

# BUSH FIREbulletin

//// THE JOURNAL OF THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

# Time for Recovery

REFLECTIONS ON THE VICTORIAN DEPLOYMENT  
BUSH FIRE RESEARCH TASK FORCE  
HOW THE ROYAL COMMISSION WORKS

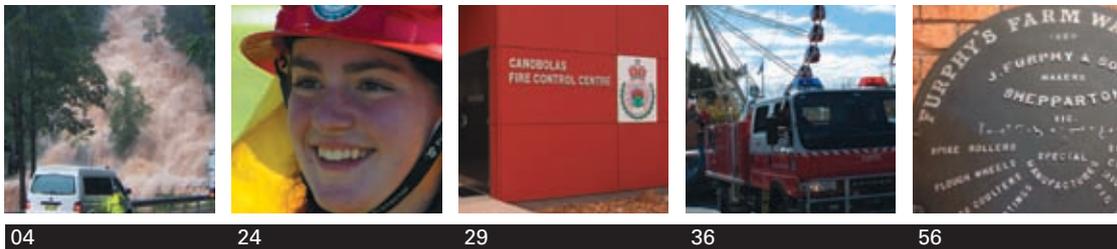
**ADDITIONAL STORIES:**

FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT: CADET CHAMPIONSHIPS  
FLOODS IN COFFS HARBOUR  
A SEASON OF HRS IN CANOBOLAS

RFS AT THE EASTER SHOW  
THE RFS WORKING IN SOUTH EAST ASIA  
WAMBOIN BRIGADE STREET MEETINGS



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# FOREWORD



In the past few months, the versatility of our members has again been on display.

About the same time as the devastating Victorian fires to which more than 3000 personnel were deployed south of the border, volunteers on our State's Far South Coast were engaged in a large firefighting effort of their own. Across the bush fire season, there was a total of nine declarations, with three of these on the Far South Coast.

Just a few weeks later, our members were in action dealing with a natural disaster of another kind. During April and May, large parts of our State's north were affected by major flooding. Our volunteers played a critical role, supporting the State Emergency Service in centres such as Coffs Harbour, Lismore, Grafton and Bellingen.

While the rains were coming down in the north, drier conditions prevailed elsewhere in the State, providing an ideal opportunity for hazard reduction. You can read about some of this activity in this edition of the Bush Fire Bulletin. There is still a lot of work to do in relation to hazard reduction and I encourage you to be as involved as you can with local hazard reduction programs.

With Winter now upon us, so is the season for house fires. Last Winter, the RFS and NSW Fire Brigades attended more than 1500 house fires and already this year, there have been a considerable number of these incidents across the State. Brigades should be continuing their work in their community raising awareness of this important issue.

The Service is already working towards the upcoming bush fire season. Early indications from the Bureau of Meteorology's National Climate Centre are pointing towards an El Niño weather pattern developing, which could mean an increased level of fire activity. We will be watching this closely and it's important that whether it develops or not, brigades are fully trained and prepared for the season ahead.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the Bush Fire Bulletin, including profiles on some of the Service's ongoing work with the Victorian fires and the recent Australian National Fire Cadet Championships.

Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM  
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



## Treats all round at the inaugural RFS C4K Charity Ball



The first ever RFS Coffee4Kids Charity Ball went off with a bang with more than 250 people from around NSW dancing the night away.

It was held in May at the Waterview Convention Centre in Sydney Olympic Park. By all accounts the Charity Ball exceeded expectations with everyone willing to get involved in the auctions, the socialising and in listening to moving stories about the work of Coffee4Kids.

Carolyn Cuello (who has a day job in the RFS Strategic Services Directorate) was the key instigator and organiser for the event.

"We were just blown away that we raised \$20,000 on top of having a great event," she said.

"The best part for me was seeing a room full of very happy guests. There were members of the Service, staff and volunteers, general public as well as other agencies. They were all having a wonderful time and all for a great cause - to make a difference to children in need."

Part of the excitement of the night included a live auction of donated goods. One of the most sought after prizes was an autographed Wallabies jersey.

The Bush Fire Bulletin heard that Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons was keen on being the owner of the jersey, but in the end he succumbed to the even more enthusiastic bidding from Brett Warton of the Charmhaven Brigade. (He's the one in the bow tie.)

Also in the photos are members of the Charmhaven Rural Fire Brigade on the Central Coast, Manager Lakes Team, Steve Sowter and Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons.

The C4K Ball raised money for children in need at The Children's Hospital at Westmead and through the Coffee4Kids Victorian Children's Bush Fire Appeal Fund.

There will be more photos of the Ball in the next issue of the Bush Fire Bulletin. With plans for a 2010 Ball already under way, be sure to keep an eye out for details in coming issues so you can also share in the fun.



## Youth get behind Bush Fire Bulletin

*"We were at the station waiting to go to the ANZAC Day march and couldn't find my four-year-old daughter, Anicia. She was very quiet (not like four-year-olds!). We found her totally engrossed. Couldn't have set it up better if we had tried!!!"*

Kylie Tunstall  
Walgett HQ



## A rose to say 'Thank You'

Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of NSW, has planted a specially named Firefighter Rose Bush in the Government House gardens to acknowledge all NSW firefighters who were deployed to Victoria in February 2009.

"The word 'hero' is often used in the media these days," the Governor said, "but in the last few months, we've seen the true definition of what a hero is in our emergency services.

"In the face of this terrible tragedy, Sir Nicholas and I want to acknowledge these men and women, who at short notice, volunteered their services and went to Victoria to provide vital replacement crews and other additional technical expertise.

"The people of NSW have made it clear to me just how appreciative they are of our officers, the important work they do and their incredible courage.

"There has been such wonderful support for the families and communities who have lost loved ones, but there is still so much more to be done and so many families who need our help.

"We so often tend to compare Victoria and NSW, whether it be in the sporting or cultural arenas, but we've seen that when tragedy strikes, borders are irrelevant and it is the Australian spirit that matters," Professor Bashir said.

Photos by Ben Shepherd, Media Services



**'WATERFALL WAY'  
LIVED UP TO ITS  
NAME DURING  
RECENT FLOODS**

# INCIDENTS

## MID NORTH COAST FLOODS - APRIL 2009

The local Bureau of Meteorology called it a "once in a hundred year event". Between 30 March 2009 and 3 April 2009, a low pressure system off the north coast of NSW combined with a strong high pressure system centred over the Southern Tasman Sea. High intensity rain falls and an already wet ground led to dramatic flooding in the Coffs Harbour region.

The Coffs Harbour and Bellingen local government areas were the worst affected. About 370-380mm of rain fell in the 10 hours up to 2100hrs on Tuesday 31 March.

Residents reported water was chest high in their homes. School children, unable to get home, spent the night in their schools. Up to 60cm of water was sloshing through the shops and streets in the Coffs Harbour CBD.

Rainfall figures showed that more than 600mm had fallen across the area over the week with the majority of the rain falling on 31 March and 1 April. The area was declared a natural disaster on 1 April 2009.

RFS volunteers were kept on their toes with more severe flooding across northern NSW in May. There will be more about those incidents in the next Bush Fire Bulletin.

### How the floods unfolded for RFS

*Michael Brougham from the Mid North Coast team sent us an hour by hour account of the emergency in late March and early April from the point of view of the RFS.*

#### Monday 30 March

**0930hrs:** Flood Watch issued by the Bureau of Meteorology for north coastal areas.

#### Tuesday 31 March

Heavy rain continues. In some areas up to 170mm of rain has fallen in the past 48 hours.



Crew from Yarrahappini/Stuarts Point Brigade assist with mud removal at Newry Island



Urunga 1, little bit stuck. It took a Cat 1 and a tractor to recover

The heavy rain is slow moving. It seems almost stationary over the region with large rainfall totals rapidly accumulating.

**1200 to 1400hrs:** Some staff from the RFS Coffs Harbour office are sent home to be with their families.

*(NB: One staff member Fire Mitigation Officer (FMO) Rod McGrath then assisted his neighbours to move things to higher ground and assisted in rescuing his neighbour's dairy cattle that were stranded in the rising water. He then assisted in organising a delivery of diesel for the back-up generators for the Bellingen Hospital and Nursing Home.)*

Mid North Coast (MNC) team make contact with SES to advise that they are available to assist if required. Also advise RFS Region North office of the possible developing situation.

**1510hrs:** First call for assistance. Woman trapped in car in Boambee. Only one member from Boambee could get to the station due to major flooding in the area. Trapped people rescued.

**1530-1600hrs:** NSW Police Superintendent arrives at MNC team office and sets up an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). Office soon very crowded with staff for the EOC.

**1600hrs:** First calls from the SES to assist with evacuations in low lying areas of Coffs Harbour, including Loaders Lane, Gundagai and Robin Streets.

Dispatch Group 4 and 6, Moonee, Bonville, Boambee, Red Hill, Korora and Bruxner Park to start the evacuations including Narranga Primary School.

Crews transport evacuees to the Coffs Ex-Services Club.

**1700hrs:** Flood waters threaten the MNC office and Police decide to relocate the EOC to Novotel Pacific Bay just north of Coffs.

RFS established an Incident Management team (IMT), with Paul Norton acting as the EOC/RFS Liaison Officer.

**1800hrs:** Urunga and Repton Brigades responded to assist with filling sandbags and evacuations in the Urunga area. Extra brigades responded into Coffs Harbour as the evacuation work increases. Country Club, Corindi, Mullaway and Sandy Beach responded.

**1815hrs:** Coffs Creek peaks at 5.14m. Urgent warning issued for Coffs Harbour as flash flooding escalates.

**2000hrs:** Bellingen River peaks at 8.6m with major flooding.

Evacuations continue. Multiple calls to MVA received. Evacuations of the Coffs Harbour Education Campus, Hogbin Drive Roundabout area, John Paul College, Bishop Druitt College, the Coffs Harbour Cancer



Crew from Valla Brigade help with mud removal at Newry Island

Care Unit at the Hospital and the Coffs Harbour Airport.

Crews requested from Clarence Valley through Region North office. MNC team received an urgent request for assistance at the evacuation centre at the Coffs Harbour Ex-Service's Club. The basement was filling with water. Power would soon need to be switched off and all the 1000 evacuees moved unless the water could be removed. We dispatched Red Hill, Bonville and Sandy Beach to assist NSWFB in this pumping.

**2200hrs:** A Strike Team from Clarence Valley arrives with ten Cat 1's and a Group Officer. Crews were Glenugie, Brooms Head, Grafton City, Ulmarra, Iluka, Halfway Creek, Southampton, Ashby, Copmanhurst, Gulmarrad and Group 3.

**2300hrs:** Clarence Valley Strike Team and crews re-tasked from Coffs Harbour responded to Urunga to assist SES with evacuation of Newry Island and Urunga Waters Caravan Park.

Evacuation centre established at Urunga Golf Club.

Local rainfall figures for Urunga area: 450mm in four hours causing major flooding.

## Tuesday 31 March/ Wednesday 1 April

**2300hrs to 0100hrs:** Evacuation of Newry Island continues until water becomes too deep for RFS trucks to continue. One tanker stranded unable to start due to water in the electrics (recovery not possible until following day).

**0100hrs:** Crews in Coffs Harbour area start to stand down.

**0300hrs:** Local MNC crews at Urunga start to stand down.

**0500hrs:** Clarence Valley crews start to stand down from Urunga.

**0641hrs:** All Clarence Valley crews return to their own district.

**0800hrs:** Request from Urunga SES for assistance with water and mud removal, chainsaw work and general flood clean up. Crews from Urunga, Red Hill, Bonville and Repton dispatched as well as a task force from Lower North Coast Zone. LNC crews were Valla, Valla Beach, Eungai, Yarrahapinni/Stuarts Point, South West Rocks and a Group vehicle.

Various local crews conduct inspection of their local area to confirm damage and check if roads and bridges are open. A Task Force from Clarence Valley Zone returned to assist with the clean up around Coffs Harbour. Crews included, Ashby, Brooms Head, Copmanhurst, Glenugie, Gulmarrad and Support 6.

**1530hrs:** Request from the Coffs Harbour SES to assist with water removal from underground car parks and buildings.

**2231hrs:** All crews returned to station.

## Thursday 2 April

RFS maintains an IMT, including a RFS Liaison Officer based at Urunga to coordinate crew tasking in consultation with the SES.

A strike team from Lower North Coast returns to Urunga and with assistance of local crews, continues the cleanup work in and around Urunga. Significant mud removal work occurred at the Old Butter Factory Bellingen, NORCO factory and Newry Island houses.

## Massive effort to stop house foundations slumping

Fernmount and Urunga Brigades were called to assist at a property at Fernmount. The heavy rain had caused a large amount of dirt to begin moving away from the footings of a house. The crews worked in dangerous, cramped and muddy conditions building a sandbag wall designed to stop any more earth moving away from the foundations of the house. It is estimated that 16 tonne of sand was put into 670 sandbags – all of them carried by hand.

## Cohabiting with Fire Brigades and Ambulance

Urunga NSWFB Station and NSW Ambulance Station sustained major damage during the flood event - 1.6m of water went through the buildings.

Both buildings require major repairs. An offer was made to the NSWFB to use a bay in the Urunga RFB Station. They continued to cohabitate with the RFS for two weeks. The NSW Ambulance moved into an office in the RFS Control Centre at Urunga. This arrangement is ongoing.

Crews from Red Hill, Corindi, Coramba, Sandy Beach Orara and Sherwood Creek with the assistance from crews from



After their station was badly damaged in the floods, the Urunga NSW Fire Brigades move into Urunga RFS station



Fernmount and Urunga Brigades construct a sandbag wall to save a house in Fernmount

Clarence Valley continue with the task of water removal from underground car parks and buildings around Coffs Harbour.

MNC receive high volume pumps from Clarence Valley, Lower North Coast Zone and Northern Tablelands Team to assist with operations. All crews return to station by 2000hrs.

## Friday 3 April

RFS maintains an IMT and local crews continued to conduct inspections of their local area to confirm damage and check if roads and bridges are open.

A Strike Team from Lower North Coast returns to Urunga and with assistance of local crews continues the cleanup work and mud removal in an around Urunga,

focusing mainly on Newry Island and Marina Crescent areas. Local crews include Corindi, Repton, Sandy Beach, Boambee, Urunga, Orara and Fernmount.

Coramba Brigade completes the work in the Coffs Harbour area.

## Saturday 4 April

RFS maintains an IMT. Crews continue to conduct inspections. Clean up work in and around Urunga continues.

## Sunday 5 April

RFS maintains an IMT. Only Urunga Brigade is used as operations wind down. RFS crews stood down at 1400hrs when the SES declares incident over.

## UNDER THE RADAR - THE FAR SOUTH COAST FIRE SEASON

By Andrew Stark, Manager,  
Far South Coast team

**T**his past Summer, the Far South Coast team experienced one of the busiest fire seasons in many years.

While public attention was drawn toward the unprecedented fires in Victoria, RFS brigades in the Far South Coast were kept busy with three S44 declarations. One of the fires was at Jingera Rock, south-east of Queanbeyan.

It started during the Christmas season with a large number of dry lightning storms. Lightning strikes began on Boxing Day and occurred almost daily for several weeks. This resulted in multiple ignitions across the region.

These early fires were largely dealt with by the RFS along with Forests NSW and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

### Extreme terrain makes access difficult

A storm late in the day on 23 January began a series of fires that kept firefighters busy. Early the following morning Triple Zero (000) received a call from a Wyndham Village resident reporting a fire on Jingera Rock.

The local Wyndham Brigade responded however the difficult terrain prevented them from gaining access to the fire.

A crew from the NPWS were re-tasked from a fire in Eurobodalla to attend this new fire at Jingera Rock. At around midday on Saturday 24 January winching of a RAFT crew commenced but high winds made the activity too unsafe.

By the late afternoon the wind had moderated and more attempts were made to winch in a RAFT crew. This time it was safely completed.

The crew of five skilled firefighters immediately began work on cutting a remote helipad so that further crews would be able to access the area. The helipad was completed on Sunday and further NPWS RAFT crews were transported to the fire.

Firefighting by NPWS RAFT crews continued on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. During this time the size of the fire remained fairly static. The fire at this time was managed by the NPWS.

RFS crews continued to assess fall back lines and identify potential new containment lines. Some new trails were cut by the NPWS and Forests NSW.

Meanwhile daily maximum temperatures were increasing every day and approaching 40 degrees Celsius.



### Emergency declaration

On Thursday the temperature rose to above 40 degrees. By mid-morning RAFT crews were limited to working below the main fire. This fire began to increase in size as it travelled south toward Jingera Rock.

A decision was made for Bega Valley Operations Committee to meet at 0900hrs the next day to recommend a declaration.

A S44 declaration was made at 1400hrs on Friday 30 January.

Following the S44 declaration an Incident Management Team was transferred from NPWS to Bega Valley Fire Control Centre (FCC).

RFS crews established a significant back burn of 8.5km on the evening of 31 January. A further back burn of about 5.5km was established the following evening to contain

the fire at its northern and north-eastern sides and to prevent an uphill run into the community and forestry assets.

RFS aviation joined the firefighting effort at that point and trialled a new fire retardant gel product.

### Rain hampers firefighters

A shower of rain on Monday afternoon slowed the planned back burning operations until the following Thursday. Another dry lightning storm on Thursday, however, ignited further fires.

Weather forecasts at this time showed the conditions worsening and Saturday 7 February looking to be a severe fire weather day.

Crews worked hard to establish stronger containment lines in anticipation of Saturday's bad weather. A containment

line on the south-east of the fire was established using the aviation crews and the new retardant. A back burn on the north-west was started using aerial ignition. Patrol and mop up of this line was performed by fixed wing and rotary aircraft.

On late Friday a further serious weather forecast for Saturday was received.

All the fire agencies involved in the fire met via telephone to discuss the best strategy. Pressure points and danger zones were identified. Crews in the relevant areas were notified of the plans. Extra RFS crews were brought in from Eurobodalla to support the local crews.

## Saturday 7 February

On the day that fires hit regional Victoria, the Eurobodalla district also saw temperatures increasing, winds increasing and a low relative humidity. All the containment lines around the Jingera Rock fire, however, were holding well.

Just before 1400hrs a fire was lit 6kms north of main fire in Southeast Forest National Park. It was suspected to have been lit by an arsonist and has since been the subject of a police investigation.

The fire came dangerously close to life and property. Quick work and direct attack by RFS crews and other agencies assisted by heavy plant was successful in containing this fire.

On late Saturday afternoon the main Jingera Rock fire began spotting outside main control lines into fall back area. These spot overs were contained by ground crews who were assisted by aircraft.

Other areas that had been identified as possible problems were direct attacked with aircraft and RAFT crews. These tactics worked containing the fire on the southern perimeter.

Just to add to the pressure, at last light on Saturday a new fire was detected southwest of Eurobodalla at Belimba. This fire resulting from lightning was also in very remote and rugged terrain. Some of the Eurobodalla crews were sent back to attend to that fire.

## Sunday 8 February

The promised slow-moving southerly change did come through early on the Sunday morning. Unusually, it had an area of dry gusty air ahead of it creating havoc in the Belimba fire. This fire grew to over 800ha by 1400hrs and was spotting on a number of fronts.

But the Jingera Rock fire remained under control.

## Mopping up

The RFS continued to patrol both fires for another two weeks using aviation and RAFT crews. The S44 declaration was revoked on



24 February. The fires continued to be Class 1 for some weeks to follow with NPWS managing it.

During this time volunteers and staff from the Far South Coast were also deployed to Victoria to help with fires in the Wilsons Promontory area.

## Thanks to the following brigades

Some forty brigades were involved in the effort to contain the Jingera Rock fire. Every brigade in Bega Valley Shire was involved as well as many brigades from the Eurobodalla district. Special thanks to those volunteers from Wollongong who brought their bulk water carrier. Thank also to:

- ACT RFS RAFT crews
- Lake George Zone
- Southern Riverina Zone
- Staff from all over the State who performed IMT and aviation roles



# Let's *unite* & *help* fellow CFA members in their hour of need



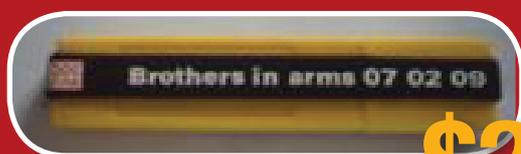
Here is the chance for all firefighters to Unite and help those CFA members who are in their hour of need. "The pager has gone off to say" "Alert, Code 1 help your fellow fire fighter" so now is the time for all members to say we're thinking of you especially to those members who suffered at the hands of Black Saturday.

To raise money The Somerville CFA has had manufactured 20,000 Sunglass head straps and 10,000 wrist bands in an effort to raise money needed to help our fellow fire fighters who suffered significant losses on Black Saturday.

All the money received will go to the VFBV as a single donation and the VFBV will administer the distribution of monies via the Black Saturday Recovery fund board of directors. This board incurs no cost.

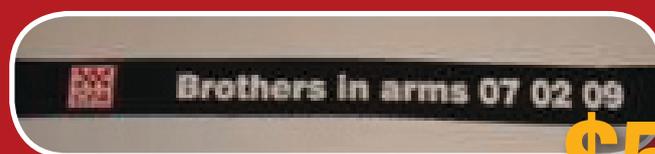
The Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria have established the *VFBV Black Saturday Volunteer Recovery Fund* and this is dedicated to firefighters and brigades directly impacted by these fires.

*All money raised and donated to this recovery fund is also free from Administration fees.*



WRISTBANDS (EX. GST)

**\$2**



SUNGLASS HEAD STRAPS (EX. GST)

**\$5**

Postage Australia Express Post \$10-90. CFA Cheques or Money order made payable to "Brothers in Arms 2009"

Download this order form and send with Cheque or Money order to *Brothers in Arms 2009*  
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Contact Andy Palmer on (03) 5977 7739

Sunglass Head Straps @ \$5-00 +GST	<u>QTY</u>	<u>\$</u>
Wristbands @ \$2-00+GST	<u>QTY</u>	<u>\$</u>
Postage and handling		<u>\$10-90</u>
Cheque to Brothers in Arms 2009	<u>TOTAL INC. GST</u>	<u>\$</u>

Your Delivery Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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The Somerville CFA wish to thank the following Companies for making this happen  
Ross Faulkner, Dulux Australia, Promotem and finally the VFBV for giving us this chance to make a difference.



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## CANOBOLAS ZONE BLURS THE LINE BETWEEN FIRE SEASON AND HAZARD REDUCTION SEASON

By Superintendent Brett Bowden, Operations Officer, Canobolas Zone

**W**ith the fire season started, the Canobolas Zone volunteers and staff were busy. Not with fires, but with moving into our brand new Standard Design Fire Control Centre built on rural land south of Orange.

Fortunately the Zone didn't have a major test of its new operational facility this past Summer, however, the 431 incidents thus far have assisted the staff in making best use of some new tools available to them.

### Victorian deployment

The Victorian fire campaign had a major impact on Canobolas with more than 75 individual volunteers being deployed as part of Region West Strike Teams. Volunteers and staff worked out of both Alexandra and Healesville in Victoria and many were engaged in more than one tour south.

Initially our crews were manning tankers from other DTZs within the Region (Bland, Temora and Hay). After 10 days or so, however, three Cat 7 tankers and a Command Vehicle were sent from the Canobolas Zone to replace some of the ten units originally deployed on February 8, 2009.

The Victorian experience was a little different for Canobolas Zone in terms of gathering firefighting resources for out-of-area deployments. Generally an "All Call" page is sent to brigades seeking interested firefighters to become involved. At times this can be a drawn out process, depending on the time of year and how this coincides with other activities across the rural landscape. It can also depend on the location and travel time involved. In this case, however, the Zone office was overwhelmed with firefighters calling in to offer their help. A list of potential crew numbers reached well over 80 personnel.

### Then the HRs began...

As the Victorian deployment concluded, the focus of volunteers and staff at Canobolas Zone shifted immediately to our Hazard Reduction program.

The Canobolas Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC) sets an ambitious target each and every year. The Bush Fire Risk Management Plan adopted by the Canobolas Zone BFMC was now in its fifth year of operation and this plan sets an annual treatment benchmark of just under 10,000ha per year as the treatment target. This year, the Canobolas Zone will be ahead of the five year average set by the annual benchmarks.

The burning program for this year was targeted toward our identified Strategic Fire



Hazard reduction at Araluen property Mullion Creek

Advantage Zones (SFAZ), plus the usual Asset Protection Zones (APZ). These are areas that our risk plan specifies to be treated on a five to 12 year basis and is to have fuel levels kept below 10 tonnes per hectare.

All HR work that involves a burn program is usually supported by good strong containment lines, many of which have to be constructed or need to be brought up to standard. This aspect of the hazard reduction was planned and supervised by Canobolas Community Safety Officer (CSO) Superintendent Arthur Sharp. Arthur spends up to four months of each year in the bush with senior volunteers and heavy plant, ensuring containment lines will meet the needs of our HR crews during the burning season.

With 53 separate HR activities scheduled, it is a tall order in anyone's language. Canobolas called upon additional help in the

form of Out of Area Strike Teams along with some specialist help in the form of Burn Plan Specialists and Public Liaison Officers (PLO).

There were a number of crews who assisted for single day operations from outside the Canobolas Zone and these included:

- Forbes Central 1 (Mid Lachlan Valley) and
- Arthurville 7 (Orana)

Other crews came in as Strike Teams deployed for 72 hours. Their stints were five days including travel and we could not have achieved the results we have without their assistance. To soften the blow of being away from home, these crews were placed in very comfortable accommodation, provided with lunches daily and restaurant meals each night. During the day they ventured into the burn areas to assist local crews on HRs that averaged 350ha per day.

Peter Jarick and Andrew Owens, North West Brigade while on deployment in Victoria



Hazard reduction burn at Mirrabeena (also pictured centre)

We thank them for their involvement.

- Coonamble 7 and Lightning Ridge 7 (North West Team)
- North Arm Cove, Tuncurry, Craven, Minimbah and Coomba (Manning Team)

Many local crews and appliances assisted, however, considerable thanks go to our Orange, North West Orange, Carcoar, Millthorpe, Clifton Grove Ophir, Waugoola, Darbys Falls, Back Creek, Cargo, Mullion Creek, Orange-Molong Road, March Neville and Support Brigades.

To date 35 of the 53 proposals have been completed and the combined Councils' mechanical works have totalled 9,666ha. In total, over 17,000ha have been hazard reduced and this was a great effort by all involved. Without the team effort from Canobolas Zone personnel, the Out Of Area Strike Team assistance and the Region West office, the results would have been far less.

With five years of implementation on our Bush Fire Risk Management Plan the communities of Canobolas Zone are now much safer and better prepared, in terms of fuel levels, fire trails and a better geographical knowledge of their areas. We now look forward to continuing and building on this good work and reaping further benefits that these efforts are already beginning to show.



Canobolas Zone volunteers during one of the Victorian deployments

## DOWN TO A TEE – FIRST HR OF THE SEASON

By Bernie O'Rourke, Senior Deputy Captain,  
Duffys Forest Rural Fire Brigade  
Photos by Ben Shepherd, Media Services

**W**eather and environmental concerns were not the only considerations for the Duffys Forest Brigade's first hazard reduction (HR) of the season. Flying golf balls also had to be taken into account.

The Wilkins South hazard reduction was conducted down the edge of two fairways of the exclusive Terrey Hills Country Club Golf Course. The golf course was open throughout the burn and members were instructed to wear helmets at all times.

The day planned for the burn was 28 March and the week prior started with some light rain, followed by a couple of clear sunny days.

The Wilkins South HR was an ecological burn for the regeneration of the endangered Duffys Forest Vegetation. The vegetation requires a hot burn and for us to meet our prescription, we also need to keep the tree canopy intact with minimal scorch heights.

With National Parks present they were able to witness the operation and the tactics used to achieve it.

The burn had very clean perimeters, to the east the perimeter trails and to the west the Terrey Hills Country Club Golf Course. The bush was within the Ku-ring-gai National Park so the Head Ranger also attended the burn.

Moisture test results on Friday were just on prescription so it was now up to the weather on Saturday. With this being one of two HRs being conducted in the Warringah/ Pittwater District, resources were split down the line with five Cat 1's, one Cat 7 and a Cat 9 allocated to the Wilkins South HR.

On Saturday morning all crew met for a road-side briefing before being tasked to the relevant sectors. The weather was clear, yet it was still a little cool and at this point a decision was made by the Incident Controller (IC) to delay lighting for an hour, just to allow the sun to get higher and burn off any dew that was about.

During this time all crew moved the vehicles into position. Those on the west sector had to try and position their vehicles as far into the bush and as far off the fairway as possible - away from flying golf balls.

As the course was still open and we would be working down the edge of two fairways, crews were reminded to ensure that their helmets remain on while working within the sector, even if not in the burn area.

The hour passed and it was time to light. A test burn was conducted at the northern most point of the of the burn area. This was a success and the crews were authorised to continue lighting.



Tumbledown Dick 7 lighting along the western edge of the burn at the 18th hole of the Terrey Hills Country Club Golf Course



Emily Mclean from Tumbledown Dick Brigade



A golfer hitting off on the 18th hole



Terrey Hills crew watching the burn from the 18th hole



Dennis Joiner, Duffys Forest Brigade, lighting on the walking trail



View towards the Club house

For a while, the residents, the golfers and brigade members were lucky enough that the smoke created a strong column into the air. This didn't last long, however, and a stronger breeze from the east pushed the smoke straight across the golf course. The smoke was so thick that golfers could not see the green from the tee – but they were undeterred. Instead of looking for the green the golfers aimed their sights on the blue and red flashing lights of a Cat 9 parked on the far side of the green!

By lunchtime, all perimeters had been locked in and crews began their mop up procedures.

The success of the hazard reduction could be assessed at this point. It was agreed that due to the lighting patterns chosen by the crews we had achieved a hot burn which was kept out of the tree canopy which would ensure maximum regeneration for this protected area.



Tumbledown Dick 7 crew

# REFLECTIONS ON THE VICTORIAN DEPLOYMENT

The impact of the Victorian bush fires was felt within every brigade of the RFS. Fire fighting, mopping up, interstate liaison and the Building Impact Analysis were key roles played by the RFS. Yet the impact was felt more deeply still and many brigades have responded in their own unique ways. There are countless stories and we have included some here.

More than three thousand RFS members were deployed to Victoria in the month following Black Saturday and it was challenging for many. One RFS member from Albury office, Superintendent Sean McArdle, speaks here about the memories he will be holding on to.

*"I was deployed to the Kilmore East - Murrindindi complex south - Kinglake & Whittlesea divisions as the Safety Advisor.*

*In this role I had a lot of contact with the community and in particular the fire fighters who were in the Kinglake area on the day the fires hit. As someone who has been to many large incidents within NSW and Victoria over the last 18 years I thought I had seen it all but I still could not fathom the intensity or the destruction these fires caused until I was in the area myself.*

*Like many others within the Service I had been eager to lend a hand but I was still shaken on arrival by the enormity of what had happened. As I worked and spoke with our brothers in Victoria I heard many disturbing details related to me first hand by those that survived and while the details of these incidents are still milling around in my head I try*

*to focus on all the positives I came across instead.*

*People from all walks of life simply pulling together, community spirit alive and well, strangers coming up and hugging me and thanking me for coming to help, fire fighters still on the job even though they had lost family members, uniforms from all parts of Australia working together as one.*

*These are the memories I want to retain, the stories of loss are something I hope over time will fade in my memory."*

## Reaching out to brigades in Victoria

While not all RFS members were able to travel to Victoria the spirit of camaraderie was seen throughout the State. Many RFS brigades were keen to make a contribution and so turned their efforts towards raising funds for those affected by the fires. The generosity of their communities astounded everyone.

Berkeley Vale Rural Fire Brigade, near Wyong, sent two members to assist with fire fighting operations in and around Marysville and Narbethong. On their return the other brigade members listened to their recollections

and heard about the sheer devastation caused by the fires. Berkeley Vale Brigade wanted to do more to help.

They held a BBQ outside the local Bunnings store. The plan had been to raise enough money to purchase two generators for the Narbethong Brigade as they had heard that most of the brigade's equipment had been lost or damaged by fires. In the process of the fund-raising for the event two generators were donated. A further \$3000 was raised at the BBQ.

Narbethong Brigade captain was humbled and thankful when he heard about the donation. He said that most of his members had lost their homes but were still out fighting fires.

Two members of the Berkeley Vale Brigade drove down to Victoria to deliver the generators in person along with the \$3000 and good wishes of the people of Berkeley Vale.

## Lending a hand

Yarramalong Rural Fire Brigade, north of Wyong, held a major fundraising event for the Marysville CFA brigade. Local businesses and individuals donated goods

for an auction and Brigade Captain Peter Taylor said the response was phenomenal.

"During the 1994 fires CFA crews from Victoria assisted local brigades fighting fires in and around Yarramalong," he said, "This is a way of expressing our gratitude for the help they gave us in our time of need."

The fundraiser met its target of raising \$25,000.

"The brigade was overwhelmed by the support. The SES turned up unannounced and conducted a bucket collection from cars driving past the station on the day. People were just coming in off the street donating and offering goods. It shows the community has been deeply touched by this disaster and are more than willing to help out in anyway they can," he said.

The brigade made contact with the Marysville Captain trying to make arrangements for the delivery of the cheque.

"Unfortunately we don't have a letterbox or even a post office in the town at the moment," he said. The funds were transferred electronically.

# THE NERVE-WRACKING WAIT

By Mat Hunter, Snr Deputy Captain, Hazelbrook Brigade

Like us all I awoke on Sunday 8 February to the tragic news of the fire situation in Victoria.

That weekend NSW was enduring a weekend of 40 plus temperatures and Total Fire Bans. My brigade like many others was on standby for Rapid Response Deployment. Even though the temperature was extreme and humidity was dangerously low, the brigade was not called out. This gave us the chance to watch the rapidly expanding news coverage of the Victorian situation.

At that stage there were only 14 confirmed deaths. It seems strange now but that figure of 14 would have been somehow acceptable compared to the final number. One death is not acceptable but as firefighters, we all know that it is a very real possibility.

During the next week the TV and radio news was filled with the Victorian disaster and the ever rising death toll. Back at Wednesday night training at the Hazelbrook Brigade we held an impromptu meeting to talk about the situation.

I, for one, felt angry and very frustrated at not being able to help the Victorian Country Fire Authority. I needed to talk about it and, as I found out, so did others members of the brigade. There is a strange bond (or brotherhood, I suppose) between firefighting agencies. We have all stood in front of walls of flame; we have constantly and consistently helped our communities in times of need. Now we all felt so helpless watching the news coverage and not being able to pitch in.

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons had asked all brigades for who was available to travel to Victoria to assist. At the Hazelbrook Brigade, of the total membership of 38, 24 of those put their names down to lend a hand. I'm sure it was the same all the way across the State.

A week went by. No word. I knew people from other brigades

who'd been called. You can imagine the level of frustration.

Another week had passed and then finally on Saturday 21 at 2030hrs the phone rang. It was my Brigade Captain asking me if I was available to travel the next Tuesday. My bag, like countless others, had been packed for two weeks.

Tuesday came and the orders were that I was to pick up further crew members from other Blue Mountains Brigades and to be at Mascot Airport by 1400hrs. One of the first rules that I was taught when I joined the RFS was 'hurry up and wait'! So it was not until 1910hrs that some 70 firefighters boarded a chartered flight to Melbourne.

Travelling from Melbourne out to our base camp at Healesville, I couldn't help noticing just how dry the ground was. Even within the Melbourne suburbs I noticed the lack of grass or lawns in gardens. I now know that this part of Victoria had received only 0.4 millilitres of rain since the beginning of the year. Some of us commented that the only green we saw was the astro-turf in the middle of a cricket pitch.

When we arrived at Healesville Base camp, which was part of the Kinglake Complex Fire, we were sorted into day and night crews. Each shift was to be 12 hours and start and finish at 7am or 7pm.

## The camp

The camp was very well set up for the 400 or so personnel who were based there. Night shift crews were accommodated in two large air-conditioned marquees which allowed us to sleep through the day. Day shift had individual tents. The facilities at the camp were excellent with everything from First Aid to 24 hour catering and even the availability of massages.

One other important luxury was also available. A coffee van from Kantina Café in Melbourne had arrived on the second day of the camp. While waiting for a coffee

late one night I asked the owner how many coffees he had made.

"I've given up counting, mate. I reckon it'd be about 15,000 cappuccinos and flat whites."

All 15,000 of those coffees had been offered to firefighters free of charge and the owner had paid his own expenses. He told me he would not be leaving until the camp was closed. This sort of generosity can be a little overwhelming. But I can tell you that we were all very grateful that he was there.

## Night life

I was a crew leader in Task Force 13D on one of the Cat 9s. Night shift generally involved checking fire lines and mopping up. We were putting out smoking logs or trees so they could not reignite in the future. The Incident Controller for our area was very concerned about any thing that may cause another flare up and impact the town. The outlying areas of Healesville had been badly hit by the fires but the town itself had so far escaped harm.

On the second night we were tasked to patrol and to check all roads and tracks for any signs of fire activity. At around midnight I drove up a particular road that had been impacted heavily by fire. Coming over a crest of a hill we suddenly came upon the eerie sight – a house, shed and several vehicles totally destroyed by fire. With nothing but our headlights for light, we checked around for any fire activity and found none. In the dark we spied remnants of police tape and orange ribbon around a fence pole. It meant that a deceased person had been found on the property. It sent shivers down my spine.

"I think we need to get out of here," I said.

My fellow crew member was quick to respond: "Yes please."

On my last shift we were tasked as a Rapid Response Group. This was made up of 18 tankers of varying sizes. We left base camp

travelling through Healesville township and we were treated like heroes by the locals. We arrived at Wesburn staging area where our group became part of a larger force of 60 vehicles.

The Incident Controller had been warned of a cold weather front coming through the area at around midnight with strong gusting winds. We arrived around 11pm and the temperature was in the mid 20s. A very warm breeze was blowing.

We had a force of some 60 tankers from Victorian Parks, The Department of Sustainability and Environment, Tasmanian Forestry, Country Fire Authority, Melbourne Water and the Rural Fire Service. We were ready for just about anything.

It was on all of our minds: what if the gusting winds picked up and the flames made a run on a township again?

Some time in the early morning we were stood down. The cold change had come through. Thankfully it had had no effect on the fire line. Our task force returned to Base Camp and we shut down for the rest of the shift.

## Homeward bound

There was a sombre mood on the bus on the way to the airport. Certainly a different mood from the trip in. Once again we were thanked and cheered by the locals of Healesville on our way out. The locals were still very nervous about the potential of the fires to flare up and I believe they were very thankful we were there to help out, just in case.

It was good to be home with my loved ones, but with so many Victorians having lost homes and loved ones I felt sobered by my experience in Victoria.

Overall it was a very humbling experience. I am glad I was able to help in some small way even if it was to just let the locals of Healesville know that they are not alone.

# A DAY IN THE LIFE

## Tuesday 24 February 2009:

Today was one of those days that shifted my world. Today I visited the townships of Marysville and Kinglake.

And what did I see?

Where do I begin?

Do I start with the trees that still stand tall, strong and true in the face of adversity and with the few leaves that they had left, faithfully pointed us to where the fire had travelled?

Do I start with the tree that once stood tall and true, but because of the winds that could only be described as cyclonic, lay spread across the remains of a house that itself once stood peacefully on a tree lined street providing shelter and accommodation for a resident that had passed into the awaiting hands of God?

Or do I start with the hectare upon hectare of tall stands of native timber that once displayed brilliant crowns of leaf cover that now stood as mere sticks in the ground, without a leaf to be found on any part of their canopy. A total and complete combustion of all available fuel without a remnant left hanging from the tree tops or lying upon the ground?

Or do I start with the remnants of a children's playground, where a solitary swing sways gently in the breeze adjacent to where the

local police station once stood as a symbol of safety, security and trust?

Or do I start with the row after row of homes destroyed by a fire that broke all of the rules. Homes seemingly well prepared, with plenty of space, with glimpses of the green grass and the orderly gardens that once lined their front fences now lying flattened across the scorched black ground under twisted sheets of corrugated iron roofing, many with their chimney's still standing as though to represent their former proud and majestic heritage?

Or do I start with the local motel, one of the only remaining structures in the town with its sign out the front of a once bustling street full of tourists and locals alike, welcoming visitors to enjoy a well earned rest, despite the total destruction that surrounded it on three of its four boundaries?

Or do I start with the local CFA Brigade and SES Unit buildings, still standing, slightly singed but remaining loyal to their purpose, to offer protection and safety to those who once resided in the close knit community?

Or do I start with the sheer enormity of the impact on a town that once held the wonder of all of those who visited its cafes, its art galleries, its craft shops, its historic buildings, who felt its sense of community and

observed its rightful place on a landscape of natural beauty with a European influence, but now lay flattened as far as the eye could see? A town no longer, a community no longer, replaced by an event that will be forever etched in the minds of a nation as the worst natural disaster in our history?

Or do I start by acknowledging the simple but overwhelming fact that not one resident was in the town today, not one. For this acknowledgement I have no words that could possibly do justice to the enormity of this event where so many had perished in a town that had offered so much to so many, both local and from afar. Words simply failed me.

In my 25 years of fighting bush fires, including some of the most significant events such as the Canberra fires and the 2002 and 2003 fires, the 1994 Sydney fires to name but a few, this single event eclipsed everything that I have witnessed in terms of loss and destruction.

As I reflected upon the immense sadness and grief that I felt for all of those who had perished I couldn't help but wonder if our lesson out of the enormity of this event is that we are all an inherent part of nature? We are not separate, we are not exclusive, and we are not an exception, we are inexorably linked to the totality of all that

exists and the ongoing cycle of birth, death and re-birth.

And in the seeking of answers and the unreasonable demands we will all place upon ourselves and each other to find out what happened, to make sure it never happens again, and even to apportion blame for those we perceive should be responsible, (and some are very much responsible!!) ought we not stop and reflect on the possibility that nature simply did what she needed to do?

As I flew home after such an overwhelming experience, the gentlemen beside me asked "what should be done to make sure this never happens again?" My response was, "I truly do not know." While I had gone down there with a head full of knowledge from 25 years of experience I came back with not one answer. Not one.

While many may be quick to rise to the position of expert equipped with all of the answers be it hazard reduction, land use planning, community messaging, stay and defend or leave early or any other array of suggestions, (and all will have a degree of relevance) I have come to realise that perhaps what is needed is for all of us to start from a position of respect for the course of nature and all that she brings with her. Perhaps it is from that point that we may truly take the lesson of such a tragic event.

## NOTHING COMPARED TO THIS

By Jeff Cree, Ex Group Officer, Warringah/Pittwater

I have been a member of the Rural Fire Service for 41 years. For 38 years I have held the office of Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain, Captain and Deputy Group Captain.

I have been to countless STARGs, task forces and strike teams all over NSW, twice to Victoria and once to Kangaroo Island ('join the RFS and see the countryside'). I actually participated in the first STARG to Eden in 1972. How things have changed since then. During this time I have seen houses burn or already burnt, forests and grasslands destroyed, livestock killed, feed stock lost and I have attended numerous MVAs including fatalities.

None of these, however, really compared to what I experienced in the Victorian fires. I was the Group Officer in charge of the night shift of Task Force 14A. Working with us were also Task Force 13A and 15A.

We were farewelled at Mascot by our Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons who tried to prepare us for the task ahead and suggested we should consider the need for counselling on our return. Very good advice.

We flew to Melbourne on a commercial flight and the crew and passengers gave us a nice acclamation at the start and finish of the flight. Next day we were bussed to Warburton, after hearing our 40 minute OH&S talk by a ranking CFA officer.

We were accommodated in pleasant holiday cabins on the bank of the Yarra River. Surprisingly the water was clear! That afternoon we were transported to our staging area, given a meal, briefed and then deployed to the fireground. I certainly wish to congratulate the caterers for their excellent food.

We were sent to the Upper Yarra dam area, north east

from Warburton and later to Toolangi, north of Healesville and towards Marysville. We did some effective mopping up and patrolling. On the last night we had to leave the area about 0500hrs due to the number of trees falling near us. It became quite dangerous as there is no warning that a tree is about to fall.

We returned to our staging area, were fed, bussed to the airport and flown to Bankstown. Assistant Commissioner Mark Crosweller welcomed us back. Full marks go to our leaders for this show of support at the beginning and ending of these deployments.

I, like many others, felt I had to go to Victoria for my own benefit. I knew my participation was not going to make much difference in the total scheme of things, but I wanted to be there.

The things I saw and experienced during our stay

have had a lasting effect on me. I admit I did feel frustrated that I couldn't help more and couldn't be more effective in helping the Victorians. I am quite happy to admit that I needed, and got, counselling.

One of the bus drivers who was taking us to our staging area confided in me that four members of his family had lost their homes. What can you say or do in this instance? Fortunately all the deceased people had been removed from the areas where I worked. My heartfelt sympathy goes to those who had to work in areas when bodies were still present.

In conclusion, I suggest that there is no training available to us to deal with these experiences. I feel my reaction is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. Do not be reluctant to get counselling. If I, or you, get to a point where we are not affected by these situations, I suggest it is time to move on. Good luck to you all and keep up the good work.

The Victorian deployment included participation in the CRC Bush Fire Research Task Force. Bush Fire Bulletin editor, Jacqueline Murphy spoke to RFS Community Planning Manager, Simon Heemstra, about the impact this work will have on Australian bush firefighting in the years to come.

## FOR THE SAKE OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

Analysing the impact of a bush fire has never been as crucial for the future of Australian bush firefighting as in the aftermath of Black Saturday.

Fully understanding the way that the fires on Saturday February 7 impacted on buildings, how the fire behaved in the weather conditions and crucially how the residents responded will form an important part of the history of Australian bush firefighting.

In the days following Black Saturday an expert multi-agency task force was quickly pulled together to collect the crucial data for the sake of future generations.

Coordinated by the Bush Fire Cooperative Research Centre (CRC), the Bushfire Research Task Force quickly formed and got to work within three days of the major fires. The RFS was involved from the start.

The purpose of the research is to provide the Australian fire and land management agencies with an independent analysis of the factors surrounding these series of fires. The research is considering which fires were ordinary or extreme and which were extraordinary; that is, exhibiting fire behaviour outside known experience.

The results from this Task Force will be submitted to the Royal Commission and will no doubt be studied and written about for decades to come.

To date, the Bushfire CRC Research Taskforce has assessed more than 1,300 homes, interviewed more than 600

residents and taken more than 21,000 photographs.

While agencies from across Australia were involved and led by the Bush Fire CRC, the RFS played a key role in the Task Force. Over the six weeks between 9 February and 21 March, eight tours of seven RFS members were deployed to Victoria to conduct building and social surveys. Ten members were involved in two or more rotations.

### The early days were crucial

In the days after Black Saturday, while most of Australia was reeling in shock from the size of the fires, those involved in bush fire impact research understood the need for urgency and acted quickly.

Fortunately for Australia, fires of such ferocity are rare and life-saving lessons can be learned from studying them in detail.

“Right from the start we were driven to be involved in the research and analysis of the fires,” RFS Community Planning Manager Simon Heemstra said.

“We knew right away that the findings will be fundamental for our understanding of the impacts of fire and the future direction of fire policy.”

On Monday 9 February Simon Heemstra had contacted the CFA to offer assistance in conducting the Bush Fire Impact Analysis.

“I think they were taken aback by the level of help and support we were offering.”

A series of meetings were conducted by telephone to discuss what action was to be taken. A crucial telephone meeting held on the Tuesday saw the fire agencies, led by the Bush Fire CRC, wrestling to decide on the best approach for the research task force.

On Tuesday two RFS vehicles with seven staff for initial survey teams departed Homebush Bay headquarters at 1500hrs. Prior to their deployment, Paul Scott, from Critical Incident Support (CIS) provided a briefing on critical incident support matters to all staff available for the BIA.

On Wednesday 11 February, three staff flew to Melbourne to assist in designing the research project. In Melbourne they joined up with NSW Fire Brigades, Tasmania Fire Service, WA Department of Environment and Conservation, CSIRO, Geoscience Australia, SA Country Fire Service, RMIT, Latrobe University and the CFA to design the approach and structure of the project.

The CRC was to take overall control of the project as contracted by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). The Task Force was to undertake research into the following areas:

1. Fire Behaviour – focussing on how fires moved across different landscapes, different vegetation, and under variable weather conditions
2. Human Behaviour and Community Safety Issues – focussing on behaviour and decision making by residents, community responses to bush

- fire warnings and implications of these events on policy
3. Building (Infrastructure) and Planning Issues – focussing on patterns of loss and patterns of survival of buildings and structures, the notion of defensible space, and planning and building controls and their impact on patterns of building losses.

Although the Victorian fire agencies provided a liaison officer to assist in the initial deployment of crews, the Victorians were left to focus on the immediate demands of firefighting. The CRC Bush Fire Impact Task Force was entirely staffed by the non-Victorian agencies.

“It was one of the ways we were able to help out,” Simon said.

### Preparing to go

The initial briefing for the survey teams occurred at 1600hrs on Wednesday 11 February at the CRC meeting room in East Melbourne. This briefing provided an overview of the situation and an introduction to the research requirements.

On Thursday 12 February, research crews were briefed on crew formation, logistics, safety and welfare issues before heading to Wandong to conduct the first surveys. Initially, there were six crews working in the field.

It was decided that the building and social surveys would be conducted concurrently. The survey teams would include a minimum two building researchers and a social researcher. The initial building survey included the standard



**“I think they were taken aback by the level of help and support we were offering.”**

AFAC house loss questions with additional questions from the RFS house loss surveys.

If possible, subject to agreement by the resident, all social interviews were to be recorded. The social interviews were to be based on a series of questions asking the resident to explain their actions and behaviour before, during and after the fire. The residents were to be also given the option of completing a short demographic survey and asked whether they would be willing to be contacted for further questions.

### First use of new CSIRO technologies

Data from the building surveys was initially collected on a paper survey, as has been the case for many years. After the first two rotations, however, the CSIRO introduced a new technology in to the process.

All Task Force teams were issued with ‘toughbooks’ using a program written in Arcpad

software. The technology had been developed by the CSIRO but had never before been put to use in the field.

A Global Positioning System (GPS) was linked to the ‘toughbook’ and properties were identified from satellite imagery. This introduced a whole new element in to the analysis – spatial analysis.

The ‘toughbooks’ allowed researchers to record information regarding the construction of houses and buildings, along with other factors relating to the property including the location of trees and fences and bodies of water.

All surveyed buildings and surrounds were also photographed with their location identified using a GPS attached to the camera.

The social interviews were recorded using a voice recorder. The social researchers were also provided with a hand held GPS to record the location of the interview.

### RFS involvement

Soon after the fires, the RFS had started to develop a list of people who would be available for the Task Force.

“We were chasing the clock,” Simon said. “We have been conducting BIA surveys for some time and were familiar with them.”

“We already had a pool of people we could send for the task who were experienced.”

Members of the Task Force were chosen based on their experience with the BIA survey, development control and building processes. For each rotation, at least two experienced crew leaders were chosen and at least two people had experience undertaking the BIA survey.

“They all worked long hours,” he said, “And to a person, I was proud of our organisation. The people in our teams were outstanding.”

In many cases Task Force members were among the first few people to re-enter the firegrounds. For many of the survivors being interviewed it was their first chance to tell their story to an ‘official’.

“They all said they were challenged by the scale and the size of the incident,” he said. “They expressed a lot of empathy for the Victorians.”

“It is our job to stop this kind of tragedy occurring and when it does happen ...well, it’s heartbreaking.”

The RFS is keen to keep an involvement with this research and has sought to assist with data analysis and survey findings.

In the short term however, the approach to Bush Fire Impact Analysis will integrate the RFS learnings from their involvement with the CRC Research Task Force and will be ready for the 2009-2010 fire season.



**The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission is set to be a benchmark in Australian firefighting history. An interim report focusing on immediate actions that can be taken prior to the next bush fire season will be published in August 2009. In the longer term the findings from the Commission will determine the direction of fire agencies across Australia.**

**This is the first royal commission in Australian history to be streamed live on the internet at [www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au](http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au). Public hearings began on 1 June 2009 and the public have been encouraged to attend in person, via the web or to read transcripts after the event.**

**Here, in a Fire Update Issue 31, the Bushfire CRC and AFAC, explain the role of the Royal Commission and how it works.**

**By Elsie Loh, Clayton Utz, Centre for Risk & Community Safety (RMIT University). Photo by Andrew Sheargold**

## Summary

Royal commissions are the most powerful form of public enquiry in our system. They have broad coercive powers of investigation, including the power to compel witnesses to give evidence and produce documents.

Though not a judicial inquiry, royal commissions often adopt the external 'trappings' of a court process. For example, it is common for witnesses to be cross-examined when appearing before royal commissions. Parties wishing to be actively involved in the commission (such as by appearing before the commission) may therefore find it extremely beneficial to obtain independent legal advice and assistance.

## Introduction

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (the Commission) was established on 16 February 2009 in response to the bush fires that swept through parts of Victoria in January and February 2009. The combination of high

temperatures, low humidity, high wind speeds and years of drought resulted in bush fires that caused unprecedented loss of life and extreme property damage. On 16 February 2009, the State of Victoria appointed the Commission to inquire and report on the causes and responses to the January/February 2009 bush fires.

## Role and powers of a royal commission

Royal commissions are special investigatory bodies found in Westminster democracies. They are established to investigate specific issues or problems and are, therefore, temporary in nature. Royal commissions are established by letters patent issued by the Governor or Governor-General on the advice of the government. Royal commissions are characterised by their open processes of investigation, the public release of their reports and collected evidence, public hearings and coercive investigative powers. They are also not bound by the rules

of evidence as in a court, as royal commissions are not determining issues between parties but conducting a thorough investigation into a subject matter. However, the evidence gathered must be relevant to the terms of reference.

Royal commissions have a more prestigious status than other types of public inquiries and are generally only established in respect of issues of significant importance. They have been described as the 'most powerful and independent instrument of review'.

Royal commissions have a 'special' status because they:

- have coercive powers of investigation conferred by legislation;
- are appointed by the Crown rather than elected officials;
- have a greater sense of independence, as members of royal commissions are drawn from outside of government;
- have often senior judicial and legal professional memberships; and
- have open processes.

The commission can be generally described as an inquisitorial commission. The primary task of an inquisitorial commission is to assemble and verify facts, hear and cross-examine witnesses and make recommendations arising out of the inquiry. Royal commissions also sometimes allocate responsibility for a particular act or incident. Though the present Commission is not mandated this specific task (of allocating responsibility), it is also not prevented from doing so under the broad terms of reference set out in the letters patent (see below for a brief description of the Commission's terms of reference.)

Each Australian jurisdiction has legislation which confers on royal commissions coercive powers. In Victoria, Part 1, Division 5 of the Evidence Act 1958 (Vic) (Evidence Act) confers on Victorian royal commissions a range of powers to collect and procure information and to make witnesses attend hearings and give evidence.

The power conferred by the Evidence Act is also not limited

by the letters patent, which grants the Commission 'full power and authority' to:

- call before it witnesses who the Commission considers are likely to afford it with any information related to the 'subject' of the Commission; and
- inquire into the matters (or 'premises') specified in the terms of reference 'by all other lawful ways and means whatsoever'.

Though the powers granted by the letters patent are broad and largely undefined, the 'lawful' powers that can be exercised by royal commissions according to the Evidence Act include the power:

- to summons any person to attend the Commission at a time and place, and to give evidence and/or produce any document in that person's custody possession or control. However, the person cannot be compelled to answer any question and/or to produce any document that he would not be compelled to answer and/or produce at the trial of an action in the Supreme Court (s.17);
- to administer an oath and to examine upon oath any person so summoned or who happens to be present before the Commission. A person who happens to be present before the Commission may also be called upon to give evidence and/or to produce documents (s.18);
- if the Commission reasonably considers it necessary, to (with the assistance it thinks fit) (s.19E):
  - enter and inspect any place and any document or thing in that place;
  - make copy of any document the Commission considers is relevant; and
  - take possession of any document or thing which the Commission considers relevant and may keep it until the Commission has completed its inquiry and report.

A person who fails to attend or produce any documents without reasonable excuse when summoned or called upon (upon happening to be present before the commission) is guilty of an offence and may be fined no more than 15 penalty units (currently \$1,701) or imprisoned for a term of not more than 3 months (ss.19 and 20).

The powers of the Royal Commission are generally confined to Victoria. Whether it is able to compel witnesses from outside Victoria to give evidence is a vexed question and is likely to depend upon the specific circumstances of the potential witness.

A person is not excused from giving evidence and/or the requirement to produce documents on the ground that:

- the evidence or document may tend to incriminate him or her. However, such evidence cannot be used against him or her in Court or form the basis of any prosecution or suit against him or her. (s.19C);
- the answer to the question or the document contains matters in respect of which the person could claim legal professional privilege (which is a legal rule that protects the confidentiality of communications between a client and his or her lawyer). The Commission may however exclude the public, or specified persons, from a hearing if this issue arises (s.19D).

Unlike other types of inquiries, witnesses appearing before royal commissions can be publicly cross-examined by the royal commissioners (or counsel assisting) and counsel representing other interested parties. This adversarial approach is considered to reinforce the open, independent and investigatory nature of royal commissions. However, others are of the view that public cross examination exposes innocent people to unsubstantiated and iniquitous allegations and scrutiny by over-zealous lawyers, necessitating the need for legal counsel to be engaged by all sides.

Despite the often adversarial approach of royal commissions, they are not 'judicial inquiries'. However, as they are often chaired by current or past judges or other senior legal professionals (as is the case here), royal commissions often end up operating much (at least in appearance) like a court. In the present Commission, the Commissioners have also engaged the assistance of four barristers. This measure suggests that the present Commission, like others before it, will likely adopt an adversarial and legalistic approach to their investigative

process, necessitating the need for independent legal representation for parties wishing to be actively involved in the royal commission process. Royal commissions are often expensive and take a considerable time.

Once a royal commission is established, little action can be taken in respect of the area being investigated, until a report is released. This is most likely why the commission has been commissioned to produce an interim report by 17 August 2009 that focuses on immediate actions that can be taken prior to the 2009-2010 fire season.

## The Royal Commission's terms of reference

The Commission is established by letters patent dated 16 February 2009. The letters patent appoints the Honourable Mr Bernard Teague, a recently retired judge of the Supreme Court, Ron McLeod, who headed the ACT government inquiry into the operational response to the 2003 ACT bush fires, and Susan Pascoe, a Commissioner with the Victorian State Services Authority, as the Commissioners of the Commission. Hon. Teague is appointed as the chairperson of the Commission.

The terms of reference as set out in the letters patent are broad. The Commission has been mandated to inquire into and report on:

1. "The causes and circumstances of the bush fires which burned in various parts of Victoria in late January and in February 2009 ('2009 Bush fires').
2. The preparation and planning by governments, emergency services, other entities and community and households for bush fires in Victoria, including current laws, policies, practices, resources and strategies for the prevention, identification, evaluation, management and communication of bush fire threats and risks.
3. All aspects of the responses to the 2009 bush fires, particularly measures taken to control the spread of the fires and to protect life and property, including but not limited to:
  - (a) immediate management, response and recovery;
  - (b) resourcing, overall coordination and deployment; and

(c) equipment and communication systems.

4. The measures taken to prevent or minimise disruption to the supply of essential services such as power and water during the 2009 Bush Fires.
5. Any other matters that the Commission deem appropriate in relation to the 2009 Bush Fires.

*The Commission has also been directed to make 'such recommendations' as it considers appropriate, including recommendations for governments, emergency services, other entities and the community on:*

6. The preparation and planning for future bush fire threats and risks, particularly the prevention of loss of life.
7. Land use planning and management, including urban and regional planning.
8. The fireproofing of housing and other buildings, including the materials used in construction.
9. The emergency responses to bush fires.
10. Public communication and community advice systems and strategies.
11. Training, infrastructure and overall resourcing needs.

The letters patent directs the Commission to conduct its inquiry as 'expeditiously as possible' and to provide to the State an interim report by 17 August 2009, focusing on immediate actions that can be taken prior to the next bush fire season and a final report by 31 July 2010. The date by which the final report must be produced may be extended according to the letters patent.

## Important dates

The Commission is to produce an interim report focusing on immediate actions that can be taken prior to the 2009-2010 fire season by **17 August 2009**.

The Commission is to produce a final report by **31 July 2010**. However, this date may be extended according to the letters patent.

**Fire Update is published jointly by the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (Bushfire CRC) and the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC).**



# THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT

For more than a century firefighters have gathered to test their skills against the clock and against each other. In April the 2009 Australian National Fire Cadet Championships saw more than 150 young cadet firefighters carry on the tradition - and have a ball while they were at it!

By Keiran Smith, Media Services

Photos by Keiran Smith, Anthony Clark, Ben Shepherd and Eric Berry



As the sun rose in the sky, hundreds of firefighters swarmed onto the staging area, their intent clear both in focus and action. Assembling with their crews, adrenalin beginning to flow, they are prepared for what awaits and willing to do their best for their mates beside them.

A lone whistle rings out across the ground and frantic activity breaks loose – the 2009 Australian National Fire Cadet Championships are off and running.

Twenty six teams from five State jurisdictions converged on Penrith Lakes in mid April for the second National Championships. The event, first held in 2007, requires cadets to safely and correctly complete a range of emergency scenarios while demonstrating initiative and quick thinking.

The Championships see more than 150 young cadet firefighters, aged between 12 and 16 years, come together for five days of healthy competition, training and social activities, while continuing a century-old fire brigades tradition.

The RFSA again stepped up to be a major supporter of the event by playing the role of Principal Sponsor. President Brian McKinlay said their aim

was to encourage and support the next generation of NSW rural firefighters and to showcase the young talent within our organisation who are our future leaders in fire management.

### It is not all about competition

Teams from near and far began arriving on the Monday before

ramping up their preparations with a final training day on Thursday. But it wasn't all just about competition. The aims of the Championships extend far further than finishing drills quicker than the other team.

The week enables socialisation between cadet firefighters from around Australia and for

team leaders to meet with their colleagues from around the country and swap ideas for the betterment of their own programs. Most importantly the Championships are about fun!

An event of this magnitude also helps to raise awareness of the many strong attributes of the various fire services' cadet



programs and many regional media publications followed and reported on the exploits of their local team.

The Championships also attracted television coverage with Saturday Disney, a national kids program on Channel 7, filming a segment with a team of Llandilo cadets and special cameo appearances by St Paul's cadet Bill Andrews and Llandilo captain Perce Denton.

The week also involved a number of official functions including a Civic Reception hosted by Penrith City Council on the Wednesday evening. Acting-Commissioner Dominic Lane officially represented the RFS and took the opportunity to speak of the strong growth of the cadets' program both at brigade and schools level.

During the week, teams also had the opportunity to visit the Museum of Fire and warm up for the weekend with some Ten Pin Bowling, which quickly saw strangers become friends.

### Let the games begin...

Friday was Day One of competition and saw teams compete in activities including the Portable Pump Drill; Hose and Hydrant; Light Tanker and Handtool; Station Response; Two Tanker; Two Lines Two Lengths and a Team Challenge.

On just the first morning several records were smashed. Amazingly, in Station Response, 18 teams broke the existing record of 1 minute 56 seconds set by Greta (VIC) in 2007, while there were multiple record-breaking feats in other events.

Every event lane had a judge from NSW and a judge from interstate in order to reinforce the national nature of the championships and to ensure impartiality of judging.

On Day Two more events were added to the schedule including Bucket Brigade; Knapsack Relay; Tanker and Ladder as well as a number of age-grade events for NSW teams to participate in.

The highlight of the Championships was the Interstate Challenge which involved teams of 12 cadets each undertaking a number of firefighting disciplines, including drafting, creating fire breaks and direct attacks on a 'target fire'. Adding to the difficulty level, teams had to complete the tasks inside 15 minutes.

After a hard-fought affair, with all teams finishing inside only eight minutes, it was Western Australia



who edged out Tasmania in second, NSW in third and Victoria in fourth, to claim bragging rights for the next two years.

Saturday also saw the Official Opening Ceremony, with Acting-Commissioner Dominic Lane joined by Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services and Member for Blue Mountains, Phil Koperberg.

The RFS Pipes and Drums assisted the RFS Protocol Team in leading the teams in a march towards the parade ground, before the National and State flags were raised to officially open the Championships. Acting-Commissioner Lane said the Championships showcased the exceptional technical skills, enthusiasm, and leadership of young cadet firefighters from across the country.

"We are all very aware of the threat from bush fires and just how valuable the RFS is to the communities they serve. So it's inspiring to see so many cadets eager to join their ranks," he said.

"It is a credit to these young people who have taken on the responsibility involved in the cadet program and who aspire to be future volunteer firefighters.

"Congratulations to Championship Director Anthony Head, the Organising Committee and the dozens of volunteers and helpers for their dedication and initiative in organising and coordinating this outstanding event.

"The logistics involved in such an operation are always immense, but the team delivered a highly

professional and well-organised event and we now look forward to the next championships in Western Australia in 2011."

The Championships concluded with a presentation dinner at St Paul's Grammar School in Cranebrook.

Defending champions St Paul's again took out the national honours ahead of Orchard Hills A and Serpentine Jarrahdale Sierra of WA. Final placings can be seen below.



## 2009 Australian National Cadet Championships

	Points
1. St Paul's	119
2. Orchard Hills A	82
3. Serpentine Jarrahdale Sierra (WA)	77
4. Oakville	65
5. Quinns Rocks (WA)	49
6. Tumut A	47
7. Young	46
8. Llandilo	40
9. Warringah-Pittwater A	34
10. Orchard Hills B	32
11. Serpentine Jarrahdale Juliet (WA)	30
12. Shoalhaven	28
13. Regentville	23
14. Victoria 2 (VIC)	22
15. Oak Flats	21
16. Southern Region (TAS)	21
17. Northern Region (TAS)	19
18. North-West Region (TAS)	18
19. Victoria 3 (VIC)	18
20. Blue Mountains B	17
21. Warringah-Pittwater B	16
22. Tumut B	14
23. Mid Murray	11
24. Blue Mountains A	11
25. Victoria 1 (VIC)	10
26. South Australia (SA)	10

All brigades from NSW unless otherwise stated.



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# THE FUTURE HAS A NEW LOOK

Photo by Brett Bowden

**E**ver since the first RFS Standard Design Fire Control Centre (FCC) was officially opened in Canobolas in late 2008 demand for new FCCs across the State has increased. In fact, in the next 12 months seven more Fire Control Centres are in the pipeline.

Why the sudden rush on new RFS Fire Control Centres?

Assistant Commissioner Keith Harrap, Director of Infrastructure Services says that the RFS Standard Design Project is behind it.

"Now that the Canobolas FCC is built people can see what they are going to get," he said, "And they are impressed."

## The Standard Design Project

The idea of common design themes, or standard designs, for all RFS buildings was first mooted in 2004. It was sparked by the design and the construction of the new RFS Headquarters at Homebush Bay.

"We wanted to take what we learned from building the Headquarters at Homebush Bay and share it with the rest of the RFS," Group Manager Fixed Assets and Infrastructure, Mr Tim Anderson said.

"We thought that the way the Headquarters building functioned, the layout, the materials used and the thought that went into the design could all become part of common design themes used across the State."

Since that time architectural plans and standards for all new RFS buildings have been generated by the RFS in partnership with NSW Government Architects. The Standard Design Project was

championed by Assistant Commissioner and Executive Director for Strategic Services, Mr Mark Crosweller along with Mr Tim Anderson, in his former role as Director of Strategic Services and Infrastructure.

Since then a range of RFS experts have produced countless draft plans and drawings for new standard design Fire Control Centres and Stations. Drafts were exhibited around the State for feedback and the final designs have received support from across the RFS.

Key to the Standard Design Project is a view that the same tools and the same facilities should be available to all volunteers.

"There is enormous variation in the standard and type of building that houses the local RFS," Mr Anderson said.

"This is largely due to the history of the RFS. We were once 142 fire agencies governed by many local councils - each with their own budget, priorities and style. We have now been brought together into one Service.

"It was this variability in infrastructure throughout the State that really drove the Standard Design Project," he said. "We have found that some areas have well appointed and maintained stations, while other areas have far more modest facilities."

The Standard Design Project will eventually affect all RFS buildings and it is estimated that it will roll out over the next 20 years. The impact of the project on the entire Service will be massive according to Mr Anderson.

"The buildings are modern and practical. They are places people can be proud

of," he said. "It will improve operational efficiency, it will enhance communication between members and it will also make the organisation more attractive to new recruits."

Improved and standardised facilities reflect the community's commitment to the volunteers who are the life-blood of the RFS.

"It's for the volunteers, they deserve it!"

## Not just a pretty face...

The Standard Design Project is not about creating on-off buildings, it is about establishing a overall system for RFS facilities. It started with making the buildings work, but it did not stop there!

The whole purpose of the Standard Design project was to create a system designed to bring maximum benefit to the RFS and its volunteers.

"You can not learn from one-off buildings, they are built and that is it," Mr Anderson said, "But with the Standard Designs we are able to learn and improve the buildings every time we build one. We can learn and improve the designs and continuously take advantage of new materials and construction processes."

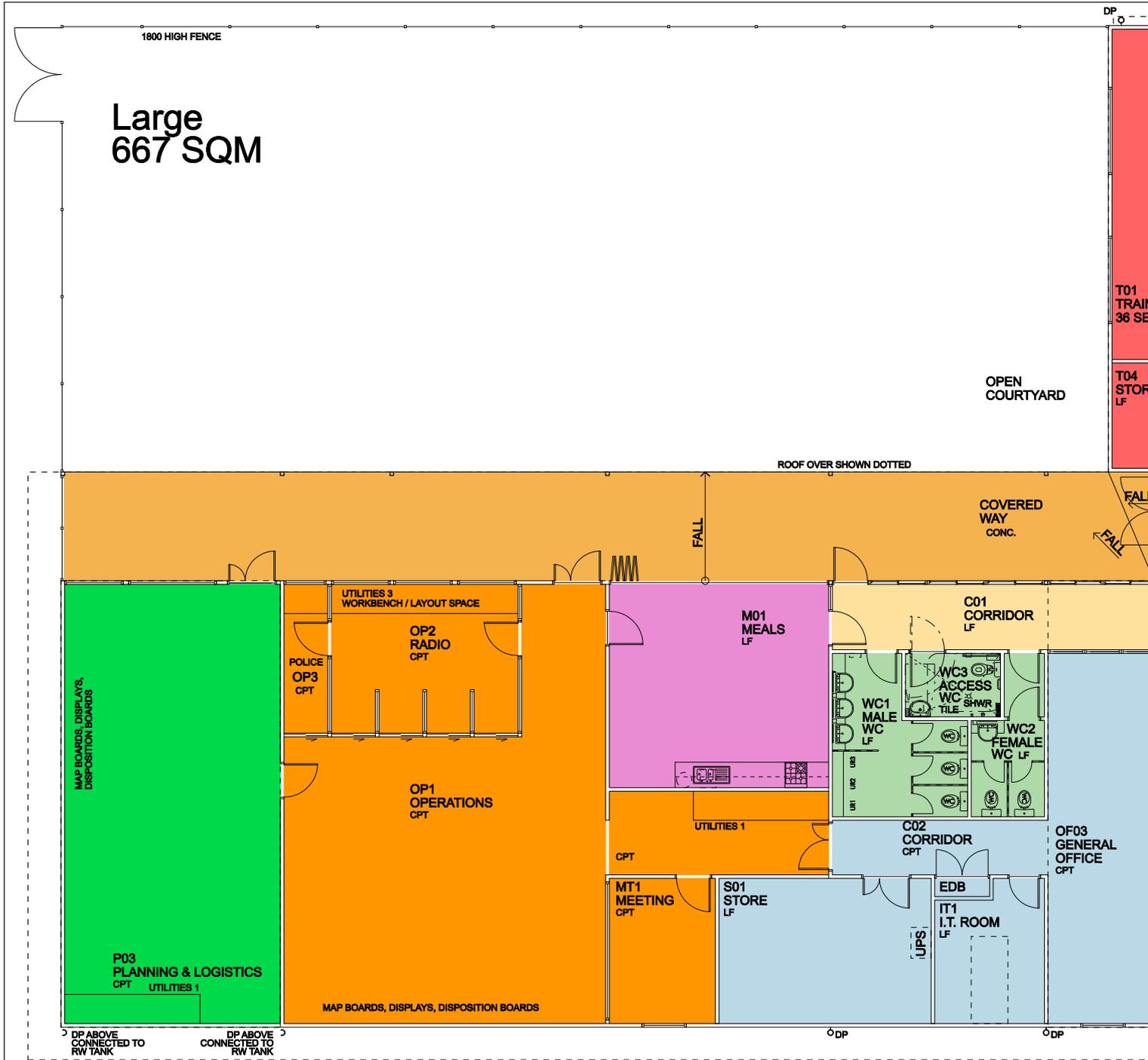
The Standard Design is energy efficient using passive solar energy, maximum cross ventilation, rainwater tanks and construction materials that are recyclable.

In addition, a common design allows the reuse of drawings and specifications saving money on every new construction.

– Continued on page 32

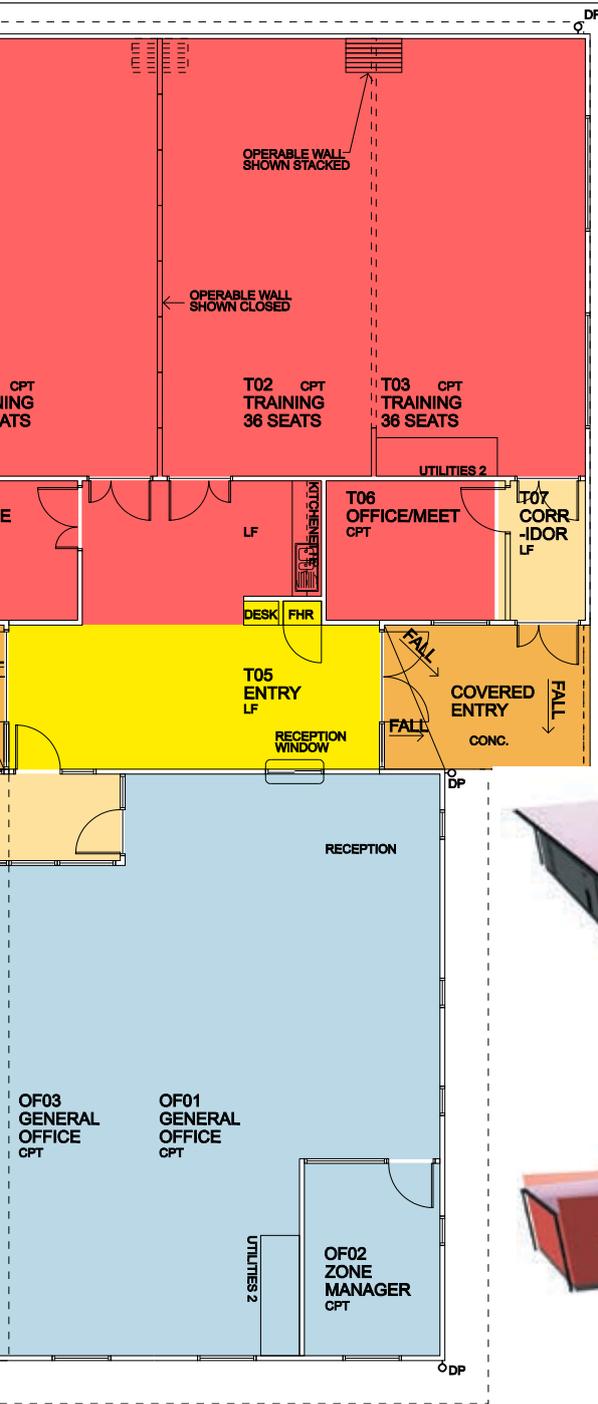


# RFS STANDARD DESIGN

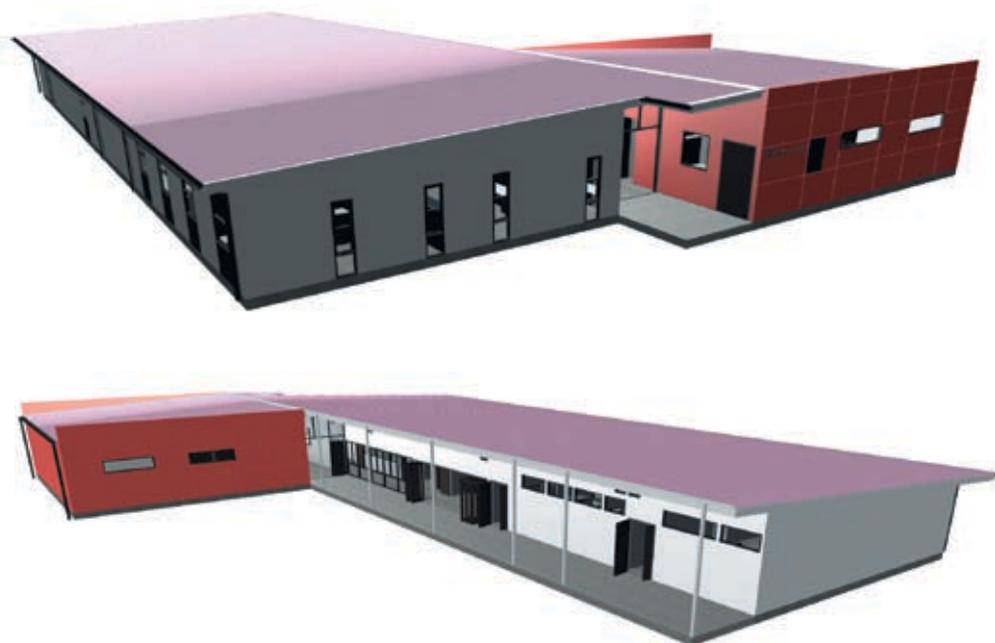




# FIRE CONTROL CENTRES



- ENTRY
- GENERAL OFFICE
- TRAINING
- SERVICES
- MEALS
- OPERATIONS
- PLANNING & LOGISTICS
- INTERNAL CIRCULATION
- EXTERNAL CIRCULATION



Photos by Denis Woodford

Pull out this section to display in your station or Fire Control Centre

# RFS STANDARD DESIGN BRIGADE STATIONS



**A**long with the Standard Design Fire Control Centres there are also Standard Design Brigade Stations.

In an effort to establish consistent quality facilities across the State the designs include one truck stations up to stations that can house four trucks and include an office and catering facilities.

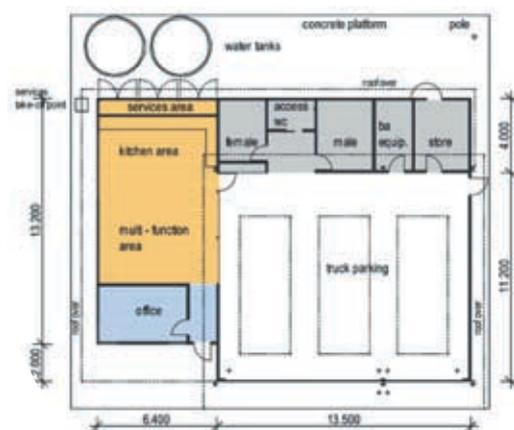
The adaptable system allows for expansion over the years as the stations grows. The modular design means that building a new station can be staged if necessary.

Similar to the Fire Control Centres, the buildings are durable and robust and designed specifically for the RFS. They meet

OH&S obligations and have been carefully planned to best meet volunteer needs. They require very little maintenance and what maintenance there is can be planned.

Probably the greatest advantage for brigades is that building design costs are virtually non-existent. Full architectural drawing sets for all versions are available now and are provided at no cost.

Brigade stations built after 1 July 2009 are to use the RFS Standard Design. Service Standard 5.1.11 sets out the conditions and provides advice on how to get started. For more information contact John Muirhead in Infrastructure Planning.



Architectural plan for a three bay station

## – Continued from page 29

“This similarity of design across the range of available Stations and Fire Control Centres will allow the RFS to take advantage of smart procurement processes into the future,” Mr Anderson said.

“Savings are able to be generated through the letting of bulk purchasing contracts for everything from roofing to light fittings and door handles.”

The RFS Standard Design includes improvements in functionality, as well as the cost efficiencies that come along with standardisation. Years of firefighting expertise have been incorporated into the designs. In particular lessons learned from the construction and design of the RFS Headquarters were transferred directly in to the Standard Designs.

John Muirhead, who is now the Coordinator of Infrastructure Planning, said the improved functionality will please the volunteers.

“I would say these designs are everything we need without going overboard,” he said.

The simple building design, based on a column and pier arrangement, can be constructed by local builders thus boosting the economy in the local area.

“It is a modular design which is entirely without brick,” Mr Muirhead said, “It is really a massive metal frame which means it can be easily extended and is virtually maintenance free. In theory, you could unbolt the whole building and relocate if you wanted to!”

The modular design is not only simple but flexible. Mr Muirhead said that in the case of the Fire Control Centres it was important that the design could handle both small and large numbers of people.

“An FCC is really the hub for any District or Zone and it’s a place where major incidents are run,” he said, “so it’s likely that people from other parts of the State will come to help out in a major incident.”

When the Standard Designs have been rolled out across the State, it will mean that staff or volunteers can walk into any centre around the State and be familiar with the way it works.

They will even know how the phone system operates. Standard Communications specifications have been generated as part of the Standard Design. That means the same telephone and radio equipment will eventually be in every RFS building which will make a big difference to maintenance and repairs costs.

With the Standard Design not only will staff and volunteers know where everything is the facilities will also be able accommodate them easefully. John Muirhead cited the air-conditioning specifications as an example of the flexibility.

“The air-conditioning is specified to handle the different loads. You could have ten people working there day to day and then in Summer it’s 45 degrees outside and there are 100 people working out of the Fire Control Centre.

“It’s the same with meals. We need a place for the staff to eat as well as a place to feed a crowd.”

Short term cycles aside, the Standard Design is also quite simple to extend. The modular design means that extra wings or modules can be added to accommodate more people or more sophisticated activities. Best of all, the architectural drawings for these extensions have already been done.

While Canobolas Fire Control Centre was opened in November 2008 (see pages 33-34) a second Standard Design FCC has since been opened in Albion Park, south of Sydney. Construction has also started in Coffs Harbour and a further five new Standard Design Fire Control Centres will be built over the next 12 or more months.



## A PILOT IN THE CANOBOLAS ZONE

Photos by Steve Smith

**T**he Canobolas Zone Fire Control Centre was the natural choice for the first Standard Design Fire Control Centre.

The Canobolas Zone FCC was already on the books in late 2005 when the RFS Standard Design Project first got off the ground. Sponsorship for the Project was then taken up by the then Region West Manager, Dominic Lane and later Acting Regional Manager, Paul Smith. Region West Manager David Hoadley, has been instrumental in getting the first Standard Design Fire Control Centre up and running.

The completion of the Canobolas Zone Fire Control Centre and Training Centre in November 2008 was the culmination of a seven year project which commenced with the formation of the Canobolas Zone in July 2001. A Coronial Inquiry following the 2001/2002 Goobang fires identified the need for a new Fire Control Centre for the Canobolas Zone.

Also in 2001 the RFS established a committee to investigate the provision of training Centres of Excellence within NSW. In January 2004 this committee allocated the roles of 'Command and Control' and the 'Bush Fire' skills to the Canobolas facility in Orange.

Canobolas Zone was identified by Region West Office as the first FCC to be constructed and was strongly supported by Region West Managers, Dominic Lane and Paul Smith.

Canobolas Zone, Orana Team and the Bland/ Temora Team joined forces with Mr Tim Anderson and the Government Architects Office to develop the Standard Design concept and plans.

### The Building Project

Orange City Council took the lead role in managing the construction and funding the Canobolas Zone project, pending reimbursement from the Rural Fire Fighting Fund.

Numerous challenges were experienced by the builders and project managers as the first building was constructed and lessons were learnt that will benefit future projects. Brett Bowden and Steve Smith from the Canobolas staff and David Hoadley, (who was working in Head Office at that time) played a major role in working with Council and Head Office to document the changes and resolve issues that arose.

The then Minister for Emergency Services, Tony Kelly is to be thanked for his assistance in facilitating the use of the parcel of Crown Land for this purpose. This provides an excellent location and will greatly enhance the profile of the RFS in the Canobolas Zone.

The staff in Canobolas Zone have learnt the meaning of patience as the project has moved through various stages to final completion. However, they are proud of their brand new building. Zone Manager, David Hoadley is thrilled about the new building.

"It's positive every way you look at it!" he said, "It's been a long wait for us and taken a lot of patience for everyone I think, but the new building is an exceptional facility."

"It's a brilliant place to work. I've noticed that the staff is very happy and they are communicating with one another in new ways. They are even taking better care of themselves. I do believe that these are part of the impact of the new building.

"The FCC has also been welcomed by the brigades and volunteers in the Canobolas Zone.

"There are definitely things that need improvement – a door here or there – but we are not complaining!"

Feedback from the existing buildings will be incorporated in to the new buildings.

### The new facility in Canobolas

It provides the following facilities:

- Accommodation for 14 staff
- Dedicated training rooms (3)
- Multi purpose Operations and Planning / Logistics rooms
- Dedicated Radio / Communications systems
- Reception and interview rooms for volunteers
- Helipad
- Canobolas Zone Equipment Store
- Storage Shed
- 500,000 litre water storage

The various rooms in the FCC have been named after the landscape areas from the local Risk Management Plan.

**TOP:** The opening of the first Standard Design Fire Control Centre in Canobolas attracted locals and RFS dignitaries



Liz Lewis, Canobolas Zone Administrative Officer



John Cook, Sutherland Zone Manager and Region West Learning and Development Officer in a previous life



Michael Spira, Senior Deputy Captain Neville Brigade



John Traves, Lockwood Brigade



Glyn Bruce, Group Captain



**TOP RIGHT:** The then Minister for Emergency Services, Tony Kelly officially opened the Canobolas Fire Control Centre with Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons

**CENTRE RIGHT:** Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons chatting with Zone Manager David Hoadley at the opening of the Canobolas Zone Fire Control Centre

**LOWER RIGHT:** Local councils and agencies who attended the opening of the Canobolas FCC in November 2008.

# Have you got the RFS CHRISTMAS SPIRIT?

The NSW RFS is giving all members the chance to submit a photo to feature on the 2009 RFS Christmas Card.

To enter, all you need to do is submit a completed entry form. The entry form outlines everything you need to know about the competition. They are available on MyRFS, the staff intranet or from your local office.

The winning entry will be officially printed on the 2009 RFS Christmas Card with full acknowledgements.

A panel of judges will choose the winner. They will be looking for a photograph that captures the 'RFS Christmas spirit' in a creative way.

All entries must be received by COB Friday July 31 2009. The winner will not be announced until the release of the Christmas card.

Good luck!

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## SYDNEY ROYAL EASTER SHOW 2009

By Shane Culbert, Community Engagement  
Photos by Ben Shepherd and Anthony Clark,  
Media Services

**A**nimal displays, dodgem cars, wood chopping competitions, stunt car performances and of course show bags are all synonymous with one of Australia's largest events, the Sydney Royal Easter Show.

More than 900,000 people poured through the gates over 14 days to eat 109,000 Dagwood dogs, 35,000 corn cobs and 34,000 scones. Visitors to the Show purchased an astonishing 1.65 million show bags which proves going to this traditional annual event is still a priority for many people.

The RFS display this year focused on promoting brigade sustainability. The stand very effectively showcased the variety of functions performed by our 70,000 volunteer members, such as communications, catering, firefighting, recruitment and community engagement.

Specific objectives were set for the 2009 Sydney Royal Easter Show exhibit:

- Increasing community awareness of the Service and its roles and responsibilities
- Creating an interactive display to encourage community interest
- Encouraging community members to join their local brigade
- Demonstrating the importance of the brigade in building community resilience

In winning the silver ribbon in the Commercial category the 'new' site, located at the main Boulevard Entrance, proved an excellent position to engage children and adults alike as they learned more about the roles and tasks performed by members of the Service. Members of the public were also given information on how to prepare their property and protect their family against the threat of bush fire.

Sutherland District kindly supplied their Operational Command Vehicle (OCV) for the Easter Show display which was used to great effect in emphasising the strengths of the Communications Corps. This new prototype vehicle will become the standard for all future communications vehicles. Hundreds of children enjoyed the OCV while learning how firefighters communicate with each other during major incidents.

Members of the public continually commented on how great it was to see the Category 1 fire appliance as they entered the Easter Show.

Children of all ages were given the opportunity to climb aboard the 'big red' fire truck to experience what it is like to be a firefighter. While the younger kids enjoyed colouring in and completing puzzles, find-a-



words and crosswords, the older kids (and adults) enjoyed playing with the various firefighting equipment on display.

The Bullex extinguisher simulator was a huge hit. Show goers of all ages learnt how to correctly use a fire extinguisher to smother a small fire utilising the systems infra-red extinguisher.

The Community Engagement Team simply couldn't make the RFS Display happen each year without the assistance of hundreds of volunteers throughout the State. More than 30 districts submitted their interest in supporting the Easter Show display. For those districts who missed out this year, get in again next year as you will be first cabs off the rank. Our thanks go to the following districts who proudly represented the

Service in such a professional manner:

- Illawarra
- Orana
- Lakes Team
- Macarthur
- Canobolas
- Gosford
- Liverpool Range
- Riverina Highlands
- Hastings
- Sutherland
- Wollondilly
- Hawkesbury
- Warringah/Pittwater
- Baulkham Hills
- Hornsby
- Great Lakes
- Wingecarribee
- Blue Mountains



The Community Engagement team would also like to thank everyone who was involved in making the RFS display at the Easter Show a huge success:

- Engineering Services
- Sutherland District
- Volunteer Relations
- Region East regional office



## RFS SAVES BLUEY IN 'THE STORY OF TRUE BLUE'

The Sydney Royal Easter Show, held over the Easter weekend each year, continues to provide an excellent opportunity for volunteers and staff to engage members of the public. In 2009 the NSW Rural Fire Service was asked by the Royal Agricultural Society (RAS) to play a major role in the nightly performance, The Story of True Blue (which featured John Williamson). This offer to participate was gladly accepted as it provided a great new way to communicate the roles and functions of the Service, while allowing us to demonstrate our firefighting skills to members of the public.

The Story of True Blue is a production about a dog name Bluey who gets lost on a farm after a fire breaks out. Members of the family desperately try to find their beloved pet throughout the performance which lasts 30 minutes.

Bluey's adventures begin when lightning strikes the family home. The house catches alight, at which point one of our tireless brigades enter the main arena under lights and sirens in a Category 1 RFS fire appliance to save the day. Once the crews have responded and arrived on scene, they immediately leap into action by starting the pump, rolling a length of 38mm canvas hose and the first aid hose in order to contain the structure fire.

Just as the house fire is blacked out and a stop message about to be called, they notice a small grass fire around the edge of the main arena. The same crew responds and is able to extinguish the fire before it gets out of control. Once both fires are out the crew packs up all hoses and leaves the arena.

What a supreme performance. The crews responded to, and successfully extinguished, the house fire and the grass



fire night after night, in fact for 14 nights in a row. Unfortunately though Bluey (the dog) was continually left behind, but all was not lost. Bluey went on his own little adventure with horses, cattle, sheep, bikes and stockmen before he was reunited with his family.

A big thank you to Terry Jackson and Mick Beltran from Region East as well as the brigades who participated in the daily performance:

- North Rocks
- Oakville
- Mannering Park
- Mount Hunter
- Blaxlands Ridge
- Dora Creek
- Catherine Fields
- West Pittwater
- Davidson
- Glenorie
- Woodford

**CENTRE LEFT:** Premier Nathan Rees took time at the Easter Show to talk with volunteers from The LakesTeam at the Easter Show on Monday 13 April.

**ABOVE AND RIGHT:** Singer John Williamson and Bluey, the blue heeler, were the stars of the show, but the RFS appliances and crews provided the drama

## GOSFORD BRIGADES FIRE UP THE CESSNOCK CELLS

Photos by Kurt Pressley and Louise Hayward

**T**hirteen members from Avoca Beach, Copacabana, Wamberal and Operational Support took part in a dynamic and entertaining day at the Cessnock training facility in late March.

The goal for the day was to keep their Breathing Apparatus and Village Firefighter skills up to date. For the Gosford crews the day began with an early morning start from Avoca Beach Station setting off for Cessnock in Avoca Beach 1, Gosford 1B and Operational Support 20 for the one hour drive.

The training facility in Cessnock offers a great opportunity for brigades with Breathing Apparatus Operators to experience the heat and real smoke of a structure fire. Several large shipping containers allow breathing apparatus operators to enter a structure with doors, rooms and various hazards, including live fire.

It simulates a real-world structure fire and allows the operators to practice complex search techniques in a dark, smoke-filled building while attacking a fire. Crew leaders and crews were also required to be mindful of exposures such as gas cylinders, power to the building as well as exterior power risks - just as they would in a real-world situation.

### Scenario One: structure fire

The initial scenario of the day involved the full roll-out of two brigades to a structure fire. Village crews were required to deploy two lines of two lengths, ship a standpipe to the hydrant system that was being pressurized from a pump at the nearby dam, and have breathing apparatus operators donned and started up within minutes of arriving.

Operational Support also played the role of Fire Communications for the incident issuing fire calls and receiving communications from the crew leaders through the exercise. While all this was going on, those enrolled in Crew Leader training were able to get some valuable Crew Leader time under their belt.

Subsequent scenarios on the day included various fire situations inside the building as well as recovering casualties and conducting thorough secondary searches. An emergency drill was undertaken where crews were required to exit the building after the BACO blew the whistle three times.

### Final Scenario: Car crash

The final scenario of the day involved a serious motor vehicle accident involving two cars with possible persons trapped. Two brigades were 'responded' and on arriving notified Communications that the two cars were fully involved. Breathing apparatus operators were used and the fire was contained and casualties were removed from the scene and treated.



Leigh Pilkington and Isaac McGoldrick, carefully open the door and throw a few jets of water to the ceiling to cool the room before entering.

### Safety Officers on hand

Throughout the training exercise, two safety officers were inside the cells at all times and present during the car fire, monitoring the progress and safety of the operators going in to tackle the incident. The crews were briefed on all safety requirements and were aware that in the event of a safety message being passed, all radio communication was to cease. Thankfully, and a credit to the members on the day, no safety issues were raised.

### Working together successfully

The organiser of the event, Leigh Pilkington from Avoca Beach, praised the three brigades.

"It was great to see three brigades undertake complex tasks with unfamiliar team mates," he said, "You work together as though you have been training with each other for years!"



It was such a successful day that there are plans to repeat the event to give other operators a chance to take part.

En route back to Avoca Beach crews were in the vicinity of a reported structural fire in Wamberal and were requested by Gosford Fire Communications to respond. Crews were surprised at the thought of putting their training into practice right away. It turned out to be a backyard burn and crews could stand down.

The entire training day was supported by the Gosford District Office with assistance from Fire Control Officers. Approval was given to take Operational Support offline and out of district as well as approval to take a Category 1 tanker to Cessnock along with Avoca Beach 1.

With these resources available, crews were able to concentrate on the training and had everything they needed for a successful, yet demanding, training day. Of course the training wouldn't have been possible without the support from Cessnock, not only allowing the use of the training facility but having an officer available on the day to open up and close down.

Avoca Beach Brigade has a terrific website. To view more photos visit:  
<http://www.avoca-rfb.sigi.com.au>



**TOP LEFT:** Avoca Beach 1 at the training ground.

**TOP RIGHT:** Leigh Pilkington and Isaac McGoldrick take the hoses from the structure prior to running another scenario.

**CENTRE:** Two BA crews tackle the car fire while keeping an eye out for any casualties.

**BELOW:** The final BAO crew of the day – (left) Isaac McGoldrick, Kurt Pressley, Leigh Pilkington and Chris Douglas.

# V2C VOLUNTEER TO CAREER WORKSHOP

The NSW Rural Fire Service in conjunction with the Rural Fire Service Association will again be conducting the V2C Programme in 2009.

The V2C programme is developed to assist volunteer members wanting to pursue a salaried career with the NSW RFS. Topics include:

1. What jobs are typically available in the RFS?
2. How can you make yourself more competitive for an RFS job?
3. How do you apply for a job in the RFS?
4. What do typical RFS jobs involve?

Programmes are held over a weekend in the following locations:

- Wagga Wagga (Region South) 11 & 12th July (contact Hilda Duff on ph 4472-4165)
- Homebush Bay (Region East) 15 & 16 August (contact Maria Yamine on ph 8741-5493)



**RFSA**  
Rural Fire Service Association



Download the application now from MyRFS [www.myrfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.myrfs.nsw.gov.au) or contact your Regional Office for more information.

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST ARE OPEN UNTIL 20 MARCH. LATE APPLICATIONS MAY BE ACCEPTED IF VACANCIES REMAIN.



## CABA BRACKET WILL MAKE LIFE EASIER

**D**onning a CABA set has been made much faster and easier with a new bracket commissioned by RFS Engineering.

The improvements have been made to make the CABA sets more accessible for all firefighters. The ergonomic design reduces physical stress on the operator and cuts down the time it takes to don the CABA sets.

The bracket is a 'pantograph style' that enables two CABA sets to be unstowed simultaneously with minimal effort as gas struts fitted to the bracket take the weight of the CABA sets. The design of this bracket enables the unstowing and stowing of the CABA sets to be a simple one hand operation and can be done in just a few seconds.

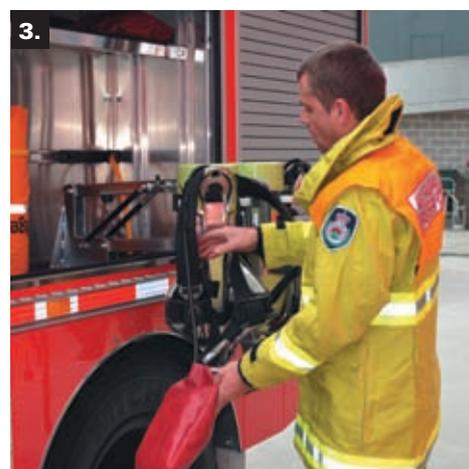
As the CABA sets are stowed offset at 45 degrees, this also allows two operators to don a set at the same time.

The bracket is rugged in construction and features several settings to enable the CABA sets to be unstowed at different heights.

This new bracket also enables the CABA sets to be stowed upright with room for two spare cylinders in the locker. This bracket suits both the older 207 Bar cylinders as well as the new 300 Bar cylinders.

Although this bracket was developed for the new model Cat 1 and Cat 11 tankers, it can also be retro-fitted to older Cat 1 tankers that have 500mm deep lockers. In the new Cat 1 tankers, the CABA sets are also now stowed on the left hand side of the tanker.

Contact Engineering Services for more information.



# in**focus**:volunteers

## Welcome to the RFS, Amy Blackwood

"Firefighting is in my blood," says the Service's newly appointed Youth Development Officer, Amy Blackwood.

Amy grew up on a farm in Young and firefighting was part of the family tradition.



### Youth Development Officer, Volunteer Relations

*"Firefighting is in my blood"*

"Mum and dad are volunteers in Region West and before them my grandfather and great grandfather were also firefighters," she said.

As a Youth Development Officer, Amy's role is to focus on the development of youth within the Service. She also coordinates the Secondary Schools Cadet Program, providing funding, training and support to facilitators across the State.

"The involvement of young people in the Service ensures the sustainability of our Service into the future," she said, "It is also young people who inject a flow of enthusiasm - just as we saw at the recent Cadet Championships!"

"I will be working towards fostering a culture of young volunteers within the RFS. I'll also be taking initiatives among young volunteers to nurture their qualities of leadership, teamwork, self discipline and initiative."

Amy has been active firefighter for more than five years and continues to volunteer with her local brigade on the Central Coast. She has a degree in Health Science and is currently completing a Bachelor of Psychology. She has worked for NSW Sport and Recreation as a Development Officer.

**Above:** Amy Blackwood acting as Marshall at the recent Cadet Championships held in April 2009.

## We salute you!

In the most recent Bush Fire Bulletin we urged members of the RFS who are also past or present members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to make contact with us.

We had an overwhelming and immediate response!

The survey showed that significant numbers of RFS members have served in the ADF or are currently serving in the ADF on land, on water and in the air.

Members of our Service reported that they have experienced operational service in Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam, the Gulf War, the Solomon Islands, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition many members have served elsewhere in South East Asia and the Middle East.

**Well done to all those men and women who responded to the survey. We salute you and your service!**

## Memorial to Emergency Service Volunteers of NSW



All members of the RFS are welcome to attend the annual commemorative service at the Memorial to Emergency Service Volunteers at The Domain in Sydney.

This year the commemorative service will be held on Sunday, 25 October 2009 at 1030hrs, Mrs Macquarie's Road, The Domain Sydney.

It honours volunteers of the NSW Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service, NSW Volunteer Rescue Association, Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol and Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association. Sixty six Rural Fire Service volunteers' names have been honoured on this Memorial.

The Service is open to anyone who wishes to pay their respects. Further details will be available on the RFS intranet and MyRFS closer to the time.

Since its inception in 2001, an annual Commemorative Service has been held at the site. On 1 January 1999 the then Premier, Bob Carr, announced that a Memorial would be established to honour Emergency Service volunteers of NSW who had lost their lives in the line of duty. The Memorial was erected within The Domain, in the precinct of Mrs Macquarie's Chair within the City of Sydney and dedicated by the Governor of New South Wales, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC, on 3 June 2001.

It would be appreciated if you are wishing to attend that you advise Cassandra Wood at RFS Headquarters in early October. Call 8741 5548 or email: [Cassandra.wood@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Cassandra.wood@rfs.nsw.gov.au)



## Long Service medal update

The Long Service Medal was released on 4 May 2009 at the Commissioner's Internal Bravery Service Awards Ceremony.

The Awards Officer Melissa Mobberley said that quite a number of nominations had been received.

"Nominations will be dealt with in the order of receipt, and according to the medal maker's ability to supply. Any nomination which is to be submitted will need to follow the chain of command which appears in Service Standard 9.1.1 Internal Service Awards. It is recommended that the applicant familiarise themselves with the Service Standard before applying," she said.

Further information regarding the release of the Long Service Medal can be found on MyRFS.



## ARIAH PARK CADET GRADUATION AT HEAD OFFICE

By Amy Blackwood, Youth Development Officer

**E**ight cadets from Ariah Park, near Temora in the State's Central West had a thrill when they received their graduation certificates from the Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan and the Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons.

On Monday the 30 March, Mr Whan joined Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons at the RFS Headquarters in Homebush Bay to welcome the eight students and presented them with their certificates in the official ceremony.

The students had spent the previous nine weeks participating in the Secondary School Cadet Program at Ariah Park Central School as an alternative to physical education activity. Volunteers from the RFS Bland Temora Zone delivered the program under the direction of the Community Safety Officer, Inspector Melissa Messenger.

The eight cadets were taught skills such as:

- Fire Safety
- Basic firefighting skills and a knowledge of fire behaviour
- Appreciation of community/volunteer spirit
- Confidence, team work, leadership, initiative
- Appreciation of the role of emergency services

After the ceremony had concluded, the cadets were taken on an informative tour of RFS Headquarters by Inspector Sean Greenwood. Inspector Greenwood gave the cadets an insight into the operational, logistical and planning requirements implemented during major fire incidents. He also gave them an overview of the day to day running of headquarters.



The cadets stayed overnight in Penrith and visited the Museum of Fire on Tuesday morning to explore the history of firefighting in Australia before getting back on the bus for the six hour journey home.

### ***Congratulations to the Ariah Park Central School Cadets 2009***

**James Lawrence**  
**Travis Pursehouse**  
**Hugh Murdoch**  
**Jeremy Aurik**  
**Julia Davey**  
**Meg Maguire**  
**Kayla Watts**  
**Lucas Walker**



Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan, talking to the Ariah Park cadets at their awards ceremony.



One of the new cadets, Julia Davey, at the award ceremony.



**Moving**  
*Let us help you.*

TRANSFERRING MEMBERSHIP TO ANOTHER AREA CAN BE EASY.

Contact your local Fire Control Centre  
or Volunteer Relations and we will let  
them know you're coming.



 **[volunteer@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:volunteer@rfs.nsw.gov.au)**  
Phone: 02 8741 5555 or your local Fire Control Centre



One group and 14 individual recipients were acknowledged by the Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan and Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons at the St Florian's Day Awards

## ST FLORIAN'S DAY AWARDS

Photos by Adam Hollingworth

**R**FS volunteers and staff were honoured for acts of bravery and outstanding service once again on St Florian's Day, May 4, 2009.

In a ceremony held at the RFS Headquarters in Homebush Bay, staff and volunteers and their families gathered to be presented with their awards.

One group and 14 individual recipients were acknowledged by the Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan and Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. Drawn from brigades and regions across the State these recipients were presented with Awards in recognition of outstanding bravery or service. The 4 May is chosen each year for the Awards Ceremony as it is the Feast Day of St Florian, Patron Saint of Firefighters and International Firefighter's Day.

### The Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery

*Awarded to recognise an act of courage under hazardous circumstances.*



Captain Raymond Mon MacKellar

### Deputy Captain Raymond Malcolm (Mon) MacKellar Weethalle RFB, Bland / Temora Zone

On Tuesday 7 January 2008 after hearing a loud explosion and observing thick black smoke, Deputy Captain MacKellar, an active member of Weethalle Rural Fire Brigade responded to the incident in his private vehicle to investigate. On arrival he observed

an overturned petrol tanker and trailer with the tanker on fire. He located the driver of the tanker through the thick black smoke and flames and managed to pull the driver away from the burning vehicle and comforted him on the side of the road. The tanker exploded into a fire ball soon after. The driver of the tanker was flown to Concord Hospital suffering severe head injuries and burns to 50 percent of his body. The tanker



Mungindi Rural Fire Brigade

was totally destroyed in the fire ball and the Mid Western Highway was closed for approximately 10 hours while a total of 10 fire appliances controlled the blaze. Damage to the road was extensive and required resurfacing. Subsequent investigation revealed that the tanker was carrying approximately 120 kilolitres of fuel when the driver lost control of the tanker causing it to rollover. Deputy Captain MacKellar's brave actions saved the life of the driver at the scene and brought credit to himself and to the Rural Fire Service.

### The Commissioner's Unit Citation for Service

*Awarded to crews, brigades, groups or organised units to recognise outstanding service of a meritorious nature, such as group actions in relation to fire service duties, group work performance, or other outstanding or meritorious service.*

#### **Mungindi Rural Fire Brigade - Moree Plains**

**Captain Kym Stanford**

**Senior Deputy Captain Linda Riley**

**Deputy Captain Lloyd Betts**

**Deputy Captain Anthony Saunders**

**Firefighter David Newman**

**Firefighter Casey Riley**

The Mungindi Rural Fire Brigade provides fire protection to the community of Mungindi situated 120 kilometres north-west of Moree. It is the only source of fire protection for this community. Since May 2007, the brigade has attended six village fire incidents of suspected arson

and all have occurred in the early hours of the morning. While on scene at these incidents the brigade members have acted promptly and professionally in meeting the fire threats imposed despite the intense radiant heat generated by these fires. A total of three properties were saved through the swift actions of the brigade. Two were occupied houses, a third the town's only doctor's surgery. The remaining fires involved caravans and a prime mover. In all cases the swift and professional actions of the brigade also prevented the spread of these fires to adjoining premises. It is of significance that the nearest backup to the brigade is an average of 40 minutes response time away. The swift and efficient actions of the Mungindi Rural Fire Brigade in meeting the fire threats imposed upon their community by a suspected arsonist is consistent with the best traditions of the Rural Fire Service and is a shining example of the role of these brigades in isolated communities.

### The Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Individual)

*Awarded to recognise service or outstanding actions in relation to fire service duties, administrative leadership, or exemplary performance of a specific project or task. The Certificate of Commendation may be awarded to an individual or unit for service beyond the scope of responsibility normally expected of that person or unit in their assigned duties and is therefore worthy of acknowledgement and commendation.*

### Group Captain Terry Best Northern Tablelands



Group Captain Terry Best

Group Captain Terry Best has provided invaluable assistance to the Annual Region North Field Exercises from 2001 in the role of Catering Manager. He unselfishly gave up weeks of his time in the lead up to each year's exercise to prepare menus and order the catering resources for up to 500 personnel over the course of the exercise weekend. He has total responsibility to oversee the ordering, preparation and service of up to 3000 meals, comply with Government Food Handling Guidelines and recruit and manage a volunteer work force of up to 30 personnel from across the Region. The members of the Region North Exercise Committee are adamant that the Region North Exercises would not have been as successful as they have been without his involvement and Group Captain Best is deserving of commendation.

### Superintendent Boyd Townsend Northern Rivers Team



Group Captain Boyd Townsend

Superintendent Boyd Townsend achieved international acclaim recently when he was chosen as the winner of the "Changing the World" category for the Annual MapInfo Meridian Awards. The two programs he developed in consultation with the Rural Fire Service GIS Unit, Map Desk and Helifire, will have a significant impact on the way the Rural Fire Service can plot fires and provide accurate information regarding what is occurring on the fireground in a time critical manner. Both of these programs allow users with a basic mapping knowledge to create maps that Incident Management Teams can rely on and can use to make informed operational firefighting decisions. Through his innovation, Superintendent Townsend is deserving of commendation.

### Deputy Captain Barry Freeman Blue Mountains District



Deputy Captain Barry Freeman

Deputy Captain Barry Freeman joined the Mount Wilson-Mount Irvine Rural Fire Brigade in 1999 and served in the positions of Secretary, Deputy Captain and Captain,

becoming a Deputy Group Captain for the Blue Mountains West Sector in 2005. During his time as Brigade Captain he developed and nurtured the Brigade into one of the most active and capable brigades in the Blue Mountains.

He currently holds the rank of Deputy Captain. A major achievement was the development of a strategic water supply program for the brigade area through the coordination of local effort and successful grant applications. Through his leadership he was also instrumental in the development and implementation of the pilot Ambulance First Responder Program resulting in the Mount Wilson-Mount Irvine Brigade becoming the State's inaugural First Responder Rural Fire Brigade. He continues to represent the interests of volunteers on the District Committees and his management and facilitation skills provide remarkable guidance to these committees and deserving of commendation.

### Superintendent Anthony Place and Deputy Group Captain Peter Mooney Mid Lachlan Valley Team



Superintendent Anthony Place



Group Captain Peter Mooney

Superintendent Anthony Place has been the Learning and Development Officer for the Mid Lachlan Valley Team since 2003 and

Deputy Captain Peter Mooney has been the District Training Officer (Volunteer) since 2005. They have always had a passion for training and for the delivery of mainstream Service courses across the Team's area. They both recognised the need for specialist training for rural remote areas. As a consequence they developed the bush fire grasslands package which, because of its duration and content, quickly became popular with the volunteers who were previously reluctant to complete training. They then fine tuned the Crew Leader Grasslands Package and also implemented this training. After the successes of these courses, volunteers in the area sought more practical training and they subsequently developed the Village Structural Grasslands Course. Their initiatives have provided an alternative to the mainstream training available and this has seen hundreds of volunteers undertake training in rural remote areas who were previously not interested in such training. Grasslands training is now being recognised by other Zones and Teams and being added to their training calendars.

Their personal efforts in the development and delivery of training are ensuring the ongoing development of firefighting skills and are deserving of commendation.

### Deputy Group Captain James Jamieson Rosebank Rural Fire Brigade, Northern Rivers



Deputy Group Captain James Jamieson

Deputy Group Captain Jamieson's involvement with the Rural Fire Service has continued to grow since becoming a volunteer in 2001. He quickly became deeply involved with his Rosebank Brigade and displayed his leadership abilities by quickly becoming Deputy, then Senior Deputy and eventually Captain of the Brigade. Since obtaining his RFI and RFA qualification he has instructed and assessed at almost all courses conducted by the Northern Rivers Training Team. Since the Operational Command Vehicle No 1 arrived in the area, he has been heavily involved in the refurbishment of the vehicle making it an extremely useful extension to the command and control facilities of Incident

Management. He also had a major input into the design and production of the Communication Trailers that are co-produced with the Rural Fire Service Association. Since gaining his Group Leader and ICS/IMT Planning and Operations qualifications he has been very involved with Section 44 fires. His willingness to shoulder responsibility and tackle workloads is coupled with his unfailing cheerfulness and he has become a shining example for others to follow and deserving of commendation.

### Communication Officer Henry Michael Earle Barwon Darling Communications



Communication Officer Henry Michael Earle

Communications Officer, Henry Michael Earle has been a member of the Rural Fire Service since 1962. He immigrated to Australia in the late 1950s. He joined the local brigade which in later years became the Warrumbungle's Rural Fire Brigade. In 1978 he joined the NSW Corrective Services and relocated to Goulburn Gaol and joined the Windellama Brigade until he relocated to Bathurst Gaol and joined the Duramana Brigade. He became North East Group Captain with Evans Shire and held this position from 1988 until 1998. Apart from his service at a number of serious fires over the years, while with Corrective Services he was instrumental in the training of prison inmates as an emergency response team with trustee inmates being trained to basic firefighter level. He was also involved in the Correctional Services Prison Industries group in the manufacture, conversion and maintenance of fire tankers, pumps and training aids for use by brigades across Evans Shire and the Sydney basin. He continued with local brigades after his retirement. In 2004 he established the Barwon Darling Communications Brigade, holding the position of Captain. This highly trained and competent brigade is frequently requested as a vital resource to manage communications for Section 44 bush fire emergencies. His long and dedicated service is an inspirational example to others and is deserving of commendation.



### The Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Unit)

*Awarded to recognise service or outstanding actions in relation to fire service duties, administrative leadership, or exemplary performance of a specific project or task. The Certificate of Commendation maybe awarded to an individual or unit for service beyond the scope of responsibility normally expected of that person or unit in their assigned duties and is therefore worthy of acknowledgement and commendation.*

### Gulmarrad Rural Fire Brigade - Clarence Valley

The Gulmarrad Rural Fire Brigade has made outstanding efforts in response to a range of serious high profile incidents. These include a number of horrific motor vehicle accidents on the Pacific Highway and most notable, two major structure fires within the central business district of the town of Maclean. On 27 February 2006, the Brigade was called to assist NSW Fire Brigades firefighters with a major structure fire in Maclean. The fire started in heritage building shop premises and whilst the premises were destroyed the initial assistance and co-operative efforts of the attending firefighters ensured that the adjoining premises were saved. On 6 May 2008 the Brigade was again called to

support the NSW Fire Brigades Maclean Station in response to a structure fire at the Maclean Video Store, Gulmarrad 1 and 7 Call Signs were the second and third appliances on scene. Again the initial co-operative efforts of the attending firefighters effectively contained the fire and prevented destruction of the adjoining premises. Through its actions, the Gulmarrad Rural Fire Brigade demonstrated the highest level of professionalism and provided an inspirational example of what can be achieved through interagency cooperation. In so doing, they have brought great credit upon themselves and the Rural Fire Service and are deserving of commendation.

### St Florian's Feast Day, 4 May

Firefighters in most European countries celebrate 4 May as St Florian's Feast Day as well as International Firefighters Day. This has been a tradition in central Europe for more than 150 years.

The Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service, in recognition of acts of bravery and outstanding service, has established an internal awards system which are always presented on St Florian's Day. The Awards were instituted on 1 February 1999. The establishment of an internal awards system is authorised under the *Rural Fires Act 1997* and accompanying Regulations.

## BRIGADE IN PROFILE

**Name of Brigade:** Blue Mountains Group Support

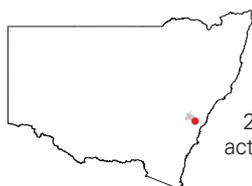
**Year brigade formed:** 2000

**Current Captain:** Ian Mann

**Current President:** Dick Smith

**D/T/Z:** Blue Mountains District / Region East

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



Although the Blue Mountains Group Support was officially formed in 2000, our brigade is actually 40 years old.

It was originally established in 1968. So we have recently celebrated our 40th Anniversary with a dinner held at the Fire Control Centre attended by 60 past and present members of the Group Support Brigade together with District Staff.

In 2000 there was a change in focus for the Blue Mountains District and the Group Support Brigade was officially formed. It now encompasses the roles of communication, catering and fire investigation. Air radio communications and planning/logistics were also added to our responsibilities at that time.

The Group Support Brigade has a membership of 82. About 20 of these are not currently active for reasons such as illness and employment restrictions.

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

Before we were a formal brigade many of our functions were being carried out within the Blue Mountains District.

We developed the concept of a specialist Operational Command Vehicle. The Blue Mountains was one of the first districts to design and construct the operational command vehicles (OCVs) which are mobile communications centres. It is used as a Command Centre at incidents and other major community activities like the Woodford-to-Glenbrook Cycle Classic and the Six-Foot-Track Marathon.

Even earlier than that we had developed mobile canteens which were 'custom' designed on a Hino chassis with adaptations to include cooking and serving areas. Back in the late 1970s this was quite innovative and uncommon.

The Blue Mountains Group Support Brigade also pioneered several training modules – the Communications Centre Assistance (CCA), Communications Centre Operator (CCO) and Communications Centre Supervisor (CCS) training regimes.

We were one of the first brigades to adopt Incident Management Team roles and Assistant Radio Operator (ARO) roles.



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

Our brigade covers an extensive area extending from Lapstone in the east to Mt Victoria in the west and the Mt Wilson and Megalong Valley areas. The Blue Mountains District covers some very difficult terrain and presents difficulties with radio transmissions in some areas.

### What type of incidents does your brigade attend?

The Group Support Brigade provides 'support' services to other brigades and agencies in the areas of communications, catering, air radio operations, fire investigations, planning and logistics.

It also provides Air Operations Support which entails setting up the Communications Bus in support of the Air Base Operations at Medlow Bath and Camden Airfields, or heli bases at various ovals or paddocks. In this role the Support Brigade does have to travel and sometimes interstate.

Generally we are busiest during bush fires. The Communications Section do provide communications each weekend, however, and support local brigades who attend road accidents, structural fires, storm damage and search and rescue tasks.

The Catering members provide food

services during incidents as well as on some training days and at local RFS or community events.

### What vehicles do you have?

The brigade has an Operations Command Vehicle, a generator trailer unit and the large mobile field kitchen and van. Other vehicles are also made available for special tasking.

### What type of training do you undertake?

All members of the Group Support Brigade have participated in Basic Firefighter training and are encouraged to undertake other training such as Advanced Firefighter or Crew Leaders training. The Captain and Deputy Captains are all fully qualified Crew Leaders.

A number of members have qualified as Air Radio Operators. Catering staff undertake further courses in food handling. Communications members are trained in Communications Assistant, Communications Operator and Supervisor courses.

All members are encouraged to undertake self-paced training including Incident Control System for Incident Management Teams.

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

Our members are drawn from all areas of the Blue Mountains District and we have



a number with dual membership. Many members are trained to undertake a variety of roles.

We have members who want to be actively involved but do not wish to be on a tanker and doing firefighting. We are also about 50/50 male and female which is a bit different from the firefighting brigades. We do have people from all age groups.

#### **What community events does your brigade participate in?**

The brigade attends various community activities such as the Six-Foot Track run, the Mt Wilson to Bilpin Fun Run, the CareFlight Fun Run and the Woodford-to-Glenbrook Cycle Classic as well as local citizenship award activities..

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

Group Support has the backing of the District Manager, Group Officers and local brigades and assists with training for other district brigades in basic communication training within other courses.

Written by Dick Smith, President, Blue Mountains Group Support Brigade and Inspector Jack Tolhurst, Operations Officer, Blue Mountains District

Photos by Peter Christmas and Ian Mann





## WAMBOIN BRIGADE NAILS SUCCESSFUL STREET MEETINGS

"Judging from the spontaneous applause, interested body language and thoughtful questions from the residents, our first meetings went well!" said Lemmi Briedis, Community Safety/Education Officer for the Wamboin Brigade.

"We had a massive 280 people present at the street meeting in late February 2009."

The Wamboin Volunteer Rural Fire Brigade has recently begun a program of street meetings in the district to assist residents to be prepared in the event of a bush fire. Since October 2008 they have held six meetings and are preparing for more.

Lemmi Briedis was elected to the Wamboin Brigade Executive in June 2007 as the Community Safety/Education Officer. Her role is to facilitate community education activities.

"The Wamboin Brigade has welcomed, encouraged and actively supported a community safety focus together with its regular operational activities," Lemmi said.

"My new role now brings even greater focus to helping people be prepared for a bush fire."

Wamboin is located just east of Canberra and south of Lake George. It has about 1200 residences over an area of roughly 200 square kilometres. So 'street meeting' coverage is quite a challenge.

The residents of Wamboin range from farmers and small business owners to retirees and professionals who commute to Canberra. The level of preparedness for bush fire varies. Longer term residents have survived previous major fires in 1985 and 2003, and the recent arrivals are often new to rural living.

"Achieving a suitable approach to street meetings means taking into account the needs of the residents and the capability of the brigade," Lemmi said.

### Brigade and community activity

The brigade have a range of community engagement activities including events like a pump demonstration morning for the Wonderful Women of Wamboin and fire awareness sessions for the Scouts.

Many of the children in Wamboin commute to school in the Australian Capital Territory, so Wamboin Brigade also works with ACT schools to ensure fire preparedness awareness is being offered.

"It is quite amazing what volunteers can achieve," Lemmi said, "On 29 October 2008 we visited Red Hill Primary School with 70 Year One students. It was great fun for the students and the crew!"

### Street meeting program

The idea of designing a street meeting program was prompted by the Regional Community Education Conference in 2007

when the RFS Farm FireWise booklet was launched. This particular booklet is well suited to the diversity of residents in the Wamboin rural residential area.

After bringing together a working group of volunteer members to discuss an appropriate strategy, on 21 September 2008 the Wamboin Brigade had a pilot street meeting at Gallagher Crescent, at the home of one of the Deputy Captains.

### Pilot street meeting

Invitations were put in letter boxes for about 30 nearby residents. Four presenters, all volunteers, a Group Captain, the brigade Captain and two Deputy Captains, covered topics such as why we were there, the 'stay and defend or leave early' decision, property preparedness and personal protective equipment. The Community Education officer introduced the speakers.

"The 'stay and defend or leave early' segment has quite some impact," Lemmi said, "It often draws discussion from those who have experienced a local fire and alerts newer residents to the issues."

The Farm FireWise booklet and Introduction were 'launched' to give the residents something to go away with and work on.

Other features of the street meeting included a fully crewed Wamboin Category 1 truck driven in by the Brigade President. One of the Deputy Captains drove the Wamboin Category 9 truck. The display included domestic portable pumps and a



Residents queuing for the February 2009 Shed meeting where 280 people turned up



mannequin dressed in clothing suitable for personal protection. The brigade support crew provided morning tea and lunch.

"On the day of the pilot street meeting the Group Captain was called out to be an Incident Controller, and so I stepped in to lead his segment," Lemmi said.

After a 20 minute reception the group discussion and presentation lasted for about one and a half hours.

"Feedback from the residents was very positive," Lemmi said, "From the interaction and questions asked, it was clear that bush fire preparedness is a concern for residents.

"Discussions with the brigade members and with neighbours about how to address certain issues was obviously most welcome.

"For me an important measure of success was when I saw the neighbours huddled in a group talking to each other even while the brigade was packing up."

The Wamboin Brigade's pilot street meeting was deemed a success. The content of the

presentation addressed local issues and the needs of the residents, and those that attended left with something to think about after an informative morning. Established residents shared their experiences of earlier fires and recent arrivals were able to access useful ideas and experiences.

### More meetings scheduled

On the basis of the Gallagher Crescent success two more meetings were held on 19 October 2008 at Fernloff Road, and 16 November 2008 at Joe Rocks Road, this time in a public area. Minor changes were made in response to the feedback received. Invitations were altered to be more precise about what the meeting was about, and to improve numbers attending, a door prize was offered.

The basic format of the presentation was retained because the group discussion on these topics worked well, as indicated by the spontaneous applause. Three more street meetings were scheduled for March, April and May of 2009.

Streets selected for a meeting were prioritised on the basis of the Risk Management Plan. A looming issue was that the brigade could not possibly cover all streets, and certainly not before the next year. Some people expressed disappointment at not being able to attend due to other scheduled activities. Based on these concerns the Wamboin Brigade responded by announcing a Street Meeting at the Shed on 20 December 2008.

The local produce markets are on at the Community Hall the same morning and the hope was that market goers would drop into the street meeting. Wamboin Fire Station and Community Hall were built by the residents and are the focal point of community activity in the area. There is no shop, or even a post box in the district.

"To our surprise and pleasure over 70 people attended," Lemmi said, "We had

only put out 20 chairs and had to get some more!"

Five-eight residents queued to get in for the Shed Meeting and 14 brigade members turned up as well as a visitor from another brigade. The interactive discussion lasted for two hours, and in the spirit of the season, the brigade gave out three lucky door prizes.

"The prizes were appreciated I think," Lemmi said, "I heard that one winner read much of her copy of 'Great Australian Bushfire Stories' that same afternoon."

Building on the success of this Shed meeting another was held in late February. A record 280 people attended.

"It was hugely successful!" Lemmi said,

### An area for improvement

The Wamboin Volunteer Rural Fire Brigade has put some effort in to the Street Meeting program and overall the program has been successful.

"There is a lot of competition for people's time on Sunday morning," Lemmi said, "We adjusted the letter box invitations and reminders to be more specific. I also think that word of mouth or phone calls might add some attendees."

The value of community preparedness cannot be underestimated, and it is by the significant contributions of the volunteer members of the Wamboin Brigade that the brigade is able to work in partnership with the community to prevent, mitigate and suppress bushfires.

"I must express my sincere appreciation to the many volunteers who so ably support community education activity," Lemmi said, "Clearly, combined we can achieve a lot!"

# WHEN TWO DEGREES IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH



**One of the Australia's leading writers and thinkers, Professor Tim Flannery was the keynote speaker at The International Wildfire Conference in Sydney in June 2009.**

**Tim Flannery was 2007 Australian of Year and has achieved world-wide attention for his insightful book *The Weather Makers: The History and Future Impact of Climate Change*.**

**Here Tim Flannery recalls the long, wet Victorian winters now replaced by a drier and dangerous climate. Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd 2009.**

The day after the great fire burned through central Victoria, I drove from Sydney to Melbourne. For much of the way - indeed for hundreds of miles north of the scorched ground - smoke obscured the horizon, entering my air-Conditioned car and carrying with it that distinctive scent so strongly signifying death, or to Aboriginal people, cleansing.

It was as if a great cremation had taken place. I didn't know then how many people had died in their cars and homes, or while fleeing the flames, but by the time I reached the scorched ground just north of Melbourne, the dreadful news was trickling in. At first I heard that 70 people had died, then 108. Then 170. While the precise number of victims is yet to be ascertained, the overall situation at least is now clear. Australia has suffered its worst recorded peacetime loss of life. And the trauma will be with us forever.

I was born in Victoria, and over five decades I've watched as the State has changed. The long, wet and cold winters that seemed so insufferable to me as a young

boy wishing to play outside, vanished decades ago and for the past 12 years a new, drier climate has established itself. I could measure its progress whenever I flew into Melbourne airport. Over the years the farm dams under the flight path filled ever less frequently, while the suburbs crept ever further into the countryside, their swimming pools seemingly oblivious to the great drying.

Climate modelling has clearly established that the decline of southern Australia's winter rainfall is being caused by a build-up of greenhouse gas, much of it from the burning of coal. Ironically, Victoria has the most polluting coal-fed power plant on Earth, while another of its coal plants was threatened by the fire. There's evidence that the stream of global pollution caused a step-change in climate following the huge El Niño event of 1998. Along with the dwindling rainfall has come a desiccation of the soil and more extreme summer temperatures. This February, at the zenith of a record-breaking heatwave with several days over 40C, Melbourne recorded its hottest day ever - a

suffocating 46.4C, with even higher temperatures occurring in rural Victoria. This extreme coincided with exceptionally strong northerly winds, which were followed by an abrupt southerly change. This brought a cooling, but it was the shift in wind direction that caught so many in a deadly trap. Such conditions have occurred before. In 1939 and 1983 they led to dangerous fires. But this time the conditions were more extreme than ever before, and the 12-year 'drought' meant that plant tissues were almost bone dry.

Despite narrowly missing the 1983 Victorian fires, and then

losing a house to the 1994 Sydney bush fires, I had not previously appreciated the difference a degree or two of additional heat, and a dry soil, can make to the ferocity of a fire. This fire was quantitatively different from anything seen before. Strategies which are sensible in less extreme conditions, such as staying to defend your home or fleeing in a car when you see flames, become fatal options under such oven-like circumstances. Indeed, there are few safe options in such conditions, except to flee at the first sign of smoke.

My country is still in shock at the loss of so many lives. But



Photo by Mark Simpson

inevitably we will look for lessons from this natural tragedy. The first such lesson I fear is that we must anticipate more such terrible blazes in future, for the world's addiction to burning fossil fuels goes on unabated, with 10 billion tonnes being released last year alone. And there is now no doubt that the pollution is laying the preconditions necessary for more such blazes.

When he ratified the Kyoto Protocol, Australia's Prime Minister Kevin Rudd called climate change the greatest threat facing humanity. Shaken, and clearly a man who has seen things none of us should see,

he has now had the eye-witness proof of his words. We can only hope now that Australia's climate policy, which is weak, is significantly strengthened.

After ignoring the Kyoto Protocol for years, just months ago we committed to a reduction in pollution of a mere 5 percent by 2020 over 2000 levels, with the possibility of increasing that to 15 percent if a successful treaty comes out at Copenhagen later this year. Our national goal is a 60 percent reduction in emissions by 2050, but such targets are easy to articulate if the bulk of the work must be done by future governments.

**(Editors Note:** *In May 2009 the Rudd Government delayed the emission trading scheme by a year until 1 July 2010.*)

As the worst greenhouse polluters, per capita, of any developed nation, there is an urgent need for Australians to reduce our dependency on coal. I believe that if we want to give ourselves the best chance of avoiding truly dangerous climate change, we should cease burning coal conventionally by around 2030. No such policy is currently being contemplated. Instead, as perhaps anyone would, Australians have been focusing on the immediate cause of some of the fires.

Rudd has said that the arsonists suspected of lighting some fires are guilty of mass murder, and the police are busy chasing down these malefactors. But there's an old saying among Australian firefighters – 'whoever owns the fuel, owns the fire'. Let's hope that Australians ponder the deeper causes of this horrible tragedy and change our polluting ways before it's too late.

The next issue of the Bush Fire Bulletin will feature talks and interviews with speakers and guests at the International Wildfire Management Conference. To learn more about the conference visit: [www.wildfiremanagement09.com](http://www.wildfiremanagement09.com)

# TRADITIONS



## IT'S A FURPHY (WATER CART)

By Chief Superintendent Alan Brinkworth AFSM, Manager State Operations

The Furphy water cart is responsible for the word "furphy" becoming an indelible part of Australian language.

The water cart was the invention of John Furphy from Shepparton in Victoria in the late 19th century. It was the only product of its kind in Australia or overseas at the time.

The Furphy water cart solved a problem faced by many firefighters and farmers alike. Very few homes were designed to collect rainwater from the roof so transporting water for stock, bush firefighting and for domestic use was essential.

The cart was also used extensively to carry water to the troops in military camps during World War 1, including at Gallipoli. The drivers of the carts gained a reputation as a source of information as they moved from camp to camp. As could be expected, not all their news was reliable and so the word "furphy" rapidly became a synonym for suspect information or rumour. It is still in use today in our fire service for "false alarms".

In fact the word furphy appears in the Macquarie Dictionary meaning a rumour or false story.

### The water cart construction

The first Furphy water cart appeared in 1878 manufactured and designed by the experienced wheelwright John Furphy. He constructed the water tank



using a method similar to the fitting of the iron band on to the wooden body of a wagon wheel, by shrinking a 4' 0" (1.2m) long iron cylinder on to the end castings, forming a tight seal.

The lighter 180 gallon (820 litre) water cart was a fair load for a good horse and was, therefore, more popular than the 250 gallon (1150 litre) water cart which weighed approximately one ton. The tank was carefully balanced over the axle of a wooden framed cart with 30" (76cm) cast wheels, to provide a good weight distribution for a horse, whether the tank was full or empty.

The water cart was used for bush firefighting in the early days, however, in 1966 the Technical Sub-Committee of the Bush Fire Committee recommended the approval of the standard specification 150 gallon (nominal 650 litre) Tanker Trailer for inclusion in

the approved list of firefighting equipment. **Historical Note:** The Bush Fire Fighting Fund allocation for the supply of firefighting equipment for the Eastern and Central Divisions in 1965-6 was \$1,236,496, which, at that time, was funded 25 percent NSW Treasury, 25 percent local councils and 50 percent insurance companies.

### Designs on the Furphy water cart cast ends

The designs on the cast ends of the water carts mirrors the reputation of the water cart. John Furphy, and later his sons, seemed to enjoy developing jokes and home-grown philosophies cast in iron. No doubt adding to the folklore surrounding the Furphy water cart as a centre of gossip and the popularity of the term furphy. More about the designs and jokes appear in the chronology on the next page.



**FAR LEFT:** John Furphy, inventor of the Furphy water cart.

**CENTRE:** High Street circa 1900. Water carts en route to the railway

**BELOW:** A cast water tank end from 1920.



1878 - 1880



1890 - 1895



1895 - 1910



1910 - 1920



1942-1965



1975 - 1984

## The chronological history of the Furphy Water Cart

- 1842 John Furphy, was born on 17 June, in Moonee Ponds, Victoria.
- 1873 John, bought 10 acres of land in Tocumwal Road (now Wyndham Street) in Shepparton and set up a Blacksmiths and Wheelwrights. There were only 13 families living in Shepparton at the time.
- 1878 John added a steam works and a Copula Furnace and so began the iron foundry section of the business.
- 1878 The Water Cart first appeared with the simple indented inscription "FURPHY" on the top of the casting.
- 1880 The wording was changed to "J. FURPHY MAKER SHEPPARTON". The foundry works flourished and employed 38 men and boys.
- 1889 The wording was changed to "J. FURPHY & SONS MAKERS SHEPPARTON"
- 1890 A list of Furphy products was added.
- 1895 The lettering was raised, "VIC" was added and the following rhyme was also added: "GOOD BETTER BEST, NEVER LET IT REST, TILL YOUR GOOD IS BETTER, AND YOUR BETTER BEST"
- 1906 The business moved to a site opposite the railway station, a large DC generator was added making this one of the few electrically powered factories in Victoria at the time.
- 1909 John at the age of 67 left Shepparton leaving control of the business to his sons William, George and Charles.
- 1910 John's son William Furphy introduced the Pitmans shorthand which read "WATER IS A GIFT FROM GOD BUT BEER IS A CONCOCTION OF THE DEVIL DON'T DRINK BEER"
- 1920 The year was added.
- 1925 George's son John Furphy took over most of the casting works and supervised the assembly side.  
  
The shorthand was changed to read "WATER IS THE GIFT OF GOD BUT BEER AND WHISKEY ARE CONCOCTIONS OF THE DEVIL COME AND HAVE A DRINK OF WATER"
- The Stork and Baby with the shorthand inscription "PRODUCE AND POPULATE OR PERISH" were also added by William Furphy. This phrase was attributed to W. M. Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia.
- 1930 Land Grader was added to the product list.
- 1938 The Partnership became a Company with the six directors, William, George, Charles, Fred, Albert and John.
- 1942 The words "BORN ABOUT 1880 STILL GOING STRONG 1942" were added.
- 1945 Rubber tyred wheels and a steel chassis were introduced.
- 1960 John's three sons Andrew, Roger and Timothy joined the business.
- 1965 Some products were deleted.
- 1970 Most of the lettering was deleted.
- 1975 The Pitmans shorthand, Stork and Baby and the product list were deleted and a Cart and Map of Australia were added.
- 1978 The business moved to a new site in New Dookie Road on the outskirts of Shepparton.
- 1983 Production of the Cast Ends to tanks ceased after the development of an all new fabricated and hot dip galvanised tank.
- 1988 A new limited edition was manufactured for Shepparton's 150th Anniversary.
- 1989 Andrew Furphy bought out the interest of his two brothers and continued as Managing Director.
- 1998 Special edition produced for the 125th Furphy Anniversary.
- 1999 100 Tank Ends cast for the "Commemorative Year 2000 Edition".
- 2009 The company is still operating today.

# WORLD FIRE



## RFS INVOLVED IN PEAT FIRES PREVENTION IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

**M**assive smoke clouds which hang over the entire South East Asia region for months at a time are one of the most important environmental and social problems in the region. The cost of the problems runs into billions of dollars.

The RFS has recently been playing a significant role in helping solve the cause of the smoke clouds – peat-land and forest fires.

Peat is a highly organic soil made up of partially decomposed vegetable matter in marshy or damp regions. When dried out it is so highly combustible that it is used as fuel. Fires in these peat-lands – both deliberately lit for land clearing purposes and also accidentally lit by lightning strikes, are the source of the smoke clouds.

There is an estimated 30 million hectares of peat-land in the ASEAN region making it the dominant freshwater wetland type in the region. Peat-lands provide many important benefits if managed in a sustainable manner. Poor management, however, can result in increasing problems related to smoke haze, fires, floods and water

shortages as well as loss of biodiversity and other resources.

During the latter part of 2007 and the first half of 2008 AusAID - Australia's overseas aid agency - contracted the RFS to be project manager for the project titled: *Capacity Building to Improve Peat-land Management and Reduce Land and Forest Fires and Associated Trans-Boundary Haze Pollution in the ASEAN Region.*

The RFS was nominated as the Australian managing partner for the project with Geoff Parish from the Business Development Unit playing the part of project manager. The project is part of the ASEAN Peat-land Management Initiative established in February 2003.

### The impact of peat fires

Between 1997 and 1998 around 12 million hectares of forest and peat-lands were burned in the region. The resulting smoke clouds covered much of the ASEAN region for months, causing significant social, health and environmental problems and an estimated cost of AUD\$7-20 billion. While these years were extreme due to the El Nino affect, fires regularly affect 1-2 million hectares of land in South East Asia each year.

"Damage is done when the peat forests are cleared," Geoff Parish said, "The clearing is mostly done illegally in order to plant palm oil plantations."

"Some of the smoke comes from the burning of the forests to clear the land. But after the land is cleared the swamp lands are drained leaving the peat dry. Dry peat is a fire hazard. It can easily catch alight from lightning strikes and it creates a massive amount of smoke."

The clearing of forests also has other environmental impacts disturbing the delicate balance of these unique areas. Geoff Parish visited the Selangor forest in Malaysia as part of the project.

"It's a whole different culture and different ecosystem than anything I had seen," he said, "In that part of the forest in Selangor the water is stained by tannin from the peat. It looks black, like flat coco-a-cola. You'd think it was polluted but actually if you are not well and are willing to drink it, it will settle your stomach!"

"There are hundreds of species of tropical fish supported by the rivers within the peat-lands. There are also reported rare rhinos, endangered monkeys and bird species living in the forest. When people destroy the peat-lands for commercial gain, the habitats of these animals are being destroyed."



The purpose of the AusAID project was to gain a greater understanding of the status of peat-lands throughout the in ASEAN region and to develop monitoring and implementation plans for the future and to identify gaps in the implementation of current strategies.

The project identified three or four new reserves of peat to include in the audit. It also identified that the most significant obstacle to protecting the peat-lands is the lack of an integrated approach to land management and fire prevention. The root causes of the fires are a combination of the following factors:

- drainage of peat-lands and opening of forests making them susceptible to fire
- lack of knowledge on the extent and susceptibility to fire of peat-lands

- lack of affordable alternative land clearing and preparation options to poor rural communities
- natural or climate change-enhanced droughts
- lack of capacity amongst government agencies and local stakeholders to prevent and control fires
- inadequate early warning systems

Through the project, peat-land and fire assessments were undertaken in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Brunei Darussalam. The team developed a National Action Plan (NAP) for peat-land management in Brunei Darussalam and NAPs in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam are awaiting finalisation. A real time peat-land fire prediction and monitoring system for the ASEAN region was developed.

A project completion meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur in November 2008 in which all reports and financial statements were accepted and signed off by the ASEAN secretariat on behalf of the member countries of the ASEAN region. The participating agencies also developed a plan for ongoing implementation of the systems that were developed during the project.

The next stage will be training, implementation on a larger scale and community awareness programs.

“The ongoing work for each of the ASEAN countries is to build up a fire regime for monitoring the peat-lands,” Mr Parish said.

“I hope that the RFS will be involved in the next stage. Perhaps we will get our guys over there for training.”

**OPPOSITE:** When the forest is drained it allows the peat to dry and become susceptible to fire. The photo show large areas of cleared swamp, cleared peat areas that have been burnt leaving tree butts left suspended in the air

**TOP LEFT:** Palm oil trees. The roots are not able to support the tree when the peat dries and shrinks. The palm plantations are fruitful for about ten years

**TOP RIGHT:** Peat forest cleared to make an illegal access road

**CENTRE:** Members of the project completion meeting in Kuala Lumpur: Back Row Fiazal Parish, Geoff Parish, Project Manager NSWRF, Tee Y Chee, Victoria Farrugia, Riena Prasiddha ASEAN Secretariat, Shashi Humaran

# BUSH FIRE BULLETIN READER SURVEY

Overall, how appealing did you find this edition?

- Very appealing
- Fairly appealing
- Neutral
- Fairly unappealing
- Very unappealing

Comments: .....

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For each of the following, please indicate or comment on the features you were interested in reading in this issue (tick column applicable)

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Send your digital image to:

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Subject: Values Photo Competition

Entrants name and contact number

**PLEASE NOTE:** photos submitted must be digital of a high resolution and per email must not exceed 8mb.

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- The competition is open to all members of the RFS and the general public.
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- To be eligible, photos submitted must be digital of a high resolution and must not be over 8mb in total.
- Proof of consent may be required
- Photo must be fully released by the owner (in writing) for reproduction by the RFS
- Photos of children under the age of 16 years of age require a written consent from parent or guardian
- Winners will be selected at the discretion of the RFS and all decisions are final
- Winners will be announced on 31.8.09 at the NSW RFS Website: [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au) and [www.myrfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.myrfs.nsw.gov.au)

## Can you picture this?

*What does Friendship and Support look like?  
What images come to mind when we say  
someone is Resourceful, or full of Integrity?*

WE ARE CALLING FOR PHOTOS FROM  
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