner



@RobRFS





ONCE-IN-100-YEAR FLOODING HAMMERS NSW

Extreme rainfall across NSW led to widespread flooding from the Northern Rivers down to Sydney in March 2021. Rainfall records across the state were broken, with the NSW coast experiencing its wettest week ever and many towns recording more than 300mm of rain in a day. Described as a “once-in-100-year flood”, the rising waters saw 18,000 people evacuated from their homes and caused more than \$1 billion in property damage.

In response, NSW RFS members went into action to support the NSW SES in their local areas and on deployment, preparing defences, rescuing people from floodwaters, assisting with evacuations and helping with the clean-up. Group Captain Andrew Macdonald from the Macarthur Zone was deployed to Port Macquarie from 24-28 March 2021. He shares his experience below.

“ The most notable thing was the enormous amount of invisible damage. After the flood subsided, you could drive along a road not knowing that properties had been impacted. Houses were standing and from a distance there wasn’t any visible damage, but the stench, internal damage and long-term mould issues rendered many properties uninhabitable.

At Camden Haven on the Mid North Coast, the floodwater was relatively clean and didn’t leave a visible ‘tide mark’ on buildings or mud on the ground. Crews had to walk from door to door to assess damage and help as required. Most of the work involved gutting homes of personal possessions and unceremoniously piling the contents in the street for another team to pick up and dump at the local tip.

Along the Hastings River at Port Macquarie, the mud left behind was 10-20cm thick in places and covered everything. After a few days it started to set like concrete and became very difficult to clear. Crews spent days simply hosing, scraping and wheelbarrowing mud.

One of the difficult issues for crews to deal with was witnessing firsthand the emotional distress of homeowners who had lost everything. There were hundreds of permanent residents in a single caravan park in Port Macquarie who had lost all of their personal possessions. Volunteers were helping as much as they could but there was no easy or delicate way to remove damaged furnishings, carpet, curtains, clothing and electrical items from a house and put them in a dump truck to become landfill.



Main (at left) and below right: NSW RFS members assisting with flood clean-up in Port Macquarie.

Top: A community meeting at North Shore Brigade station.
Above: North Shore Brigade members after a muddy day of clean-up work. All photos by Andrew Macdonald.

The residents of North Shore on the northern side of the Hastings River at Port Macquarie were isolated for more than a week. Due to the flood, the car ferry to North Shore was out of service and ultimately left high and dry, requiring a tug boat to refloat it.

Many residents had lost power and there was no reticulated or potable water available. Consequently, the job of cleaning thick mud off walls, floors and other possessions couldn't be done. Due to electrical issues and power outages, pressure pumps for rainwater and sewerage systems didn't work. Private boats and cars had been washed away or rendered inoperable by the flood.

The area was an isolated disaster zone within sight of the Port Macquarie CBD. The local North Shore Brigade fortunately had power and sufficient stored rainwater, becoming the community hub for a number of weeks. The local captain provided regular community updates each day based on information he could gather from local sources. The local brigade and its volunteers played a major role in ensuring the community was receiving information and had not been forgotten. ”





FLOODWATERS ISOLATE CRESCENT HEAD VILLAGE

By Christian Yanni, Operational Officer, Lower North Coast

Following a week of heavy rain across the Mid North Coast in March 2021, floodwaters were progressively cutting access to the small coastal village of Crescent Head. By Friday 19 March 2021, the western end of Crescent Head Rd near South Kempsey – known as “Rudders Lagoon” – was flooded, cutting the only remaining access between Crescent Head and Kempsey.

The first callout for the Crescent Head Brigade was to assist with a flood rescue in the early hours of Saturday morning. The brigade was unable to reach the location due to the amount of water over the road and had no choice but to leave the job until daylight when a brigade member was able to collect the resident in their private boat.

By morning, water was rising over “the Corduroy” – a long, flat, low-lying section of Crescent Head Rd, approximately 2.5km in length on the western side of the village. Knowing that the road would soon be impassable, Brigade Captain Greg Kings relocated himself and his family (also members of the brigade) into the village.

With the Corduroy now flooded, this meant that Crescent Head was broken into two isolated sections east of Kempsey – the village itself and the large “middle section” of Crescent Head Rd between Rudders Lagoon and the Corduroy.

At this point, as the NSW RFS was the only emergency service available in the village, Greg established an emergency coordination hub at the Crescent Head Country Club, liaising with the NSW RFS representative at the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) located at the Kempsey Police Station.

From the Crescent Head Country Club, contact was made with a number of brigade members in the

middle section to ensure there was communication with residents in that area. This was vital as these residents were unable to reach emergency services or shops in either Crescent Head or Kempsey.

The local Crescent Head Surf Life Saving Club deployed two Inflatable Rescue Boats (IRBs) onto the Corduroy to ensure access could be gained to the isolated section of Crescent Head Rd. They were later joined by two locals who assisted with their punt-style, flat bottom boats.

The first priority for the emergency coordination hub was to ensure resources were identified in both the town and middle section should an emergency arise. A number of off-duty nurses, a doctor, a vet and other essential locals were identified and formed the basis of an emergency contact plan. This plan proved to be useful a number of times, as external emergency services were significantly delayed from reaching the town.

It soon became apparent that supplies in town would be exhausted within the next day. The coordination hub liaised with shop owners and formulated a list of essentials that were required until a more significant delivery could be arranged. These essentials were flown into town via a NSW RFS helicopter, with the brigade on hand to unload the supplies.

The first issue was how to transport 70 crates of milk into the village, with the water height reaching 1.5m in some locations. Once the milk had crossed Rudders Lagoon on a NSW SES punt boat, a number of locals with utes assisted with transport down Crescent Head Road to the Corduroy where the crates were then loaded onto the punts and IRBs for transport into the village.



Main image: Locals and Crescent Head Brigade Captain Greg Kings transporting supplies into town via boat. **Above left:** Crescent Head Brigade members with a NSW RFS helicopter after it was used to fly emergency supplies into the town. Both photos by Cameron Dann.

Above right: A crane on the Pacific Motorway lifts pallets of supplies onto the overpass for transport into Crescent Head. Photo by Craig Millburn.

This delivery provided a benchmark that would help in the planning of the much needed major supply delivery in the next couple of days.

A number of evacuations of elderly and ill residents took place by whatever means necessary as water inundated homes in outlying streets. The coordination hub organised for an ill resident to be transported across the Corduroy by boat and down Crescent Head Rd to Rudders Lagoon by vehicle, where they were met by an SES boat and ambulance to take them to Kempsey Hospital.

This procedure was used a number of times in the coming days for residents that required hospital treatment, including one who had suffered a suspected stroke, a heavily pregnant expectant mother and a two-year-old child who consumed an entire tube of toothpaste.

In the midst of medical emergencies and relocating vulnerable residents from flooded homes, the coordination hub was working tirelessly on a plan to resupply the town with a major delivery of essential goods on Tuesday 23 March 2021. However, with the closure of the Pacific Highway at Taree and some 22 pallets of supplies required, this proved challenging.

The initial puzzle to solve was how to cross Rudders Lagoon. With only one boat available, this would have been a slow and labour intensive operation as all the supplies would need to be loaded by hand on both sides. At Greg's suggestion, a plan was developed to use the Crescent Head Rd overpass on the Pacific Motorway, as it would provide direct access to Crescent Head Rd between Rudders Lagoon and the Corduroy.

One of the southbound lanes of the motorway was closed and a 50-tonne crane used to lift the pallets of supplies up onto the overpass (see photo above).

This side of the operation was coordinated by the EOC and involved Transport for NSW, NSW Police, NSW SES and the NSW RFS. The operation took six hours, and involved the lifting of 22 pallets of groceries, as well as 10 pallets of fodder to feed local cattle.

Through the coordination hub, Greg arranged everything on the Crescent Head side of the operation. A local resident supplied a prime mover and low loader, which enabled the pallets to be lowered from the crane directly onto the deck of the truck, avoiding a hand load. The owner of the truck also had a forklift on hand to load the pallets from the truck into the punt boats once the load reached the Corduroy, once again saving a long hand load. In town, Foodworks store owner Matt provided a large tractor with forklift attachment and a 12-pallet trailer to transport the supplies to the store.

Unfortunately, one of the punts broke down, meaning not all supplies made it across that day. But as locals were eager to assist, the operation was successfully completed the following morning. This was dubbed locally as "Operation Feed the People", and was a true display of the community banding together to look after those in need.

Over the following week, water levels progressively dropped at both Rudders Lagoon and the Corduroy. Initially, 4WD vehicles were able to cross the flooded sections one direction at a time. The brigade used their Cat 2 tanker as an escort vehicle until Council were able to establish traffic control.

Without a doubt, lives would have been lost had Captain Greg Kings and the Crescent Head Brigade not taken the action they did during this significant event. It was a true display of community spirit and locals working together to help others in the community. ■



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN DEPLOYMENT

CYCLONE CLEAN-UP A NEW

Tropical Cyclone Seroja made landfall on 11 April 2021 just south of the coastal town of Kalbarri in Western Australia, approximately 500km north of Perth. The Category 3 cyclone brought heavy rain and wind gusts of up to 170km/hr, damaging homes and buildings across an area of WA as large as the state of Victoria.

The worst of the damage was to the tourist town of Kalbarri, where many commercial and residential buildings completely lost roofs.

The town lost power for more than a week, with kilometres of power lines being destroyed. Many properties were deemed unliveable and needed to be rebuilt.

In the weeks after TC Seroja hit, NSW RFS members were deployed on four occasions to WA to provide assistance. Captain Jody Preston of Wallacia Brigade was one of five NSW RFS members on the first deployment to WA from 13-17 April 2021 to assist communities affected by the cyclone. Here he shares his experiences.

“ The cyclone hit WA on Sunday 11 April 2021 and I received the message asking for interest in a deployment on Monday morning. By Monday afternoon my flight was booked for Tuesday morning, so it all happened very quickly.

Upon landing in Perth, we had a four-and-a-half-hour drive north to Geraldton, where we were to be based for our deployment. For the next two days we were tasked to the rural community of Mingenew, about 100km southeast of Geraldton, to assist with the clean-up.

It was a very different deployment to the typical NSW RFS experience – there wasn't a hose or a fire to be seen. TC Seroja had caused widespread damage, with the roofs ripped off houses and lying in pieces up the street. It was confronting to see the extent of the damage and realise this was all caused by only the wind.

Our tasks were to clear debris, make buildings safe and accessible and tarp roofs. Given the damage, we often had to improvise to get tarps in place. Many roofs couldn't be easily accessed, so we had to work on the bare roof beams rather than the roof itself.

There was also asbestos everywhere, which meant there were plenty of places we couldn't work in.

As NSW RFS members, we worked alongside members of the NSW and Victorian SES, Fire and Rescue NSW and the Australian Defence Force – it was a small but very diverse crew.

The locals we helped were taken aback when they learned how far we'd travelled to give them a hand. They hadn't expected to see help so soon after the cyclone and were very grateful for our presence.



KIND OF DEPLOYMENT

Above: Cyclone damage to the pub in the town of Northampton.
Below left: NSW RFS members tarping a roof in Mingeneu.

On the drive into Mingeneu we noticed several dead trees painted blue, standing out in the rural landscape. Then at a property outside Mingeneu we were assisting a family and noticed they too had a blue tree in their yard. After talking to the family, we discovered it was an initiative to bring awareness to mental illness in the area.

The family was struggling as cyclone damage had ripped apart the house, they had no power and fuel for their generator was running low. Their

Below right: NSW RFS and NSW SES members working to repair damage in Mingeneu. All photos courtesy of Jody Preston.

nearest service station was two hours away, and there was a four-hour wait to get fuel.

As a crew we decided to help them out and borrowed their jerry can when we returned to Geraldton for the evening. Upon our return to Mingeneu the next day, we returned the jerry can full of fuel. The family didn't ask for it, we took it upon ourselves to help out. They were so appreciative and thankful - that kind of interaction is the reason why we volunteer. ”





WESTERN AUSTRALIAN DEPLOYMENT

RESCUING A SMALL PART OF

One of the more unique calls received by a NSW RFS deployment during the clean-up of Tropical Cyclone Seroja was an urgent request that came in from the WA Government on 20 April 2021. The request was for the salvage of a historic Lone Pine Tree at Binnu Primary School in the small town of Binnu, north of Geraldton.

The tree is a descendant of the pine tree in Gallipoli for which the Battle of Lone Pine in World War One is named. Its offspring in Binnu was seeded from a pinecone brought home from Gallipoli by Lance Corporal Benjamin Smith, planted in 1968 and uprooted more than 50 years later by TC Seroja. Given its historical significance to Australia and Western Australia, a multiagency effort was made to salvage the tree.

Two NSW RFS members – Senior Deputy Captain Steve Caunt from Calderwood Brigade and Deputy Captain Robert Demmery from Mt Keira Brigade – were part of the team sent to salvage the tree, accompanied by SES crews from NSW and Victoria and two members of the ADF Engineering Corps.

Given the ADF could not get heavy equipment to the site until the following day, the crew had to come up with a novel way to salvage the tree. Upon arriving at the site, the SES members got to work to clear fallen trees from the driveway so the crew could gain access to the property.

Empty hessian sandbags were lined across the top of the tree base in the air to act as a wet wick, and all the tree foliage that was cut from the driveway was laid in under the tree base.

The whole 1,400L water tank of a DFES fire truck was hosed on the wick, the foliage, the tree base and the ground where the remaining root system was still in place. A tarpaulin was then wrapped around the base of the tree to hold water in and keep the sun off.





ANZAC HISTORY IN WA

The early response work of the multiagency crew managed to keep the tree alive and elevated for long enough for the ADF to bring in the necessary heavy equipment to right the tree and construct long-term support for it.

The mission was a success and the Lone Pine is now standing proudly again at Binu Primary School, as it has for decades. The NSW RFS members involved are proud to have played their small part in salvaging a resilient and important piece of Australian history. ■

Above left: The crew hosing down the foliage and tree base of the historic Lone Pine. **Above:** NSW RFS members Robert Demmery (far left) and Steve Caunt (far right) with fellow crew members from NSW and Victorian SES and the ADF Engineering Corps. **Below left:** A plaque on the tree. **Below:** The historic Lone Pine leaning dangerously after TC Seroja. All photos courtesy of Steve Caunt.





FOCUSING ON WHAT MATTERS MOST

Nine immediate priorities for the NSW RFS were set in July 2020 by Commissioner Rob Rogers in the wake of the 2019/20 fire season. These priority projects focus on allowing members to operate safely and effectively, better connect with the Service and work together to best serve the community.

Since the priorities were announced, significant progress has been made on several of these initiatives, details of which you can read about below. In addition to these updates, the next few pages will go into depth on two of the nine priorities – respiratory protection and Farm Fire Unit integration.

You can also read more on the nine priorities via the online portal www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/priority-projects. This resource has a section on each of the priority projects, so you can access the latest updates and related information at any time.

Personal Protective Equipment – Head Protection

The Service has now distributed approximately 24,000 helmets to brigades, with distribution to continue through to the end of 2021.

The distribution of these helmets would have not been possible without funds allocated by the NSW RFS and Brigades Donation Fund as a result of the 2019/20 fire season.

You can check www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/priority-projects for the planned date on when your brigade's helmets are likely to be delivered to your district.

If your brigade is not on this list it means that your helmets are already on the way to your district.

With AGMs occurring, there may be changes in member roles and ranks. Rank sticker kits have now been added to the catalogue for ordering by Captains and districts. Unfortunately, the issue of new BR9 helmets based on rank changes will not be possible until the initial rollout has been completed and alternate production capacity is made available.

The existing HF46 helmets remain available as an interim measure.

Integrated Dispatch System

Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) is an integrated dispatch system that will bring together the Service's existing dispatch processes and systems to enhance the way we respond to emergency incidents.

This computerised system will help streamline our dispatch process and improve our response time by automatically ensuring the closest, most appropriate resources are dispatched.

CAD was rolled out to the 16 districts already on Centralised Dispatch in early 2021, and is being rolled out to the 27 districts not on Centralised Dispatch progressively.

Macarthur, Sutherland, South West Slopes, Monaro, Chifley/Lithgow and North West districts were moved onto Centralised Dispatch over June and July. Southern Highlands and Southern Tablelands will be moved on 11 August 2021.

For the eight districts going online this year, face-to-face consultation dates and training dates have been locked in and nominations have been received to attend. Discussions have been underway so far with four districts to complete new business rules for how CAD and centralised dispatch will work.

The timeline for remaining districts to be moved to Central Dispatch and CAD is being finalised and will proceed as follows:

➤ **2022:** Liverpool Ranges, Namoi/Gwydir, Northern Tablelands, Lower North Coast, The Hills, Southern Border, Clarence Valley, Lower Hunter, Mid Murray, New England, Mid Lachlan Valley.

➤ **2023:** Far North Coast, Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai, Northern Rivers, Blue Mountains, Hunter Valley, Lower Western, MIA, Far West.

For more information, visit www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/priority-projects to access FAQs and other resources. If you have any questions, contact your district in the first instance. Alternatively, you can email the team at cad@rfs.nsw.gov.au.

One NSW RFS Member Website

Further testing of the new One NSW RFS Member Website (One NSW RFS) is continuing with the Member Reference Group ahead of its planned launch in August 2021.

Members attending the RFSA Conference in the Hunter Valley in June 2021 were able to view live demonstrations of One NSW RFS. Key features of the website, such as the ability for members to view news, events and documents specific to their brigade, were well received.

The Service has been demonstrating the new website to a wider group of members including brigade leaders, focusing on the new communication and collaboration tools available to support our members and their teams.

If you have any questions on One NSW RFS, you can email the team at memberwebsite@rfs.nsw.gov.au.

Electronic Membership Application System

Final testing and refinements of the eMembership portal – the online system providing new members with an easier way of joining the Service and a streamlined approach for brigades to manage new applications and transfers – continues on track for its planned launch in August 2021.

At the initial project showcase, members belonging to the eMembership Change Champions group were shown some of the key features of the eMembership system. Based on their feedback on the approval process for a volunteer application, adjustments were made to simplify the user experience for brigades and district management.

Change Champions and the eMembership Member Reference Group also attended further live system demonstrations in June 2021 to provide them with a deeper understanding of the new volunteer application process, answer questions and take on feedback.

The eMembership project is another that has benefited from funding as a result of the donations made to the NSW RFS and Brigades Donation Fund following the 2019/20 fire season.

If you have any questions on eMembership, you can email the team at comms@rfs.nsw.gov.au. ■

Members will get regular updates on the priority projects via MyRFS, the priority projects eBulletin and NSW RFS Connect.





SAFETY IN THE SMOKE

The safety of our members is of the utmost importance to the NSW RFS, and we know that exposure to smoke is an ongoing hazard faced by firefighters during the course of their duties.

During the 2019/20 bush fire season, members raised concerns about the level of respiratory protection available to NSW RFS volunteers while on the fireground. As such, respiratory protection was identified as one of the Commissioner's priority projects in July 2020 and the Service commenced work to investigate the issue further.

WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

We know there are large knowledge gaps in the research on smoke exposure for our members. This is why the Service engaged an Occupational Hygienist company to investigate respiratory hazards faced by NSW RFS members from smoke during bush fires, structure and vehicle fires and hazard reductions.

Simultaneously, we have been working with researchers from the University of Wollongong to conduct two field studies into the thermoregulatory effects of respirators. These studies were held in March and April 2021 in Dubbo and Albion Park to test a range of reusable respirators and their impact in a bush firefighting context.

It was important that the members involved represented a broad spectrum of NSW RFS volunteers to ensure that we tested a range of age, fitness, gender and other variable categories. The participants undertook four rounds of an obstacle course, each time wearing a different level of

respirator and providing physiological data at each stage before and after the course.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

The Occupational Hygienist report highlighted a lack of existing research and data on both the levels of smoke experienced by firefighters from bush fires and the long term health impacts of that smoke. It identified five preliminary recommendations that the NSW RFS has accepted and will begin to work towards. These recommendations and timeline were sent to members and can be accessed on our Priority Projects web page at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/priority-projects.

A significant focus of the recommendations is to undertake a program of research to better understand the impacts of smoke exposure on our firefighters, across the various activities they perform. Importantly, the report also confirmed that the respiratory protection offered by the P2 disposable masks and CABA currently in use across the NSW RFS meets the Australian Standards and should continue to be used by our firefighters.

The thermoregulatory study, undertaken with researchers from the University of Wollongong, provided an initial assessment of the effects of respirators on firefighters' bodies when conducting bush firefighting.



There is more work to be done, but initial testing confirmed that respirators, no matter the type, will all generally increase demands on the body equally. The outcomes of this testing and the testing planned for the future is vital to developing ongoing training and doctrine in the use of respirators.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO NEXT?

As part of our response to the report we will be engaging with industry and seeking to expand the respiratory protection options that we make available to all firefighters to include half and full face respirators with P3 canisters. It is our intent to have this expanded offering available for the forthcoming 2021/22 fire season, as the Service is currently going through a tender process with manufacturers. As we navigate our way through the fire season and better understand the research on smoke impacts on firefighters, we will always be focused on safety.

Following on from the thermoregulatory study, the Service is building a long term research partnership with the University of Wollongong to focus on several research projects around the effectiveness of respirators and the impact of bush fire smoke. The largest of these research projects will be a study of the individual exposures faced by NSW RFS volunteers. This study will look at how factors such as fuel type, fuel moisture, fire conditions and

a range of other factors affect bush fire smoke, and the impact this has on firefighters.

The ongoing feedback and involvement of members throughout this process is valued and we want to hear about your experiences using respiratory protection. You can get in touch with the team by emailing RPEfeedback@rfs.nsw.gov.au. ■



All photos: NSW RFS volunteers undergo respiratory testing at the Illawarra FCC. All photos by Nicole Brimelow.



BUILDING A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FARMERS AND THE NSW RFS

The farming community is the historical foundation of the NSW RFS. More than one hundred years ago the first rural bush fire brigades were formed by farmers, and today the farming community are key partners in the Service. While farmers have always used their own private vehicles to fight fires and are often members of the Service, it is important we now integrate and recognise the work farmers undertake in the operational firefighting environment.

As such, one of the Commissioner's nine priority projects is improved integration of Farm Fire Units (FFUs) and the NSW RFS. The Service recognises farmers as an important partner in managing and responding to the threat of fire across our landscape, and is committed to ensuring farming communities are well prepared and agricultural assets are protected.

The Service has been working closely with farmers and members from across the state to produce an Operational Guide that provides essential advice to FFU operators and NSW RFS members on safety, cooperation and communication on the fireground.

To identify the shared principles for the integration of FFUs and the NSW RFS, the Service worked closely with the NSW Farmers' Association and conducted consultation and workshops earlier in 2021 with farmers in Dubbo, Armidale and Wagga Wagga.

Feedback from the consultation process and these workshops was used to develop the Operational Guide.

The Operational Guide, to be published later in 2021, outlines the shared expectations for FFU operators and NSW RFS members working together on the fireground, provides important safety and preparation advice and explains how FFU operators can be included in NSW RFS operational and communications systems.

It also provides FFU operators with information about the necessary legal obligations and liability around insurance, vehicle standards and personal injury protection.

The next page outlines in brief the shared principles of cooperation and communication between FFUs and the NSW RFS. For more information, visit www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/farmers. ■

Photo by Adam Hollingworth.



FARM FIRE UNITS

The NSW RFS recognises that in many parts of the state our NSW RFS resources are supported by the use of private equipment, including Farm Fire Units (FFUs), to fight and contain fires.

Safety at fires is **everyone's responsibility**, and the NSW RFS is committed to working with property owners and community members to ensure **we can manage fire together** in a safe and coordinated way.

PREPARE



- Know your local brigade and how to contact them.
- Have your PPE readily available during fire risk days.
- Ensure your farm fire unit is working, safe and legal.
- Check your pumps, hoses and firefighting equipment.
- Brigades should get to know their local landholders and their firefighting capacity.

COMMUNICATE



- If a fire starts, call Emergency Triple Zero (000).
- If safe to do so, assist and keep small fires small.
- Speak to the first arriving fire crew.
- Move to a local UHF channel as agreed, keep contact.

INTEGRATE



- Talk to Brigade Officers and share local knowledge. Collaborate on the plan.
- Inform firefighters about what's important to you on your property.
- Follow the plan and direction of firefighters to keep each other safe.
- Don't forget to tell someone if you leave the fireground, go home or go to get water.
- Brigades should keep FFU operators informed on operational and safety issues.



It's everyone's responsibility to keep each other safe on the fireground, including landholders, farmers and firefighters.

For more information on Fire Fire Units visit www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/farmers or contact your local Fire Control Centre



PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

www.rfs.nsw.gov.au

➤ GOVERNMENT COMMITS A FURTHER \$268 MILLION IN RESPONSE TO NSW BUSHFIRE INQUIRY

Firefighting drones, aerial firefighting, enhanced strategic fire trails and improvements to local emergency infrastructure and equipment will be funded by an additional \$268.2 million over four years as part of the NSW Government's response to the independent NSW Bushfire Inquiry.

The \$268.2 million funding package announced in the state budget includes:

- More than \$48 million for fleet replacement and vehicle safety retrofits for frontline firefighting agencies
- \$16 million for the continued funding of additional NSW RFS crews for hazard reduction and mitigation works
- \$34.4 million to accelerate the statewide delivery of strategic fire trails
- \$17.2 million to operationalise two Black Hawk helicopters and to replace an existing NSW RFS helicopter
- \$20 million over two years to upgrade Fire Control Centres, Emergency Operations Centres and Neighbourhood Safer Places
- \$6.7 million to enhance firefighter safety through fireground tracking, training and accreditation of heavy plant machinery operators



- \$5.2 million for additional drones for firefighting operations

"This commitment will assist by increasing mitigation crews on the ground, getting aviation assets in the sky, and most importantly providing safer trucks for our firefighters," said Commissioner Rob Rogers.

➤ CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON NEW AREA COMMAND FACILITIES

Earlier this year construction began on two new NSW RFS Area Command Centres, at Cowra and Tamworth. The new buildings will provide state-of-the-art facilities to support volunteers, staff and local communities across west and northwest NSW.

The first sod of the new \$2.6 million Area Western Command Centre in Cowra was turned (pictured right) in April 2021 by Commissioner Rob Rogers, Cootamundra MP Steph Cooke and Mayor of Cowra Shire Bill West. The building will operate as the Command base for the Western Area, with office space, amenities and storage for mitigation and brigade equipment. In addition to NSW RFS Area operations, the site will also house and support the Waugoola Brigade and Air Base. Construction of the new facility on Johnstone Way, Cowra, is due for completion by December 2021.

Construction began in Tamworth at the new \$8.2 million Fire Control Centre in May 2021. The site will include an operations room, office space for Tamworth District and North Western Area Command staff, training facilities, meeting rooms and storage areas for tankers and equipment.



The new facility on Country Road, Tamworth, will also house and support mitigation crews, with construction due to be completed by mid-2022.

➤ SYDNEY MARKETS DONATES NEW TANKER TO BATLOW BRIGADE

The devastating fires of 2019/20 had a significant impact on the Snowy Mountains community of Batlow, a renowned apple-growing area. The community suffered greatly from the fires, with several homes destroyed and approximately 40 percent of the region's apple orchards burnt to the ground. The Batlow Brigade's tanker was also damaged in the fire.

In March 2021 the Batlow Brigade took ownership of a new Cat 7 tanker, generously donated by the Sydney Markets Foundation. The Foundation is the charity arm of Sydney Markets, which has a strong link to the town of Batlow – roughly 60 percent of the apples grown in Batlow are delivered to Sydney Markets. The Foundation raised more than \$230,000 for the purchase of the new tanker for the Batlow Brigade.



➤ FOUR NEW RESCUE VEHICLES FOR WESTERN NSW



The NSW RFS brigades of Louth, Euston, Pooncarie and Menindee each took delivery of a new purpose-built rescue vehicle in April 2021. The vehicles are designed to respond to serious motor vehicle accidents and ensure casualties of road crash trauma in remote areas receive a faster rescue response. The specialist vehicles possess off-road capability and are well equipped with hydraulic rescue tools, vehicle stabilisation, patient handling equipment and automatic external defibrillators.

The Louth, Euston and Pooncarie Brigades all completed the required training in late 2020 and hold pre-accreditation from the State Rescue Board. A further 20 members from the Menindee Brigade undertook Road Crash Rescue Training in April 2021, delivered by specialist NSW RFS instructors.

➤ NSW RFS MEMBERS ELIGIBLE FOR COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

The NSW RFS reminds all members about the availability of COVID-19 vaccinations. Emergency services personnel are part of the Phase 1B vaccine rollout, meaning vaccines are available regardless of your age. Vaccination should be considered in order to assist with maintaining operational capability across the coming fire season.

Vaccination clinics are located across NSW, including the Vaccination Centre at Sydney Olympic Park, near NSW RFS Headquarters. Vaccination is not mandatory, however all members are strongly encouraged to consider vaccination and discuss any concerns with their doctor. Please continue to monitor [www.rfs](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au).

nsw.gov.au/coronavirus for updates, and the NSW Government website for identified case locations.





NEW AIRCRAFT MAKES AMAZING JOURNEY FROM CANADA TO AUSTRALIA

A new Cessna Citation V (C560) became the latest aircraft to join the NSW RFS fleet in May 2021. The plane, to be operated by Coulson Aviation on behalf of the NSW RFS, will perform lead plane work for water-bombing aircraft, conduct line scanning and transport crews.

The plane had to take a very long and scenic route from Coulson Aviation's headquarters in Canada to get to Australia, as the aircraft is unsuitable for the straighter cross-ocean journeys routinely taken by commercial jets. The four-day journey was flown by Coulson Aviation pilots Michael Hayes and Jamie Whatman. Michael shares his experience below.

“ After completing annual training in California and receiving a negative COVID-19 test result, we made our way to Coulson Headquarters at Port Alberni on Vancouver Island, Canada, where our NSW RFS Citation was waiting. Our journey to bring the plane home would include an exciting four days of flying with three nights in various ports.

We were cleared to leave Canada and begin the journey back to Australia once we received our third negative COVID-19 test result for the trip. Stunning scenery greeted us as we departed out of Port Alberni for Anchorage, Alaska.

This was unfortunately short-lived as we climbed through 16,000 feet and sat on top of overcast cloud for the remainder of the flight, missing out on all the beautiful scenery that British Columbia and Alaska offer.

Departing Anchorage the next day, we managed to see clear skies for the first half-hour of the flight with views over Lake Clark and Katmai National Park before the clouds set in again. Our track took us all the way down the Aleutian Islands and into our next stop of Adak, a settlement in the Aleutian Islands about halfway between North America and Russia.

The weather in Adak was a chilly four degrees, with high winds and heavy rain – a beautiful day, according to the local refueller. Following a quick fuel stop in the cold and wet, we were off across the Bering Sea towards Russia.

This arrival was vastly different to the last. Flying over completely snow-covered mountains and volcanoes for miles all around, the arrival took us into Yelizovo Airport on the eastern tip of Russia. Taxiing on the ground we got some views of the Russian Mig fighter jets only ever



Main left: Sunset at New Chitose Airport near Sapporo, Japan.

Above: The four-day journey taken by Michael, Jamie and the Citation, from Port Alberni in Canada to RAAF Base Richmond.

Inset: The NSW RFS Cessna Citation at Anchorage on the first day of its journey. Photos by Michael Hayes.

seen in the movies. Due to the tight security restrictions and armed military personnel greeting us, we were not able to take any further photos.

Russia was expected to be the hardest leg of our trip to manage in terms of services provided and approvals to enter. However, it ended up being the easiest and most streamlined out of all ports.

The next leg took us over the Sea of Okhotsk and into Japan, flying over some of the best ski fields in the world around Sapporo City before landing at New Chitose airport. Yet another COVID-19 test was taken, and a two-hour wait in the aircraft to receive the results, before we could clear Customs and Immigration and head to the hotel for the night.

We were greeted with thick fog the next morning for the shortest leg of the trip to Fukuoka, with our route taking us alongside North Korean airspace. After a quick turnaround in Fukuoka we were off to Laoag in the Philippines, overflying Okinawa and Naha on the way. Laoag Airport is surrounded by tropical scenery and coastal waters, and was a humid 32 degrees on the ground.

Our last leg of the day had us bound for Manado, Indonesia. We flew down the mainlands of the Philippines straight over Manila when we encountered some forecast thunderstorms associated with a Tropical

Cyclone. The thunderstorms had tops reaching up to 60,000 feet, which made for some spectacular sights. After some significant deviations off track to avoid the weather, we finally set course back into Manado.

The next day was our final day of the trip. The cyclone had shifted further off the coast and cleared the skies to Darwin. We had a nice easy arrival over Bathurst Island before landing on home soil again after four-and-a-half weeks abroad.

As expected, yet another COVID-19 test awaited us on arrival, and after a quick check of our passports and paperwork we were off to Alice Springs. We had views of the Asia/Pacific aircraft storage facility as we arrived at Alice Springs, with 200-plus aircraft temporarily discarded right beside the runway. It was a very sobering view, and highlighted the devastating impact this pandemic has had on the aviation industry. I am thankful to be out of the airline industry and now part of the NSW RFS aerial firefighting team.

Our final leg was a smooth and comfortable flight over the rich red sands of the Simpson Desert and over the Blue Mountains to the aircraft's new home at RAAF Base Richmond. For Jamie and I, we were one step closer to home. But we weren't quite there yet, with 14 days of mandatory hotel quarantine to be endured – our second round of quarantine within the past six months. ”



SIMULATOR AND CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE TO BOOST AERIAL FIREFIGHTING

The Service recently strengthened its ability to fight fires from the air with the installation of a new aviation simulator and plans to build an Aviation Centre of Excellence at the NSW RFS Training Academy in Dubbo.

AVIATION TRAINING ENHANCED BY SIMULATOR

The NSW RFS provides training for more than 140 personnel to support aviation operations in a variety of roles including Air Attack Supervisors, Air Observers, Air Base Managers, Air Base Operators, Aircraft Officers and Air Operations Managers.

The majority of personnel who perform these roles are sourced from NSW RFS volunteer members across the state who receive specialised training. The NSW RFS also facilitates aviation training for other emergency services, including the NSW SES, as well as other interstate fire services.

The aviation simulator was purchased in response to recommendations from the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and installed at the NSW RFS Training Academy in Dubbo in March 2021. The simulator will allow for cost-effective training, maintaining and enhancing the skills of specialist aviation personnel in the emergency services.

The simulator, built like the cockpit of a helicopter, is designed to simulate specialist aviation roles. It exposes trainees and trained aviation personnel to difficult scenarios in a controlled virtual

environment where their decision making can be monitored and assessed.

Helmet-mounted virtual reality headsets are used to simulate all types of weather and fire conditions, and enable the personnel to look in, around and out of a visual representation of a full aircraft.

The initial simulator is built on an AS350 Squirrel airframe, which is one of the most common rotary air attack platforms used by the NSW RFS. A virtual version of Firebird 200 has also been rendered within the system, and other typical NSW firefighting aircraft have been added to the aircraft library.

Inspector Bernie O'Rourke from the NSW RFS Aviation team says the system has been developed and designed to simulate Air Attack Supervisor and Air Observer training, with the ability to incrementally increase training intensity. The simulator was used as part of the Air Attack Supervisor course in Dubbo in June 2021, which allowed both instructors and participants to experience this new technology.

"Helmet-mounted devices simulate air traffic management and enable the instructor to alter scenarios to create new and exciting challenges



Main previous page: An artist's impression of the plans for the Aviation Centre of Excellence. **Above:** The aviation simulator in action at the NSW RFS Training Academy in Dubbo.

in training and planning,” says Inspector O’Rourke. “The Aviation and Operational Capability teams will continue to assess how best we integrate the simulator as part of our broader aviation training program.”

The new simulator is the first of several aviation simulators that will operate at the new Aviation Centre of Excellence (more information below), and is in addition to the four winch simulators operated in Mogo, Armidale, Lithgow and Glendenning. All simulators were procured from and installed by Virtual Simulation Systems (VSS), an Australian company based in Port Stephens, NSW.

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE A FIRST FOR AUSTRALIA

The Aviation Centre of Excellence, to be built at the NSW RFS Training Academy in Dubbo, will be a first in Australia and the home of aerial firefighting training across the state and country. The NSW RFS is working with Dubbo Regional Council to build the world-class, multi-million dollar centre, as recommended by the NSW Bushfire Inquiry.

The centre will consist of a two-storey building housing four simulator rooms, a central control room, meeting rooms and accommodation. The site at Dubbo City Regional Airport was chosen because of the accommodation facilities and space available, as well as the fact that training activities

Below: A NSW RFS member acts as the instructor for a simulation.

are less likely to disrupt commercial flights at a regional airport like Dubbo than in Sydney.

The NSW RFS will work with the National Aerial Firefighting Centre and other jurisdictions to promote and make the centre available to interstate and international personnel to enhance aerial firefighting capabilities more broadly. Construction of the centre is scheduled to commence in late 2021, with the centre opening in mid-2022. ■





FAREWELL TO DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRUCE MCDONALD

After more than 41 years with the NSW RFS, in May 2021 Bruce McDonald, Deputy Commissioner Preparedness and Capability, moved into an exciting new phase of his life – retirement.

“There are big changes ahead for the agency, and driving that change will take a lot of energy and a mountain of effort,” says Bruce. “I feel this is the right time for me to move on to another chapter of my life and allow some fresh blood to come through.”

Bruce rose through the NSW RFS ranks in the way many do – starting as a volunteer with Beacon Hill Brigade in 1980 after significant fires on the Northern Beaches. Over the years he held the positions of Firefighter, Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain, Captain and Group Officer.

Bruce then took up a paid role as District Inspector of the old Warringah/Pittwater District (now Northern Beaches District) at the local council. Later he became State Operations Officer, then held several management roles in communications systems and infrastructure before being appointed a Director.

In 2014, Bruce took on the role of Executive Director Infrastructure Services and rose to the rank of Assistant Commissioner. Finally, in November 2020 he was made Deputy Commissioner. Reflecting on his career and the Service, Bruce acknowledges he has been at the coalface of operations for many years and seen many changes.

“Back in the big fires of 1994, the equipment and machinery were rather rudimentary and interaction with adjoining fire districts wasn’t as sophisticated as it is today,” he says. “You fought fires with basic equipment – they were tough old days.

“The fires in 2001 were probably the first time we had sought and received firefighting resources from interstate – in this case Victoria. The hours for our firefighters were long and draining and it was so important for them to have backup and some reprieve.”

Main photo: Bruce farewelled by NSW RFS staff at HQ on his last day. **Below:** Deputy Commissioner Bruce McDonald.

One memory of his years in the Service that really stays with Bruce is landing in Kingslake, Victoria after the Black Saturday fires of 2009.

“We landed on the Sunday and my role was as a community liaison person. We were figuring out the public messaging and working with people who had lost neighbours, friends and family. There was a lot of trauma and it had a huge impact on the community.”

Bruce believes one of the positives to come from the 2009 Victorian fires was the introduction of fire warning systems, more consistent messaging and a stronger connection with media.

“From all the big fire activities there are lessons to be learnt,” he says. “A whole lot of new processes came into play after the catastrophic Black Saturday fires that we continue to build on, such as the emergency alert phone systems and better interaction with support agencies.”

When asked about the 2019/20 season, Bruce replies it was “an absolute blur.”

“While the indicators were for a big season, no one could have predicted the season’s intensity and duration right across NSW,” says Bruce. “We saw fire behaviour after sunset and before sunrise that you would expect at 3pm.”

“It was an unrelenting and unforgiving series of fires, and the draw on resources was relentless. Our members just stood up and came back time and time again, as did their directors. There was just no time to have a break.”

“I have never before been in a service position when we’ve lost firefighters in operations – plus the loss of the US airmen and so many members of our community, as well as homes, livestock and livelihoods. It was just devastating.”

“No firefighter takes the loss of anything easily – you feel like you’ve failed. But you do your best and then it becomes what it becomes.”

If a silver lining can be found from the 2019/20 fire season, Bruce says it was the generosity of everyday people worldwide.

“The \$120 million donated was magnificent – it allowed us to do things that we’d struggle to do in a normal budget year.”



“In an organisation this size, it would be hard to make change rapidly like this and the donated funds helped us to make change faster.”

Bruce has many lasting legacies as a result of his time with the NSW RFS, but the ones he nominates as highlights are improved PPE and helmets, station upgrades, new vehicles and a standard approach to how people think about a rural fire brigade station.

He is also proud of the way the NSW RFS has evolved as an agency and is addressing the mental health impacts from major fires.

In retirement, life will get slower and hopefully more peaceful for Bruce, with more time to catch up with family and friends.

“I am going to swim twice a week, walk my two dogs, sleep in a bit and not watch the clock,” he says. “I’ve got my eye out for a motorhome too, and who knows, I might just go and visit the relatives in New Zealand.”

The NSW RFS wishes Bruce McDonald a long, happy and healthy retirement. ■



NSW RFS MEMBERS ENCOURAGED TO ‘SPEAK UP’

The NSW RFS is building a new grievance and discipline process to improve the handling of members’ complaints and ensure a contemporary and consistent approach to grievances and discipline across the Service.

The Grievance and Discipline Review Survey conducted in early 2021 received almost 2,500 responses and provided useful insights on how the NSW RFS can enhance grievance and discipline processes. A thorough analysis of all responses was completed, and a finalised report was sent to members to showcase their feedback.

The survey feedback is being used alongside a review of best practice models in similar agencies to develop a new framework for managing grievance and discipline matters in the NSW RFS, which will be presented to members by the end of 2021.

Alongside this work, an external review of serious misconduct complaints previously reported to the NSW RFS is being carried out by independent legal firm, Clayton Utz.

The independent process, known as ‘Speak Up’, is the result of a planned review of the way the Service handles grievance and discipline matters.

The ‘Speak Up’ review process began on 31 May 2021 and is open to current and former NSW RFS members seeking a review of past matters of serious misconduct that they have previously reported.

Members seeking a review can submit applications directly to Clayton Utz’s secure online portal via the link on MyRFS. Members

are encouraged to review the eligibility criteria available on the portal and gather any information to support their application before submitting.

“This independent review process is an important step toward ensuring the Service is a respectful and safe place of work and that members can be confident that disciplinary matters will be treated appropriately,” says Commissioner Rob Rogers.

“Where it is found that matters haven’t been handled appropriately, recommendations on remedial actions may be made to the NSW RFS and these will be acted on.”

Applications will be treated in confidence by Clayton Utz, with strict rules in place on how sensitive information can be shared. To ensure the independence of the process, NSW RFS involvement is limited to providing Clayton Utz with any required background information and documents to assist with the review.

The ‘Speak Up’ review process will be open to members until new NSW RFS grievance and discipline processes are implemented, likely in the first half of 2022.

To read a copy of the feedback report and for more information on the review process, eligibility criteria and how to submit an application, you can access the secure online portal via MyRFS. ■



ENGAGING AND PROTECTING NORTH WESTERN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

The NSW RFS has been working closely with the Aboriginal communities of Toomelah and Walhallow in northwest NSW to improve their bush fire resilience. The project has been led by the North Western Area Command and involved collaboration between the Namoi/Gwydir and Liverpool Range districts, local brigades and the Toomelah and Walhallow communities to deliver increased bush fire protection and community engagement.

NSW RFS members began working with Toomelah and Walhallow in early 2021 as part of the Building Resilience in Aboriginal Communities (BRAC) project, meeting with the communities to discuss their bush fire resilience, identify areas of concern and build a relationship. Mechanical work soon followed to construct enhanced Asset Protection Zones (APZs) and Strategic Fire Advantage Zones (SFAZs) to better protect the two communities.

For Toomelah, a community of 250 people situated less than a kilometre from the Queensland border, the involvement of the NSW RFS was much needed.

“A number of risks were identified in and around the Toomelah community – the area has experienced a lot of fire activity and there were high fuel loads right up to the houses,” says Mick Williams, District Officer at Namoi/Gwydir. “With the aid of Mitigation crews we treated a number of areas to build a buffer zone and reduce the threat, and we continue to grow our relationship with the community.”

As part of this relationship, much of the work around Toomelah involved the NSW RFS Indigenous Mitigation crew based at Moree. The crew, along with members of Boggabilla Brigade and Area and District staff, visited Toomelah Public School to

engage with the youth of the community, explaining the role of the NSW RFS and why the mitigation work was necessary.

“The schoolkids are always inquisitive, and it was really valuable for the crew to visit and have a yarn to the kids,” says Rex Weribone, CEO of the Toomelah Local Aboriginal Land Council. “Some of the members of the Indigenous crew had family in Toomelah, and they were also able to touch base and reconnect.”

While recent wet weather and COVID-19 restrictions have hampered further work to protect Toomelah and Walhallow, more activity is planned for the future. A Community Protection Plan program is scheduled for Toomelah and will be implemented once COVID-19 restrictions ease to help with community preparedness. A Neighbourhood Safer Place review is underway at Walhallow, and cultural burns are planned for both locations that will involve Mitigation crews and brigades working alongside community members.

“We’re looking forward to the NSW RFS coming back to do some cultural burns and getting the community involved,” says Rex. “It will be great to teach cultural burning to some of the young fellas in our community and get them involved in keeping the community safe.”

Photo: NSW RFS members with the kids at Toomelah Public School. Photo courtesy of North Western Area Command.

UPGRADES AND NEW S

If you've been down a fire trail in NSW recently, you might have noticed a brand new trail sign showing you the way. The new signs are part of the **Strategic Fire Trails Program**, implemented in 2013 but recently boosted by additional funding following the NSW Bushfire Inquiry.

The Program aims to establish a strategic network of fire trails across NSW and upgrade these trails to ensure they meet our operational needs. Trails will be appropriately signposted and configured to suit the NSW RFS firefighting fleet.

This will allow for greater confidence in our drivers and crew leaders, instead of 'nosing down' a fire trail or sending a walking crew ahead to ascertain trail condition and suitability. By upgrading trails in accordance with the NSW RFS Standards, and placing appropriate signage, driver expectations can be managed, leading to greater crew safety and better firefighting operations.

The NSW RFS is currently working with all key land management agencies, as well as private landholders, to implement the upgrade of the 30,000km of fire trails identified as of strategic importance.



A red circle on a trail sign indicates the fire trail has been upgraded to meet the NSW RFS Fire Trail Standards. The red circle will highlight the vehicle classification the trail has been built to, in this case a Category 1 tanker.

FIRE TRAIL SIGNS EXPLAINED

FIRE TRAILS CATEGORIES

The program has classified fire trails across NSW into three key categories:

- > Strategic trails
- > Tactical trails
- > Track/other trails

> TACTICAL FIRE TRAILS

A trail that provides an advantage and the Service wants it to remain open, but not necessarily to meet the NSW RFS Fire Trail Standards.

> STRATEGIC FIRE TRAILS

A trail that provides some form of strategic advantage in fire prevention or suppression, and should meet the standards outlined in the NSW RFS Fire Trail Standards.

> TRACK/OTHER TRAILS

A trail or track the Service wants to know the location of, but remaining open is optional and it can be opened if needed.

SIGNS FOR FIRE TRAILS



As well as the name of the fire trail, the new signs also include latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates of the trail, exact to where the sign stands.

Tactical and strategic trails that have not yet been upgraded may have slightly different signage. The signage for these trails may include a black indicator for vehicle capacity of the trail.

NEATH F/T C1

AFAC BUSH FIRE SYMBOLOGY

AFAC bush fire symbology will be mounted to fire trail signs where relevant. No through roads will also be clearly marked.



HELIPAD



STAGING AREA



REFUGE



WATER POINT HELICOPTER



WATER POINT



ESCAPE ROUTE

HOW BIG IS THE FIRE TRAIL NETWORK ACROSS NSW?



- > Strategic fire trails: 30,108km
- > Tactical fire trails: 24,430km
- > Track/other Trails: approx. 15,000km

For comparison, in NSW, Transport for NSW manages 21,006km of national highways, state, regional and local roads.



SECONDARY SCHOOL CADET PROGRAM

The NSW RFS Secondary School Cadet Program (SSCP) has been going from strength to strength since its pilot program in 2004. Now running for 18 years, with only a slight hiccup during 2020 when COVID-19 limited Term 1 delivery, the 2018/19 program saw record participation with 882 students graduating from 56 schools.

“The program is now back on track to complete 11,000 graduations by the end of 2021,” says Paul Cunningham, NSW RFS Senior Advisor Program Development. “We are evolving to meet demand and to ensure we have enough volunteers available to help deliver the program right around the state.”

“One way we are doing this is to develop a shorter intensive program of three days,” explains Paul. “We are finding this suits schools as students can better retain focus and interest over the consecutive days and volunteers are more likely to be able to take time off work for shorter periods.”

At least five NSW RFS districts have delivered the program over a shorter intensive format instead of the traditional ten-week program, and this is expected to grow in light of the benefits for both volunteers and schools.

“It’s an amazingly inclusive and engaging program,” says Paul. “Over the years we have delivered it to students with disabilities, special behavioural needs and even to children being home schooled.”

Recently, the SSCP was delivered over a three-day period to seven Indigenous students from years 8 to 10 attending the Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural and Development Centre in Coleambally, with stunning results. The Centre offers professional, innovative

and culturally-based support programs for at-risk Aboriginal youth, and saw an opportunity to get involved with the NSW RFS.

Deanne Bailey, Operational Officer in the MIA District, oversaw the rollout of the Centre’s first cadet program.

“When we offered the cadet program as a three-day intensive with plenty of Indigenous connection to land and burning techniques included, they were very interested,” says Deanne. “We engaged our Indigenous mitigation crews from Bourke and Brewarrina to come along, as well as volunteers from the MIA District, to teach the kids and show them what can be possible – they were amazing role models for the boys.”

“By giving the boys a taste of fire training and having these role models there for them, we are showing them that you can have a hard upbringing and still turn it around.”

This may have been the first time the Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural and Development Centre had taken part in the SSCP, but according to Matt Watts, the Centre’s CEO, it won’t be the last.

“We were thrilled to be involved in the program – it offered the boys so many opportunities to learn new hands-on skills,” says Matt.



DELIVERS FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

“These students are here because they have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging with school and entering the justice system. We are keen to offer them experiences that help them find purpose in their lives and the cadet program can achieve just that.

“And the boys absolutely loved it. I’ve actually seen very few programs delivered by external service providers that have been approached with such vigour and excitement.

“The kids have been absolutely worn out at the end of the day, which is brilliant. We are so impressed with it, we’re hopeful of running it each term.”

Based on feedback supplied, the students also had a blast: “This course was heaps fun and I learnt stuff too,” observed one; “The course was deadly and the (NSW RFS) guys were heaps of fun,” wrote another; “It was cool and I know how to give mouth-to-mouth and save lives” and “I loved wearing all the suits and hats and going on the fire trucks!”

The SSCP is delivered on average to more than 50 schools and 800 students annually. There is an almost even split of genders participating, with 55 percent male and 45 percent female students taking part. In a field that has in the past been traditionally male, this is really encouraging and reflects the increased diversity in brigades across the state.

Top left: Bourke and Brewarrina mitigation crew members with Tirkandi Inaburra students following a traditional dance. Photo by Deanne Bailey **Top right:** The Tirkandi Inaburra students with members of the Bourke and Brewarrina Indigenous mitigation crews. Photo by Rachel Woods. **Right:** A Tirkandi Inaburra student learns from a NSW RFS mitigation crew member. Photo by Deanne Bailey.

While the SSCP provides young people with an insight into fire safety and prevention, and also develops practical life skills and a general appreciation of community service and volunteerism, the icing on the cake for the NSW RFS is to encourage transition from the school program to local brigades.

“This varies district to district, but a program run at Bega High School recently saw 100 percent of participants transition to their local brigade, which is a really terrific result,” says Paul.

For more information on the NSW RFS Secondary School Cadet Program visit www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/volunteer/youth. ■



VALE

SUSAN OWENS

1940 – 2021

BY MARK LORSCHY AND WAYNE DILLON, GROSE VALE BRIGADE

Sue Owens joined the Grose Vale Brigade in the Hawkesbury in 1985 with her husband Barry. After only a few years with the brigade, Sue was elected Secretary in 1988. She continued in this position up until recently, her contribution spanning more than three decades.

Sue was a tremendous Secretary and a major part of the Grose Vale team, gaining the respect and friendship of all – 36 years a member and 32 of those years as Secretary is a tremendous contribution.

In the same year as she joined Grose Vale, Sue also joined the Hawkesbury Communications Brigade. Sue's membership of Hawkesbury Communications also spanned some 36 years, during which time she held many positions including Treasurer, Callout Officer, Deputy Captain and Captain for 21 years from 1993 to 2014.

It goes without saying that Sue was a tremendous contributor at Hawkesbury Communications, gaining the admiration of so many during her time in the operations room. A fantastic Captain, Sue was very welcoming to new members and a great mentor.

Sue made a tremendous impact on everyone she met during her 36 years of service to the NSW RFS and her presence will certainly be missed by all.



Sue was truly an extraordinary lady, a wonderful friend to so many and her dedication to all was outstanding.

Sue's voice over the NSW RFS radio will provide a long-lasting memory. She was the voice of the Hawkesbury District for many years, providing that personal touch to the operations room. Her calming voice and fun nature will be very much missed.

Sue Owens was a leader, a mentor and a friend. Her life was dedicated to the service of others and was a life that was very well spent – she will be a very hard act to follow.

She was an inspiration to so many, and her memory will continue to live on in all those that knew her.

May Sue Rest In Peace.

Photo by Roberta Colbran



GO FOR LAUNCH: SUPPORTING THE BUREAU WITH THUNDERSTORM FORECASTING

BY NICOLAS EVERARD-SHEPLEY, FIRE BEHAVIOUR ANALYST

The NSW RFS owns and operates a fleet of five Portable Atmospheric Sounding Units (PASU), or weather balloons, that measure temperature, wind speed and humidity from up to 20km in height.

This data is used by NSW RFS Fire Behaviour Analysts and Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) meteorologists to detect dangerous fire weather and specifically the potential for fire-induced thunderstorms. However, these units are also extremely useful for determining the potential for thunderstorms that occur separately to fires.

The BoM also undertake sounding to detect thunderstorms from fixed locations around Australia at various times every day.

On 10 March 2021, delays in delivery of replacement parts meant that the BoM's sounding unit at Moree was unable to be used. With significant and widespread thunderstorms forecast for the region over the coming days, the BoM requested the NSW RFS conduct balloon launches on their behalf in order to ensure accurate forecasting of the potential for severe thunderstorms.

The launches were organised at short notice over the weekend of 11 and 12 March 2021, with significant

coordination between the State Air Desk and the Civil Aviation Safety Authority to receive the necessary approvals for the launch.

The NSW RFS has a number of trained members capable of assisting in this operation, both volunteers and members of mitigation crews.

On this particular occasion, members of the Mudgee mitigation crew conducted launches at Wongarbron (southeast of Dubbo) and Bugaldie (northwest of Coonabarabran). A launch was also conducted from Grafton by a volunteer and staff members.

The crews executed this task with precision and were able to successfully launch soundings in support of BoM forecasting. The data they gathered was able to assist the BoM in more accurately recording the potential of severe thunderstorms and allow residents and emergency services to prepare for the potential threats.

For further information on balloon launches contact the Predictive Services Team on 8741 5317 or email fba@rfs.nsw.gov.au.

Photo: A NSW RFS member launching a weather balloon in March 2021. Photo by Reuby Grantley-Davies..



ST FLORIAN'S DAY BRAVERY & SERVICE AWARDS 2021

The fourth of May is International Firefighters' Day and the Feast Day of St Florian, patron saint of firefighters. On this day each year, the NSW RFS holds an internal awards ceremony to recognise the bravery and outstanding service of volunteers and members.

The awards recognise volunteers and staff who have gone above and beyond – either by showing incredible acts of bravery in protecting the community or delivering the highest level of commitment to the Service that is worthy of special recognition.

In all cases, the recipients are nominated by their peers, which makes receiving an award on St Florian's Day even more significant and special.

This year's recipients demonstrated extreme acts of bravery in the face of horrific conditions experienced during the 2019/20 bush fires. The list includes recipients for 2020 who were unable to receive their commendation due to COVID-19 restrictions last year.

During a bush fire season like no other, our members fought tirelessly for months to save lives and property. Tragically, four NSW RFS members were killed in action during this terrible season. Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer from Horsley Park Brigade, Samuel McPaul from Morven Brigade and Colin Burns from Belowra Brigade were posthumously awarded individual Commissioner's Commendations for Bravery.

Given the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, the Service was unable to mark St Florian's Day this year with one event to present all recipients with their awards.

On 4 May 2021, the 16 individual award recipients and one brigade receiving the highest of honours were presented their awards.

COMMISSIONER'S COMMENDATION FOR BRAVERY (INDIVIDUAL)

CAPTAIN WILLIAM ROSS and DEPUTY CAPTAIN ALISON WADE

Spencer Brigade, Central Coast, Area Hunter

On 1 April 2019 at 0710 hours, the Spencer Brigade was activated to an incident within the Spencer township. The incident was initially reported as a pile burn and then subsequently updated to a structure fire as further information became available.

On arrival, a scene assessment confirmed a fire burning in an under-house storage location had spread to the structure of the home with flames extending to the roof. While crews established hose lines, Deputy Captain Alison Wade isolated the power and commenced a primary search.

When Captain William Ross arrived on scene, the corner of the structure was well alight with flames extending internally to the roof and toxic smoke building up inside the structure. Deputy Captain

Wade reported she had seen the resident inside the house near the window and also heard a dog barking inside.

The house was locked and attempts to alert the resident, who appeared to have impaired cognitive ability, were unsuccessful. After their initial scene assessment, Captain Ross and Deputy Captain Wade concurred there was a need to gain access and undertake a primary search within the structure.

With backup at least 15 minutes away and the risk that the fire would engulf the building, a forced entry was made through a door at the rear of the building. Spencer Brigade is not an accredited CABA brigade, so without the use of breathing apparatus both Deputy Captain Wade and Captain Ross entered the building to search for the resident. Crouching below the thick smoke, they were able to locate the resident and his pet dog and lead them both outside to safety.



Above: Recipients of the Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery with Commissioner Rob Rogers. Photo by Adam Hollingworth.

After completing the rescue, Deputy Captain Wade and Captain Ross assisted crews in suppressing the structure fire to minimise further damage to the home. The actions of Captain Ross and Deputy Captain Wade were both selfless and brave. They risked their own lives to save the life of a fellow community member.

**CAPTAIN STUART ANDERSON
AND FIREFIGHTER ANDREW JULIAN**

*Back Creek-Greater Hume Brigade,
Southern Border, Area South Western*

DEPUTY GROUP CAPTAIN IAN AVAGE
*Splitters Creek Brigade, Southern Border,
Area South Western*

**CAPTAIN ANDREW GODDE
and FIREFIGHTER RODNEY O'KEEFFE**
*Culcairn North West Brigade, Southern Border,
Area South Western*

On Sunday 29 December 2019, after an extended period of heat and dryness, a dry lightning strike hit a tree on the "Avoca" property within the Talmalmo district of the Murray River area. Several crews were immediately dispatched to what was considered a small fire.

The following day, conditions deteriorated and the fire quickly spread within the adjacent Woomargama National Park. The forest and farmland were very vulnerable and the late afternoon weather created unexpected

catastrophic conditions. The expanding fire generated a vortex known as a fire well, which was likely to have produced extreme wind speeds consistent with a tornado and stretched some eight kilometres in height.

The crews saw the build-up and decided to move away to a safe refuge when, without warning, the fire well exploded with a downward force that caused significant damage.

Captain Stuart Anderson and Firefighter Andrew Julian were assisting a landowner to protect his property from the Green Valley fire when impacted by the catastrophic conditions, forcing Captain Anderson to seek shelter in a nearby shed and Firefighter Julian to take refuge in a pipe.

Despite being subjected to extreme heat, flames, extraordinary wind and flying debris from the fire well, Captain Anderson and Firefighter Julian managed to locate each other and escape to the nearby river. Both suffered severe burns and other injuries in the incident and were airlifted to hospital.

Deputy Group Captain Ian Avage was doing a reconnaissance of the fire area and checking on his crews at the time when the fire well exploded. Deputy Group Captain Avage's vehicle was impacted and blown from the roadway, the force of the explosion turning it on its side and disabling it.

Deputy Group Captain Avage showed great courage by exiting the vehicle and running through the catastrophic conditions. He managed to navigate through the winds and debris and take shelter in a nearby property before his vehicle exploded into flames.

Captain Andrew Godde was defending the Talmalmo property "Lightwood" as part of the Green Valley fire when the vehicle he was driving was impacted by this catastrophic event, with the fire well picking up and overturning his eight-tonne truck.

Captain Godde climbed through the damaged windscreen of the vehicle and rendered assistance to Firefighter Rodney O'Keeffe who was momentarily trapped in the crew refuge area.

A fellow crew member, Firefighter Samuel McPaul, was also travelling in the rear of the vehicle. He was trapped and tragically passed away at the scene.

Captain Godde, still in the volatile environment, immediately commenced first aid to the severely burnt Firefighter O'Keeffe and assisted with his emergency airlift to hospital. Captain Godde was later transported to the local hospital in Holbrook and received medical assistance.

DEPUTY GROUP CAPTAIN SCOTT CAMPBELL

Lawrence Brigade, Clarence Valley, Area North Eastern

On 8 November 2019, the Liberation Trail fire impacted numerous properties near the village of Nymboida. As Divisional Commander of the Nymboida Sector, Deputy Group Captain Campbell received advice of a person trapped and responded immediately.

On arrival, Deputy Group Captain Campbell went to the aid of a distressed woman who was in a fire-damaged car in a paddock. After getting her car onto the road, he gave her directions to drive to safety and told her he would get to her husband. He then continued on to a neighbouring property, where he found the woman's injured husband battling a shed fire.

The resident was surrounded by fire, with spot fires from the main fire front approaching from the southwest under strong winds.

Deputy Group Captain Campbell helped the resident fight the fire and prepare the property until he was down to approximately 100 litres of water. With the fire fast approaching and flames more than nine metres high, he made the decision to retreat to a safer area even though the resident refused to leave.

After some pleading, and with the fire less than 100 metres from the house, Deputy Group Captain Campbell managed to convince the resident to get in the tanker.

As they were leaving, they drove over a small fallen tree and the vehicle was overrun with fire. With flames at least 12 metres high and fire behind them even higher, Deputy Group Captain Campbell knew their only chance was to keep going. The vehicle sustained significant damage and soon stalled.

Eventually, Deputy Group Captain Campbell was able to start the tanker and continue the escape through poor visibility and extreme heat. He successfully manoeuvred the vehicle, the resident and himself to a safe area where an ambulance attended to the injured resident.

Deputy Group Captain Campbell demonstrated exceptional fortitude, bravery and acts of courage during this perilous life-threatening situation.

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN NATHAN BARNDEN

Jellat Brigade, Far South Coast, Area South Eastern

FIREFIGHTER JOHN GALLAGHER

Tathra Brigade, Far South Coast, Area South Eastern

On New Year's Eve 2019, large and destructive bush fires impacted on the townships of Quaama and Cobargo, threatening many properties.

On this day, Senior Deputy Captain Nathan Barnden was on duty as a Divisional Commander and Firefighter John Gallagher was on duty at the local NSW RFS brigade shed where residents were sheltering from the fire.

A disability services home in the area was threatened by fire, where Senior Deputy Captain Barnden helped to coordinate crews. As the fire impacted, crews were overcome and had to take shelter away from their vehicles.

Fearing they had been badly injured, Senior Deputy Captain Barnden quickly checked on their safety. One of those firefighters was his father, Clem.

As the fire situation deteriorated, Senior Deputy Captain Barnden's main focus turned to the protection of human life, including taking residents to the local brigade shed to shelter.

While there, he was notified of a family trapped by fire at their property at Quaama. With Firefighter Gallagher, they responded and drove through heavy smoke and strong winds.

Upon arrival, the home was well alight and they feared the family was deceased. They entered the burning home and found the family of seven sheltering inside a room under a wet blanket, as smoke filled the house.



Senior Deputy Captain Barnden and Firefighter Gallagher rescued the two adults and five children just as the family home was totally destroyed by fire, again driving through treacherous conditions to the safety of the local brigade shed.

Responding to an additional report of an injured person trapped at their property by fire and fallen trees, Firefighter Gallagher, on foot, guided Senior Deputy Captain Barnden off-road through burning bushland to locate the person. The pair provided immediate first aid to the patient, who had significant burns to their body and airway, before transporting the patient back to the local NSW RFS station.

The incidents at Quaama were just two of a number that Senior Deputy Captain Barnden and Firefighter Gallagher attended that morning.

The fires took an enormous toll on Senior Deputy Captain Barnden, who tragically lost two family members in the fires.

Since the events of the 2019/20 bush fire season, Senior Deputy Captain Barnden has used his own experience to highlight the significant mental health impact the fires have had, and continue to have, on NSW RFS members.

FIREFIGHTER RYAN CLARKSTONE

*Wilton Brigade, Southern Highlands,
Area Greater Sydney*

FIREFIGHTER DEAN SYMONS

Illawong Brigade, Sutherland, Area Greater Sydney

On the afternoon of Sunday 21 December 2019, Firefighters Ryan Clarkstone and Dean Symons were undertaking field reconnaissance duties as part of efforts to control the Green Wattle Creek fire. They were tasked to the area of Balmoral Village, where conditions were hot and smoky.

Firefighters Clarkstone and Symons performed a number of hit-and-run firefighting operations while conducting reconnaissance, including property protection on a NSW RFS member's house. They were able to rescue a possum and transport it to the Balmoral Village Brigade station.

A wind change was observed in the late afternoon and Firefighters Clarkstone and Symons received radio reports of significant fire activity in the Balmoral Village, with numerous people trapped in houses that were alight in Station Street.

At the end of Station Street, Firefighters Clarkstone and Symons located a family sheltering in their car. The rear of the car had begun to catch fire and melt.



Firefighters Clarkstone and Symons exited their appliance and escorted the family in their car to the end of the street, as visibility was hampered by fire and smoke. Most of the vegetation in the street was alight and visibility was near zero.

Without access to breathing apparatus, Firefighters Clarkstone and Symons undertook a primary internal search of 3 Station Street and were unable to locate any persons.

Further reports of a male trapped in his house were received, and Firefighters Clarkstone and Symons forced entry through the front door of 5 Station Street. They commenced an internal search, and soon located and extracted a male occupant. The upper section of the house and eaves were well alight.

Firefighters Clarkstone and Symons then extinguished several fires in Station Street that they deemed a risk to property before linking up with the Northern Beaches Strike Team.

COMMISSIONER'S CITATION FOR BRAVERY (UNIT)

HARRINGTON BRIGADE

Mid Coast, Area Hunter

On 8 November 2019 at approximately 2300 hours, Harrington Brigade was paged to a structure fire at Wharf Road, Johns River. Harrington arrived at the fire just after Kundle Moto Brigade, who passed on a radio message of someone being trapped inside a house at 232 Wharf Road. Both brigades responded to the address through extreme fire conditions.

Kundle Moto were travelling up the driveway of the property when a large tree fell in front of them, causing them to stop suddenly. Right behind them, Harrington 1 also had to stop quickly to avoid hitting

their colleagues. Kundle Moto then radioed Harrington and Firecom to say conditions were too dangerous and they were retreating – visibility was down to zero, the firestorm was still raging and the fallen tree was blocking the driveway.

Without thinking twice, Deputy Captain Garth Honeysett and Senior Deputy Captain Robert McPherson of the Harrington Brigade commenced breathing apparatus (BA) operations using the only two sets on board Harrington 1.

The Harrington Captain informed Firecom that the BA crew and Officer in Charge (OIC) from Harrington were going in on foot. As the Harrington crew ran up the long driveway with no visibility in extreme fire conditions, a large

branch fell in front of them and tripped Deputy Captain Honeysett. The other crew members helped him to his feet and continued on. Captain Michael Cleland returned to the truck to obtain the thermal imaging equipment.

Captain Cleland returned to the crew, who were on their way back down the driveway after searching the property and adjacent shed.

The crew informed the Captain that a two-storey house was completely burnt to the ground and there were no signs of survivors.

Harrington OIC gave Firecom a sitrep of the tragic outcome. The Harrington crew waited outside the property for the arrival of NSW Police and Fire and Rescue NSW, who confirmed the occupant of the property was deceased.

COMMISSIONER'S COMMENDATION FOR SERVICE (INDIVIDUAL)

INSPECTOR ANGUS BARNES

Surf Beach Brigade, Far South Coast, Area South Eastern

DEPUTY GROUP CAPTAIN PETER BAVINGTON

Captains Flat Brigade, Lake George, Area South Eastern

GROUP CAPTAIN GRAHAME CHEVALLEY

Gresford Brigade, Lower Hunter, Area Hunter

FIREFIGHTER JOHN DOWNES

Jamberoo Brigade, Illawarra, Area Greater Sydney

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN JENNIFER FARRELL

Matcham/Holgate Brigade, Central Coast, Area Hunter

GROUP CAPTAIN GLEN HOWE

Kariong Brigade, Central Coast, Area Hunter

FIREFIGHTER MELODY LOVELACE

Manyana Brigade, Shoalhaven, Area South Eastern

CAPTAIN ALBERT MARAS

Jingellic Brigade, Southern Border, Area South Western

DEPUTY CAPTAIN TED MILLSTEED

March Brigade, Canobolas Zone, Area Western

CAPTAIN PETER O'CONNELL

Krawarree Brigade, Lake George, Area South Eastern

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN JOHN RALSTON

Bendolba-Salisbury Brigade, Lower Hunter, Area Hunter

CAPTAIN GREGORY SPEED

Orchard Hills Brigade, Cumberland, Area Greater Sydney

DEPUTY CAPTAIN WARWICK TEASDALE

Killcare/Wagstaff Brigade, Central Coast, Area Hunter

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN BARRY WHALAN

Eulomogo Brigade, Orana, Area Western

COMMISSIONER'S CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION (INDIVIDUAL)

CAPTAIN JAMES BARRON

Peak View Brigade, Monaro, Area South Eastern

BRIGADE CALLOUT OFFICER JULIE BARRON

Peak View Brigade, Monaro, Area South Eastern

CAPTAIN PAUL BOTT

Mongarlowe Brigade, Lake George, Area South Eastern

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN JONATHAN BRACHT

Robertson Brigade, Southern Highlands, Area Greater Sydney

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER TANIA BURGER

Hastings Communication Brigade, Mid Coast, Area Hunter

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN ROSEMARY BYERS

Ashley Brigade, Namoi Gwydir, Area North Western

**COMMISSIONER'S CERTIFICATE
OF COMMENDATION
(INDIVIDUAL)****FIREFIGHTER****BERNADETTE DAWSON**

Regentville Brigade, Cumberland,
Area Greater Sydney

DEPUTY CAPTAIN**EVAN DELAFORCE**

Tucabia Brigade, Clarence Valley,
Area North Eastern

GROUP CAPTAIN STUART DICK

Bingara Brigade, Namoi/Gwydir,
Area North Western

DEPUTY CAPTAIN**ELIZABETH ELLIS**

Burrawang Brigade, Southern
Highlands, Area Greater Sydney

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN**LINDSEY FLYNN**

Bundeena Brigade, Sutherland,
Area Greater Sydney

MR JONATHAN GAUCI

Community Resilience, Operations,
NSW RFS Headquarters

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN**HAROLD GIBSON**

Trenayr Brigade, Clarence Valley,
Area North Eastern

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN**TODD GIBSON**

Heathcote Headquarters,
Sutherland, Area Greater Sydney

GROUP CAPTAIN**JOHN HAWKINS**

Lankeys Creek Brigade,
Southern Border,
Area South Western

GROUP CAPTAIN**BARRY HENRY**

Walgett Headquarters,
North West, Area North Western

GROUP CAPTAIN**MATTHEW HICKS**

Jindera Brigade, Southern Border,
Area South Western

MS JANE HOLLIER

Deputy Commissioner's Office,
Operations, Headquarters

CAPTAIN**NICHOLAS HORNBUCKLE**

Queanbeyan City Brigade,
Lake George, Area South Eastern

FIREFIGHTER MALCOLM IRONS

Central - Greater Hume Brigade,
Southern Border,
Area South Western

CAPTAIN GERARD JAMES

Bunnaloo Brigade, Mid Murray,
Area South Western

CAPTAIN ANDREW JONES

Laguna Brigade, Lower Hunter,
Area Hunter

DEPUTY CAPTAIN**BRETT MARTIN**

Narara Brigade, Central Coast,
Area Hunter

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN**GORDON MEIKLEJOHN**

Wollondilly Support Brigade,
Southern Highlands,
Area Greater Sydney

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN**LORYN MENDHAM**

Hastings Communication Brigade,
Mid Coast, Area Hunter

CAPTAIN TREVOR MUDDLE

Mittagong Brigade, Southern
Highlands, Area Greater Sydney

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN**WALTER MURRAY**

Mount Ramornie Brigade,
Clarence Valley,
Area North Eastern

CAPTAIN JUSTIN PARR

Nerriga Brigade, Lake George,
Area South Eastern

CAPTAIN**TIMOTHY RAYNOLDS**

Araluen Brigade, Lake George,
Area South Eastern

CAPTAIN MICHAEL ROGAN

Grafton City Brigade, Clarence
Valley, Area North Eastern

DEPUTY GROUP CAPTAIN**PETER TAYLOR**

Lankeys Creek Brigade, Southern
Border, Area South Western

DEPUTY CAPTAIN**PETER THOMAS**

Wollondilly Support Brigade/
Oakdale Brigade, Southern
Highlands, Area Greater Sydney

GROUP CAPTAIN DAVID TUCKER

Bonalbo Brigade, Northern Rivers,
Area North Eastern

DEPUTY CAPTAIN**ROBIN TUCKFIELD**

Menai Brigade, Sutherland,
Area Greater Sydney

DEPUTY CAPTAIN**VICTOR (PAUL) VAUGHAN**

Eulomogo Brigade, Orana,
Area Western

DEPUTY CAPTAIN**WAYNE WATSON**

Central - Greater Hume Brigade,
Southern Border,
Area South Western

SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN**LESLEY WOOD**

Mandemar-Wingecarribee Brigade,
Southern Highlands,
Area Greater Sydney

**COMMISSIONER'S CITATION
FOR SERVICE (UNIT)****ARCADIA BRIGADE**

Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai,
Area Greater Sydney

**AVIATION RESCUE CREW
AND OPERATIONS SUPPORT**

Operations Support, Headquarters

BAWLEY POINT BRIGADE

Shoalhaven, Area South Eastern

**MR DANIEL BUSCH
AND MR SIMON CURRY**

Operational and Mitigation
Services, Headquarters

CHERRYBROOK BRIGADE

Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai,
Area Greater Sydney

**CUMBERLAND
STRIKE TEAM BRAVO**

Cumberland, Area Greater Sydney

**FAR NORTH COAST
STRIKE TEAM**

Far North Coast, Area North Eastern

GULMARRAD BRIGADE

Clarence Valley, Area North Eastern

KINGS PLAINS BRIGADE

Canobolas Zone, Area Western

**COMMISSIONER'S
CERTIFICATE OF
COMMENDATION (UNIT)**

ARALUEN BRIGADE

Lake George,
Area South Eastern

BEMBOKA BRIGADE

Far South Coast,
Area South Eastern

**BUSH FIRE BUILDING IMPACT
ASSESSMENT TEAM**

Planning and Environment
Services, Headquarters

CHAPLAINS

Headquarters

**CLARENCE VALLEY FIRE
CONTROL CENTRE GROUP
CAPTAINS - GROUP 1,
COALDALE BRIGADE, TRENAYR
BRIGADE AND COPMANHURST
BRIGADE**

Clarence Valley,
Area North Eastern

CRESCENT HEAD BRIGADE

Lower North Coast,
Area North Eastern

**CRITICAL INCIDENT
SUPPORT SERVICES**

(Peer Support Team),
Headquarters

**COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY
STRIKE TEAM 1304**

Victoria

**DEPUTY CAPTAIN
ARRON DEEGAN AND
DEPUTY CAPTAIN
LUCY BREARLEY**

Southern Highlands,
Area Greater Sydney

**EUROBODALLA
VOLUNTEER OPERATION
SUPPORT BRIGADE**

Far South Coast,
Area South Eastern

EWINGAR BRIGADE

Clarence Valley,
Area North Eastern

FAR NORTH COAST BRIGADES

Far North Coast,
Area North Eastern

FAR NORTH COAST SMT

Far North Coast,
Area North Eastern

FIELD SERVICES TEAM

Information and Communication
Technology, Headquarters

GRAYS POINT 1B

Sutherland,
Area Greater Sydney

GOODOOGA BRIGADE

Far West,
Area Western

INTERSTATE LIAISON UNIT

State Operations,
Headquarters

LAGUNA BRIGADE

Lower Hunter,
Area Hunter

LOFTUS 1 BRAVO CREW

Sutherland,
Area Greater Sydney

**LOWER NORTH COAST ZONE
BRIGADES, GROUP CAPTAINS
AND STAFF**

Lower North Coast,
Area North Eastern

MALUA BAY BRIGADE

Far South Coast,
Area South Eastern

MELLONG FIRE STRIKE TEAM

Hawkesbury, Area Greater Sydney

MURRUMBATAMAN BRIGADE

Southern Tablelands Zone,
Area South Eastern

**NORTHERN RIVERS BRIGADES -
BUSBYS FLAT/RAPPVILLE FIRES**

Northern Rivers Zone,
Area North Eastern

**NORTHERN RIVERS
BRIGADES - KYOGLE**

Northern Rivers,
Area North Eastern

**OPERATIONAL RESOURCES
AND TRANSPORT TEAM**

Operational and Mitigation
Services, Headquarters

PREDICTIVE SERVICES

Community Resilience,
Headquarters

PUBLIC INFORMATION UNIT

Communications and
Engagement, Headquarters

REGION SOUTH STRIKE TEAM

Riverina Zone,
Area South Western

SILVERDALE BRIGADE

Southern Highlands, Area Greater
Sydney

**SOUTHERN TABLELANDS ZONE
STRIKE TEAM ECHO 1**

Southern Tablelands,
Area South Eastern

**SOUTH WEST SLOPES ZONE
SMT**

South West Slopes,
Area Western

STATE LOGISTICS UNIT

State Operations,
Headquarters

SUTHERLAND STRIKE TEAM

Sutherland,
Area Greater Sydney

TYRINGHAM BRIGADE

Clarence Valley,
Area North Eastern

WINMALEE WALKING PARTY

Blue Mountains,
Area Greater Sydney

WORONORA BRIGADE

Sutherland,
Area Greater Sydney



FLOODS AND COVID-19 CAN'T STOP NORTHERN EXERCISE

BY INSPECTOR ANGELA DALY, FAR NORTH COAST

The 2021 Northern Exercise was held at Glen Innes from Friday 19 to Sunday 21 March 2021. Following the late cancellation of the 2020 event due to the outbreak of COVID-19, it was particularly satisfying for all involved to be able to participate in this, the 20th anniversary of the Exercise.

With the recent drought, unprecedented bush fires, the COVID-19 pandemic and record floods on the east coast of NSW during the weekend of the Exercise, it was a testament to the remarkable popularity of the event and the tenacity and professionalism of the organisers that the Exercise was able to proceed at all. Despite the challenges presented, the Exercise was a resounding success with participants providing overwhelmingly positive feedback.

A total of 313 volunteers and staff nominated to participate in this year's Exercise, which had a cap on attendance in line with the approved COVID-19 Safety Plan. The registered attendees represented 13 Districts across three Area Commands. The crews were assigned to 46 appliances and allocated into 12 Strike Teams. Due to the onset of flooding on the coast, some crews withdrew at the last minute and, as a consequence, the actual number of attendees at the Exercise was reduced to 269.

The scenario methodology employed was "Explain, Demonstrate, Practice". This continued the recent adoption of a principal of emphasising that crews are both taught new skills and given the opportunity to refresh existing skills in line with NSW RFS procedures and protocols.

The scenarios conducted in the 2021 Exercise included: MVA, Practical Pumping, Basic Skills, Gas Attack, Vehicle Maintenance, Essential Energy, Vehicle Overrun, Structure, First Aid, Public Liaison, Pump Maintenance and CISS.

Congratulations to the following crews and members recognised for their outstanding performance:

**Alan Brinkworth Perpetual Trophy
for Best Performing Crew**

Gilgandra Brigade

**Tony Jarrett Perpetual Trophy
for Best Strike Team Leader**

Mark Sandry

Will O'Brien (Runner Up)

Best Crew Leader

Natalie Ballard

Fiona Staines (Runner Up)

Outstanding Crew Members

Louisa Anderson and Riley Vanderbyl

Committee Encouragement Award

Cindy Robinson

Michelle Wheeler

Outstanding Support Person

Myra Drollet

Best Presented Tankers

Warral 2

Kootingal 7 (Runner Up)

Ulmarra Pumper (Encouragement Award)

Basic Skills Event winners

Diggings Brigade

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Exercise, each attendee received a number of commemorative items including a cap, pen, challenge coin and drink bottle.

Planning is well underway for the 21st Northern Exercise, which will be held at the Glen Innes Showground from 18-20 March 2022. ■

Photo: Wet weather didn't dampen the turnout at the Northern Exercise. Photo by Inspector Michael Brougham.



LESSONS FROM BLACK SUMMER: HOW PEOPLE EXPERIENCED THE 2019/20 FIRE SEASON

BY DR JOSH WHITTAKER, DR KATHARINE HAYNES, CARRIE WILKINSON, STEPHANIE SAMSON (UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG); DR MATALENA TOFA, TASMIN DILWORTH, JESSICA COLLINS, LILLIAN TAIT (MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY).

Research after the worst fire season in NSW history shows there are challenges around community expectations of bush fire warnings, with many people expecting to receive highly detailed and localised information in near real-time.

In NSW between August 2019 and February 2020, tens of thousands of people were displaced, including residents, tourists and visitors over the Christmas and New Year period.

Tragically, 25 people lost their lives as a result of the fires, while many more people were affected by smoke in both metropolitan and regional areas. By season's end, bush fires had burned a record 5.5 million hectares of NSW and destroyed 2,476 homes. The fires adversely affected many industries, including agriculture, forestry and tourism.

New research has investigated exactly how people across NSW were affected by the 2019/20 bush fires and what actions they took. It was commissioned by the NSW RFS and undertaken by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, the University of Wollongong and Macquarie University. The research will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of community warnings and engagement approaches.

Researchers conducted 202 in-depth interviews with people affected by the fires across NSW, to identify key themes and experiences, while a further 1,004 respondents completed an online survey. Importantly, both the interviews and survey included ACT residents

who were in NSW at the time of the fires, to understand their experiences as visitors. Both the interviews and surveys explored risk communication, preparedness (and how this changed due to the length of the fire season) and the experiences of tourists and visitors, especially during the Christmas and New Year period.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCH FIND?

The extent of the 2019/20 fires, and the sheer number of people affected, presents opportunities to reach new audiences with bush fire safety information and promote planning and preparation. The research found that previous experience of bush fire motivated many people to plan and prepare.

However, the results also reveal certain challenges around community expectations of warnings, with many people expecting to receive highly detailed and localised information in near real-time.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



57% of residents had read the NSW RFS Guide to Making a Bush Fire Plan

44% had participated in a local NSW RFS brigade event



Main image previous page: A bush fire raging at the North Black Range in NSW, December 2019. **Above:** The Currowan fire in the Shoalhaven in December 2019. Both photos by Ned Dawson.

Next page bottom: The Green Valley Talmalmo fire in January 2020. Photo by Seth Wilmot.

New initiatives, including fire spread prediction maps and Tourist Leave Zone messages, were found to be effective in communicating risk and motivating people to take protective action during the worst of the conditions.

> PROLONGED AND/OR REPEATED EXPOSURE TO FIRE

The length of the fire season and the repeated threat of bush fire was a significant factor that influenced people’s planning, preparation and responses.


The extended fire season required many people to adapt to fire as an everyday part of their life, juggling work, schooling and family celebrations with ongoing monitoring, preparation and responses to fire.

Many people were exhausted by the ongoing nature of the threat and the continual need to monitor and prepare. Some discussed living with the continual ‘anticipation of threat’ and voiced times where they had wished the fires would arrive so that the experience would be over.

> FIRES NEAR ME NSW

The Fires Near Me NSW app was extremely popular, with 94 percent of primary residents surveyed reporting they had downloaded the app, including 39 percent reporting that it was the most useful source of information (followed by NSW RFS volunteers as the next most useful source at 13 percent).

FIRES NEAR ME NSW APP



94% of residents had downloaded the Fires Near Me NSW app

78% indicated that the app was their preferred source of information in the future

Most residents thought Fires Near Me NSW was easy to understand (89 percent) and useful (88 percent). More than two-thirds thought the information was sufficiently localised. However, less than half believed the information was up to date (47 percent).

While a number of people reported that Fires Near Me NSW was not updated frequently enough, there was still a strong preference for it as a source of information, with 78 percent of survey respondents indicating it was their preferred source of information in the future.

The NSW RFS had identified issues with Fires Near Me NSW, including the timeliness of maps due to the large number of fires and the speed of the fire spread, and these issues were reflected in many community interviews.

> FIRE SPREAD PREDICTION MAPS

Fire spread prediction maps were introduced and published by the NSW RFS during the 2019/20 season to communicate elevated risk from fire conditions and the large number of dangerous fires burning across the state.

FIRE SPREAD PREDICTION MAPS



86% of residents recalled seeing a fire spread prediction for their area

93% found it easy to understand, **77%** sufficiently localised and **85%** useful

Most people recalled seeing these maps for their area (86 percent) and found them easy to understand (93 percent), sufficiently localised (77 percent) and useful (85 percent).

Around half of these respondents said that seeing the fire spread prediction influenced their decision to leave or avoid travelling to a fire-threatened area.

Some tourists and visitors consulted fire spread prediction maps prior to starting their travel.

A small number of people said the fact that their travel destination was not within a fire spread prediction area gave them a false sense of security in continuing with their travel plans.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFER PLACES



44% of residents were familiar with the term 'Neighbourhood Safer Place'

72% of those were aware of a Neighbourhood Safer Place in their area

> TOURIST LEAVE ZONES

Tourist Leave Zones were communicated to encourage visitors to leave certain areas due to the fire risk.

Around half (47 percent) of the tourists, visitors and secondary residents who were surveyed reported that they were in a Tourist Leave Zone during the bush fires.

After receiving notification of the Tourist Leave Zone, 54 percent of people returned home to their primary residence and 14 percent went to another location outside the zone. Around one-third stayed within the zone.



TOURISM



38% of tourists and visitors considered it likely that a bush fire could occur in the area they were visiting and **33%** considered it unlikely

52% of tourists and visitors had not done anything to prepare for the possibility of bush fire on their trip

Reasons for staying within the zone included to protect houses and property (mostly occupants of secondary residences – 32 percent); because police, fire or emergency service advised people to stay (12 percent); and because attempts to leave were unsuccessful (11 percent).

The majority of interviewees understood the purpose and were supportive of Tourist Leave Zones.

> TOURISTS AND VISITORS

While most tourists, visitors and those who owned secondary homes were aware of bush fire activity in the vicinity of their travel destination, many did not think they would be directly affected.

Continuing with annual holiday plans and wanting to escape smokier conditions at their primary place of residence were the main motivations for people to travel during the bush fire threat.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

The findings presented in this research offer numerous opportunities for the NSW RFS, other government agencies and communities to reduce future bush fire risk. Few opportunities are the responsibility of any one stakeholder alone.

The findings highlight the complexities of community preparedness and responses to bush fire and the need for integrated and holistic responses to risk reduction. Bush fire risk reduction is a shared responsibility between governments, fire and emergency services, businesses and communities at risk.

For the full research findings, see *Black Summer - how the NSW community responded to the 2019-20 bushfire season* at www.bnhcrc.com.au/publications/black-summer-nsw-community. ■



**GET
READY
WEEKEND**

PREPARE FOR BUSH FIRE

11-12 SEPTEMBER 2021

IS YOUR BRIGADE PARTICIPATING?



PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.
NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



AUSTRALIAN FIRE

The Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) is awarded to a member of an Australian fire service for distinguished service. Congratulations to the seven NSW RFS members who received an AFSM as part of the 2021 Queen's Birthday Honours, recognising their commitment to the community.

DAVID CULLANE OAM

Firefighter

Canobolas, Area Western

Firefighter David Cullane has been actively involved with the NSW RFS since joining the Rivers Brigade in the Cowra Fire District in 1951, where he held the positions of President, Deputy Captain, Captain and Group Captain.

In 1984 he was elected Group Captain, a position he held concurrently with Captain of Rivers Brigade. During his time as Group Captain, he managed five brigades in the Rivers Group.

Firefighter Cullane was a volunteer representative on the Bush Fire Management Committee, Senior Management Committee and Liaison Committee to assist with zoning. When the *Bush Fires Act 1949* was replaced by the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, he was actively involved with disseminating the changes to local farmers and the community to ensure compliance across the Service.

He continues to be an active member of Rivers Brigade, holding the President role for more than 10 years. He arranges training at a brigade level and

assists the district with organising further training for the brigades. He secured the Rivers Brigade's future by generously donating land for the brigade station.

Firefighter Cullane's dedication and commitment to the NSW RFS and to the community of Canowindra, for more than 70 years, has been exemplary.

JEFF TERRENCE GOULD

Group Captain

Bland Temora,
Area South Western

Group Captain Jeff Gould joined the Wamboyne Brigade in 1975 and continues to be an active volunteer. He held the position of Captain from 2000 until 2008 when he was nominated and duly elected as Group Captain for Bland Temora Zone, a role he continues in to this day.

Group Captain Gould housed the Brigade's tanker on his property for many years and, when it was replaced, he donated land on his property to the NSW RFS. A single-bay transportable brigade station was then constructed to house the new tanker.

His commitment in representing volunteers on the Zone's Bush Fire Management Committee,

Liaison Committee and Senior Management team is well recognised and appreciated, as is his ability and leadership on the fireground.

In 2008, he was employed by the NSW RFS for three months to assist with the servicing and inspection of brigade tankers, stations and equipment. This demonstrated the level of respect that the NSW RFS has for his significant experience. His contribution and engagement with volunteers, land managers, officers and major stakeholders is outstanding.

Group Captain Gould is a most worthy NSW RFS volunteer, and his dedication to the safety of his community is of the highest order.

NEVILLE DENZIL LAWRENCE OAM

Firefighter

Lower Hunter,
Area Hunter

Firefighter Neville Lawrence joined the Gresford Brigade in 1965, serving continuously since that time.

He has held the roles of Brigade Training Officer, Permit Officer, Brigade Treasurer, Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain

SERVICE MEDALS 2021

and from 1994 to 2019 served as Captain of the Gresford Brigade.

As Deputy Captain in 1985 he was the driving force in all fundraising activities for the refurbishment of the existing Gresford station to incorporate meeting facilities, amenities and the construction of a new two-bay shed to accommodate firefighting appliances.

Over many years he has attended a number of out-of-area deployments and is a key member of the Community Engagement team. In 2007, he was nominated as Dungog Shire Citizen of the Year for his contribution to the NSW RFS.

In 2014, he was awarded the NSW RFS Commissioner's Commendation and on Australia Day 2017 he received the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for his distinguished and exemplary service to the NSW RFS and the greater community.

Captain Lawrence has displayed outstanding dedication and commitment to the NSW RFS, and to his local community, throughout his more than 55 years of service.

CAROLYN NANCY NOON

Group Captain
Tamworth,
Area North Western

Group Captain Carolyn Nancy Noon joined the Woolbrook Brigade in 1989, and has been a member of several brigades over her 32-year tenure.

During this time, she has held the roles of Brigade Training Officer, Brigade Secretary and Deputy Group Captain. She also served as Group Captain for Tamworth and the New England Zone concurrently.

A highly experienced firefighter in her own right, Group Captain Noon has held significant leadership roles at many incidents, and is a high profile role model and mentor for female members in her district. She has also been significantly involved in training and assessing and is a highly regarded Rural Fire Driving Instructor, recognised as a subject matter expert and the primary 'train the trainer' for the New England North West.

She is a qualified and experienced Critical Incident Peer Support Officer, a role she has fulfilled for many years to provide ongoing and comprehensive support

to members in need. Group Captain Noon has demonstrated commitment and dedication to the NSW RFS, and to the community of New South Wales, throughout her 32-year volunteer career.

DAVID ALAN PETERS

Group Captain
Chifley/Lithgow, Area Western

Group Captain David Peters joined the Hartley Brigade in 1976 and immediately became very active within the Brigade as an operational member.

His commitment to the Brigade saw him elected to the positions of Training Officer, Deputy Captain and President, the latter of which he has held for over 20 years. He was also elected as Group Captain in 2001, a position he continues to hold, and was also appointed a member of the Lithgow Bush Fire Advisory Committee.

Group Captain Peters has always supported hazard reduction as a risk management strategy, utilising his strategic firefighting skills and lengthy experience as a rural property owner. His input into Lithgow Bush Fire Management Committee meetings and working groups has been invaluable



in creating a hazard reduction strategy for the district.

His work to improve the firefighting capability of the members and brigades as a trainer and assessor is highly regarded. He represents the NSW RFS with integrity and professionalism and has enhanced the community's respect for volunteers and the organisation as a whole.

During the 2019/20 bush fire season Group Captain Peters performed with distinction as a Divisional Commander for many weeks, in numerous areas along a 90km front, even as his own property was damaged by fire.

GEOFFREY PETER RYAN

Group Captain
Chifley/Lithgow, Area Western

Group Captain Geoffrey Ryan joined Rockley Brigade in 1968 and has remained an active member for more than 52 years. He was elected Group Captain in 2004, a position he still holds today.

He has been the driving force for many years to keep the local Arkell, Lagoon, Trunkey and Rockley Brigades active by overseeing each brigade's membership and ensuring that member's skills and qualifications remain up to date. He has also

been involved in the mentoring of Chifley's Deputy Group and Group Officers and has assisted at Group Leader courses held in the Chifley District.

During his career he has attended numerous local incidents and several Section 44 fires including the State Mine fire in 2013 and more recently the Gospers Mountain fire in 2019/20.

One of his greatest achievements has been contributing as one of the founding members of Division 8 of the RFSA. He continues to serve in the role of Chairman, a role he has held for several years. He is a State Council Representative and a long serving delegate on the RFSA Consultative Committee.

Mr Ryan has been an outstanding member of the NSW RFS and the RFSA throughout his more than 52-year career, and has dedicated himself to the safety of his community.

PAUL JAMES SWEENEY

Fire Investigator
Macarthur, Area Greater Sydney

Fire Investigator Paul Sweeney commenced his service with the NSW RFS in 1989 at the Leppington Brigade, where he has held the positions of Firefighter, Training Officer,

Secretary, Treasurer, Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain and Captain. He also served in the position of Deputy Group Captain in the Camden District.

Fire Investigator Sweeney became a Peer Support Officer with the Critical Incident Support Services (CISS) in 2002 and then a CISS Duty Officer in 2008 and currently serves in that role. As a senior member of the CISS team, he has attended a large number of traumatic incidents and events throughout NSW and has performed an extraordinary number of hours of volunteer service.

In 2005 he was employed by the NSW RFS at the rank of Inspector as the Learning and Development Officer with the Southern Highlands District. He was subsequently appointed to Region East as the Operations Officer and Fire Investigator, responsible for training and supervising a team of wildfire and structural investigators. He was deployed in 2009 to Queensland Fire and Rescue Service for fire investigations in Rockhampton, and also assisted in training Korean wildfire investigators in 2014. He remains an active volunteer, Fire Investigator and CISS Duty Officer.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

KYLE STEWART



Following the realignment of Head Office functions and the retirement of Bruce McDonald, Kyle Stewart was appointed to the role of Deputy Commissioner Preparedness and Capability in May 2021.

Hailing from NSW Police, where he has spent the past 36 years rising from cop on the beat to Commander and Assistant Commissioner, Kyle is looking forward to getting his teeth into his new role at the NSW RFS.

The role as head of the Preparedness and Capability directorate will oversee the Service’s Community Risk, Built and Natural Environment, Training and Doctrine and Logistics and Equipment functions.

Kyle is particularly interested in ensuring the Service strengthens its connection with other emergency service agencies. He previously acted as NSW SES Commissioner for six months during 2019/20 and has developed an appreciation for the logical crossovers in the work of both agencies.

“I bring a solid grounding in what is the emergency sector and coordination of support activities in fire and flood at various levels,” he says.

Photo credit: Greg Allan

“This role will have me supporting the activities of the NSW RFS and in particular ensuring brigades have the training and equipment they need to do what is required of them.

“I will be working hard to continue the delivery of a modern fleet that meets the needs of firefighters and the communities they serve, as well as the ongoing delivery of modern workplaces from Fire Control Centres to remote NSW RFS brigade sheds.”

Kyle is also excited about the potential of the NSW RFS Training Academy at Dubbo and the new Aviation Centre of Excellence (see page 20 for more information).

“These facilities offer opportunities to do amazing work in training and development and enhancing the capacity of our workforce,” he says.

On his days off you will find the self-confessed “mad Swannies fan” supporting his AFL team and his daughter who plays Premier League netball – and maybe even catching a wave off the glorious coast of Kiama. ■



NSW RFS

KENTHURST VOLUNTEER ACHIEVES AMAZING MILESTONE

BY BILL DUNCAN, KENTHURST BRIGADE

Sidney Lionel Smith, affectionately known to his family, friends and colleagues as Lionel, has given 75 years of continuous service to our state's firefighting organisations. In 2021 he became the first NSW RFS member to be awarded the sixth 'bar' to his National Medal: a unique and amazing milestone.

Lionel's story was featured in the 2017 book, '75 Years of Service', written to commemorate three quarters of a century since the establishment of Kenthurst Brigade at the request of Prime Minister John Curtin in early 1942.

At that time, Lionel was just entering his teenage years. He was born in 1929 in Oakville where he went to the local primary school and completed high school by correspondence. His family were farmers, raising poultry and crops.

Lionel's first firefighting experience was at age 15, when he participated in attacking a fire in Oakville that was started by a spark from a steam train near Mulgrave station. Lionel fought the fire with wet bags and a knapsack spray.

Lionel's father was one of the founders of Oakville Brigade in 1946 and Lionel became one of the earliest members, before serving as Senior Deputy in that unit from 1952 until 1968. He went on to become a Deputy Group Captain, then Deputy Fire Controller and later Fire Control Officer (FCO) for the Hills Shire.

In those days, the FCO reported to a Shire councillor - there were no uniforms or formal training, and little equipment. Some brigades had converted old ex-army

'blitz' trucks to use as fire tankers. The Hills District headquarters then operated out of the Council depot behind the old Council chambers, where the Castle Towers theatres now stand.

Having worked in the automobile industry, Lionel was always an innovator and developed many ways to improve firefighting equipment and techniques. Consequently, he was very active in the then Bush Fire Council of NSW, especially its technical committee, and was always at the forefront of improvements in firefighting vehicles, pumps and other equipment.

He subsequently designed and manufactured the Quenchmaster firefighting foam system in his spare time, which is now employed in tankers right across Australia and New Zealand. Lionel and his wife, Gwen, championed the use of 'two-way radios' in Hills brigades. Indeed, Gwen was the chief radio operator for the Hills brigades in those early years.

Lionel chaired the Bush Fire Control Officers Association of NSW and has been awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal for his professional leadership, as well as the Commissioner's Commendation for Service.



Now in his early nineties, this wonderful gentleman continues to serve with Kenthurst Brigade in the Hills District as a Deputy Captain.

In this role he mentors younger NSW RFS volunteers and instructs them in the use of the Service's vehicles and equipment and also assists with chainsaw maintenance, heavy vehicle driver training, specialist foam training and anything else that is needed.

Lionel also provides specialist training on a Shire-wide basis on all aspects of foam use in firefighting.

He is still a very active member of Kenthurst Brigade and attends as many fire calls, hazard reductions, training activities and maintenance duties as he can. A Life Member of Kenthurst, he is also a Life Member of Round Corner Brigade. Sidney Lionel Smith is a true Australian champion of community service. ■

Previous page and above: Lionel at Kenthurst Brigade station. Photos courtesy of Bruce Linton. Inset article right: Lionel (second from left) as featured in a 1987 edition of the Bush Fire Bulletin.



MID-COAST INSTITUTION RETIRES AFTER 43 YEARS

After 43 years with the NSW RFS, Terry Kitching of the Mid Coast District has hung up his boots.

Terry's NSW RFS career started in 1978 with the Inverell HQ Brigade, where he spent 13 years as a volunteer. In 1990 he moved to a salaried role as Superintendent and Fire Control Officer (FCO) at Inverell Council, where he remained until 2002.

"As a FCO and the only employee, you were everything," he says. "You did communications, community engagement, fire and volunteer management, financial management, on-call duty 24/7, fire vehicle design and building, fire vehicle procurement, conducted training in basic and advanced firefighting, the list goes on - it certainly gave you experience across all facets and versatility."

In 2002 when the Northern Tablelands Rural Fire District was formed, Terry stepped back to the rank of Inspector and became a Community Engagement Officer with the NSW RFS.

In 2009 he was given the opportunity to move to the Mid Coast (or Manning Team as it was known then) as a Community Engagement Manager, a role he continued until his retirement in early 2021.

"In the 2016/17 season our Community Engagement team visited more than 2,200 homes in the Manning Area, gave everyone a bush fire survival plan and talked to them about their roles in protecting and preparing their homes," says Terry. "I'd like to think this made a difference in the outcomes of the 2019 fires, but I'll never really know."



"I'd indicated in early 2019 that I intended to retire at the end of 2019, then the fires hit Mid Coast around June. I left in December 2019 for one year's long service leave, after I was sure the fire activity in the Mid Coast had been contained.

"I was done by then. I really felt I had done all I could with the Service - but it does give me comfort to know that we did all we could to educate and communicate to the community their role in preparing their homes and evacuation plans."

Even in retirement, Terry will be keeping a close eye on advances in bush fire management.

"I've seen so many changes and improvements in preparing for and fighting fires," he explains.

"Bush fire research has come a long way and there is so much research coming out about the way we think about fire.

"I think we will see a lot more interest in how we manage the landscape into the future, such as Indigenous cultural burns - it's an exciting time. It's great to see so much support now being given to the volunteers as well."

The NSW RFS wishes Terry and his wife Wendy all the very best as he enjoys life after work. ■



BRIGADE IN PROFILE

NORTH ROCKS BRIGADE

North Rocks Brigade celebrated its 75th anniversary on 15 May 2021, after a postponement of nearly a year due to COVID-19.

The brigade, located in the Hills District, was established in 1945 by the War Agricultural Committee as the North Rocks-West Pennant Hills Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade, in what was then orchards and chicken farms.

Members initially used their own vehicles to attend incidents, with a trailer acquired in 1958 and the first dedicated vehicle in 1966. As the area was developed for housing the brigade relocated to a new site in Carlingford in 1979.

Today the brigade is based in an urban area and is well-known for supporting the other Hills District brigades and participating in out-of-area deployments. During the 2019/20 fire season, brigade members responded to fires as far afield as Glen Innes and Queanbeyan and spent significant time in the Hawkesbury on the Gaspers Mountain fire. Over the years, brigade members have also served on interstate deployments to Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania.

The brigade now has 85 members, of which more than 40 are regular active members serving the community by responding to bush and grass fires, participating in hazard reductions and attending community events. As the most urban-based brigade in the Hills District, the North Rocks Brigade proudly carries the nickname of “Latte Hills” – a friendly joke from other brigades in the district about North Rocks having all the urban mod cons including a coffee machine on their trucks.

The 75th anniversary event in May was a great success with 95 current members, past members and family members in attendance alongside a host of VIPs, including NSW RFS Deputy Commissioner Peter McKechnie.

The brigade honoured its oldest life member, Ron McDonald, with a portrait by member Simon Bedak. An honour roll was also unveiled following the induction of three new life members: former Senior Deputy Captain David Brock, Captain John Meredith and Deputy Captain Sean Connell. ■



NORTH ROCKS BRIGADE

ESTABLISHED: 1945

CURRENT CAPTAIN: John Meredith

DISTRICT: The Hills, Area Greater Sydney

Top: North Rocks Brigade station. Photo by Shaun Anderson.
Above right: Deputy Commissioner Peter McKechnie with North Rocks Brigade Captain John Meredith at the Brigade’s 75th anniversary event. Photo by Damien Haddock.

OUR BUSH FIRE bulletin HISTORY

PAGE TWELVE



1. The Clarence River floods South Grafton at the peak of the flood. Many residents had to be evacuated.

2. Looking south from Grafton, the railway complex and Duncan's Mill area graphically depicts the extent of the inundation.

3. Flooded Boggabilla, on the Macintyre River.

4. Who said the Controller rarely gets his feet wet? North West Division Controller Bruce Secombe receives a cuppa in the welfare room of the Manginda headquarters. Mr Secombe flew to the town in the early hours of the morning by helicopter.



BUSH FIRE bulletin

ON TROVE



The NSW RFS has joined forces with the National Library of Australia to digitise the entire collection of the Bush Fire Bulletin dating back to September 1952.

All editions of the Bush Fire Bulletin are available online and are fully searchable, making this huge historic archive easily accessible.

This collection brings to life the important work our members have undertaken over the years and makes the history of the NSW RFS available for all of Australia and the world to see.

You can search place names, brigade names, dates and fire-related topics such as “fire trails” or “large air tanker”.



HOW TO SEARCH BUSH FIRE BULLETIN ON TROVE

On the Library page of the NSW RFS website, you will find links to browse the various collections of the Bush Fire Bulletin.

You can also search for articles on a particular topic (such as the town of Merriwa) by using the link provided and following the instructions.



BUSH FIRE bulletin

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Cover photo: NSW RFS tankers line up to assist with flood clean-up and recovery efforts at the staging area in Port Macquarie in March 2021. Photo by Andrew Macdonald.



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

Postal address

NSW Rural Fire Service
Locked Bag 17
GRANVILLE NSW 2142

Street address

NSW Rural Fire Service
4 Murray Rose Ave
Sydney Olympic Park NSW 2127

T (02) 8741 5555
F (02) 8741 5550
W rfs.nsw.gov.au
E Bush.Fire.Bulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au

Social Media

f www.facebook.com/nswrfs/
t @NSWRFS
@ @NSWRFS