

# BUSH FIREbulletin

THE JOURNAL OF THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

## Works crews on the job

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# FOREWORD



This has been one of the quietest fire seasons in recent memory – yet brigades across the State have been kept busy.

The devastating floods across eastern Australia over the past few months have seen the Service assisting communities in need across NSW, Queensland and Victoria. It has demonstrated the versatility, professionalism and willingness of our people to help.

In Queensland, during what has become one of the country's costliest natural disasters, the NSW RFS provided personnel and resources. Aviation resources were sent into the Lockyer Valley in early January to assist with rescue operations. Additionally, two strike teams were sent to Brisbane to assist with the massive cleanup effort.

In Victoria, we have had a number of crews working in areas such as Echuca which experienced record flood levels. Our crews, deployed from the Mid Murray Zone, assisted with sandbagging in the township.

Here in NSW, more than 700 NSW RFS personnel have assisted the NSW State Emergency Service (SES) with flood operations. These crews have included members from the Far North Coast, Northern Rivers, Clarence Valley, Northern Tablelands, Mid North Coast, Lower North Coast and Namoi Gwydir.

I think we have all been affected by the dramatic coverage and tragic stories coming from flood affected areas - particularly in Queensland. I have been encouraged by the number of members expressing a willingness to assist. It is a testament to that great Aussie spirit of mate helping mate.

2010 was also a period of further learnings and enhancements to our services in response to the 2009 Black Saturday fires in Victoria. In November 2010, I had the opportunity, along with the Premier and Emergency Services Minister, to announce the NSW response to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

It is testament to the work of our members over the years that NSW was largely consistent with many of the 67 recommendations announced as part of the Royal Commission's final report. Where there was an opportunity to build on these successes, we have enhanced our services, policies and procedures.

As an example, it has been announced that there will be another significant enhancement to the NSW RFS mitigation works crews program. These crews have proven successful in recent years by assisting infirm, disabled and elderly residents with preparing their properties. They have also assisted volunteer members by establishing thousands of kilometres of control lines, allowing brigades to concentrate on hazard reduction burning when weather conditions allow. You can read more about the work of the crews in this edition of the *Bush Fire Bulletin*, as well as further details of the NSW response.

As we begin a new year, I would like to again thank you for your efforts over the past 12 months and wish you a safe time ahead.

Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM  
NSW RFS Commissioner

## IN THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE WE VALUE

community and environment

support, friendship and camaraderie

knowledge and learning

integrity and trust

one team, many players and one purpose

adaptability and resourcefulness

mutual respect



Photo by Grant Turner, Mediakoo

Seven more members of the NSW RFS were awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal last Queen's Birthday. In August 2010 they received their medals from the Governor of NSW, Professor Marie Bashir, at an Investiture Ceremony at NSW Government House in Sydney. Congratulations to these worthy recipients of Australia's highest fire service award. (L-R):

Lance Howley, Group Captain, Balranald (AFSM Australia Day)  
Geoffrey Thiessen, Group Captain Wingecarribee District  
Dr Kenneth Hughes, Warringah District,  
Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons,  
Barry Carr, Group Captain Cabonne District,  
Ken Neville, Fire Control Officer, Mid Lachlan Team,  
Ian Bartholomew, Gosford District.  
Kevin Cooper, Group Captain Macarthur Zone

## Wildlife management



The NSW RFS responded to a request from the Taronga Western Plains Zoo to improve their fire protection. In July 2010 the NSW RFS donated a 1984 Isuzu Category One tanker.

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons visited Dubbo for the hand over of the tanker and met some of the wildlife while he was there. Here we see the Commissioner with members from the Zoo plus two of the residents.

*Photos courtesy of Amy Griffith/  
Daily Liberal.*

## New chaplains for the Service

Our much-loved Senior Chaplains, Ron and Carol Anderson will be retiring on 30 September, 2011. Ron and Carol have been with the NSW RFS since January 1997, providing more than a decade of selfless care and support to members and their families.

As part of planning for their retirement, discussions have been held with Ron and Carol, the NSW RFS Commissioner and The Salvation Army Commissioner Linda Bond. Commissioner Bond has approved the appointment of Assistant Senior Chaplain Captain Ian Spall, and Assistant Senior Family Support Chaplain Captain Kerry Spall as Ron and Carol's successors. Ian and Kerry started with the NSW RFS on 13 January 2011 and will work alongside Ron and Carol until the Andersons retire in September 2011.

Ian and Kerry entered The Salvation Army training college in 1994 to train for officership (Ministers) attaining an Associate Diploma in Salvation Army Ministry. In 1997 Ian was appointed to the role of Chaplain to the NSW RFS (covering the Nambucca and Bellingen areas). Ian undertook the basic firefighting course at the Nambucca Fire Control Centre.

Over the past fourteen years, Ian and Kerry have undertaken studies in a number of areas including crisis intervention, strategic response to crisis, suicide intervention, assisting individuals in crisis, pastoral crisis intervention and domestic violence. Ian and Kerry will begin work in a variety of areas in the Service including the Headquarters in Lidcombe and Region East for two months, moving to different regions every two months throughout 2011.

To contact the new chaplains call the State Operations Centre on 1800 049 933. They are also available on their mobile phones: Ian - 0418 622 479 and Kerry - 0418 493 033.

**TOP: Senior Chaplains, Ron and Carol Anderson will retire from the Service in September 2011.**

**RIGHT: Kerry and Ian Spall are the new NSW RFS Assistant Senior Chaplains. Photos by Adam Hollingworth**



## A new generation



Order online [www.dmp.net.au](http://www.dmp.net.au) | Printable order forms available online

Blue Mountains DMP Enterprises have been supplying clothing and other items marked with the NSW RFS Crest since the early 1990s.

After being the heart and soul of Blue Mountains DMP for nearly 20 years, Pam and Mike Taylor are retiring and passing the baton to the next generation of Taylors – their daughter-in-law, Gini Taylor.

"Although looking forward to a well-earned rest," wrote Mike and Pam, "We are certainly going to miss the thousands of wonderful volunteers and their families and

other RFS personnel, who have given so much support during these years. It has been greatly appreciated!"

Business with the new proprietor will begin on 11 January 2011. Over the Christmas break the business was relocated from Sawtell, Mid North Coast, back to the Blue Mountains at Springwood.

Contact and ordering details will remain unchanged:

**Phone** 1300 792 751, Fax 1300 722 792

**Email** [sales@dmp.net.au](mailto:sales@dmp.net.au) **Web** [www.dmp.net.au](http://www.dmp.net.au) or

**Postal address:** P O Box 158 Springwood NSW 2777

# THE FLOODS: LENDING A HELPING HAND



12 JANUARY 2011: The view of Brisbane from the NSW RFS chopper just before the height of the flooding. Photo by Glen Coddington

The floods across the eastern seaboard in December 2010 and January 2011 will go down in history as one of our worst ever natural disasters.

Throughout the emergency the NSW RFS was working alongside other agencies in three States. From assisting State Emergency Service (SES) and other emergency services across northern and southern NSW, to specialist rescue teams and helicopters sent to the Lockyer Valley in Queensland, to sandbagging in Echuca in Victoria, the NSW RFS has been deployed across three states providing vital assistance.

In times of flood, the NSW RFS crews assist other agencies by pumping out floodwater from basements and car parks and rescuing those on flooded properties or stranded cars. In other cases, the NSW RFS will help people prepare for rising flood waters by sandbagging or after the flood has receded, hosing out people's homes and cleaning streets of debris and mud. Here is the account of the NSW RFS activities over December 2010 and January 2011.

### December 2010

In the first two weeks of December 2010, several hundred NSW RFS personnel worked alongside the State Emergency Service (SES) and other agencies providing assistance to flood affected communities across NSW.

Record rainfall would show this was the wettest start to summer in decades.

On December 1 more than 250 requests for assistance were made to the SES to deal with flooding and storm operations across inland areas. The main focus was on the Castlereagh area around Mendooran and Coonamble.

### 2 - 3 December 2010

The Public Information and Inquiry Call Centre (PIIC) was opened at the NSW Police Force Centre in Surry Hills Sydney on 2 December to answer flood enquiries. The general community of NSW is able to contact the PIIC via a toll free number to receive general flood-related information such as evacuations and road closures.

NSW RFS members from Sutherland, Baulkham Hills, Cumberland, Wollondilly, Macarthur, Hornsby, Warringah, Gosford, Hawkesbury and HQ volunteered for 12 hour shifts in the PIIC which were to run until 12 December. They joined volunteers from the Red Cross, Marine Rescue NSW and the SES.

Andrew McDonald from the Macarthur Zone wrote to the *Bush Fire Bulletin* with his account of a shift in the PIIC in early December 2010.

*"Our shift was just after central NSW had been severely flooded with the heavy rain moving from Queanbeyan*



2 DECEMBER 2010: NSW RFS volunteers and staff helped out at the NSW Public Information Inquiry Centre. (L-R) Macarthur Deputy Group Captain, Andrew McDonald and Catherine Field Senior Deputy Captain Mark Pal on the phones. Photo by Rodney Fenech

*to Forbes and on towards Tamworth. The extent of the flooding was enormous with the State Government declaring many councils as natural disaster areas.*

*After a brief induction to the PIIC, each volunteer was allocated to a desk with three computer screens and a telephone.*

*The reality of our task quickly became apparent when an emotional call was received from a member of the public. A funeral for one of her relatives was due to be held that day in a small town in central NSW. The caller was seeking our advice as to whether the hearse and the mourners would be able to travel from Dubbo to the outlying town.*

*In another instance there was conflicting information relating to the status of the Federal Highway that links Canberra with Goulburn. Luckily this*

*issue was resolved when the Police supervisor made a radio call to a Goulburn highway patrol car who confirmed that the road was open. During our shift each volunteer answered approximately 150 calls and when we finished for the day we all felt as if we had done our bit."*

Andrew Macdonald  
Deputy Group Captain  
Macarthur Zone

Apart from the PIIC activity, RFS crews were assisting the SES across NSW. By 3 December, 106 NSW RFS personnel with 28 specialist vehicles had been deployed to assist with pumping, sandbagging, relocating people trapped by flood waters or assisting with the search for missing people around the State. The central western NSW town of Parkes was isolated after 106 millimetres of rain fell over five hours while about 1,000 residents in Coonamble were cut off by floodwaters and placed on alert for possible evacuation.

On 4 December, 44 NSW RFS personnel and 13 vehicles were deployed to assist the SES who had already responded to 718 requests for assistance and performed 26 flood rescues.

### 4 - 8 December 2010

Natural Disaster Declarations were made for Weddin, Wellington, Warrumbungle, Cootamundra, Coonamble, Harden and Young shires. Evacuation orders were issued for Wagga Wagga and Gundagai. On 5 December the NSW RFS deployed 68 personnel and 21 vehicles.

On 6 December there were moderate to major flood warnings for Castlereagh, Macquarie and the Murrumbidgee River which peaked at Wagga Wagga. The suburb of North Wagga Wagga was completely isolated by road and, along with Coonamble, was the focus of response operations.

By 8 December a total of 1,599 requests for assistance had been



5 DECEMBER 2010: Land around Wagga Wagga was inundated in early December with farmers forced to rescue stock. Helicopter pilot Grant Roberson and photo by Steven Douglas

logged by the SES mainly to do with flash flooding and storm damage. A total of 88 flood rescues had been conducted including 50 people and 15 animal rescues.

### 9 - 10 December

The 9 December saw a spike in requests for assistance, and on that day 343 NSW RFS personnel and 55 vehicles were deployed.

By 10 December a total of 33 Natural Disasters had been declared across the State. Severe weather warnings for flash flooding were given for the Northern Tablelands, North West Slopes and Plains and Hunter Mid North Coast forecast districts. Evacuations were in place for parts of Queanbeyan, North and East Wagga Wagga, Gumly Gumly, Eugowra, Wongajong area to the South East of Forbes as well as a 'Prepare to Evacuate' warning for Wee Waa.

On 10 December, 173 NSW RFS personnel and 27 vehicles were deployed. Aircraft involved in the flood operations included 16 helicopters, one fixed wing aircraft and five specialist aviation refuelling tankers.

NSW RFS Strike Teams from Cumberland, Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains were tasked to assist SES and RFS units in Dubbo, Warren, Trangie and Narromine.

The deployment of out-of-area NSW RFS resources allowed local brigade members to attend to flooding on their own properties. Quite a number of these local brigade members and their neighbours had been hit hard by the floods, with many now left with ruined crops.

### 11 - 13 December 2010

Moderate flooding was continuing across inland NSW, as a result of the large volumes of water moving down the already swollen rivers. On 11 December, 57 NSW RFS crew and 14 vehicles were deployed. The following day 60 crew and 19 vehicles were deployed.

With no impending rainfall expected, the PIIC was closed at 1800hrs on 12 December after processing a total of 14,778 calls from 2 December. As of 13 December, the SES had received a total of 2,823 requests for assistance and a total of 139 flood rescues had been conducted.

### 26 December - BOXING DAY

Flooding was again experienced in the Canobolas area in the districts around Orange. Steve Smith, Operations Officer - Canobolas Zone, on call officer and resident of Molong reported on the dramatic Boxing day events.

*"At 0720hrs on Boxing Day, Canobolas on call staff received a phone call from SES to assist with sandbagging at Clifton Grove (north east of Orange). Before brigades could be activated, we received another call advising of flooding occurring around Molong, again requesting urgent assistance. Multiple Canobolas brigades were activated to cover both areas - at approximately 1000hrs the Mitchell Highway was closed at Molong with traffic diversions put in place at the request of NSW Police Force.*

*More assistance was requested from Orange with crews and tankers arriving shortly after. The Christmas period had left both SES and the RFS short of personnel to assist. Pumps, both tanker and portable, were utilised to prevent ingress of water into residences and businesses. All crews departed shortly after the river had dropped from its peak with major flooding being averted at around 1400hrs.*

*Further heavy rains in the afternoon in the catchment areas of both Molong and Orange brought everyone back on line quickly. Additional crews were requested from Orange to assist around the Molong township.*

*With the aid of NSW Police Force, roads were closed early and diversions put in place to ensure the safety of crews working on the main road through the town. With tanker and portable pumps from NSW RFS and the local NSW Fire Brigades pumper echoing over the noise of gushing water and sandbags walls being made higher where needed, it was a busy night for all. The stormwater finally peaked just after 0030hrs and a united sigh of relief was felt when the water level finally starting dropping. Crews started to stand down just after 0130hrs with the last crews heading back home at 0230hrs.*

*While the crews were busy in Molong, equally busy were crews from Orange, who were kept busy helping SES with sandbagging, doorknocking and assisting residents of Clifton Grove (just north east of Orange). The constant radio transmissions over the PMR confirmed all brigades involved were going their hardest.*

*A big thank you to those NSW RFS crews who gave up Boxing Day with their families to assist the people of Molong and Clifton Grove - it was a long day for all."*

By Steve Smith, Operations Officer Canobolas Zone, Resident of Molong



**BOXING DAY:** Molong township being 'de-watered'. Photo by Steve Smith

### 10 - 11 January 2011

While flooding in NSW had kept emergency services busy, the disaster in Queensland had been escalating. By 10 January the Queensland floods had killed eight people - it had become clear that Queensland was in the grip of one of the most devastating Australian floods in recent years.

The NSW Government deployed extra fire and rescue workers, hydrologists and helicopters to Queensland to assist. A RFS helicopter was sent to Toowoomba on 10 January and rescued at least seven people stranded on roof tops on its first day of operation. A second helicopter was requested on 11 January and was immediately deployed to Queensland that afternoon.

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons spoke directly to one of the NSW RFS members involved in the rescue operations, Captain Kendall Thompson of the Kootingal Brigade near Tamworth. The Commissioner wrote:

*"Kendall was deployed with one of our aircraft into some of the worst affected areas across the border. Kendall, who has qualifications in aviation and RAFT, was deployed as the 'down the wire crewman' (basically operating at the end of the winch line).*

*In what can only be described as atrocious conditions, Kendall and the aircrew were personally responsible for the rescue of 40-50 people stranded and trapped in flood waters.*

*Soaked through to the bone, due to torrential rain and wading through water up to the neck, he was repeatedly inserted into the water, onto roof tops or onto floating cars. He was left to prepare and secure the victims, then call the aircraft in and either winch or 'hover load' people into the helicopter for transport to safer ground.*

*Kendall described the experience as something he'd certainly never seen before and was simply not prepared for the enormity or scale of destruction and devastation.*

*His efforts were nothing short of extraordinary. He says that he and the team simply did what they could to rescue as many people as physically possible."*

In NSW, heavy rain had fallen in the State's north east and around 4,400 people were isolated in various communities across the north coast, with further heavy rains and floods expected.

The town of Tenterfield was isolated and heavy rain in the upper reaches of the Clarence

Valley resulted in significant stream rises, resulting in isolation of Tabulam and nearby rural properties. In addition, approximately 500 people were isolated in Bonalbo, a further 500 were isolated in the Darkwood and Upper Thora communities, and 150 people in Ewingar.

A total of 59 Local Government Areas in NSW had been declared Natural Disasters since December 2010.

### 12 January 2011

Flooding across NSW was such that the Public Information and Inquiry Call Centre (PIIC) was re-activated. NSW RFS staff were rostered day and night for the PIIC and they answered about 80 calls per hour throughout the day. A RFS Liaison Officer was assigned to State Emergency Operations Centre.

The RFS continued to provide assistance to the SES right across northern NSW from Far North Coast, Northern Rivers, Clarence Valley, Northern Tablelands, Mid North Coast, Lower North Coast and Namoi Gwydir. The State Air Desk had deployed up to 17 aircraft a day across northern NSW and Queensland.

The Tabulam Bridge, west of Casino, was reported to be 'rocking' due to the influence of the flood water in the Clarence

River. Further west, the Bruxner Highway was cut in three places west of Tenterfield due to road and bridge damage. The Clarence River in Grafton peaked at 1900hrs, however major flooding in Grafton was averted.

### 15 January 2011

The NSW RFS Commissioner received a formal request from authorities in Queensland for assistance with flood recovery in Brisbane which the Service immediately responded to.

In Victoria, a number of crews worked in areas such as Echuca which experienced record flood levels. Crews were deployed from the Mid Murray Zone and assisted with sandbagging in the township. The river peak is expected at 0300hrs and the RFS crews assisted the NSW Police Force by visiting homes and notifying residents.

Echuca Council distributed sandbags through the local brigades and brigades reported a two kilometre queue for sandbags.

A total of 20 NSW RFS members from Caldwell, Bunnaloo, Deniliquin and Moama assisted SES and emergency services in Victoria. All crews returned to NSW early the next morning.

The NSW RFS continued to support the SES on the north



coast as well as in Boggabilla which was hard hit by flood waters.

### 16 January 2011

The NSW RFS was now providing assistance across three states.

Two RFS strike teams of five appliances and a total of 53 personnel supported by six command and liaison personnel were deployed to Brisbane to assist with flood recovery operations.

In Victoria a Task Force of 45 NSW RFS members was sent to Echuca for a 12 hour shift.

Three Category One vehicles, a Category Nine, two minibuses and three private vehicles were sent across the border. All brigades were from Mid Murray

Zone and were tasked to general flood preparation work such as sandbagging.

### 18 January 2011

NSW RFS crews in Brisbane were in full swing hosing out homes and businesses and cleaning up roads in some of the worst affected areas. Many of the RFS volunteers were surprised by the scale of the disaster.

Given what they have been through, local residents were grateful for the help.

One NSW RFS volunteer said: "They (the local residents) are just absolutely lovely. A girl yesterday – I had never seen her before – she just came up and gave me the biggest bear hug! Kids had written sticky notes that said: Thanks very much, you are doing such a great job."

### 19 January 2011

A return to isolated showers and thunderstorms on the coast and ranges had been predicted and was expected to continue for several days. There were sunny conditions elsewhere in NSW.

The NSW RFS State Air Desk facilitated the deployment of eleven helicopters and one fixed wing aircraft tasked to the NSW SES for flood and flood relief related activities. Additionally, six specialist aviation refuelling tankers were deployed to support those operations.

NSW RFS crews assist Victoria in the area around Quambatook which is further west than previous support efforts in Echuca. A total of 13 from Koraleigh, Barham and Murray Downs brigades assisted.

### 20 January 2011

The crew of more than 50 volunteers returned from Queensland. Two RFS strike teams of five appliances and a total of 53 personnel supported by six command and liaison personnel were from brigades across the Northern Rivers and Far North Coast. They had been working in Fairfield and Milton, some of the hardest hit areas in Brisbane.

On their arrival back in NSW the Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan thanked the team for its efforts.

"It's been extremely hard work for these men and women, in difficult conditions," Mr Whan said. "In some of these areas, residents have been working without electricity, struggling to clear inches of mud from their homes.

"The NSW RFS volunteers have been moving from house to house, using their tankers to hose out properties in a matter of minutes."

### 21 January 2011

Rivers in several catchments across western and southern NSW remained in flood and flooding was expected to continue within the west of the State for several weeks.

In the south, the Murray Region is currently monitoring floodwaters coming out of Victoria and their ongoing impacts downstream of Barham. An RFS Liaison Officer was deployed to assist the Murray Region with indigenous liaison. Mid Murray Zone teams continued to assist across the border into Victoria.

### Late January 2011

On Monday 24 January the NSW RFS State Air Desk facilitated the deployment of nine helicopters and one fixed wing aircraft for flood and flood relief related activities. Additionally, seven specialist aviation refuelling tankers were deployed to support those operations.

The SES took over the Murray Downs Village Brigade station as its coordination centre for flood preparations along the Murray River. A NSW RFS crew from Koraleigh Brigade assists in the Swan Hill area.

Victoria's flood disaster continued to worsen, however, with fears of further flooding as the engorged Loddon and Avoca Rivers emptied their excess water into the Murray. At the time of publication, flood waters were moving more slowly than expected and householders and emergency services were simply waiting to see the full impact of the flooding. One third of the state of Victoria had been affected by the floods.

TOP LEFT: 18 JANUARY 2011: Norman Eatock, Dunoona Brigade cleaning up in the suburbs of Brisbane. Photo by Darryl Offer, Tenterfield Brigade

## La Niña: The weather pattern that caused so much destruction

The extremely heavy rains of late 2010 and early 2011 were caused by a very strong La Niña event in the Pacific Ocean. The December Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) was 27.1 – the highest December value on record and highest monthly value since 1973.

Previous strong La Niña events occurred in 1955 and 1974 and were also associated with heavy flooding in eastern Australia. La Niña is the 'positive' phase of the El Niño (below average rain and thus drought conditions) Southern Oscillation. It is associated with cooler than average sea surface temperatures (SSTs) in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.

The floods in January 2011 throughout Victoria, NSW and Queensland happened after what had been the wettest December on record for eastern Australia. It was also the wettest July to December period on record for the whole of Australia.

An intense cold front and thick cloud band passed over NSW at the beginning of the period bringing heavy rain and severe thunderstorms. The rainfall from this system resulted in localised flooding. For western NSW these have been the most widespread major floods since 1998.



# GUTTED

## THE PELAGIC FISH PROCESSING FACTORY

By Andrew Gray, Bega Valley Fire Control Centre. Photo by Geoff Sims, Manager, Eden Depot, Origin Energy

On December 3, 2010, a Triple Zero (000) call was received by the Bega Valley Fire Control Centre Duty Officer at 0630hrs to assist NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB) with a shed fire in Hopkins Street, Eden on the Far South Coast.

This shed fire turned out to be Pelagic Fish Processors - a \$6 million plant for processing Australian salmon, pilchards (sardines), mackerel and whiting for the fresh and frozen fish market.

The plant was built in 2000 and is one of the biggest of its kind in NSW. It employs around 30 people from the local district and has been the backbone of Eden's fishing industry.

Eden Brigade's Category 2 and Category 9 arrived to find NSWFB's Eden Pumper already on scene and applying hose streams to the processing plant.

RFS crews immediately relocated to the neighbouring business, Origin Energy, to undertake asset protection. Crews established hose streams to cool exposed gas cylinders being affected by the radiant heat emitted from the plant fire.

As luck would have it, the very same RFS crew had taken a training session with Origin a few weeks earlier on how to

protect the Origin Energy site including what to look for if there was a fire close by and areas not covered by their automated sprinkler system.

The Eden RFS crews remained in position, establishing a hydrant point to maintain the water supply to feed the three lines of 38mm hose to successfully cool the exposed cylinders and protect assets in Origin Energy's yard.

When the fire had been knocked down to a suitable level, NSWFB Breathing Apparatus Operators were able to get close enough to reassess the interior of the building and located the potential hazard of acetylene and oxygen cylinders. Exclusion zones were established around the plant for all firefighting personnel.

Throughout the morning other units from FRNSW and NSW RFS were called to assist as well as RTA and Country Energy.

RFS units Merimbula Cat 1 and Pambula Cat 1 were tasked to water supply by relay pumping to the growing number of NSWFB pumpers on scene - at one point laying ten 65mm lines to reach a water supply.

RFS crews also operated the pumps, aggressively attacked the fire or performed asset protection for the buildings nearby the burning processing plant.

### Toxic smoke fears

A major concern at this fire was the 5,000 litre ammonia tank located in the processing plant. While the fire was burning, ammonia gas was mixing with the already toxic smoke of the fire creating a dangerous smoke haze in the area.

The NSW Police Force evacuated approximately 100 people from homes and businesses in the area and closed the Princes Highway coming into Eden.

NSWFB HAZMAT crews monitored air quality surrounding the plant fire to ensure all firefighters remained safe during the operations. NSW Ambulance had units in place at the incident as well as within the township of Eden to assist anyone affected by the toxic smoke.

Fortunately, the wet and humid weather assisted with managing the ammonia hazard and no reports of people needing assistance were logged.

All RFS units were stood down from the incident at around 1330hrs to return to station and replenish supplies, clean gear, prepare trucks and conduct their after incident reports.

All crews worked in a very professional manner under difficult and dangerous circumstances.

### Units and agencies in attendance:

#### NSW RFS

Liaison Officer  
Eden Cat 2 and Cat 9  
Merimbula Cat 1  
Pambula Cat 1

#### NSW Fire Brigades

Eden - 2 units  
Merimbula - 1 unit  
Jindabyne - 1 unit  
Cooma - 1 unit  
Batemans Bay HAZMAT - 1 unit  
Bega HAZMAT - 1 unit

#### Other agencies

NSW Police Force  
NSW Ambulance  
RTA  
Origin Energy  
Country Energy

TOP: Ammonia gas mixed with the already toxic smoke of the fire creating a dangerous smoke haze in the area.



# BROOKLYN PRAISED FOR THEIR QUICK WORK

By Inspector Viki Campbell, Learning and Development Officer, Hornsby / Ku-ring-gai District

Photos by Anthony Clark, Media Services

On Friday 30 July 2010, Brooklyn Rural Fire Brigade responded to a call for a fishing trawler alight near the public wharf at Brooklyn. The time of call was 2012hrs and the first Brooklyn unit arrived on scene at 2021hrs.

On arrival, crews found a 23 foot timber fishing trawler well alight with flames threatening vessels moored either side of the trawler. The first priority of crews on scene was to protect the immediate exposures and knock down the fire on the fishing trawler.

Three appliances responded from Brooklyn: Brooklyn pumper (first on scene), Brooklyn 1 (second on scene) and the Brooklyn boat which assisted with operations from the water. Other NSW RFS brigades who assisted were Cowan 1, Berowra 1, and Hornsby Group 5.

The quick work by crews on scene ensured all the surrounding vessels were protected and the fishing trawler was extinguished with foam. Despite using foam to accelerate the extinguishing process, the vessel had taken on a lot of water and was at risk of sinking.

After the initial knock down phase, efforts were focused on the overhaul process as well as ensuring minimal impact to the Hawkesbury River environment. NSW RFS Breathing Apparatus teams were utilised during the overhaul phase on the boat. A boom was deployed around the

vessel to limit the spread of debris. A ruptured fuel line was located and HAZMAT attended to assist with the removal of 200 litres of fuel from the fishing trawler's fuel tank.

NSW RFS crews were on scene for two and a half hours before the scene was safe to depart. The owner of the fishing trawler published a public thank you to the Brooklyn Brigade in the *Hornsby Advocate* newspaper for their quick response that saved the fire spreading to other commercial fishing vessels moored next to his boat.

# \$106.9 MILLION BUSH FIRE PROTECTION PACKAGE ANNOUNCED

The NSW response to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Final Report was announced in November 2010 with the NSW Government investing more than \$106 million in extra funding.

Premier Kristina Keneally and Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan visited the NSW RFS Headquarters in Lidcombe to announce the funding package, which will improve for bush fire protection in NSW.

The package includes funding for NSW RFS, Forests NSW, and National Parks.

The package includes:

- \$84 million for strategic hazard reduction to enhance the work of fire agencies and land managers.
  - Of this, \$62.5 million will be allocated from the Climate Change Fund over five years to double the amount of bush fire prevention and suppression in National Parks; The first \$11.7 million of this will be rolled out in 2011-12;
  - \$9.96 million for the NSW RFS for an additional 80 workers for State Mitigation Support Crews to help firefighters to conduct more hazard reduction;
  - \$3 million for increased hazard reduction in State Forests; and
  - \$8 million for the Rural Fire Fighting Fund.
- \$11.2 million to accelerate the upgrade of RFS communications including radio and pager networks;
- \$4.54 million for the establishment of Rapid Aerial Response Teams to enhance the deployment of aircraft to fires;
- \$3.4 million to manage and maintain Neighbourhood Safer Places – a place of last resort for people caught in a bush fire;
- A new Vulnerable Communities Unit within the RFS to better plan for the protection of those particularly susceptible in a bush fire; and
- More than \$2.15 million a year for a Bush Fire Public Awareness campaign, to educate the community about the need for preparation before and during the fire season.

“Our fire services are renowned for their skill and experience -



but we can never afford to be complacent,” Ms Keneally said.

“It is incumbent on us to learn from Victoria’s terrible Black Saturday experience, which is why we’re boosting vital services across the State with this \$106.9 million bush fire package.”

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons welcomed the new funding.

“As I have said on a number of occasions, the Black Saturday fires were a terrible tragedy on a scale never before seen in this country. While these events did take place in Victoria, it is incumbent on us all to learn from the tragedy,” he said.

Following the release of the Royal Commission’s Final Report in July, the Premier established a working party of senior personnel from relevant agencies, including the NSW Rural Fire Service, to carefully review the 67 recommendations, the NSW position on each and determine any implications for our State.

This review found that NSW is largely consistent with the majority of recommendations. The full NSW response to the Royal Commission’s 67 recommendations can be viewed



on the NSW RFS website under Publications.

Over the past two years the Service has already introduced a comprehensive series of reforms and initiatives in the wake of the 2009 Victorian bush fires and the interim Royal Commission recommendations, including:

- New Fire Danger Ratings;
- The identification of around 790 Neighbourhood Safer Places;
- The new national Emergency Alert telephone warning system; and
- Improved availability of information during fires - including higher capacity phone lines and more online information. (See page 12 for more about the Bush Fire Information Line.)

“The increase in funding for hazard reduction will also allow us to continue our focus on strategic and effective hazard reduction, whether that be through burning, mechanical or other means,” Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

“I have made it one of my highest priorities to ensure we increase the amount of effective hazard reduction and this package will assist NSW in continuing that upward trend.”

ABOVE: Premier Kristina Keneally and Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan joined Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons at the NSW RFS Headquarters in Lidcombe to announce the funding package. Photos by Ben Shepherd, Media Services



## ENHANCED BUSH FIRE INFORMATION LINE

Story and photo Sean Greenwood,  
Bush Fire Information Line Manager

The 2009 Black Saturday Bush Fires in Victoria highlighted the pressure that can be put on information channels in times of emergency or disaster.

In its Interim Report in August 2009, the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission pointed out that the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL) failed to meet the demand from the public during the Black Saturday tragedy.

For some years, the NSW RFS had a dedicated 1800 number (1800 NSW RFS or 1800 679 737) which was a simple recorded messaging system that could be diverted to an actual operator in the Operations Customer Service Centre when the need arose. A simple Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system was installed and even before the recommendations from the Royal Commission, plans were in place to increase the capacity of the Bush Fire Information Line (BFIL).

The first stage concentrated on technological improvements. An expanded IVR system was installed with the capacity to allow 50 people to listen and select automated responses concurrently.

Callers are able to select information on the following topics:

- Development Control
- Community Education
- Total Fire Ban information
- Major Fire Updates

The Major Fire Updates and Total Fire Ban information is drawn from regularly updated information which is also displayed on the NSW RFS website. The IVR has the capacity to deal with up to 1,500 calls per hour 24 hours per day. It is anticipated that the majority of callers will be captured and dealt with through the IVR.

In September 2009 a further expansion was undertaken, with the installation of a BFIL Call Centre facility housed in the NSW RFS Headquarters in Lidcombe. The number of telephone lines to NSW RFS Headquarters was immediately expanded from 80 to 180 and the new call centre fitted with telephony and monitoring software and 15 permanent seats for call-takers. An additional 15

seats can be made available if the need arises. Should even this capacity be exceeded, there are both State and Federal agreements in place to escalate calls to other State and Federal Government Call Centres.

The software in the new Call Centre allows the number of callers coming through, including waiting times and average call handling times, to be regularly analysed to ensure that the appropriate number of staff are engaged.

In times of emergency or heightened fire activity, the BFIL will be fully staffed and will have the capacity to deal with up to 300 calls per hour. Depending on projected and actual call volumes, it could be open for a couple of hours a day or 24 hours a day. After hours calls will be dealt with by the Operations Customer Service Centre.

BFIL operators will be drawn from the NSW RFS Headquarters staff who have been specially

trained for the role. They will be seconded from their substantive, positions for the period that the BFIL is operating. They will answer public enquiries using scripted responses from a Frequently Asked Question database, ensuring that every enquiry is handled to a consistently high standard. Each Call Centre operator will be able to deal with up to 10 enquiries an hour.

Throughout the bush fire season and at any time when there is a bush fire emergency, the BFIL will work in concert with the NSW RFS public website and the Media Services Unit to ensure the community is kept well-informed during bush fire emergencies.

TOP: NSW RFS staff in the Bush Fire Information Line Call Centre in Lidcombe. The screen at the front of the room shows the statistics about the call centre's performance such as number of calls waiting and number of calls answered within 60 seconds.

# AN **INSIGHT** INTO STATE MITIGATION SUPPORT SERVICES



By Simon Davis, Supervisor, State Mitigation Support Services. Photos by Kelly White, Fire Mitigation Support Officer, State Mitigation Support Services

On 1 July 2009 the NSW Rural Fire Service embarked on a new program to provide volunteers and district staff across the State with front line services to assist with hazard reduction programs.



After a comprehensive and highly successful trial known as the Brigade Mitigation Support Program, State Mitigation Support Services (SMSS) was formed. SMSS Mitigation Crews are tasked with supporting brigades and districts in the preparation of control lines for hazard reduction burns, creating and maintaining Asset Protection Zones (APZ's), assistance with managing Strategic Fire Advantage Zones (SFAZ's), works under the Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents (AIDER) program, assistance with hazard reduction burning and support during operations.

In 2009/10 a total of 763 works were completed by SMSS Mitigation Crews, consisting of 354 completed mitigation works and 409 jobs for the AIDER program. Of the 354 mitigation requests from Districts, 208 jobs were in preparation of hazard reduction burns, 55 were mechanical works and the remaining 91 were for other hazard reduction works, including vegetation work on fire trails. In total, 1,308kms of bush fire hazard vegetation was managed.

SMSS currently consists of 60 members in 15 seasonal mitigation crews across the State. Each crew is made up of a Crew Leader and three Crew Members who are employed on a temporary basis.

Crew Leaders report to a Supervisor who is responsible for multiple crews across their Service Delivery Area. The Supervisor is assisted by a Works Assessment Officer who assesses work requests prior to and following the completion of the work. Supervisors and Works Assessment Officers regularly liaise with districts to prioritise work in their area and ensure the

best level of support is provided to brigades.

The crews operate in a number of different vehicles including Category 1 and Category 7 tankers and use tractors, slashers, tritters, small plant and other equipment to undertake mitigation works.

Group Manager of Operational and Mitigation Support Services, Rebel Talbert said the work that crews undertake is physically demanding but highly rewarding.

"The crews undertake mitigation work in some of the most arduous terrain in the State. Although the work is physically demanding, crew members see their role as a great opportunity to assist brigades with mitigation preparation works and help the most vulnerable members of the community through the AIDER program."

"Feedback about the AIDER program has been very positive with the crews preparing hundreds of homes in bush fire prone areas for the threat of bush fire. Crews undertake work that vulnerable members of the community can't manage themselves including clearing out gutters, thinning vegetation, removing leaf and tree debris and mowing or slashing long grass.

"With new positions being advertised across the State, I would encourage anyone interested in becoming a SMSS Mitigation Crew Member to find out more information on MyRFS and apply.

To date, SMSS Mitigation Crews have worked in most areas of the State with work undertaken as far west as Cobar, Bourke and Brewarrina, as far north as Moree and as far south as Albury and Wagga Wagga.



Manager of SMSS, Superintendent Angelo Baldo, AFSM said the effort put forward by the members involved has been tremendous.

"The goal of the program is to support volunteers by doing the hard physical labour. It means more weekends are available for volunteers to perform actual burns or other brigade activity. These work crews have got jobs done in a week that would have taken volunteers, who can only work part-time, six months."

"On a number of occasions, volunteers and SMSS staff worked side by side during

the planning, preparation and execution of prescribed burns. The team work shown and relationships built have been prime examples of NSW RFS values."

In 2009/10, SMSS Mitigation Crews provided assistance with many Section 44 bush fire emergencies and set up five base camps in Lithgow, Mudgee, Bingara, Narrabri and Tamworth. During the fires, mitigation crews also provided transport for the base camps, air bases and assisted in moving essential equipment around the State with up to seven trucks running at any one time.

All photos are of the Glendenning and Cessnock SMSS works crews. Photos by Kelly White





## “I HAVE THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD”

Crew Leader Greater Sydney Area and West, Scott Severs, explains how rewarding it is to be a Mitigation Team Leader.

*“I get to work in the best office in the world - the Australian bush. I really enjoy the camaraderie and doing something for the community. Being able to help the volunteers and helping to protect the community is fantastic. I have the best job in the world.”*



Beryl Wells in her own backyard with the SMSS crews from Glendenning and Cessnock.

## ASSISTING THOSE AT RISK

By Tony Jarrett, AIDER Program Coordinator

The AIDER Program was launched in July 2009 to reduce bush fire hazards for Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents and as part of the SMSS program.

This innovative program assists vulnerable residents to live safely and confidently at home. In 2009/10, 409 AIDER jobs were completed, with more than 550 residents benefiting. As word about AIDER spreads, the demand for NSW RFS assistance is growing, with requests this year well above the same time last year.

Each client's property is assessed by an SMSS Works Assessment Officer. SMSS Works Teams come back to do things like clearing out gutters, thinning vegetation, removing leaf and tree debris and mowing or slashing long grass. Many jobs are simple and the crews provide reassurance and advice to residents with concerns about their bush fire risk and personal safety. Other AIDER jobs can be more complex requiring multiple crews working over a number of days to reduce extensive bush fire hazards.

AIDER clients, by their very eligibility for the program, are more likely to be vulnerable to the impact of a bush fire. While most clients are aged (and many living alone), a large number of jobs have been completed for people with disabling conditions that limit or prevent them doing yard work themselves. Often, a client seeks our help just to 'get the place back to what it used to be', particularly if that person has recently lost their partner, or are caring for their partner. While AIDER is primarily about the reduction of bush fire hazard, Works Assessment Officers and Team Leaders take time to talk with the client about personal bush fire safety.

Clients are extremely grateful for the help of the NSW RFS, and are often overcome with emotion. The Work Teams see and experience that AIDER is a very special program.

Most clients have been identified via community organisations already working with aged and disabled people in the community – such as Meals on Wheels, Home and Community Care. In 2009/10, 70 percent of AIDER work came from referrals via community organisations. These connections with aged and disability service providers build trust in the NSW RFS and helps us develop local networks that can be used to disseminate important bush fire safety information.

To refer a potential client to the AIDER Program, contact 8741 4955, email [aider@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:aider@rfs.nsw.gov.au) or complete the form at [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/aider](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/aider)

The following letter was received from the Aged and Disability Support Services on the Central Coast who has been involved with AIDER.

*"It is with much gratitude that we write this letter ... to acknowledge the wonderful effort that the Rural Fire Service contributed to the clearing of a client's property in need of this service.*

*The contribution that this program made, gave our client a greater sense of dignity where circumstances had kept him at a great disadvantage, and we believe that both your and our involvement bought a sense of community to him.*

*The NSW Rural Fire Service has great people to liaise with as well as having a great sense of humour with a generous spirit, which our community can be really proud of. Our thanks again for the difference you made to our client's life, and know that this project will change the lives of many Australians who can no longer maintain their properties as they would like to."*

Many thanks  
ADSSI Ltd

# WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN THE STATE MITIGATION SUPPORT SERVICES?



**Current Position:** Works Assessment Officer

**Name:** Stephen Rothwell

**Age:** 43

**SMSS since:** The pilot program in 2007

**Work Background:** Running my own painting business for 17 years

## What do you do?

I assess either mitigation jobs or AIDER jobs, and scope out the works so that when the teams come in I can show them what needs to be done and what the issues are.

## Where has the job taken you?

Mostly Greater Sydney and Western region (including Cobar and Wilcannia). Also Gosford, Hawkesbury and the Blue Mountains.

## Best part of the job:

There are two - the first is the reward from helping people through the AIDER program. The second is helping brigades and districts achieve good outcomes through mitigation works - which in turn, helps the community.

## Hardest part of the job:

Walking around in the bush on a wet day!

## When I joined SMSS, I never expected...

to find so many people out there who really want to do something around their house, but don't know how to go about it. Those people we help through the AIDER program are really appreciative. Once we've finished the job, some break down and cry, and others have said 'that's how my husband used to keep the house'.

**Current Position:** Supervisor

**Name:** Darryal Luxford

**Age:** 57

**SMSS since:** April 2010

**Work Background:** Fire Management Officer with State Forests, Central Region

## What do you do?

Make sure the crews know what they're doing each day, by liaising with Community Safety Officers and Fire Mitigation Officers in the districts. That includes collating mitigation and AIDER tasks and prioritising them, then tasking the crews. I also check the work when it's complete, to see if it's satisfactory.

## Where has the job taken you?

Everywhere in the Northern Region, plus the Manning and Namoi/Gwydir.

## Best part of the job:

I'd say the uncertainty and originality. It's all very new so you've got the opportunity to make it work how you want it to work. You learn a lot as you go along and I enjoy the challenge.

## Hardest part of the job:

Rainy days.

## When I joined SMSS, I never expected...

the enthusiasm of the young people in the Works Crews, and how it rubs off on others around them. We had three guys recently doing their task-based assessment, but only two passed. When the third bloke did the test again two weeks later, the other two came back and went through it with him, just to help him over the line. There's a great team spirit there.

Expressions of Interest for seasonal works staff will be advertised shortly. For more information visit MyRFS where you can find some of the work of the SMSS and learn more about the roles on offer.

Any enquiries regarding the State Mitigation Support Services can be directed to Superintendent Angelo Baldo via email to [angelo.baldo@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:angelo.baldo@rfs.nsw.gov.au).



**Current Position:** Team Leader

**Name:** Chris Firkins

**Age:** 54

**NSW RFS volunteer since:** 1994 (I think)

**Brigade:** Boambee

**SMSS since:** January 2010

**Work Background:** Bank worker for 20 years, and then a teacher's aide in primary and high schools.

#### What do you do?

The Supervisor gives me the works requests and then we go to the job, assess the job and brief the crew on what has to be done and how to do it. Once the job's done, I complete the paperwork and make sure everyone gets home safe.

#### Where has the job taken you?

Anywhere from Tweed Heads, Sydney, Mudgee and Gilgandra.

#### Best part of the job:

The satisfaction, the travelling, seeing different parts of NSW, working with different people...I like it all!

#### Hardest part of the job:

It's very hard, physical work - especially when it's hot and humid. But that's part of the job, you train for it and away you go.

#### When I joined SMSS, I never expected...

to meet so many nice people and to learn so much from seeing how different crews work. Each part of the State has a different way of doing things - what we do around our area is different to how it's done somewhere else, so you're always learning something new.

**Current Position:** Works Team Member

**Name:** Rebecca Phillips

**Age:** 24

**NSW RFS volunteer since:** 2005

**Brigade:** Perthville/Georges Plains

**SMSS since:** December 2010

**Work Background:** Stay at home mum

#### What do you do?

We cut APZ (Asset Protection Zone) trails using the brush cutters, trim trees and make it safe for RFS brigades. We also help elderly and disabled people keep their homes fire safe, by cleaning gutters etc

#### Where has the job taken you?

I have had the opportunity to work or travel through some beautiful country towns in Central Western NSW - from Orange to Gin Gin to Wellington and many other smaller localities in between. We also travel to Sydney now and then.

#### Best part of the job:

Being outdoors and meeting new people. It has been a great feeling to see the beaming look of appreciation from those we help through the AIDER program. It has also been great for me to learn to drive the truck.

#### Hardest part of the job:

Being away from my two kids - having said that, they adapted to the change really well, which made it a bit easier for me.

#### When I joined SMSS, I never expected...

That I would dangle out the side of a helicopter. Being winched in and out of a helicopter during training was quite an experience!

# FORECASTING A CHANGE

By Michael Logan, Bureau of Meteorology





Gridded weather introduction workshops were held around the State including the NSW RFS Headquarters in Lidcombe. Photo by Jacqueline Murphy, Organisational Communications

A significant change to the way fire weather is forecast and viewed has been developed by the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) in conjunction with the NSW RFS.

The upgraded forecasting system is a large part of the BoM's Next Generation Forecast and Warning System (NexGenFWS) and brings a shift from text-based reporting to visual and graphical displays.

"The new information is graphic and it is quite powerful," said Simon Heemstra, NSW RFS Community Planning Manager, "It is a totally new way to do business.

"With this new forecasting system, forecasters and firefighters can see images of the Fire Danger Ratings across the State and watch real time changes of the forecasts. It really is a matter of: 'a picture paints 1,000 words'."

Firefighters can gain an immediate visual picture of fire conditions across NSW. The entire surface of NSW can be viewed in grids of six kilometre by six kilometre resolution. This means that local variables of temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction can be understood more accurately. A significant new aspect is the ability to forecast the duration of any given fire threat.

The forecast software has been in use in the US for ten years and piloted in Victoria since 2009. It was launched in NSW in late 2010 in time for the 2010/11 fire season.

The shift from text based data to graphical data will be a watershed in fire weather forecasting for many years to come. A range of weather forecast products and maps is now available that will provide a significantly improved forecast picture helping with fire management for bush fires and hazard reductions.

Funding for the revolutionary new forecasting system to be rolled out across Australia was announced in the Federal Government's 2009/10 budget. The government allocated \$30.5 million over five years for the project.

Along with dramatic changes and upgrades for fire weather forecasting will be the ability to give rural and regional centres the same level of service that has previously only been available to the major cities.

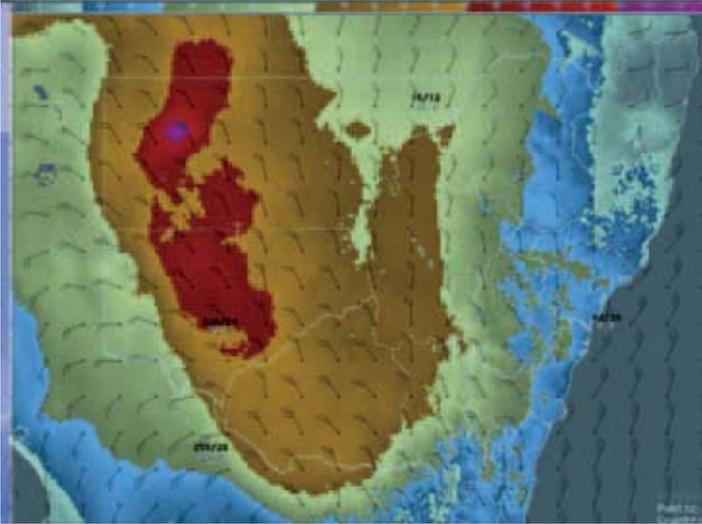
### Software upgrade

This change is a completely new method of forecasting operations for the Bureau of Meteorology. Forecasters are able to interact with the weather grids using a specially designed grid editing software package developed by the US National Weather Service and adapted for use in Australia. This package enables the meteorologist to input local weather knowledge and experience into the weather forecast process and value-add to the computer model guidance available to them.

For the first time in Australia, quality controlled weather forecasts provided by the Bureau are available in graphical or map form out to seven days ahead for anywhere in the state. The Forecast Explorer service enables the user to find, display and zoom into weather details for their area down to the six kilometre grid scale by point and click. Some useful tips on how to use the viewer are linked from the help tab above the maps.

The result is a digital database of spatial forecast data from which maps of forecast weather can be generated. This will also allow us

**FIGURE 1** Graphics of forecast daily maximum fire danger across NSW, with an overlay of the 3pm wind barbs at approx 75km spacing.



**FIGURE 2** The summary page of the routine fire danger forecast is designed to capture the key information for the whole State in one table.

**Fire Weather Forecast for New South Wales for Wednesday 20 January 2010**

Issued at 4:30pm EDT on Tuesday 19 January 2010

FORECASTS ARE ISSUED REGULARLY: PLEASE ENSURE YOU HAVE THE LATEST VERSION

**Summary**

Fire Area Number	Fire Area Name	Area FDI	Area Rating	Percent Coverage	Fire Weather Warning	Total Fire Ban
1	Far North Coast	24	Very High	25		
2	North Coast	35	Very High	25		
3	Greater Hunter	55	Severe	15	Y	Y
4	Greater Sydney	23	High	15		
5	Illawarra Shoalhaven	55	Severe	15	Y	Y
6	Far South Coast	65	Severe	35	Y	Y
7	Monaro Alpine	45	Very High	80		Y
9	Southern Ranges	50	Severe	10	Y	Y
10	Central Ranges	70	Severe	50	Y	Y
11	New England	70	Severe	50	Y	Y
12	Northern Slopes	90	Extreme	75	Y	Y
13	North Western	95	Extreme	75	Y	Y
14	Upper Central West Plains	80	Extreme	70	Y	Y
15	Lower Central West Plains	110	Catastrophic	50	Y	Y
16	Southern Slopes	85	Extreme	80	Y	Y
17	Eastern Riverina	45	Very High	35		Y
18	Southern Riverina	25	Very High	30		
19	Northern Riverina	30	Very High	90		
20	South Western	25	Very High	100		
21	Far Western	25	Very High	100		

\*Area FDI is the representative peak FDI in the Fire Area, 10% of the Fire Area has a maximum FDI higher than this value.

\*Percent Coverage is the percentage of the Fire Area that falls in above the Area Rating threshold Thursday

Rain area and isolated thunderstorms in the northeast, easing later in the day. Scattered showers and possible thunderstorms in the southeast, tending to rain periods in the far southeast with possible heavy falls. The chance of isolated showers in central districts. Fine over the western inland. North to northwest winds in the northeast. Southwest to southeast winds elsewhere, likely becoming strong to gale in the far southeast. Dangerous surf conditions on the south coast.

to produce forecast Fire Danger Index (FDI) maps (Figure 1) as well as the duration of the fire weather.

**Spatial Data**

The use of forecast spatial data for understanding fire threat will be new to everyone in the wider NSW fire community. The data is very visual and can give an instant understanding of threat across NSW; however the incorrect use of graphics could lead to downstream problems. So what are the pros and cons of using spatial data?

Benefits of Spatial data (Graphical output):

- Will allow for an immediate understanding of the threat across a NSW Fire Area, or even across NSW as a whole.
- Provides a graphical output of threat duration.
- Allows the user to visually compare a threat over different periods of time, (hours or days).
- Shows the direct effect meteorology is having on FDI across an area, e.g. sea breezes along the coast, cold front moving over NSW.
- Allows for spatial variance of fuel information, (fuel type, curing rates, grass fuel loads).
- Allows input into fire behavior modeling.

Limitations of spatial data (graphical output):

- The graphics show an exact solution which:
  - hides the forecast uncertainty based on the meteorology of the situation.
  - could lead to a false perception about a specific outcome, i.e. what the graphics show is exactly what will happen.
  - could create an expectation that the FDI value at a specific point will occur in reality.
- The sensitivity of the underlying Macarthur meters at higher values is not always apparent
- Small changes in forecast weather elements, (e.g. wind), on high end days could result in significant changes to displayed spatial information.

Spatial data provides an immediate visual picture of fire threat; however this must be quantified in a systematic manner before it can be used to assess the correct fire danger

rating for a NSW Fire Area, or the need for Fire Weather Warnings and TOBANS. Information about what percentage of an area is covered by each rating category allows the threat from the spatial data to be measured.

The routine fire danger ratings forecast produced by the Bureau has been changed to display summarized spatial information in a tabular format. Information will include forecast onset time, duration and spatial coverage for Severe and higher categories.

The form will be split into three sections: a summary page (figure 2), detailed spatial data for each NSW Fire Area, and point location forecast data for the traditional fire weather points. It is important to note that the rating and warning decisions will all be made based on the spatial data. Individual point location data is provided to give context to the forecast weather situation.

**How will Ratings, Fire Weather Warnings, and TOBANS be assigned?**

The rating for a NSW Fire Area will be defined using the spatial coverage of the Fire Danger Index within that NSW Fire Area. The highest rating category with at least 10 percent\* spatial coverage will be assigned to the Fire Area.

For a given NSW Fire Area the spatial coverage is:

- 75% - Low to Moderate
  - 20% - High
  - 5% - Very High
- Fire Area Rating = High

(\*The threshold of 10% coverage is used for other Bureau warning services driven by the upgraded forecasting platform. This threshold provides a balance between ensuring the public is informed about weather related risk, without over warning and reducing the impact of the service).

**Fire Weather Warnings**

The decision on when to warn the public will now be based on weather conditions expected across the whole fire ban area and not just at the sites in the fire weather estimates. This will come about in two ways:

1. A 'hard wired' threshold that forces a decision, (based on percentage coverage only). The threshold is 10 percent coverage for Severe, Extreme, and Catastrophic.

2. A discretionary range where other factors are taken into account, eg. Duration of threat, current fire activity, forecast uncertainty, population, fuel, topography, community vulnerability, etc. The discretionary range will be spatial coverage of 1-10 percent for Severe, Extreme, and Catastrophic.

**Total Fire Ban Advice**

Total Fire Bans will continue to be issued at the discretion of the NSW RFS and not linked directly to the Fire Danger Index.

Fire Weather Warnings (FWW) and TOBANS will remain independent meaning one can be issued without the other, although it is recognised that consistency of the two products is desirable where practical. To achieve this broad consistency, consultation between the Bureau and the NSW RFS will take place before either a FWW or TOBAN is issued. The FWW will remain an important component of the Bureau’s public warning service and also a key tool used by the NSW RFS in assessing the need for TOBANS.

**Western NSW using grassland ratings**

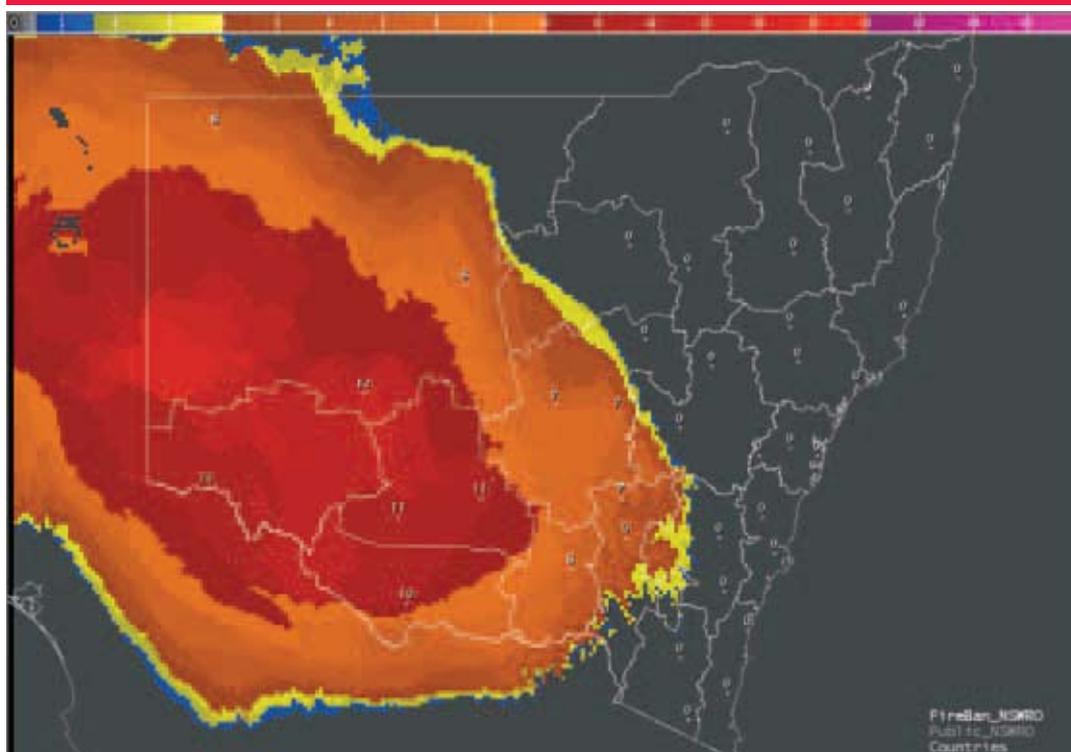
There are two types of Fire Danger Ratings Indexes relevant in NSW – Forest Fire Danger and Grassland Fire Danger. In the new forecasting system a decision has been made to simplify the forecasting in western NSW and only use the Grassland Fire Danger (Figure 3). The new forecasting system will contain gridded Curing and Grassland Fuel Load information based on advice provided from the NSW RFS to the Bureau.

It is expected that this change will result in a reduction in the number of TOBANS and Fire Weather Warnings through western NSW, especially when Curing and Fuel Load values are low.

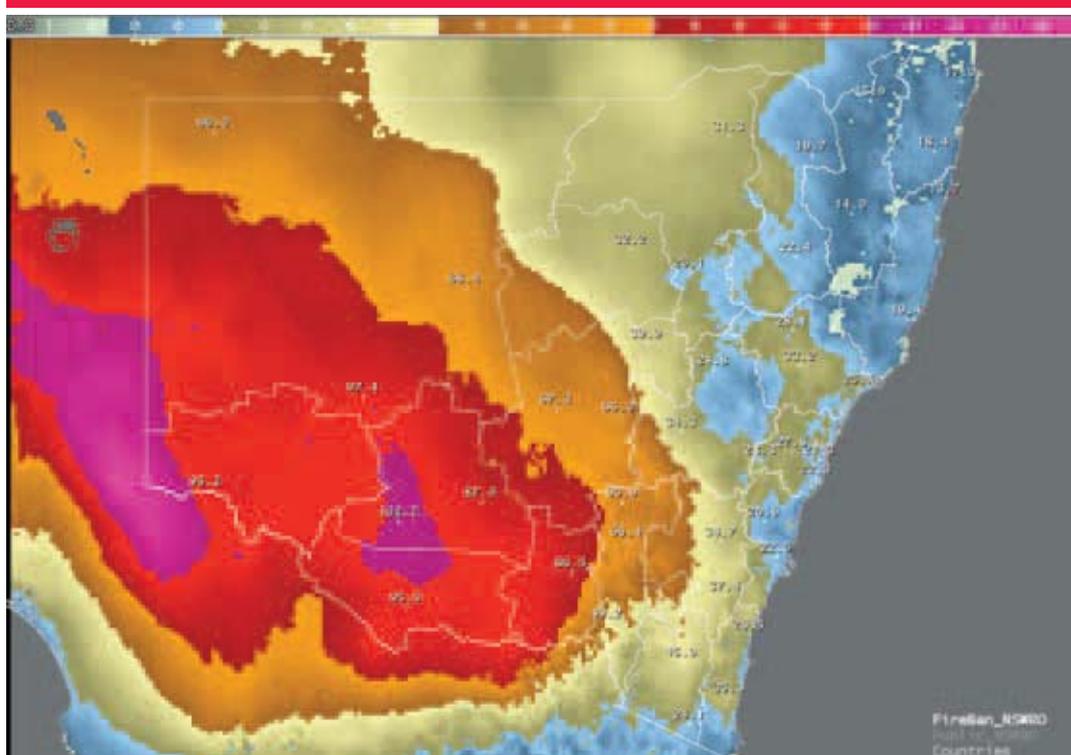
**New outlook graphics**

The Four-Day Outlook graphic will be produced using forecaster edited computer forecast guidance. For each day in the outlook period a graphic of daily maximum fire danger, and hours duration above an FDI of fifty will be displayed (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 3** Classification of Primary Fuel Class used to assess fire danger across NSW. Areas shaded pink will only use the Grassland Fire Danger Index. Areas shaded green, (and the ACT), will use both the Forest and Grassland Fire Dangers.



**FIGURE 4** Example outlook graphics of daily maximum fire danger (left) and hours duration above an FDI of 50 (right). (Note the format of this graphic is not exactly as it will be provided during the fire season).



**Duration of the threat**

The duration of any given fire threat will now be available for fire managers, providing much more specific information. Fire managers will now be able to see, for example, that a particular area has a Severe fire danger rating for eight hours, which rises to Extreme for three hours and then reaches Catastrophic for one hour.

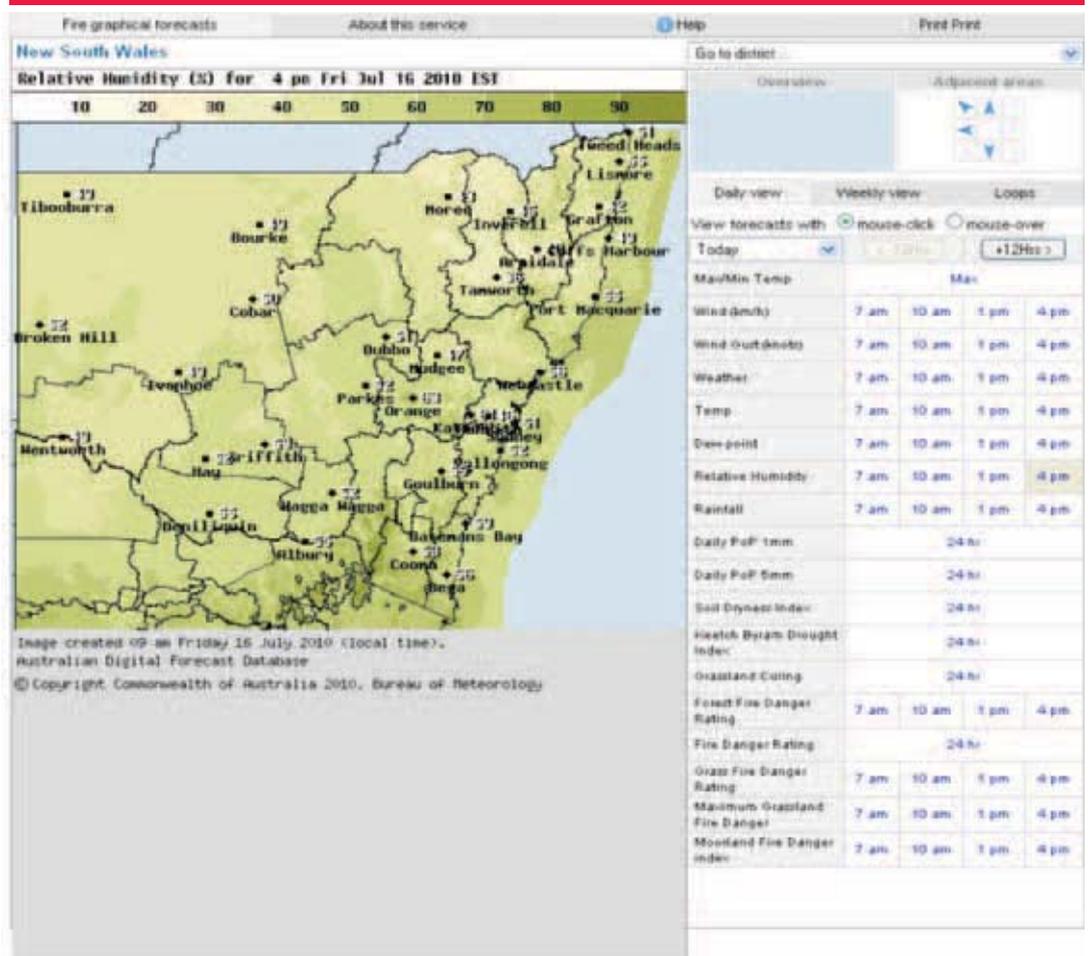
Included in the data shown on the maps, is the temperature, humidity, wind and all the information that goes into the working out the FDI.

**The Fire Weather Forecast Explorer**

The Fire Weather Forecast Explorer is a major improvement in forecast delivery. Interactive graphical maps displaying forecasts for fire danger, wind, temperature, humidity were introduced at the beginning of the 2010/11 fire season.

These maps, viewed through the Fire Weather Forecast Explorer (Figure 5), allow users to view detailed fire weather information at a regional level. The Fire Weather Forecast Explorer can be found on the fire agency registered user sites.

**FIGURE 5** The Fire Weather Forecast Explorer will allow for interactive viewing of fire weather forecast data across NSW. Users can change the time of day and zoom into regional areas for enhanced detail.



Images are updated routinely at around 6 am and 6 pm EDT.

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE NSW RFS FIRE MANAGERS?

The Bureau and NSW RFS Community Planning Unit have been holding workshops to explain the new forecasting software and familiarise managers and firefighters with NexGenFWS.

There is a massive amount of new information available to firefighters but the Bureau warn that it will take some time to get used to interpreting the data.

“This first season there will be a lot of exploration,” Mick Logan said, “In the first instance, our aim was to reproduce the type of information that we are all used to - but in spatial form.

“Then once we are used to interpreting this data in real time and in real situations, we can improve, enquire and expand our use of the data.”

**Additional Information:**

Additional information about changes to the fire weather service can be found on your agency registered user site, or via contacting the NSW RFS Fire Meteorologist, the Severe Weather team at the Bureau, or Simon Heemstra Manager of Community Planning.

# WARNINGS, RATINGS AND MESSAGES IN THE FIRE SEASON

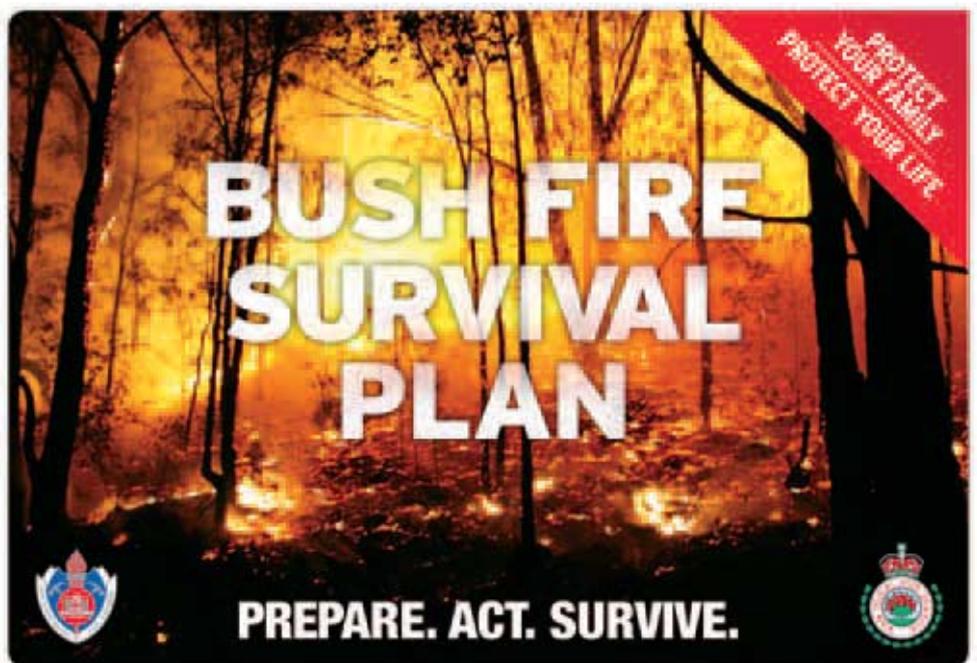
## A FACT SHEET

Bush fires are a part of the Australian environment and in recent years we have seen the devastating effect they can have on homes, families and communities.

Despite this, many people fail to prepare for bush fires – and in some cases, people leave it too late to make important decisions about their safety.

Recently, changes were made to the information provided to the community, before and during a fire. It's important all of us understand the changes – so we can help the community make informed decisions.

This Fact Sheet is for all NSW RFS members to help you provide information on preparing for bush fires and answers some of the questions you may get from the community.



### BEFORE THE FIRE

#### What's the most important thing people can do to prepare for a bush fire?

The most critical element in surviving a bush fire is preparation. This means preparing your Bush Fire Survival Plan, preparing yourself and your family and preparing your property for bush fires.

For this reason, every person living in an area where a bush fire can start should prepare a Bush Fire Survival Plan. The Bush Fire Survival Plan helps families make important decisions, such as whether to Leave Early or Stay and

Defend a well-prepared property. It also assists with decisions such as when to leave, what to take and what to do with animals. These decisions shouldn't be left until the last minute.

Sometimes, no matter how well prepared you are, things don't go according to plan. Regardless of whether you are planning to Leave Early or Stay and Defend, you need to have a back up plan.

Everyone's Bush Fire Survival Plan will be different, depending on their circumstances. Think about your family's situation when writing your Bush Fire Survival Plan.

You can download the NSW RFS Bush Fire Survival Plan from the RFS website or pick up a copy at your local Fire Control Centre.



# WARNINGS, RATINGS AND MESSAGES

## What are the Fire Danger Ratings and why have they changed?

Fire Danger Ratings are used to give an indication of the consequences of a fire, if one was to start. Fire Danger Ratings tell you how a bush fire may act, what impacts there might be on the community and when to implement your Bush Fire Survival Plan.

The Fire Danger Ratings were changed following the 2009 Victorian bush fires to give the community clearer trigger points, and to help firefighters plan and prepare for the forecast conditions.

## How is the Bush Fire Danger Rating determined?

Fire Danger Ratings are based on the Fire Danger Index, which is a combination of factors including the forecast temperature, relative humidity, wind speed and the dryness of the landscape.

At Low-Moderate, fires will generally be easily controlled. At the highest level, Catastrophic, fires will burn so quickly that they will generally be uncontrollable. Just because the Fire Danger Rating is at the upper end of the scale, it doesn't mean there will be a fire but the rating gives an indication of how serious a fire would be if one started.

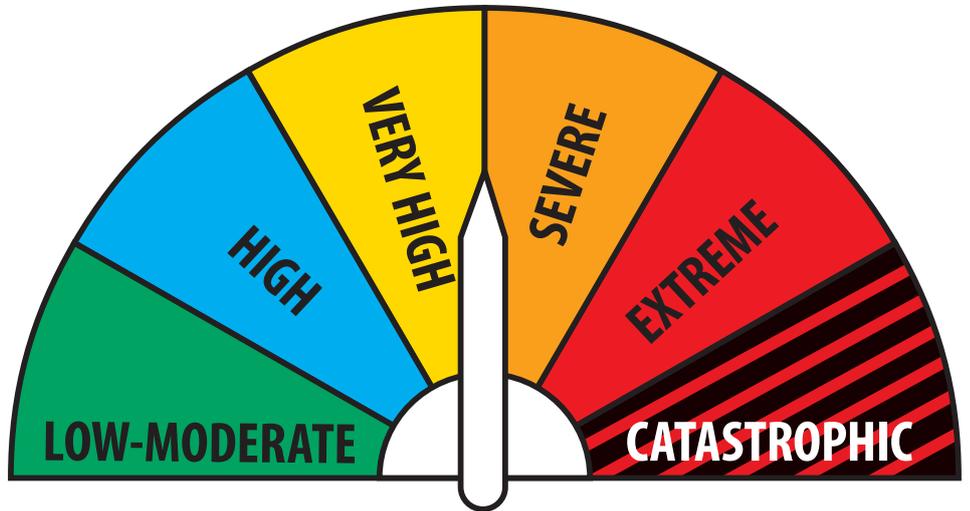
A Fire Danger Rating will apply to a Fire Weather Area, which is a group of local government areas. You can find out which area you're in by visiting the RFS website.

## What should I do on a Catastrophic day?

These are the worst conditions for a bush or grass fire. Homes aren't designed or constructed to withstand fires in these conditions.

The safest place to be on Catastrophic fire danger days is away from areas where a bush fire may start. Leaving the night before or early in the day is the safest option. You may not need to travel great distances to be safer. It may be as simple as going to a friend's house or into a well built-up area which is away from the bush.

Put your Bush Fire Survival Plan into action as soon as possible – do not just wait and see.



## DURING A FIRE

### When a fire starts, should I stay or go?

The NSW RFS recommends that you make the decision to Leave Early on days when:

- There is a Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating or
- The Fire Danger Rating is Extreme, if your home has not been specially designed, constructed or modified to withstand a fire, or if you are not well prepared.

On any other day you should only Stay and Defend if you have a well maintained property and if you are physically and emotionally prepared to defend your home.

Not all homes are defensible, and not all people are able to cope with the ordeal of staying to defend their home. It is important that you consider your individual and family circumstances when making decisions about what you and your family should do.

In some situations, the choice to Leave Early is much more important, such as if there are children, elderly or disabled people in your home, or people who are vulnerable due to age, health or any other reason.

Leaving Early is always the safest option.

### Where do I find the latest information about fires?

It's important that people keep themselves informed and stay up to date when there are fires in their area.

During fires, you can get information through the radio and television, the NSW RFS website, the 1800 679 737 Bush Fire Information Line and by speaking with neighbours, friends and family.

Do not rely on a single source of emergency information.

### Will I get a text or voice message?

The NSW RFS uses the national Emergency Alert system.

Emergency Alert allows the NSW RFS to send warning messages by telephone. Landline telephones will receive a recorded message, providing important information and advice. Mobile phones will receive a short text message, if the billing address is within the warning area.

Some fires start and spread so quickly that there isn't time to give any warning. That's why it's important that people have a Bush Fire Survival Plan, so they know what to do if a fire starts.

If you receive a warning, you must take it seriously. Failure to take action could result in injury or death of you or your family members.



# IN THE FIRE SEASON » A FACT SHEET

## What is the Bush Fire Alerts Matrix?

The Bush Fire Alerts Matrix is what the NSW RFS uses to issue warnings and advice to the public about the level of threat from a fire. It's based on two factors:

- The current Fire Danger Rating
- The fire's estimated time of impact.

## What are the different levels for Bush Fire Alert Messages?

- **Advice:** A fire has started. There is no immediate danger.
- **Watch & Act:** A heightened level of threat. Conditions are changing; you need to start taking action now to protect you and your family.
- **Emergency Warning:** You may be in danger and need to take action immediately. Any delay now puts your life at risk.

Emergency Warnings are updated every 30 minutes or as the situation changes.

Watch and Act messages are updated at least every two hours.

Advice messages are updated at least twice a day.



## What is the Standard Emergency Warning Signal?

The Standard Emergency Warning Signal is a distinctive siren which may be played on radio or television, to alert you to important information about a fire.

It will be followed by a scripted announcement, provided by the NSW RFS, providing information such as the location of the fire, where it's expected to impact and what people should do to protect themselves.

## What about if I'm travelling?

It's important that people stay up to date, especially when travelling in an unfamiliar area.

You should find out the local Fire Danger Rating by checking local media, the RFS website or calling the Bush Fire Information Line.

If there is a fire in the area, be sure to stay up to date on local conditions.

## What's a Neighbourhood Safer Place?

Neighbourhood Safer Places were introduced following an interim recommendation from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. So far, around 800 of these locations have been identified in NSW.

Neighbourhood Safer Places are buildings or open spaces that are away from bushland and can provide some protection from the immediate threat of a bush fire. They're not intended for pets and livestock.

They are a place where people can take short-term shelter during a bush fire and should only be used until the threat of a bush fire has passed. Water, toilets and food may not be available and emergency services personnel may not be present.

Neighbourhood Safer Places are not long-term options and should not be confused with Fire Refuges, Evacuation Centres, Welfare Centres or Assembly Points.

It's also important to remember that there may be some risk in using a Neighbourhood Safer Place. There may also be some risk in travelling to one.



Neighbourhood Safer Places do not guarantee your safety and should only be used as a Place of last Resort during a bush fire

A full list of approved Neighbourhood Safer Places is available on the NSW RFS website.

## What if there's no Neighbourhood Safer Place in my area?

Not every area will have a Neighbourhood Safer Place because they need to meet strict criteria before being approved.

Residents who don't have a local Neighbourhood Safer Place should identify other safer locations such as a nearby well-prepared home, the beach, a shopping centre or a sports oval that is away from the bush.

## What about fire bunkers?

Private Bush Fire Shelters (sometimes referred to as bunkers) should not be used as a substitute for proper preparation of yourself and your home.

Inadequately designed, badly located or poorly maintained private bush fire shelters are extremely dangerous.

Anyone who wants to build a private bush fire shelter in NSW must go through the development process and obtain approval from their Council. The shelter must comply with the Australian Standard introduced in April 2010.

# BUSH FIRE DANGER RATINGS



Bush Fire Danger Rating	What does it mean?	What should I do?
<b>CATASTROPHIC</b>	<p>These are the worst conditions for a bush or grass fire.</p> <p>Homes are not designed or constructed to withstand fires in these conditions.</p> <p>The safest place to be is away from bush fire prone areas.</p>	<p>Leaving bush fire prone areas the night before or early in the day is your safest option – do not wait and see.</p> <p>Avoid forested areas, thick bush or long, dry grass.</p> <p>Know your trigger – make a decision about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- when you will leave</li> <li>- where you will go</li> <li>- how you will get there</li> <li>- when you will return</li> <li>- what you will do if you cannot leave</li> </ul> <p>Consider staying with your property only if you are prepared to the highest level. This means your home needs to be situated and constructed or modified to withstand a bush fire, you are well prepared and you can actively defend your home if a fire starts.</p>
<b>EXTREME</b>	<p>Expect extremely hot, dry and windy conditions.</p> <p>If a fire starts and takes hold, it will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving. Spot fires will start, move quickly and come from many directions.</p> <p>Homes that are situated and constructed or modified to withstand a bush fire, that are well prepared and actively defended, may provide safety.</p> <p>You must be physically and mentally prepared to defend a property in these conditions.</p>	<p>If you are not prepared to the highest level, leaving bush fire prone areas early in the day is your safest option.</p> <p>Be aware of local conditions and seek information by listening to local radio, go to <a href="http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au">www.rfs.nsw.gov.au</a> or call the NSW RFS Bush Fire Information Line on 1800 679 737.</p>
<b>SEVERE</b>	<p>Expect hot, dry and possibly windy conditions.</p> <p>If a fire starts and takes hold, it may be uncontrollable.</p> <p>Well prepared homes that are actively defended can provide safety.</p> <p>You must be physically and mentally prepared to defend in these conditions.</p>	<p>Well prepared homes that are actively defended can provide safety – check your Bush Fire Survival Plan.</p> <p>If you are not prepared, leaving bush fire prone areas early in the day is your safest option.</p> <p>Be aware of local conditions and seek information by listening to local radio, go to <a href="http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au">www.rfs.nsw.gov.au</a> or call the NSW RFS Bush Fire Information Line on 1800 679 737.</p>
<b>VERY HIGH</b>	<p>If a fire starts, it can most likely be controlled in these conditions and homes can provide safety.</p>	<p>Check your Bush Fire Survival Plan</p>
<b>HIGH</b>	<p>Be aware of how fires can start and minimise the risk.</p>	<p>Monitor conditions</p>
<b>LOW-MODERATE</b>	<p>Controlled burning off may occur in these conditions if it is safe – check to see if permits apply.</p>	<p>Action may be needed</p> <p>Leave if necessary</p>

**NSW RFS Website - [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au) NSW RFS Bush Fire Information Line - 1800 679 737**

**PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.**

# A BOAT NAMED BOB

A new Elvina 15 Fire Boat named *Bob Anderson* was launched by the Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons at a community gathering at Elvina Bay in Sydney's north in October 2010.

The new boat was named *Bob Anderson* in honour of a long-time Towlers Bay resident and active brigade member.

The boat was presented to West Pittwater Rural Fire Brigade Captain, Roy Atkins by Commissioner Fitzsimmons and NSW MLC, Kayee Griffin who was representing NSW Emergency Services Minister, Steve Whan. Member for Mackellar, Bronwyn Bishop and Member for Pittwater, Rob Stokes were also present.

The Commissioner commended the brigade for its work in developing the boat and praised the State Government's input to the vessel's construction and fit-out.

The boat is a punt-style aluminium vessel with a shallow draught and a drop front for easy beach landings, and the capacity to carry 12 crew. It has a hull length of 8.1 metres and a waterline of seven metres. It is powered by two 115hp Yamaha four-stroke outboard motors.

The design process included incorporating purpose-built storage facilities for the array of firefighting equipment needed to be carried on the boat, and it features a specially 'marine-ised' pump, similar to those fitted to the NSW RFS Category 1 Tankers.

Training exercises held recently tested the pump which easily pushed water up the lines at Cottage Point, highlighting its versatility in fighting both bush fires and house fires in more remote areas of Pittwater and Hawkesbury.

The commissioning of this vessel adds to the NSW RFS capabilities on Pittwater. The West Pittwater Brigade also has two Cat 7 tankers – one at Elvina Bay and one at Lovett Bay, as well as a personnel carrier and assorted portable pumps. Nearby Scotland Island also has a fireboat along with Cat 7 and Cat 9 tankers, and a personnel carrier.

With the two fire boats on Pittwater, the NSW RFS can respond to all types of incidents, including bush fires, boat fires and waterfront house and



TOP: Inspector Wayne Reeve, Warringah Pittwater Fire Control Centre, West Pittwater Brigade Captain Roy Atkins, Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, West Pittwater Deputy Captain Andrew Cutler, Senior Deputy Captain Kylie Stackhouse and boat builder Michael Short. Photo by Tim Byrne

ABOVE: Brigade and community members gather on the foreshore of Pittwater to witness the launch of the new fire boat. Photo by Mark Casper



# HORNSBY KU-RING-GAI DISTRICT EXERCISE 2010

By Daryl Johnson, Berowra Waters Brigade. Photos by Filip Mincev, Westleigh Brigade

Saturday 21 August was a quiet sunny day in the leafy northern Sydney suburb of Berowra when at 0800hrs, just as the first intrepid souls were entering the polling booths to decide on who would govern the country, the fire trucks of the Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai District started to move throughout the suburb.

Residents stopped and wondered what was happening. It turned out to be a regular parade throughout the day as vehicles were tasked from one exercise scenario to another at regular half hourly intervals.

The Hornsby Ku-ring-gai District Exercise is a competitive exercise which sees local brigades competing across seven different scenario-based events. The winners are awarded a trophy and all the results also contribute to the calculation of the winner of the annual Bob Schofield Trophy for Training Excellence within the District.

This year's Exercise tested the land-based brigades as well as the Communications Brigade, who managed the two controlled networks used on the day and tasked all units to their various scenarios, and the Support Brigade, who provided logistics support to all the scenarios.

The scenarios required crews to establish hose lines to protect the local scout hall from a 'fire'

that was threatening to run up the gully and engulf it; undertake a trail chip to allow a 'back burn' to be put in to protect homes in several streets from an approaching fire; draft water using both the truck and portable pumps; attend an LPG fire and an MVA, before demonstrating their ability to survive a fire overrun.

By the end of their rotation, crews were looking a little the worse for wear.

Along with these tasks, each crew deployed and re-stowed all their equipment seven times inside a period of 3.5 hours.

All the crews were in agreement that they had a great time on the day and everyone learnt at least one lesson and refreshed many of their skills in a high-pressure situation - particularly the crew leaders.

The competition was fierce with the top five brigades separated by a mere two points. In the end, however, there has to be a winner - see opposite page.





**Winner** Hornsby Ku-ring-gai District Exercise 2010  
Ku-ring-gai Brigade

**Second**  
Hornsby Brigade

**Third**  
Mt Ku-ring-gai Brigade

**Fourth**  
Berowra Waters Brigade and Cowan Brigade



# PROTECTING INJURED FIREFIGHTERS

The Rural Fire Service Association (RFSA) held its annual conference in June 2010 in Canberra and the symposium was well attended by both volunteers and salaried NSW RFS members.

During the conference a formal signing ceremony was held to mark an important milestone between the NSW RFS and the RFSA.

The signing of a formal Memorandum of Understanding recognises and provides support for volunteer members who are injured in the line of duty and require support mechanisms additional to that afforded by existing workers compensation and rehabilitation services.

While the NSW RFS has long provided additional benefits to injured members as needed, the MOU enunciates very clearly and unequivocally the intent to support its members in times when such support is needed and warranted.

A copy of the Memorandum of Understanding is published here on page 35 and can be found on the RFSA website: [http://www.rfsa.org.au/rfsa/files/Memorandum\\_Of\\_Understanding.pdf](http://www.rfsa.org.au/rfsa/files/Memorandum_Of_Understanding.pdf).

The Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan, has also expressed his support for the MOU. A letter from the Minister is published here.



**The Hon Steve Whan MP**  
Minister for Primary Industries  
Minister for Emergency Services  
Minister for Rural Affairs  
Member for Monaro

Dear Members

Many of you would be aware that earlier this year the Rural Fire Service Association (RFSA) signed a Workers Compensation Memorandum of Understanding with the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) to clarify existing arrangements and provide comfort for NSW RFS volunteers who have suffered long-term injuries in the line of duty.

I would like to commend both the RFSA and the NSW RFS on this initiative to reinforce the commitment to provide ongoing support and assistance to injured volunteers.

The Memorandum of Understanding, a copy of which is included in this edition of the Bushfire Bulletin, outlines the cooperative and comprehensive approach that is afforded to volunteers in relation to managing Workers Compensation issues.

The Government recognises the critical work that RFS volunteers undertake in our communities. This Memorandum of Understanding underlines the Government's commitment to ensuring appropriate protections are in place for RFS volunteers in undertaking their work, no matter what their roles or responsibilities.

Once again, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Members for their hard work throughout the year and in particular, wish you all the best for the current bush fire season.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steve Whan'.

Steve Whan MP  
**Minister for Primary Industries**  
**Minister for Emergency Services**  
**Minister for Rural Affairs**

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Parliament House  
Room 808, Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000  
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**RFSA**  
Rural Fire Service Association

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Between the New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS) and the New South Wales Rural Fire Service Association (RFSA) concerning Workers Compensation for NSW Rural Fire Service Volunteers

### PURPOSE

To ensure that a co-operative approach is taken to the administration of Workers Compensation issues as they affect New South Wales Rural Fire Service Volunteers in a manner that recognises their commitment and dedication, and that of their families, in providing protection to the community.

### PRINCIPLES

1. The NSWRFS recognises that WorkCover NSW (the fund manager) is responsible for the administration of the Workers Compensation (Bush Fire, Emergency and Rescue Services) Act, 1987- (the Act).
2. Both the Fund Manager and the NSWRFS are committed to ensuring that claims for Workers Compensation are processed effectively and expeditiously on behalf of New South Wales Rural Fire Service Volunteers.
3. The NSWRFS and the RFSA acknowledge that from time to time in the administration of Workers Compensation for New South Wales Rural Fire Service Volunteers 'special circumstances' may arise that warrant further consideration beyond the scope of the Act.
4. In such cases the NSWRFS will take all necessary steps to ensure that the 'special circumstances' of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service Volunteer are resolved satisfactorily.
5. The NSWRFS also undertakes to ensure that appropriate treatment, care and financial assistance are afforded to New South Wales Rural Fire Service Volunteers and their families whilst the volunteer is determined as medically unfit.
6. The process by how these matters will be actioned will be as follows:
  - The matter will be brought to the attention of the Director Membership and Strategic Services, who will on behalf of the Commissioner, have the 'special circumstances' investigated.
  - The Director Membership and Strategic Services and appropriate staff will liaise with the Fund Manager with a view to resolving any issues under the provisions of the Act.
  - Where 'special circumstances' exist and are not provided for adequately under the Act, the Director will make appropriate recommendations to the Commissioner.
  - The Director Membership and Strategic Services will consult with the Rural Fire Service Association Workers Compensation Working Group (RFSAWCWG) on issues that require particular attention.
  - The health, safety and welfare of the injured volunteer and family will be the paramount consideration in the proper resolution of any matter.
7. In the consideration of these Principles both the NSWRFS and the RFSA acknowledge the ongoing need for dialogue and consultation in the administration of Workers Compensation issues affecting NSW Rural Fire Service Volunteers and their families.
8. The RFSAWCWG will continue to examine and resolve administrative and policy issues as well as advocating on specific matter/s that affect volunteers for example the NSWRFS will continue to consider reasonable and legitimate claims for loss or damage to personal property as may be claimed by NSWRFS volunteers.
9. The NSWRFS will continue to work closely with the Fund Manager conducting regular claims review meetings and ensuring the administration of claims are given the highest priority.
10. The Commissioner NSW Rural Fire Service and the President Rural Fire Service Association will meet, on a needs basis, to discuss issues regarding Workers Compensation matters and NSW Rural Fire Service Volunteers.

Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM  
Commissioner NSWRFS

Brian McKinlay, AFSM  
President RFSA

Date: 19/06/2010

# in**focus**:volunteers



Nathan and Jodie Grundy of the Bargo Brigade freshly qualified in CABA.

## Bargo goes CABA

Bargo Brigade has recently achieved a milestone by becoming the first brigade in the Wollondilly Shire to be qualified in Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus (CABA).

In August 2010, nine out of 25 active members of the brigade became certified in using CABA and four members became qualified in Breathing Apparatus Control Operator.

Currently the brigade attends an average of 120 emergency incidents a year, with half the calls being structure fires, motor vehicle accidents and vehicle fires.



*"This is a picture of members of the Stoney Creek Brigade performing Tai Chi exercises in the tranquil morning light as we calmly awaited the (slightly delayed) first activity of the day at the 2010 Region South Exercise in Gundagai.*

*Well, Master Craig Macleod from Stoney Creek Brigade, said they were Tai Chi moves... we weren't so sure because we were all falling about laughing. I think this position was called the 'BF discovers hot embers underfoot' which was followed by 'Crouching Crew Leader, Hidden Group Officer!'*

*David Hanzl,  
Stoney Creek Brigade*

Central Tilba Brigade life members Captain Bruce Allen (left), Richard Bate and Tralee Snape turn the sod at the site for their new brigade station. Photo courtesy of *The Narooma News*, Stan Gorton  
Inset photo by Russell Clarke, Eurobodalla Operations Officer



## Central Tilba turns the sod



Central Tilba Brigade station could be the most unique brigade station in NSW if not in Australia.

Its site is in the middle of a National Trust Village that has not changed since the late 1800s. Our present brigade station is on a hill. To get the truck into the bay we have to reverse some 100 metres up a hill and on a 12 percent slope!

The first bay was built in 1970 by the local council and in those days it housed an old International truck. That truck and the brigade station served the town well but as the district grew so did the need for another bay. In the early 1980s the local people got together and built another

bay, an amenities block and a meeting room. At that time we received an old Dodge truck.

It was in the 1990s that we started to push for a new site for the shed. By then Tilba Brigade looked after five small villages including a National Trust Village of Central Tilba, and an area of 370 square kilometres.

When the holiday season came around and the town of Central Tilba was filled with visitors, it was a big problem to get out of the shed and out of the town to answer a call. During the peak season, it is not uncommon to take upwards of 25 minutes to get out of the town and manoeuvre our trucks out the narrow main street.

Members of the brigade are now thrilled to have a new site just outside the township of Tilba for their new brigade station. It is situated at the Central Tilba / Princes Highway intersection and will make access for the trucks much easier.

Construction has commenced on the new NSW RFS Standard Design Brigade Station which has a two-bay shed, meeting room and kitchen facilities. Modifications to the standard design have been made to meet Tilba's heritage listing, including the addition of a high-pitched roof.

*Tralee Snape, Tilba Brigade*



# TENTH VOLUNTEER MEMORIAL SERVICE

Photos by Hired Gun, Adam Hollingworth

2010 marked the 10th Annual Memorial Service for the Emergency Service Volunteers of NSW which was held at Mrs Macquarie's Point in Sydney.





Governor Marie Bashir was joined by the Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan, in laying a wreath



Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons laid flowers on behalf of the NSW RFS and in honour of those RFS volunteers who have died in the course of their duty

The Service was held on Sunday 10 October at 10am. A large number of family and friends attended to pay their respects to those listed on the Memorial.

As with the inaugural Service, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CV, Governor of NSW addressed those present.

Tragically, one name was added to the Memorial this year. Mr Ian Bassam died during the response operation following the 2010 Father's Day wind storms on the South Coast.

2010 also marked the 30th Anniversary of the tragic Waterfall fire of November 1980 in which five Rural Fire Service members lost their lives. There was a large turnout of members from the Brigade with a number of them laying a wreath on the Memorial alongside the Governor, Minister and Heads of Service to pay tribute to their fallen comrades.



NSW RFS members raising and saluting the flag in honour of those who have fallen

# A TEAM OF CHAMPS!

Photos by Supt Allyn Purkiss, Tamworth Manager

A crew from the Moonbi/Kootingal Brigade are making a name for themselves among the NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB).

The four man crew from the Tamworth Zone have been competing in the NSWFB Zone championships every year since September 2005. They are John Clason, Allen Madden, Kendell Thompson and Phill Moore.

After a year of very good results in the Zone Championships the Moonbi/Kootingal crew came in third overall NSWFB State Championships with only 95 points separating First and Third. NSWFB members said it was the closest result in many years.

“Overall it is an outstanding effort by the Kooti boys,” said Superintendent Purkiss, “They have done the RFS proud. You couldn’t buy the good PR they have generated. The NSWFB/RFS relations are exemplary thanks to them.”

“At all these events the boys are treated as equals by the NSWFB teams and they all get along very well. I have attended a few of these events and the team are well known and respected within NSWFB circles. I think even the NSWFB Commissioner Greg Mullins could be a fan of them as well.”

In 2008 the team competed and achieved a respectful 12th overall. In October 2009 they represented the NSW RFS in New Zealand at the Australasian FireFighter Championships where they came in 18th overall. The result is not bad when you take into account that they were competing against the best firefighters of the Australasian region.

Throughout 2010 the boys from Moonbi/Kootingal did the NSW RFS proud. In May at the NSWFB Zone Championships in Telarah they came in second, then in July in Port Macquarie they won the competition by a huge margin of 519 points. In September 2010 in Berry, they came in second after having a bad day on the track.

Tamworth Manager, Superintendent Allyn Purkiss, is a keen supporter of the Moonbi/Kootingal crew.

“They only train once a week for about an hour and a half if they can, but the guys are very



competitive,” he said, “Some of the events run during the champs include BA and Rescue events, which, given they don’t have the right gear, are very difficult to practice for. Yet they continue to do well at all events.”

“I think it’s their attitude, skills and excellent teamwork that makes them so good.”

The Tamworth District RFS provides the crew with vehicle to travel to the NSWFB events but otherwise they fund themselves, camping in brigade stations to help keep their costs down.

“The crew usually ask if they can get a bit of floor space at the local brigade station or Fire Control Centre to throw down a swag,” Superintendent Purkiss said.

With the good results behind them, the Moonbi/Kootingal crew set off for the grand final – the NSWFB State Championships in October 2010 at Banora Point, Tweed Heads. The boys broke the State record in the Urban Pump and BA Section which was a surprise - given they don’t even have urban pumper or BA in their local brigade. The Hose and Hydrant Two Man event again saw them breaking the State record. In the Hose Hydrant Four Man they again broke the State record



TOP: Moonbi/Kootingal Team successfully representing the RFS at the FRNSW State Championships. They came in first and broke the State Record for the Hose and Hydrant Four Man Event.

CENTRE: FRNSW Commissioner Greg Mullins with the Moonbi/Kootingal team at the prize giving for the Hose Hydrant and Breaching event where the NSW RFS crew came in third. (L-R) Allen Madden, Kendell Thompson, Commissioner Greg Mullins, John Clason and Phill Moore.

BELOW: The Kootingal crew’s yellows stand out at the all-blue FRNSW events.

# CADETS AROUND THE STATE



More than 3,000 young people have graduated from the NSW RFS Cadet School Program in the past five years. Here are some of our latest recruits.

Twenty four enthusiastic students from Gundagai High School took the 10 Week Cadet Program in June 2010 under the guidance of Tumbalong Captain and Cadet Coordinator, Brian Lewin with the assistance of local volunteers Peter Clout and Dale Chadwick. Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons attended their graduation in September 2010 (ABOVE). After the graduation the Commissioner wrote to the Riverina Highlands Zone Gundagai Cadet Coordinator Peter Jones:

*It is a genuine privilege to attend and see the results of the passion and commitment that you and the team have invested in making a real difference in the development and growth of our youth.*

*You know, no matter the school, and it was certainly repeated again on Wednesday with Gundagai, the positive energy and pride of the cadets, teachers, mums and dads, community leaders, etc. (not to mention the RFS staff and volunteers involved) says it all.*

*The program is really making a difference and a big thanks to you and the team for what you've done, and I've no doubt will continue doing, with the kids.*

Regards,  
Shane

Photo courtesy of The Daily Advertiser (Wagga Wagga)

Director Membership and Strategic Services, Bronwyn Jones, travelled to Singleton in June 2010 to present the Certificate of Attendance to cadets from the Singleton High School (ABOVE LEFT). Photo by Steve Brown

Cadets from Singleton High School had the opportunity to use fire extinguishers and portable pumps at a training session on house fire and village firefighting in September 2010 (LEFT). Photo by Steve Brown



# GETTING ON LIKE A HOUSE ON FIRE



By Stephanie Nadalini, Gulgong DC Rural Fire Brigade  
Photos by Phil Carrick, Communities NSW and Todd Burns, NSW State Emergency Service

“You cannot put a price on volunteers. Not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.”

These words by author Sherry Anderson and quoted by the Managing Director of the Centre for Skills Development, Dominic Thurbon, as he addressed the young volunteers gathered in the Crystal Palace Luna Park, rang true with all in attendance.

It was the morning of Saturday 28 August 2010 and a crowd of young volunteers had descended upon Luna Park for the Young People in Emergency Services Forum. Some of us were fresh faced and wide awake after a

good night’s sleep, others were sleep-deprived, still waking up after their early morning flights or drives.

Yet we all had one thing in common. Whether it was the yellow of the NSW Rural Fire Service, the orange of the State Emergency Service, or the red and yellow of Surf Life Saving NSW, we held our heads high and wore our uniforms with pride. Also joining the group of youthful volunteers were Marine Rescue NSW, St John Ambulance Australia, the Volunteer Rescue Association and the Australian Red Cross.

The weekend kicked off with a demonstration by Marine Rescue NSW, giving those of us who were unsure about who Marine Rescue were and what they did, a very clear idea. This was the first of many such opportunities for the volunteers to gain

valuable insight into the roles and workings of other emergency services.

First to address us that morning was the Minister for Youth and Volunteering, Peter Primrose, who let us know how much he respected us for what we were doing, and appreciated us being there. Hearing such words from someone in his position filled many of us with pride.

Our second speaker, Dominic Thurbon, Co-Founder and Managing Director of the Centre for Skills Development, was for me, our most inspirational speaker. He spoke to us about how small ideas can become a much bigger concern and that most innovative solutions have come from everyday people. Not only did he fuel our imagination with his words, he motivated us with real-life examples. With the challenge laid before

us, and the seed of inspiration planted, we moved into our first groups. Here came our first chance to meet new people, and we took it eagerly. Introductions were made, and, united by the same cause and interest, we were soon getting on like a house on fire (excuse the pun).

The main ideas discussed were regarding young people in volunteering in our regions: what is good, what needs to be done and what solutions could be effective. It was surprising to find that the same issues were raised, not only throughout all emergency services, but across all of the State.

Our second groups consisted of people from within the same service getting together. We talked about ideas to attract and retain young RFS volunteers. There were certainly some wild ideas thrown around,



making laughter one of the most prominent sounds in the room. The wild ideas put aside, some exceptionally valuable suggestions were put forward. There was even a competitive edge, with each group trying to outdo the other.

Then came the time we looked forward to most eagerly, free time at Luna Park! By this time, most people had changed out of their uniforms, so we weren't such daunting figures as we descended upon the unsuspecting staff. Those who were still in uniform cut a striking figure as they spun around on the rides, carnival lights catching on reflectors and dazzling anyone around. What can I say? We just have that effect on people!

As much fun as we were having interacting and socialising, a close eye was kept on the time as we all wanted to be on time for the dinner when we could meet with the Commissioners, Chief Executive Officers and other delegates from our various emergency services agencies.

NSW RFS Assistant Commissioner Dominic Lane, was lucky enough (or perhaps unlucky enough) to be sat at my table. I wasn't sure about the

other delegates, but poor Dominic was fortunate if he was able to have two consecutive mouthfuls of his dinner, such were the number of questions. By the time the Assistant Commissioner was able to escape his questioners, everybody sitting at the table was satisfied that we had been able to address some of the most significant issues affecting our areas. We were pleased and appreciative of the time we were able to spend with our Assistant Commissioner and the interest he had taken in us.

After dinner, we relaxed to the music of Youthrock finalists, Brotherfunk, with some of us up on the stage dancing, while those sitting down laughed at the antics. As the music drew to a close, we left to spend more time among the novelties of Luna Park.

On Sunday, we listened attentively when Youth Programs Manager of Country Fire Authority Victoria, Sherri McKerley, took to the stage. She spoke to us about the research she had done in Victoria regarding the difference between generations and their way of thinking. The research echoed the points that we had brought up the day before. She then spoke to us about strategies that were in the

process of being implemented for young volunteers in the CFA. We were pleased to note that some of the strategies she suggested were ones that we had already put forward or had in mind. There were others, however, that lead us down a new way of thinking.

Separating into groups again we discussed ideas that we could use to promote and sell our organisations to youth in general. Some of the ideas proposed were wilder than those from the day before. There were some that had the potential to become great, such as volunteers day at schools, volunteer camps and marketing slogans to attract young volunteers to our services.

Our last task finished, the weekend was winding down, and the group took on a melancholy mood. NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons took to the stage as the last guest to address us. He spoke of how proud he was to see us all there, and recounted what the NSW RFS was like when he first became a volunteer, and how much it had evolved. This had us thinking of how it will evolve from where we are now, and if our weekend would play a major role in the future direction of our services. As his speech concluded, the

place came alive with cheers and applause, as much for the Commissioner as for everybody involved in the weekend.

While we were having lunch that Sunday afternoon, I was struck by the physical change that had taken place in one day. While we had started off timid and reluctant to approach each other, we now stood and mixed as one undivided group, swapping phone numbers and Facebook information, eager to keep in contact with each other and build on the work we had started.

I personally gained a great network of new friends and contacts, the ideas continuing to run between us all the way to the airport and they are continuing even now. I have heard nothing but praise for the weekend, and I think that everybody involved can be proud of what we achieved together. Thank you everybody for making it such a fantastic weekend.

LEFT: The weekend kicked off with a demonstration by the Marine Rescue NSW

ABOVE: Young NSW RFS members came from across the State to attend the Young People in Emergency Services Forum at Luna Park

# THEY DESERVE A SPECIAL MENTION...



By Alan Lundie, Deputy Group Captain,  
Copacabana Rural Fire Brigade

They say behind every successful man there is a good woman...well lucky for the Copacabana Brigade, we have more than 20 amazing ladies who work tirelessly raising money for our brigade ensuring we are one of the most successful in our district.

After eleven years of service, the Crafty Ladies have raised almost \$30,000 for our brigade. A group of women from the Broadwater Retirement Village, these ladies make and sell their own knitting, crocheting, handmade greeting cards, jams, handmade jewellery and books - all to raise funds for the Copacabana Brigade! All costs come out of their own pockets. These women are truly amazing and our brigade has built up a long and lasting bond with them.

I have been sworn to secrecy regarding the individual ages of these young ladies but I can tell you their ages begin around 75 years through to a very young 97 years!

The Crafty Ladies get a little of their own back when the brigade takes them out on bus trips or holds a regular barbeque where it is incumbent upon the brigade members to wait on the ladies for a few hours.

The money raised by the Crafty Ladies has been used to fit out the Copacabana Category 9 tanker and more recently to enhance our brand new brigade station.

Firefighters receive some recognition through service medals or write ups in local papers, but how do you recognise volunteers like these ladies who work behind the scenes with no acknowledgement or recognition?

We wanted to take this opportunity to make a special mention of the Copacabana Crafty Ladies. All the ladies deserve a special mention, however, a few in particular have been instrumental in keeping the Crafty Ladies going: Enid Berry, Maisie Bissett and Willma Cannon. Thank you so much!

All these wonderful women deserve this recognition along with the staff at Broadwater Retirement Village who assist our Crafty Ladies. It is people like the Crafty Ladies who make being a volunteer easy and worthwhile.

Thank you from Copacabana and its community.



## The Copacabana Crafty Ladies Roll of Honour...

Wilma Cannon  
Maisie Bissett  
Enid Berry  
Joan Mitchell  
Irene Hewitt-Button  
Lorna Aldridge  
Audrey Young  
Shelia Hughes  
Lorraine Prothero  
Jean Robinson  
Shirley Burnett

Jill Smith  
Marjorie Thompson  
Dorothy Burgess  
Audrey Houston  
Dorothy Gallard  
Jill Manzie  
Betty Sullivan  
Patricia Leonard  
Rita Purves  
Dorothy Shiels  
Faith Madden



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# BRIGADE IN PROFILE

## Name of Brigade:

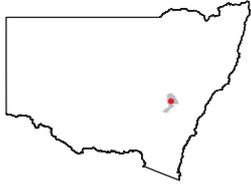
Eglinton Rural Fire Brigade

Year brigade formed: 1939

Current Captain: Garry Bennett

Current President: Maurice McMillen

District: Bathurst Regional District/  
Chifley Zone/Region East



## Can you give us a brief history of the brigade?

In October 1939 a group of like-minded farmers joined together to form the Eglinton Volunteer Rural Fire Brigade. The early records show that members paid anywhere from two to 10 shillings to be a member.

Tanker trailers and private vehicles were used to fight fires but after a large fire in the area in 1976, there was a push to purchase a tanker for the brigade.

The first tanker was a second-hand C1600 rear wheel drive, single axle International 'straight six' petrol table top. When we got the International it was still painted army green, had no tank, no pump and no equipment. A small band of dedicated members set about transforming the truck into a suitable firefighting appliance. Brigade members became very good at acquiring parts to fit out the unit.

Over the years many raffles and fundraisers were held in the local community to purchase trucks and upgrade them into efficient firefighting units, as well as to build a station in which to house them.

## What are some unique parts of your brigade's history?

Since the early days Eglinton Brigade has been built on the strength of its members and local community. In 1999 the brigade had out-grown its station and was in need of a property in which to build a new one. Hearing that the brigade was seeking to purchase a suitable area, local land owner Doug Callagan generously donated a portion of his land to the brigade for its new station.

Built entirely by volunteer labour, the current four-bay fire station was planned and managed by brigade members while still holding down their own jobs and



running their own businesses. All construction work was done by professional tradesmen, with bricklayers, electricians and carpenters donating their time and local businesses donating or supplying material at reduced rates.

The brigade recently celebrated the 10th birthday of its new station. All the tradesmen and businesses were invited back to the station for a party to thank them for a job well done.

## What type of landscape and environment do you cover?

Our brigade covers approximately 500sq km which includes over 1,000 dwellings, a number of schools and an airfield. The Bathurst district covers many different terrains from open grassland, to dry sclerophyll forests and heavily timbered areas.

## What types of incidents does your brigade attend?

We are a Village 2 brigade and are also the only CABA qualified brigade in the Zone. As well as attending bush fires, approximately half of our calls are to incidents such as structure fires, storm damage, search and rescue, flood damage and aviation requirements.

The brigade responds to over 100 incidents each year and as most members live in Eglinton the average turnout time is 4-7 minutes day and night.

## What vehicles do you have?

The brigade currently has a Category 1 Heavy Tanker, a Category 7 Tanker, a Category 10 Pumper and the District Bulk Water Carrier.

We also have a vintage 1930s Dennis 250-400 (above). This ex-NSW Fire Brigade tanker is housed in our station and is used during some community events.

## What type of training do you undertake?

Most members have completed at least the Village Firefighter training course and are encouraged to undertake further training.

First Aid qualifications are also highly regarded due to the number of CABA operators and the nature of our rural area we attend to. More than 95 percent of our members have First Aid qualifications.

## What are some unique skills and features of your brigade?

Our members range in age from 16 to 70 years. Members come from all walks of life and most



trades are represented within our brigade which gives us a very versatile and multi-skilled member base. While most of our members are from the local area, we have a number with dual membership and the number of female members is increasing.

**What community events do your brigade participant in?**

Eglinton Brigade actively participates in many local community events such as school gymkhanas, The Edgell Bathurst Jog as well as helping Santa make his rounds in the local area.

During holidays and long weekends our brigade, with the help of the local SES, staffs a Driver Reviver point in Bathurst for motorists passing through.

Each October the brigade provides fire protection on behalf

of Bathurst Regional Council at the V8 Supercar Races on Mount Panorama.

**Any final thoughts or comments you would like to add?**

Eglinton Brigade would again like to thank the local community for its support over the last 70 years, especially with the building of our new station.

*Written by Nadine Morton,  
Eglinton Brigade*

TOP LEFT: The vintage 1930s Dennis 250-400 - sadly out of service but used during community events

TOP RIGHT: Eglinton Brigade actively participates in many local community events

ABOVE: Eglinton Brigade Station and tankers - Category 1 Heavy Tanker, a Category 7 Tanker, a Category 10 Pumper and the District Bulk Water Carrier

Photos by Greg Ingersole, Senior Deputy Captain, Eglinton Brigade

# OFFICER IN PROFILE

**Name:** Maurice McMillen  
**Rank:** Group Officer  
**District:** Bathurst Regional District  
**Years in service:** 36

## How old were you when you first joined your local brigade and what made you decide to join?

I was about 24 years old when I joined Eglinton Brigade. I already knew a few members in the brigade and it seemed to be the logical organisation for me to join. My wife and I had recently moved to Eglinton. Barbara has now been the treasurer at Eglinton Brigade for the last 20 years and both our children Brett and Kristy are also trained active members of brigades.

## How long have you been a member of the Service and what keeps you as a member?

I've now been a member of the Service for 36 years. There are many reasons why I stay involved...brigade friendships, colleagues in the Service and the local community spirit and support. It is good to know that you've got mates looking out for you in difficult times both on the fireground and in your personal life.

## What do you do when you're not wearing an orange helmet?

My wife and I have run our own business in Bathurst for the last 18 years and between that, the NSW RFS, and family, there isn't a lot of spare time, especially since becoming a Group Officer. I do like to be involved in many of the community events that Eglinton Brigade attend. For me, the NSW RFS is not just about putting fires out and going to meetings.

## What have you gained personally from your time as a volunteer?

The satisfaction of getting a job done and the great feeling you get when you've stopped a fire or saved someone's house, beating the 'Red Steer'! I've also made some really great friends through the Service and travelled many miles around the State during campaign fires.

## What are some of the most significant changes that you have witnessed during your time with the Service?

The level of professionalism and the quality and quantity of equipment has markedly improved over recent years. I don't think that members have changed much over the years though. People



who stay in the NSW RFS for any length of time are of a similar ilk. There is the common thread of community spirit.

## What has been the most frightening moment you have experienced?

Watching a fire approach a street of houses that we were committed to protecting in the Blue Mountains. The photos taken that day tell it all.

## What are some of the other big fires and memorable incidents that you have been too?

Billy's Fire and the summer of 2007 in the Blue Mountains and Coonabarabran are all

memorable due to their size, intensity, the number of people tasked and the huge areas that were involved. All that, however, seemed dwarfed by the December 2009 fires in the Chifley Zone. The intensity of those six or seven days was quite memorable and it was all of it occurring in my *own back yard*.

The 1999 storms in Sydney are also still vivid in my mind. It was demanding work and the amount of debris the storm had caused was staggering.

## What is your most satisfying moment?

Two events stand out. Being awarded the National Medal for

Service and the construction of the Eglinton Brigade Station some 10 years ago. I was Captain of the brigade at the time. The brick station was built entirely by volunteer members of the brigade, the village community and local 'tradies', with support by the local council and NSW RFS. It was a huge effort and it stands today as a testament to a group of organised, like-minded people working to a common goal.

## What advice can you give to other volunteers?

Do it for the right reason.

*By Nadine Morton  
Eglinton Brigade*

910  
41  
The Frogmore Bush Fire Brigade was first formed at  
a meeting convened for that purpose on  
December 10<sup>th</sup> 1910. When Mr J Russell was elected  
President, W J Russell secretary, & J G Chudleigh Treas.

# 100 NOT OUT

Mangain

Thurgoona

Two NSW Rural Fire Brigades, Mangain, Thurgoona, celebrated their centenary in 2010 and they are still going strong.

The stories of these brigades remind us that members may come and go, numbers swell and recede, boundaries change or merge, but the spirit of service binds generations and communities together.

## TELL YOUR BRIGADE'S STORY

There are as many stories in the NSW RFS as there are members. Each one teaches us something new about resilience and courage and about the volunteer ethos of helping others. Many of them are told over a beer at the station barbeque or at an important event like a station opening or medal ceremony.

The Bush Fire Bulletin is collecting and reproducing these unique and moving stories so that the entire organisation benefits, and the wider community understands what volunteering really means.

If you'd like to be part of telling the story of volunteering and the NSW Rural Fire Service, send in your story and historical photos to [bushfirebulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:bushfirebulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au) along with a contact number and name.

Don't let our history be lost.



## Mangain Brigade

With the rigour of a good archivist, Brigade Secretary Kay Turner has uncovered the early history of her brigade.

She writes: "In early December 1905, the local Mangain Farmers and Settlers Association held a meeting where some serious discussion was voiced with regard to forming a bush fire brigade. A public meeting was held later in the month, but I have been unable to find what happened at that meeting. A December 1909 newspaper helped locate the formation of the Mangain Brigade."

The newspaper reported a meeting convened by Norman Devlin part owner of Ganmain

station. At the meeting a decision was made to form a brigade. Devlin himself became the first president. Office bearers included a Senior and Junior Vice President, Secretary/Treasurer, Captain and Lieutenants.

On 7 July 2010, the Mangain Rural Fire Brigade held centenary celebrations and the extended family of that first Brigade Captain, Mr John Baker, were able to attend, along with 80 others. Kay Turner was delighted to hear more about the local history with the Baker's family.

Kay discovered that in its first fire season the Brigade Secretary/Treasurer Thomas Palmer had responsibility for obtaining four

100 gallon tanks with Number 3 pumps and hose. Brigade minutes record, however, that members were to provide their own beaters.

Records of a further meeting of August 1910 attest to annual subscriptions at 3/6d (three shillings, six pence) per 100 acres with a minimum of 10/- (10 Shillings).

In 1996 Mangain amalgamated with the neighboring Ganmurra Brigade. Gunmurra boasts a proud history itself having formed in 1932. Currently Mangain Brigade has two appliances and 27 listed members. Well done Mangain!

ABOVE: (L-R) President Wes Kember, Anthony Thompson (60 years in the NSW RFS), Current Maingain Captain Les Graham and the brigade's newest recruit, Katharine Graham. Photo courtesy of *Wagga Daily Advertiser*



TOP: More than 150 members of the community came together in the new Thurgoona Brigade station to celebrate 100 years of service to the local community, proving the local spirit of volunteerism is alive and well in Thurgoona. Photograph courtesy of [www.uberlick.com.au](http://www.uberlick.com.au) photographer Carla Libury

Long Service and Life Memberships were awarded at the Centenary event held on 18 September 2010. BACK ROW: (L-R) Sean McArdle, Eric Becquet, Col Brian, John McGrath, Bill Lethbridge, John Townsend, Kevin Thorman, Ron Strong, John Pratt, Mike Lott, Shannon Britton, Darren Gugger (Captain) Michael Webb, Geoff Johnston, George Alexander. FRONT ROW: (L-R) Colleen Tankard, Marg Wehner, Marie Hoffmann, Shane Fitzsimmons. Photograph courtesy of [www.uberlick.com.au](http://www.uberlick.com.au) photographer Carla Libury

## Thurgoona Brigade

Local records show that the Thurgoona Brigade, north of Albury, was formed in 1909. So when extensive renovations to the station were completed recently, 150 members of Thurgoona community and brigade members decided to celebrate.

On 18 September, 2010, the NSW RFS Commissioner attended the Brigade's Centenary. Apart from the opening of the new renovation, 18 Long Service Medals were presented - including one for Marie Hoffman.

Marie epitomises the generosity and commitment of this remarkable brigade. She joined the NSW RFS along with her husband, Perc, in 1942. The Commissioner presented her with a Long service Medal and Life Membership in gratitude for her 68 years of service which, by the way, she is continuing to offer.

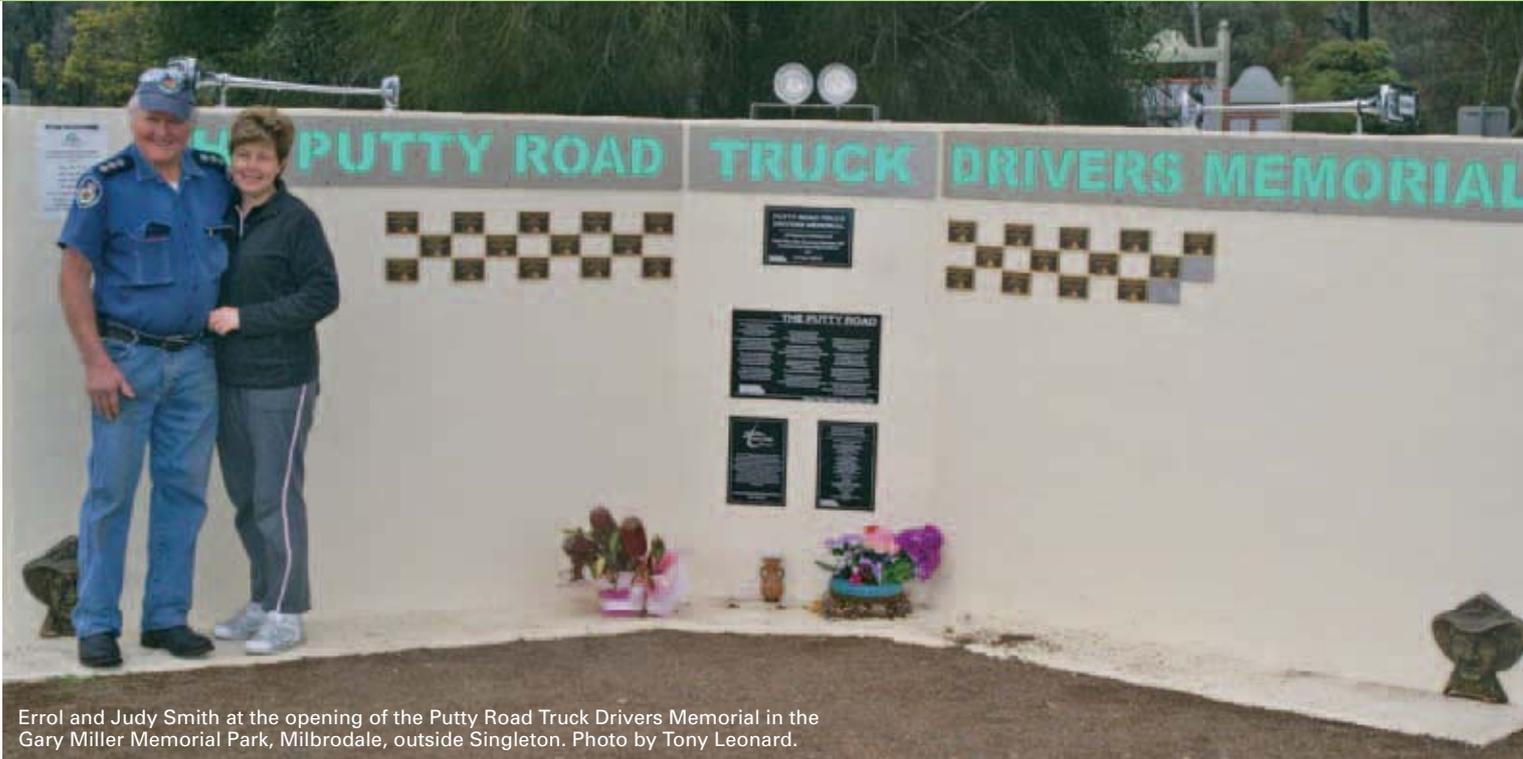
While the brigade has a long and proud history with members like Marie, it is also has a great future. Marie's most recent efforts have been as part of the team that raised \$120,000 for the additional bays, storage and renovation of the parking area for the Thurgoona Brigade.

The new station will house two new appliances which were also handed over at the Centenary event. There are currently 102 members of the brigade.

The brigade currently provides protection for 400 square kilometres of rural pastoral areas, as well as the urban interface with the town of Albury. Each year the brigade attends approximately 30 incidents, mainly grass fires. They also attend motor vehicle accidents and provide support to NSWFB and CFA as required.

# NEVER FORGET...

## A SENTIMENTAL STORY



Errol and Judy Smith at the opening of the Putty Road Truck Drivers Memorial in the Gary Miller Memorial Park, Milbrodale, outside Singleton. Photo by Tony Leonard.

By Errol Smith, Group Captain, Group South, Hunter Valley Team

The work of NSW RFS volunteers can be thankless, but every now and then, a person learns just what kind of difference volunteers make in the lives of others. Here Errol Smith from the Hunter Valley Team tells a sentimental story...

On 15 May 2010 my wife Judy and I attended the opening of the Putty Road Truck Drivers Memorial in the Milbrodale, outside Singleton.

It was a very well organised and moving experience. The wall commemorates the truck drivers who have lost their lives on the Putty Road – sadly there are twenty three plaques on the wall.

After the opening we attended the Singleton Golf Club for dinner. Judy and I arrived around 1830hrs, purchased a drink and sat at the end of one of the tables waiting for more to arrive. About five minutes later a lady from another group of people walked over and asked us to join them at their table as we looked a little lonely sitting by ourselves. We moved

down and joined the group of five. Introductions were made and they asked who it was that we had lost on the Putty Road.

I explained that we had not lost anyone and that as a NSW RFS volunteer and member of the Bulga Brigade, I had attended many fatal accidents on the Putty Road to help rescue and clean up. The family told us that they had lost their son on the 22 October 1987. Lois told us that her son was driving down a steep hill on the Putty Road when his load shifted and the trailer pulled the prime mover over and his rig skidded upside down along the road and down an embankment.

The story triggered some memories for me, so I asked if he was driving a White Road Boss truck. Lois replied: Yes, he was. I asked if he was carting glass bottles which were stacked two pallets high. Lois replied: Yes.

I told Lois that I attended this accident on that fatal night. I was Captain of the Bulga Brigade at the time.

Lois grabbed my right hand - I thought she was going to break it. She demanded to be told everything I could remember.

Her son's truck had skidded upside down along the roadway and had been ripped apart by the impact. It had not been a pretty sight and I felt there are some things best left unsaid. But Lois insisted that she wanted to hear everything that could I remember because she needed closure.

There had been a passenger in the truck, who had survived the crash with minimal injuries. Lois's son had pushed the passenger to the floor and told him to stay down - it had saved the boy's life. The family had been told that part of the story and they considered their son a hero. So do I. The passenger, who survived the accident, keeps in regular contact with the family.

The son of the driver, who was 11 months old when his father died on the Putty Road, was there and so too was the driver's father. The family had come from Queensland for the opening of the Memorial and had never driven the Putty Road and were not sure where the accident had occurred.

After telling all that could I remember, my wife Judy and I invited the family to our home at Milbrodale on Sunday morning so I could take them for a drive down the Putty Road to High Wollemi where their son had lost his life.

The father travelled with me in my NSW RFS Group vehicle while the mother and son followed behind in their private car. We travelled the 66 kilometres south along Putty Road.

We turned around on the top of High Wollemi Hill and pulled up at the slight left hand turn where the trailer rolled. The parents walked the 200 metres to the bottom of the High Wollemi Hill while the son and I drove to the bottom to meet back up with them. We sat for a further 20 minutes talking, remembering and grieving. It was a very moving time. They thanked me for telling them the truth about their son's death and assured me that it was the closure they had been looking for over the past 23 years. Although this had awakened some memories I had put aside, I feel that I have done a great justice for this family and hope that they can now move on with their lives.

Judy and I have spoken of this weekend often and feel that it was fate that brought us together. We are proud to be able to help this lovely family find some closure in such a tragic event and that a mother can now go to sleep at night knowing that her son was a hero.

# COURAGE UNDER FIRE

By John Parnaby, Manager Region East

A project to take four children or grandchildren of fallen or seriously injured firefighters between the ages of 17 and 25 on the Kokoda Track is being planned for 2012. Courage under Fire is designed to give the families of fallen firefighters an experience they can reflect upon for life.

The initiative comes from NSW RFS members who have walked the Kokoda Track and would like to see young people also experience the Track.

## Why Kokoda Track?

Kokoda was arguably Australia's most significant campaign of the Second World War. More Australians died in the seven months of fighting the Japanese on the Track than in any other campaign. Outnumbered and outgunned by an estimated five to one, they fought to an eventual standstill on the ridges overlooking Port Moresby.

Many of those Australians, as young as 16 and old as 52, made the ultimate sacrifice and now lie buried at the Bomana War Cemetery outside Port Moresby.

The soldiers who fought in the Kokoda Campaign were volunteers. The 39th and 53rd Battalion were sent to Papua New Guinea to unload ships and develop a base around Port Moresby. Within four weeks they were fighting for their lives on the Kokoda Track in the defence of Australia.

I had the privilege of trekking Kokoda in 2008 with nine other NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers.

As a former soldier, I had an interest in military history, but for me it was also about the challenge of completing one of the hardest treks in the world. Within hours of starting the trek, I soon realised that there was more to the Kokoda Track. I was embarrassed about my original motivation and by the time night fell on that first day I realised just how significant this place was.

To stand on the spot where Private Bruce Kingsbury performed an act of valour for which he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross - the first VC awarded on Australian Territory, an action that has been linked by some as the turning



Photo by Tony Longa, Corporate Communications

point in the defence of Australia, was humbling. To walk past the fighting pits where so many fought and died or to see the remnants of bullet casings, water bottles, tin helmets mortars and grenades, still lying where they fell nearly 70 years ago, is grounding, very grounding.

I can honestly say the 10 days on the Track has left an ever lasting impression on me.

## The format for Courage Under Fire

Courage Under Fire will take four children or grandchildren of fallen firefighters along the Kokoda Track in April 2012. The trek will be managed by Investa Treks, a recognised Kokoda Trek operator associated with the Salvation Army.

Sponsorship and fundraising will be sought in order to keep costs to each participant to a minimum. The RFS Brigade that their family member served will be asked to raise some funds to assist in the project.

Participants will be identified through a direct approach method and expression of interest, with consultation from Manager Counselling and Support Unit, Paul Scott and recently appointed RFS Chaplains, Ian and Kerry Spall.

Upon the return from the trek, participants will be asked to address forums to talk of their experience on the Track. Opportunities exist for other



Photo courtesy of John Parnaby



Photo by Tony Longa, Corporate Communications

interested NSW RFS members or other family members to take part in the trek as full paying participants. Any assistance would be greatly appreciated and

I can be contacted by:  
(02) 8741 5493 or email:  
[john.parnaby@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:john.parnaby@rfs.nsw.gov.au)

# PHOTO COMPETITION it's who we are



## What will I need when it comes time to enter?

Send your photos via email to [bushfire.bulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:bushfire.bulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au) or post to Bush Fire Bulletin, Locked Bag 17, Granville, NSW, 2142.

Please provide photos that are of high resolution e.g. A4 300dpi

You will need to provide written consent of those featured in the photograph, and/or written consent from parents or guardians for children under the age of 16 years.

Please provide written permission for the NSW RFS and its approved partners to reproduce your photos.

Please pay particular attention to the correct uniform (PPE) in the photos. Photos that feature persons, practises or equipment that would adversely represent the NSW RFS will not be considered.

Grab your good quality camera, and start taking photos that capture the cultural icons of our organisation. As part of the ongoing EnergyAustralia Partnership Agreement we will be running a photo competition in February 2011.

Icons evoke feelings of pride and support for our organisation and are things that are important to us, or loved by our members. These photos might be of faces, groups, activities, events, buildings or equipment that are readily identifiable as part of the NSW Rural Fire Service.

The winning photos will be used in marketing and education programs and will be profiled in the *Bush Fire Bulletin* and in the publications of EnergyAustralia.

**WINNER**  
\$1,000 photographic  
equipment gift voucher

**2nd Prize**  
\$500 photographic  
equipment gift voucher

**3rd Prize**  
\$300 photographic  
equipment gift voucher



Proudly supported by



Terms & Conditions • You must be a registered NSW RFS member to be eligible for the prize. • Entries not selected to win a prize may still be published in the *Bush Fire Bulletin* or EnergyAustralia internal or external publications. • Prize winners are at the discretion of the *Bush Fire Bulletin* editorial team and all decisions are final. No correspondence will be entered in to.

# Crew with the COMMISSIONER

Your photo or story could win your brigade a VIP crew member for a shift - **Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons.**

## HOW TO ENTER

Email your story or photograph to **Bushfire.Bulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au.**

Please send photos as separate jpg attachments, in as high a resolution as possible. Indicate in the subject line that you are entering for a chance to "Crew with the Commissioner". Then, be sure to read the next issues of the Bush Fire Bulletin to see if your brigade has won!

Send us a story and photographs about events in your brigade and you could Crew with the Commissioner. Whether you are a member of catering brigade, communications brigade or you are putting the wet stuff on the hot stuff, we want to hear from you. You could be the one giving the Commissioner the order to put in the line or have him rescue your hose bowl. Imagine having him using your call sign to provide a SitRep to FireCom ...or trading that sandwich for a lolly pack at lunch during an HR.

So whether it's a story you have written about a local volunteer who is making difference in their community, or an amazing photo, we would like to receive your individual brigade contributions.

And don't forget - win or lose - the NSW RFS will publish the very best stories and photos in a future issue of the magazine. This may be the only chance to win this prize, so ...what are you waiting for?

Throughout the year, NSW RFS members from across NSW send in amazing stories and photos to the *Bush Fire Bulletin* depicting the highs and lows of firefighting.



Terms & Conditions • You must be a registered NSW RFS member to be eligible for the prize. • Entries not selected to win a prize may still be published in the *Bush Fire Bulletin* or EnergyAustralia internal or external publications. • Prize winners are at the discretion of the *Bush Fire Bulletin* editorial team and all decisions are final. No correspondence will be entered in to.



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 Granville NSW 2142  
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ISSN: 1033-7598

Publisher NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE Produced Corporate Communications Editor Jacqueline Murphy

Graphic Design& Art/Production Coordinator Steve Byers - Carillon Graphics

Cover Photo Glendenning and Cessnock State Mitigation Support Services crews on the job. Photo by Kelly White, SMSS.