

# MEDIA RELEASE



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

## The NSW Rural Fire Service fires up community engagement!

31 May 2012

The NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) is hosting more than four hundred emergency management and community engagement experts, at the annual Australian Community Engagement and Fire Awareness Conference in Wollongong.

The conference will be opened by Celeste Geer, a survivor of the devastating 2009 Victorian bush fires who has been documenting the recovery of her home town Strathewen.

NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said that Celeste's footage has been transformed into a powerful and moving documentary entitled 'Then the Wind Changed.'

"Celeste's portrayal provides a strong reminder that all communities are unique and what resonates with people in one town may not be as effective down the road.

"The theme of this year's conference, *'Fire Up Engagement'*, highlights the importance of fire and emergency service agencies working with communities before, during and after a natural disaster, to help them understand their responsibilities so they know what to do.

"Community engagement is a crucial part of the bush fire management package. Having a well informed and well prepared community is as important as our capability to fight fires.

Commissioner Fitzsimmons said that recent natural disasters such as bush fires and major flooding demonstrate the need for communities to be properly prepared - prior to big events.

"This conference gives emergency services personnel the opportunity to come together, share experiences and enhance their ability to prepare, respond and utilise resources.

"The growth of this conference has been greatly enhanced by our valued Principal Partner Ausgrid, who has joined us for the third consecutive year.

"Our brigades and the volunteers that work closely with their communities, should be extremely proud of the critical role they play in helping communities across NSW become safer and more prepared for bush fires," said Commissioner Fitzsimmons.

The 16<sup>th</sup> annual Australian Community Engagement and Fire Awareness Conference will be held in Wollongong, at the Novotel Northbeach from the 31 May – 2 June, 2012.

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