

NSW Rural Fire Service and Brigades Donations Fund

Report On the Use Of Donated Funds
February 2021

About The NSW RFS and Brigades Donations Fund

The NSW RFS and Brigade Donations Fund was established in 2012 to support volunteer brigades with the management of publicly donated funds.

The Fund is managed by a Trust, which distributes funds for a range of activities, including:

- To or for the brigades in order to enable them or assist them to meet the costs of purchasing and maintaining firefighting equipment and facilities, providing training and resources and/ or to otherwise meet the administrative expenses of the brigades which are associated with their volunteer-based fire and emergency service activities
- For authorised investments which are consistent with carrying out the purpose described in the bullet point above
- To meet the reasonable costs of the current and continuing operation and management of the Trust.

The Trust's webpage provides an update on allocations made for the donations received. Updates will be published at <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/about-us/nsw-rfs-and-brigades-donations-fund>

An update on Trust activities

Despite the recent challenges posed by COVID-19, the Trustees met 23 times during 2020, including face-to-face and online, to discuss the management and disbursement of funds to brigades.

Through the extraordinary support of the community, our brigades and volunteers have seen many benefits. These are some of the highlights:

- \$70 million to support priorities for NSW RFS volunteers - The Trust has allocated \$70 million to important initiatives like upgrades of equipment, personal protective equipment and fire trucks, and improving the way we respond to incidents in the community. Many of these programs would not be delivered without the support of public donations.
- \$20 million in grants to volunteer brigades – The NSW RFS and Brigades Donations Fund has established a grants scheme for brigades, allowing them to purchase additional equipment or make improvements to their stations.
- Providing up to \$18 million of funding, based on an allocation of \$400,000 per district, for major projects or purchase larger assets that have broad benefits to many volunteers.
- Volunteer support – We're working to establish an ongoing benevolent fund which can support the families of firefighters who lose their life while protecting others.

For local brigades, this support has delivered equipment and improvements to facilities, over and above what is provided through normal funding.

An online survey of volunteers was conducted by the NSW RFS during March/April 2020 that sought feedback on the use of public donations. This survey received over 1600 responses and the results of the survey have helped the Trustees, in consultation with the NSW RFS Executive team, to determine funding priorities. The results of this survey were made available to all volunteers in July 2020.

The Trustees are continuing to work with the Executive of the NSW RFS to develop programs and expenditure items that not only meet the purpose of the Trust, but also meet donor and volunteer expectations where possible.

\$20m Brigade Grant Scheme

On 27 February 2020 the Trustees announced that they had established a grant scheme whereby all NSW RFS brigades could apply for funding of up to \$10,000 each. Brigades have the flexibility, subject to Trust and NSW RFS requirements, to spend these funds as best suits their particular needs, with a focus on spending in the local community where possible.

To date, a total of over 1700 brigades have applied for this grant with a total of almost \$16m having already been paid with the grant evaluation and approval process continuing.

Common items funded include:

- building improvements and enhancements including concrete hard stands, bathroom, kitchen and training room upgrades
- portable pumps, chainsaws, blowers, battery operated incident scene lighting
- driving licence upgrades, first aid courses

Funds have been progressively assessed and distributed to brigades.



Myrtle Park Brigade responded to a fire at Deniliquin during October. The donated funds enabled the brigade to purchase a Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC) which saved time and effort when determining where attention was needed during the clean up process.

Feedback received from Myrtle Park Brigade “the TIC has made a positive impact on a fireground and enabled a team of volunteers to get a difficult job done, under arduous conditions and more efficiently”



Beelbangera Brigade is constructing a new training room and kitchenette which will greatly enhance facilities for volunteers.



Many brigades purchased items such as tools, blowers, battery operated incident lighting equipment, fireground radios, truck jump start unit, and kit bags all to assist volunteers better respond to / during incidents.

Helmets and Respiratory Protective Equipment

The Trust has committed funding to offer volunteer NSW RFS firefighters with a new world class, fit-for-purpose helmet. The NSW RFS has entered into a contract with Pacific Helmets to provide these helmets, and distribution is expected to commence in early 2021.

This is a significant commitment and meets the expectations of not only the volunteers but also many of the donors to the Trust.

The NSW RFS has sought research into the appropriate types of respiratory protective equipment for its volunteers and the diverse range of incidents that may require this type of equipment. This research and evaluation process is continuing.

The Trust has reconfirmed to the NSW RFS that funds are available to assist with the purchase of respiratory protection equipment for volunteers once suitable products have been identified. This is a key expectation of donors and volunteers alike.



With the use of donated funds, the NSW RFS is issuing new, fit-for-purpose helmets to its members.

Pictured is Chair of the Trust, Andrew Macdonald, and NSW RFS Commissioner Rob Rogers.

The rollout is expected to commence in early 2021.



Benevolent Fund

The NSW RFS has committed to establishing a benevolent fund to support the families of firefighters who are killed in the line of duty.

The Trust has agreed to provide funding to establish the fund.

Work has been undertaken to establish the governance and operating model for the fund, and criteria for funds to be established.

NSW RFS District Funding Opportunity

For NSW RFS administrative purposes, the state of NSW is currently divided in 45 Districts. Each district has a separate layer of management whose purpose is to service the needs of the volunteers amongst other things.

The Trustees have allocated a total of \$400,000 per District (\$18M in total) that is intended to be spent on updating volunteer training facilities and training equipment, updating catering facilities or for the purchase of specialised support vehicles as used by the volunteers. Where possible and appropriate these Districts can pool funds if this produces a better outcome for the volunteers.

As is expected of all NSW Government Agencies, detailed project costings, tenders and multiple quotes will be required. As a consequence, none of this funding allocation has been spent to date however the Trustees have set an expectation with the NSW RFS Executive that these funds will be spent by 30 June 2022.

Donations Review

During August and September 2020, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) conducted a review of the Trust and other charities which were the recipient of large public donations. This review included the Trust's financial management, governance, procedures and compliance with ACNC legislation. The ACNC report on the Trust has been released and is available at Bushfire Response 2019-20 - Reviews of three Australian Charities.

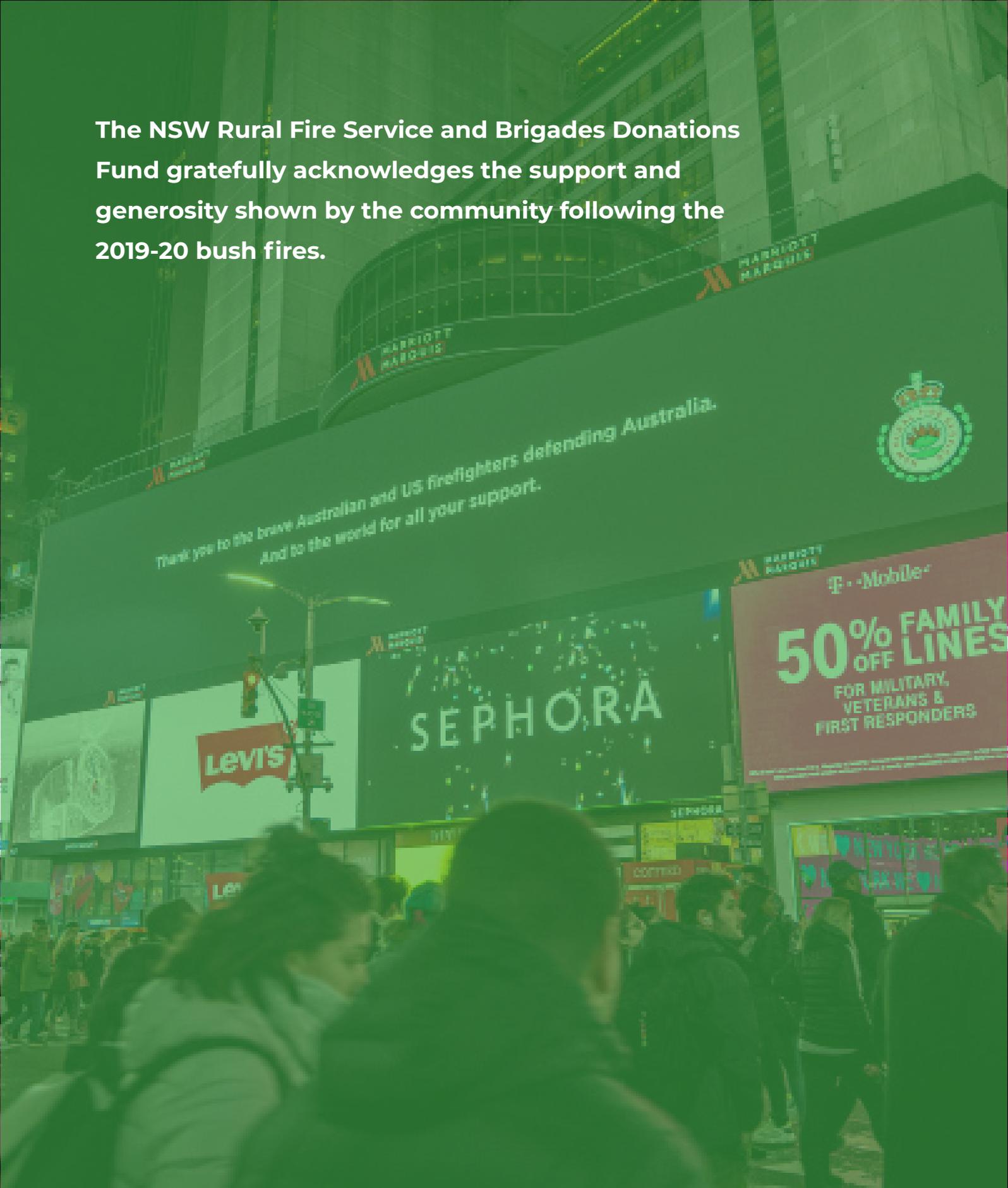
The report found that each charity was credible and professional, and were able to demonstrate that steps were being taken to manage funds in a responsible way, and disburse funds in a timely manner.

Strategic Audit Services (SAS) has been engaged to conduct the yearly review in accordance with ACNC legislation. In addition, SAS has also been engaged to conduct an internal review of member brigades to ensure compliance with NSW RFS service standards and Australian Taxation Office deductible gift recipient legislation. The Trust's financial statements and auditors report will be lodged with the ACNC in due course.

The Trustees are working closely with the NSW RFS Executive team to ensure that all donated funds are spent in accordance with the wishes and intent of the donors, volunteers and many other interested parties. In particular, the Trustees seek assurances from the NSW RFS Executive that donated funds are not replacing funding that is normally provided through other means, such as Government.

Andrew Macdonald, Chair

The NSW Rural Fire Service and Brigades Donations Fund gratefully acknowledges the support and generosity shown by the community following the 2019-20 bush fires.



NSW Rural Fire Service and Brigades Donations Trust

Email: committees@rfs.nsw.gov.au

Webpage: <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/about-us/nsw-rfs-and-brigades-donations-fund>

Photo: A thank you message displayed by the NSW RFS in Times Square, New York City. The billboard was donated by Silvercast Media and carried a message from the NSW RFS recognising the support from around the world.