



INTERNAL  
BRAVERY & SERVICE  
AWARDS CEREMONY  
2016



## THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE INTERNAL BRAVERY AND SERVICE AWARDS

The Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS), in recognition of acts of bravery and outstanding service, has established an internal awards system. 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. Eligibility for these Awards is extended to all members of the Service as defined within the Act and Regulations.

Nominations for awards must be lodged in accordance with the Service Standards 9.1.1 and on the prescribed nomination form. The Service Standards and nomination form are available on the NSW RFS Intranet and on MyRFS. Copies are also available from Region, Zone, Team and District Offices. Nominations for Internal Bravery and Service Awards close annually on 1 October for presentation on St Florian's Day, 4 May in the following year.

Nominations are sent to the Awards Committee. The Committee consists of representatives from the volunteers and salaried staff of the Service appointed by the Commissioner and is required to fully examine each nomination for eligibility. Once a nomination has been assessed and deemed to be eligible, the Committee then makes a formal recommendation to the Commissioner. If a nominee accepts the nomination, the full details of the member being recognised are then officially listed in the NSW RFS Awards Register. Individuals may be nominated for the Award for Valour, the Commissioner's Commendations for Bravery and for Service or the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Individual and/or Units). Brigades or formally comprised units may also be nominated for the Unit Citation for either Bravery or Service.

The functions of the Awards Committee notwithstanding, the Commissioner may award an Internal Bravery or Service Award to any person at any time and for any reason.



At the Awards Ceremony on 4 May 2016, nine individual and ten group recipients are to be acknowledged by the Commissioner. Drawn from the Service's Regions and Headquarters these recipients are presented with Awards in recognition of outstanding bravery or service. The fourth of May is chosen each year for the Awards Ceremony as it is the Feast Day of St Florian, Patron Saint of Firefighters and International Firefighters' Day.

## AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL ANTHEM

*Australians all let us rejoice,  
For we are young and free;  
We've golden soil and wealth for toil;  
Our home is girt by sea;  
Our land abounds in nature's gifts  
Of beauty rich and rare;  
In history's page, let every stage  
Advance Australia Fair.  
In joyful strains then let us sing,  
Advance Australia Fair.*

*Beneath our radiant Southern Cross  
We'll toil with hearts and hands;  
To make this Commonwealth of ours  
Renowned of all the lands;  
For those who've come across the seas  
We've boundless plains to share;  
With courage let us all combine  
To Advance Australia Fair.  
In joyful strains then let us sing,  
Advance Australia Fair.*



## THE ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS

### National Anthem

NSW RFS Pipes and Drums Brigade and State Protocol Squad

### Welcome to Guests

Executive Director Membership and Strategic Services, Bronwyn Jones

### Prayer

Senior Chaplain, Major Ian Spall

### Address

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons AFSM

### Address

The Hon. David Elliott, MP  
Minister for Corrections, Minister for Emergency Services, and  
Minister for Veterans Affairs

### Presentation of Awards

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons AFSM

### Photography

All recipients will be photographed during and following the conclusion of proceedings. A complimentary CD of group and individual photographs will be posted to each recipient.

### Lunch

Recipients and their guests are invited to join the Commissioner for lunch in the marquee and outdoor terrace area

*We wish to thank the NSW RFS Pipes and Drums and State Protocol Squad  
for their assistance during today's festivities.*



## COMMISSIONER'S COMMENDATION FOR SERVICE (INDIVIDUAL)

*Awarded for service of a meritorious nature, or for outstanding actions in relation to fire service duties, administrative leadership, or for exemplary performance of a specific difficult project or task, not involving bravery.*

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### Deputy Captain Derek Colebrook

Nelligen Rural Fire Brigade, Far South Coast Team, Region South

In the early hours of 2 January 2014 Deputy Captain Derek Colebrook worked swiftly and bravely to save the lives of his family during a fire in his home.

Woken in the middle of the night by fire-related noises inside his house, thick smoke and flames prevented Deputy Captain Colebrook and his wife from accessing their children's rooms through the house. Deputy Captain Colebrook smashed the windows of his bedroom and helped his wife to escape the house. He used a star picket to break the windows of the children's rooms. Through his actions Deputy Captain Colebrook was able to save his two children.

Multiple crews from NSW RFS and Fire & Rescue NSW were engaged to fight the structure fire and protect the neighbouring property.

*Deputy Captain Derek Colebrook is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Commendation for Service.*



## COMMISSIONER'S COMMENDATION FOR SERVICE (INDIVIDUAL)

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### **Firefighter Rudy Schuett AFSM**

Moonee Brigade, Mid North Coast Team, Region North

Firefighter Rudy Schuett AFSM has been a much valued and popular member of Moonee Brigade for over 20 years. He has responded to hundreds of incidents and acted in the role of Crew Leader on many occasions. He has been responsible for the maintenance of the station and equipment and was instrumental in the building of the new Moonee Rural Fire Station.

Firefighter Schuett has been the Mid North Coast volunteer Operations Support Officer for over 10 years. Each week he spends more than 30 hours working at the Fire Control Centre on fleet and equipment. It is not unusual for Firefighter Schuett to start at 4.00 am and still be working well after dark. He travels to Sydney to pick up new tankers, transports crews to out-of-area fires, takes tankers to be serviced and returns them to station. He assists with vehicle recovery, conducts driver training in the Category 1 tankers, and takes trainees for their licence tests. In fact, the Roads and Maritime Services driving assessors have a high regard for Firefighter Schuett and know that NSW RFS trainees, under his mentoring, have been very well prepared for their assessment.

Firefighter Schuett is well respected right across the Mid North Coast Team. His contribution to the team and the NSW RFS is immeasurable and well above and beyond what is expected of a brigade member. Add to this his easygoing nature and wonderful sense of humour, Firefighter Schuett is a pleasure to have on the team.

*Firefighter Rudy Schuett AFSM is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Commendation for Service.*



## COMMISSIONER'S CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION (INDIVIDUAL)

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### Chief Superintendent Alan Brinkworth AFSM

NSW RFS Headquarters

Before his retirement in July 2011 Chief Superintendent Alan Brinkworth AFSM was the Manager, State Operations. During his career, Chief Superintendent Brinkworth developed an extensive knowledge of field operations and information that would become relevant and helpful for those at the scene of an incident.

In 2003, Chief Superintendent Brinkworth proposed and developed the concept of an information booklet that allowed for operational information to be on hand on the fireground. It needed to be compact, durable, easy to use and waterproof. The information was to include basic safety, operational guidelines, vehicle and appliance categories, officer recognition guides, quick references for acronyms, codes used for radio communications, mapping tools, and a number of other resources including a separate notebook.

In 2004, the user friendly and portable Firefighters' Pocket Book was introduced. Five thousand copies were given to Captains, Group Officers and Fire Control staff, and based on their overwhelmingly positive feedback, a further 5,000 copies were published for all active firefighters in 2005. The Book was then updated and 10,000 copies were printed in 2008 for all new members. After the Victorian fires in 2009 a complete review was undertaken and 60,000 copies were reissued for all active volunteers and staff in 2010. Following the success of the printed book, a smartphone app version of the Firefighters' Pocket Book was created in 2014.

*Chief Superintendent Alan Brinkworth AFSM is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation.*



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### **Captain Michael Browne**

Forbes Central Brigade, Mid Lachlan Valley Team, Region West

Captain Michael Browne of Forbes Central Brigade is a highly valued member of the Mid Lachlan Valley Team. Captain Browne has been an active member of the NSW Rural Fire Service since 2003 and during that period he has gone above and beyond of what is expected of a brigade member.

Not only has he led his Brigade in an exemplary manner he has also been responsible for getting the Forbes Airbase Operations functioning in a professional way. Captain Browne personally ensures all water supplies at the airports are ready for action, he agitates the retardant every month and promotes the role of air base operations to members undertaking the required training. The appliances are washed and polished every week, usually by him.

Captain Browne also helps at the Fire Control Centre with a wide variety of tasks including office administration and anything he is asked to do.

*Captain Michael Browne is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation.*



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### District Officer Alex Chesser

Warringah Pittwater District, Region East

On 1 October 2013 District Officer Alex Chesser responded to a fuel tanker crash and resulting fire on Mona Vale Road, Warriewood.

Upon arrival District Officer Chesser was faced with many significant risks including downed powerlines, several vehicles on fire, bush alight as well as a flowing fuel fire coming from the overturned fuel tanker. The flowing fuel fire had already resulted in the death of one person, severely burned a second person, burned a number of other casualties and posed a clear, direct and imminent threat to more than 100 members of the public downhill.

To ensure a coordinated response effort, District Officer Chesser established important liaison links with the other agencies on scene to manage the incident. By performing this role, District Officer Chesser contributed to the extinguishment of the fire and minimised further risk to members of the public, emergency personnel and those involved in the crash.

*District Officer Alex Chesser is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation.*



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### **Firefighter Brendon Lewis**

Pacific Palms Rural Fire Brigade, Gloucester Great Lakes Team, Region East

On Monday 17 August 2015, Firefighter Brendon Lewis was on his way to school do a trial HSC exam when he witnessed an elderly woman driving erratically and then crash into a tree. Firefighter Lewis immediately stopped his car and applied his first aid training. He took the first aid kit from his car, rendered assistance and tried to keep the woman calm until the ambulance arrived.

After parental permission and welfare checks by his school, Firefighter Lewis went ahead with his exam.

The school has always been proud of Firefighter Lewis' community service and were particularly proud of his actions on this day. Firefighter Lewis' ambition is to one day gain full-time employment with a fire service.

*Firefighter Brendon Lewis is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation.*



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### **Firefighter Barbara McMillen**

Eglington Rural Fire Brigade, Chifley Zone, Region East

On 17 October 2013 following dispatch of all Chifley Zone Staff and available brigades from Bathurst and Oberon to the State Mine Fire, Firefighter Barbara McMillen and her husband Group Captain Maurice McMillen sought to assist in any way they could. From 17 October to 25 October 2013, Firefighter McMillen and Group Captain McMillen staffed the Chifley Fire Control Centre, managing the day to day incident response and strike team deployments of the Zone.

For the duration of the State Mine Fire, Firefighter Barbara McMillen and Group Captain Maurice McMillen found, organised and dispatched day and night crews for a total of eight days straight. They also went above and beyond their duty of running Chifley Zone operations, delivering food from the local bakery to the catering crews at the Lithgow Fire Control Centre.

Firefighter Barbara McMillen and Group Captain Maurice McMillen are no strangers to performing this role and can often be found within the Fire Control Centre at all hours of the day and night especially when fire activity in the surrounding areas requires the out-of-area attendance of the local staff. Their dedication demonstrates the passion of our NSW RFS senior volunteers to take up the challenge and seek leadership roles in times where staff resources may be at its limit.

*Firefighter Barbara McMillen is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation.*



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### **Group Captain Maurice McMillen**

Eglington Rural Fire Brigade, Chifley Zone, Region East

On 17 October 2013 following dispatch of all Chifley Zone Staff and available brigades from Bathurst and Oberon to the State Mine Fire, Group Captain Maurice McMillen and his wife, Firefighter Barbara McMillen, sought to assist in any way they could. From 17 October to 25 October 2013, Group Captain McMillen and Firefighter McMillen staffed the Chifley Fire Control Centre, managing the day to day incident response and strike team deployments of the Zone.

For the duration of the State Mine Fire, Group Captain Maurice McMillen and Firefighter Barbara McMillen, organised and dispatched day and night crews for a total of eight days straight. They also went above and beyond their duty of running Chifley Zone operations, delivering food from the local bakery to the catering crews at the Lithgow Fire Control Centre.

Group Captain Maurice McMillen and Firefighter Barbara McMillen are no strangers to performing this role and can often be found within the Fire Control Centre at all hours of the day and night especially when fire activity in the surrounding areas requires the out-of-area attendance of the local staff. Their dedication demonstrates the passion of our NSW RFS senior volunteers to take up the challenge and seek leadership roles in times where staff resources may be at its limit.

*Group Captain Maurice McMillen is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation.*



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### Michelle Wakka

Professional Standards Unit, NSW RFS Headquarters

On 14 February 2015, Ms Michelle Wakka was acting Manager of the Professional Standards Unit when the NSW RFS was served with a search warrant by the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in respect of allegations of a significant fraud perpetrated by two employees and one volunteer member. Ms Wakka played a lead role in the Service's response to ICAC's investigation, which became known as Operation Vika.

Ms Wakka's role included daily strategic meetings with the Commissioner and Senior Executives to consider and analyse ICAC requests for information and proposed responses. She oversaw the meticulous gathering of documents and prepared detailed responses to requests for information within designated tight timeframes. Ms Wakka assisted various NSW RFS staff called as witnesses by the ICAC to obtain legal representation via the Legal Representation Office and support if required from the NSW RFS internal counselling services.

At the conclusion of the public hearing, the ICAC Chief Investigator acknowledged Ms Wakka's efforts in an email to the NSW RFS: "On behalf of the Commission Investigation team involved in Operation Vika, I would like to express our gratitude for the cooperation and professionalism of RFS personnel from 14 February 2015 onwards. We are especially grateful to you and everyone in the Professional Standards Unit for your hard work and patience over the last few months".

Ms Wakka's service has been beyond the scope of responsibility in her assigned duties and is therefore worthy of acknowledgement and commendation.

*Ms Michelle Wakka is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation.*



## COMMISSIONER'S UNIT CITATION FOR SERVICE

*Awarded for service of a meritorious nature, or for outstanding actions in relation to fire service duties, administrative leadership, or for exemplary performance of a specific difficult project or task, not involving bravery.*

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**Jeremy Wong, Paul Moroney, Nicholas Samaan, Nathan Bower,  
William Shearman, Mark Unwin, Lachlan Crammond, Grahame McLeod,  
Peter Nixon and Timothy Stocker**

**Kellyville Rural Fire Brigade, The Hills District, Region East**

On Sunday 1 March 2015, the Hills District brigades were providing assistance at the annual Tour de Hills bike ride. Early into the event, Kellyville Brigade responded to a head-on accident between a cyclist and a motorbike. When they arrived, the Brigade was confronted by a chaotic scene with the injured cyclist unresponsive and a growing crowd of concerned cyclists.

The crew immediately began first aid on the cyclist. They performed CPR, ensured a defibrillator was ready and requested urgent ambulance assistance. The crew also attended to the motorbike rider and closed the busy Glenhaven Road to protect the crew and prevent any further incidents. The crew worked tirelessly on the injured cyclist until paramedics arrived and the patient was declared deceased.

The crew showed professionalism throughout the entire event, including their support to bystanders and family members who arrived at the scene after the incident. The NSW Ambulance inspector on the scene later returned to the Brigade station, complimenting the crew for their efforts and giving the patient every chance with their actions taken.

*Kellyville Rural Fire Brigade is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Unit Citation for Service.*



## COMMISSIONER'S UNIT CITATION FOR SERVICE

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**Bill Duncan OAM, Chris Talbert, Sue Talbert, Ray Hancock and Jenny Hancock**

**Kenthurst Firewise Resident Awareness Program Coordinating Group  
Kenthurst Rural Fire Brigade, The Hills District, Region East**

The Kenthurst Rural Fire Brigade developed the Firewise Resident Awareness Program in response to the harsh lessons learnt in the Victorian fires, as well as reflecting on major fires that occurred within the Kenthurst community. Kenthurst Brigade had some 35 years earlier also innovated in the community engagement space with the first 'Community Fire Guard' program and the current Kenthurst Firewise program builds on many of these community engagement principles. The aim of the program is to create a more bush fire resilient community, giving local property owners the necessary knowledge and practical skills to minimise and respond to bush fire risk. The program incorporates both classroom and field elements, with a positive neighbourhood networking component to build community cooperation.

To date, more than 500 residents have participated in the program. More recently, a tailored version for women and young mums was successfully held on days and times better suited to their availability. The results of the program are evident throughout the community, reflected in the local commitment to bush fire survival plans, the installation of firefighting equipment, attention to asset protection zones and the general landscaping of local properties. The program has also resulted in new recruits for the Kenthurst Brigade.

Following the positive feedback and results from the Kenthurst program, other rural fire brigades and community engagement groups have tailored the program to meet the unique needs of their communities. The Kenthurst Rural Fire Brigade Firewise Resident Awareness program has also been a recipient of other external awards recognising the dedication and achievement of the Kenthurst Brigade volunteers.

At the heart of this program have been five individuals, known as the Firewise Resident Awareness Program Coordinating Group. This group has driven this program from inception and continues to be the impetus for its ongoing success. This group comprises of: Deputy Captain Bill Duncan OAM (Program Inventor and Director), Deputy Captain Chris Talbert, Communications Deputy Captain Sue Talbert, Firefighter Ray Hancock and Firefighter Jenny Hancock.

*The Kenthurst Firewise Resident Awareness Program Coordinating Group is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Unit Citation for Service.*

## COMMISSIONER'S UNIT CITATION FOR SERVICE

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**Vic Fischer, David Aberdeen, Cody Runciman**

Kyogle Rural Fire Brigade, Northern Rivers Zone, Region North

On Thursday 18 September 2014, Kyogle Headquarters 1 with a crew of four was responding to a house fire. Multiple units were being responded to the incident. Shortly after departing, the crew became aware that Deputy Captain Witton was showing signs of distress and had become unresponsive. The crew immediately notified Fire Control, requested an ambulance and stopped the incident response.

As they pulled the truck to the side of the road, Deputy Captain Witton was lapsing in and out of consciousness. With grave concern for his condition, the crew extricated Deputy Captain Witton from the rear cab of the Category 1 truck. They placed him on the ground, readied the Automated External Defibrillator unit and administered first aid. As the paramedics arrived Deputy Captain Witton went into cardiac arrest. The crew initially performed CPR until the paramedics were able to take over and deploy their equipment.

The paramedics and NSW RFS crew worked together on the side of the road for approximately 25 minutes to stabilise Deputy Captain Witton before his transport to hospital. Unfortunately he did not regain consciousness and passed away on the way to the hospital.

The Kyogle Headquarters 1 Crew demonstrated the highest levels of professionalism and dedication in their efforts to preserve the life of their fellow crew member and mate Deputy Captain Peter Witton. The actions of the crew reflect the NSW RFS traditions of mateship and dealing with extreme adversity.

*Kyogle Rural Fire Brigade is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Unit Citation for Service.*



## COMMISSIONER'S UNIT CITATION FOR SERVICE

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**Ken Thornton, Justin Honner, Bradley Feddersen, Sonia Broadbent, Nikolaus Ramin, Tim Honner**

**Willow Tree 2 and Willow Tree 7, Willow Tree Rural Fire Brigade, Liverpool Range Zone, Region North**

At approximately 2000 hours on Saturday 9 May 2015 the Willow Tree Rural Fire Brigade responded to a reported structural fire within the Willow Tree township in the Liverpool Range Zone. An unoccupied antique store was well alight and the fire posed an immediate threat to neighbouring and nearby buildings.

The intensity of the fire meant the antique store was beyond saving. The Willow Tree crews requested additional firefighting resources and focussed on property protection and resident relocation. In the 45 minutes before the arrival of back up firefighting resources the Willow Tree crews performed an outstanding job to preserve life and limit property damage. The situation was hazardous and highly complex. There were gas cylinders connected to the neighbouring cafe, potentially hazardous contents of the antique store, and downed powerlines. The intensity of the fire also necessitated the closure of the New England Highway for four hours.

The incident response was a great example of firefighting and interagency teamwork. Backup resources included NSW RFS crews from Braefield/Dury 1, Wallabadah 1 and Bulk Water from Big Jacks Creek 1 and Fire & Rescue NSW units from Murrurundi and Quirindi. NSW RFS crews from Scone, Merriwa, Wingen and Blandford and additional FRNSW resources from Tamworth also supported the incident. All involved played an important part in the operation.

The highly professional and effective work undertaken in the initial response by the crews of Willow Tree 2 and Willow Tree 7 saved significant structural assets, the loss of which would have been potentially devastating to the small Willow Tree community.

*Willow Tree 2 and Willow Tree 7 are worthy recipients of the Commissioner's Unit Citation for Service.*

## COMMISSIONER'S CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION (UNIT)

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Braefield/Dury 1, Wallabadah 1, Big Jacks Creek 1, Currabubula Rural Fire Brigade and Merriwa River Rural Fire Brigade, Liverpool Range Zone, Region North

At approximately 2000 hours on Saturday 9 May 2015 the Willow Tree Rural Fire Brigade responded to a reported structural fire within the township of Willow Tree in the Liverpool Range Zone. The town's unoccupied antique store was well alight and the fire posed an immediate threat to neighbouring and nearby buildings.

Incident Controller Group Captain Ken Thornton requested additional firefighting resources and secondary response crews began to arrive on scene approximately 45 minutes later. These crews included Braefield Dury 1 and Wallabadah 1, with Big Jacks Creek 1 operating as a bulk water carrier. All crews were welcome arrivals and provided much needed support for firefighting appliances including FRNSW pumpers that were also later involved. Currabubula and Merriwa River members also arrived as secondary responders and provided valuable support.

The incident was a great example of firefighting and interagency teamwork. The timeliness and professional assistance provided by the secondary responders contributed significantly to saving structural assets.

*Braefield/Dury1, Wallabadah1, Big Jacks Creek1, Currabubula and Merriwa River Rural Fire Brigades are worthy recipients of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Unit).*



## COMMISSIONER'S CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION (UNIT)

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### Kenthurst Rural Fire Brigade, The Hills District, Region East

The Kenthurst Rural Fire Brigade developed the Firewise Resident Awareness Program in response to the harsh lessons learnt in the aftermath of the Victorian fires, as well as reflecting on past major fires that had occurred within the Kenthurst community. The aim of the program is to create a more bush fire resilient community, giving local property owners the necessary knowledge and practical skills to minimise and respond to bush fire risk. The program incorporates both classroom and field elements, with a positive neighbourhood networking component to build community cooperation.

To date, more than 500 residents have participated in the program. More recently, a tailored version for women and young mums was successfully held on days and times better suited to their availability. The results of the program is evident throughout the community, reflected in the local commitment to bush fire survival plans, the installation of firefighting equipment, attention to asset protection zones and the general landscaping of local properties. The program has also resulted in new recruits for the Kenthurst Brigade.

Following the positive feedback and results from the Kenthurst program other Rural Fire Brigades and community engagement groups have tailored the program to meet the unique needs of their communities. The Kenthurst Rural Fire Brigade Firewise Resident Awareness Program has also been a recipient of other external awards recognising the dedication and achievement of the Kenthurst Brigade volunteers.

*Kenthurst Rural Fire Brigade is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Unit).*

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### Lithgow District Brigades, Region East

On 17 October 2013 the Lithgow District was affected by two major bush fire events. The State Mine Gully Fire, a section 44 emergency, travelled 30 kilometres during the afternoon and impacted directly on Lithgow, Clarence, and Dargon. Six dwellings and 18 sheds were destroyed. On the same day, a second fire started in Mt Victoria and impacted on Hartley, destroying many kilometres of fencing and threatening 100 rural properties.

All Brigades in the District were dispatched on this day to assist and combat the fires. Battling extreme odds with winds of 120 kilometres per hour, all crews demonstrated service above and beyond the call to contain the two out of control fires. Due to the extreme conditions, fire behaviour and strenuous workload crews were rotated as required.

The Brigades that responded on 17 October 2013 were: Clarence/Dargan, South Bowenfels, Marrangaroo, Hartley, Kanimbla, Wallerawang, Portland, Cullen Bullen, Lowther/Hampton, Tarana, Rydal, Capertee, Sunny Corner/Meadow Flat, Dark Corner, Palmers Oaky, Lithgow Communications and Hartley Catering.

*Lithgow District Brigades are worthy recipients of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Unit).*



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### Lower Hunter Zone, Region East

On Monday 20 April 2015 an east coast low formed off the coast of Newcastle and the Lower Hunter, delivering cyclonic winds and torrential rain. The initial storm created massive damage with wind and flash flooding. During the following 11 days, large parts of the Lower Hunter were subject to substantial flooding and many areas became isolated. Tragically, four residents lost their lives in floodwaters.

In the initial stages of this storm, Brigades from the Lower Hunter Zone began attending to Triple Zero (000) calls and moved around the area helping residents. The NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) started assigning NSW RFS units with Requests for Assistance (RFA), and throughout the response NSW RFS crews completed more than 1,000 RFAs. As part of the support to NSW SES, the Lower Hunter Zone provided crews for strike teams, liaison officers, aviation support, media liaison, and assistance to NSW Police and Ambulance Service of NSW.

Some Lower Hunter Brigades were isolated due to road closures and flooding, cut off from communication systems and without power. These Brigades remained in their communities and assisted residents where they could, often as the only emergency service able to assist. Power was cut in some areas for over a week and it was impossible to get even the basics to them, such as food, water, and fuel. These Brigades provided assistance in extremely difficult circumstances.

*Lower Hunter Zone are worthy recipients of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Unit).*

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### Professional Standards Unit - Operation Vika Response

#### NSW RFS Headquarters

From February 2015, a team was formed within the Professional Standards Unit to prepare the NSW RFS response to matters associated with Operation Vika by the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). The team members were Ms Michelle Wakka (Team Leader), Ms Jane Hollier, Ms Stacey Weston, and Mrs Tania Marelic.

The NSW RFS response to Operation Vika was an involved and difficult undertaking. It required the collection and cataloguing of a vast quantity of documents. The team prepared these documents in a highly professional manner and in a high pressure environment. They were required to maintain the strictest confidentiality and their work needed to be undertaken in a time critical manner. All members put in over and above their normal hours of work, including weekends, so that the NSW RFS met its requirements in all submissions to the ICAC.

Throughout this period, the team acted with the highest level of integrity, professionalism and consideration to those around them.

*Professional Standards Unit – Operation Vika Response are worthy recipients of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Unit).*



## 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 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.*

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### The Lakes Team Brigades, Region East

On Monday 20 April 2015, an east coast low formed off the Central Coast, creating cyclonic conditions throughout Wyong, Lake Macquarie and the neighbouring local government areas. The storm came to be known as the April 2015 Super Storm and The Lakes Team Brigades were allocated to an exceptional volume of Triple Zero (000) calls and requests for assistance.

Throughout the night and following day, NSW RFS communications operators and crews responded to hundreds of incidents. Crews removed trees from homes, cleared roads, and provided safe passage to members of the community who were threatened and stranded by floodwaters.

On Tuesday 21 April local brigades responded to an urgent call for assistance from the Broadcast Australia site. Broadcast Australia had been running on back-up battery power for 10 hours, with only six hours battery remaining, and their single access road was blocked by trees. The site contains strategic assets for the government radio network, television and radio equipment essential in maintaining communications between emergency services and the community.

Local brigades and specialist chainsaw crews from Seahampton, Cameron Park, Wakefield and Dooralong began clearing 2.4km of road, supported by dedicated Communications volunteers. Working in cyclonic conditions and with the risk of falling trees and debris, the task was arduous and dangerous. In less than five hours, the crews had cleared 34 large trees and debris from the road. Broadcast Australia was able to bring in and install a generator which maintained the integrity of their vital broadcast equipment.

The efforts of The Lakes Team Brigades throughout the April 2015 Super Storm were conducted under exceptional and extraordinary circumstances and are worthy of recognition.

*The Lakes Team Brigades are worthy recipients of the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Unit).*



## ST FLORIAN'S FEAST DAY, THE FOURTH OF 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.

Born about 250 AD in Cetium (now in Austria), Florian joined the Roman army and angered the Emperor Diocletian when he refused to persecute Christians in the area. Florian gave himself up to the soldiers of Aquilinus, the governor, when they were rounding up the Christians. He was twice scourged, half-flayed alive and sentenced to be burnt alive. While being set on fire he challenged the Roman soldiers to light the fire, saying "If you do, I will climb to heaven on the flames". As the soldiers were apprehensive, they took another path and threw Florian into the River Enns with a stone around his neck.

About 600 years later, in approximately 900-950 AD a monastery was built near Florian's tomb, and subsequently the village of St Florian grew around it. St Florian was adopted as the Patron Saint of Poland, following an incident when a person was saved from a fire by invoking St Florian's name. Since then, St Florian has been invoked against fire and has been generally regarded in most countries as the Patron Saint of Firefighters.

Florian is associated with brewers because of a legendary incident in which he miraculously stopped a fire with a single pitcher of water. He is often depicted holding a pitcher of water.

Many miracles of healing are attributed to his intercession and he is invoked as a powerful protector in danger from fire.

