



AN UPDATE ON DONATIONS

The 2019/20 fire season was unprecedented, but so was the response from the community and the outpouring of support for the men and women of the NSW RFS. In addition to donations made directly to individual brigades, more than \$100 million was donated to the NSW RFS and Brigades Donations Fund – an international show of support for the volunteers who gave up their time to help others.

The NSW RFS and Brigades Donations Fund (the Trust) was set up to support brigades with Deductible Gift Recipient requirements, and as a central fund to aid all brigades across the state.

As a result of the huge amount of donations over last season, a number of funding allocations have been made to support brigades directly and to fund major projects focused on improving NSW RFS equipment, technology and services.

The Trust has allocated \$90 million to initiatives which will benefit NSW brigades across the state, based on feedback from members.

VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK ON USE OF DONATED FUNDS

To help guide the Trust in how funds should be distributed, it sought the views of volunteers across the state through an online survey. More than 1,600 submissions were received, with the majority being from rural brigades.

Some of the key things that members told us were:

- That publicly donated funds can help deliver improved programs or services for volunteers and brigades;
- The views of NSW RFS members are important in assessing where funds are spent;
- It is important to spend donated funds and report on progress, so that the community sees their donations going to good use;
- Donated funds should not replace funding that is normally provided through other means, such as government funding.

The survey was used by the Trust to inform discussions about funding allocations for a range of major projects and initiatives.

\$20 MILLION FOR BRIGADES

Following the fire season, the Trust made a pool of up to \$20 million available for brigade grants. Each brigade can apply for a grant of up to \$10,000 for equipment, training and resources that help them deliver services in their local community.



Main (at left): Hazard reduction conducted by Northern Beaches brigades. Photo by James Morris. **Above:** Balmoral Village Brigade take a break from battling the Green Wattle Creek fire in January 2020. Photo by Sharon Quandt.

Nearly \$10 million has been spent already, with brigades applying for a range of items such as GRN and fireground radios, mobile phone signal boosters, electric hose reels, thermal imaging cameras and station enhancements and security systems. The Trust is encouraging brigades to buy locally to support local businesses.

Chair of the Trust, Group Captain Andrew Macdonald, noted the effort that has gone into administering the fund this year and particularly wanted to thank the NSW RFS staff involved for their hard work.

“At the height of the 2019/20 fire season, the NSW RFS administrative team were receiving hundreds of enquiries and donations per day that required actioning and response,” he said. “In addition, the establishment and ongoing administration and management of the brigade grant scheme has been an enormous undertaking that will continue into early 2021.

“Without the support of this team and the hard work behind the scenes, the brigade grant scheme would not be the great success that it is.”

\$70 MILLION FUND FOR MAJOR PROJECTS

The Trust has allocated an additional \$70 million of funds to support important initiatives that will help volunteer brigades respond to incidents safely and provide welfare and support to members.

The additional funds have been allocated for programs including modernising the way we respond fire trucks to incidents – from how volunteers can register their availability, to responding and getting back to their station.

The funds will also support new or improved Personal Protective Equipment like helmets and respiratory protection for volunteers – to ensure our members can work safely and get home to their families. There is also funding to support the health and wellbeing of our volunteers, and to establish an ongoing welfare program to ensure when the worst happens to our volunteers their families are supported into the future.

“Importantly, the donated funds do not replace normal sources of funding such as the government, but they do accelerate the delivery of major projects to support volunteers and communities which may otherwise never happen,” said Commissioner Rogers. “We’re also making sure, wherever possible, we’re spending funds in local communities to support the businesses and industries that employ and support our members.” ■