



MEDIA RELEASE

Bush fire season draws to a close

31 March 2015

Today marks the end of the statutory Bush Fire Danger Period (BFDP) in NSW. From an early start to the season in August 2014, through to March 2015, NSW firefighters responded to more than 9,200 bush, grass and scrub fires which burnt 168,687 hectares across NSW.

These incidents included the destructive McGills Rd and Florda Rd fires on the Mid North Coast and Lower North Coast and the Cliff Drive fire at Katoomba, as well as large fires at Peak Hill near Parkes, Warrimoo in the Blue Mountains and, just three weeks ago, three fires in the Pilliga East State Forest.

NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said while relatively mild conditions prevailed across the state during summer, there had been several early indications that the season would be a challenging one with above average fire activity.

Fifty-five of 152 Local Government Areas (LGAs) commenced the BFDP up to two months before the season's official start on 1 October 2014, due to prevailing hot and dry local conditions.

During August and September 2014, there were 1,417 bush and grass fires, including an eight day period in the Clarence Valley and Kempsey LGAs where 114 bush and grass fires burnt 9,500 hectares, destroying five homes and damaging a further eight.

"As late as November 2014, the Bureau of Meteorology was advising that higher than average temperatures would prevail statewide, with an above average likelihood of El Niño further intensifying conditions," Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

"Fortunately, the conditions that did eventuate were less severe than those forecast, providing our members with a welcome reprieve from fighting destructive bush fires during Christmas and the subsequent summer period."

As well as responding to incidents across NSW, the NSW RFS coordinated a number of interstate response teams to provide assistance to colleagues battling devastating blazes in South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia.

"More than 830 firefighters worked alongside their interstate colleagues as part of a coordinated firefighting effort including NSW RFS members, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services, Fire and Rescue NSW, Forestry Corporation and Ambulance NSW," Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

In February, NSW RFS crews helped NSW Far North Coast residents prepare for Cyclone Marcia and in March, 15 NSW RFS members were sent to Elcho Island in the Northern Territory to construct temporary shelters for residents left homeless after Cyclone Lam.

Commissioner Fitzsimmons thanked all NSW RFS members and emergency service workers who attended incidents across NSW during the season as well as those who provided assistance interstate, away from their families and friends.

“Throughout the season NSW RFS volunteers and our emergency service colleagues have spent time away from their loved ones, their jobs and their communities so they can help others and for this they deserve our sincere thanks and gratitude,” Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

“I would also like to thank their families and loved ones for the ongoing support because, without that support, our members would simply not be able to do the job they do.

“We rely on that support year round because, as those families well know, the end of the season does not mean our members stop working.”

Commissioner Fitzsimmons also highlighted the vital role employers played during the 2014/15 bush fire season, adding that employers that actively encourage employees to volunteer are contributing to a safer community.

“Without question, the support of employers is one of the key elements in helping NSW RFS volunteers protect their local community and give them the flexibility to contribute to firefighting efforts interstate.”

While the bush fire season ends for the majority of NSW today, 13 of the state’s 152 LGAs have extended the BFDP until 30 April 2015, due to ongoing dry conditions in the Southern Ranges and Southern Slopes regions.

Commissioner Fitzsimmons said crews have already begun hazard reduction burning and will conduct further prescribed burns as weather opportunities are presented.

“Hazard reduction burns are very much rain and temperature dependent and traditionally there is only a small window of opportunity, sometimes as few as 20 or 30 days, during which these prescribed burns can be safely and effectively conducted,” Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

“The continuous rainfall we have experienced across large areas of NSW will result in an increase of grass and other undergrowth that has the potential to fuel substantial bush fires.

“This makes it even more vital for people living near Bush Fire Prone Land to not become complacent and to ensure they take the time now to clear, prepare and maintain their properties.”

While Fire Permits are not required outside the BFDP, property owners conducting private hazard reduction burns are usually required to have a Hazard Reduction Certificate before lighting up.

Hazard Reduction Certificates are free and can be obtained from NSW RFS Fire Control Centres.

To interview NSW RFS Commissioner Fitzsimmons, please call the NSW RFS State Duty Media Officer on 02 9898 1855.



2014/15 BFDP facts and figures

- > Total number of bush, grass and scrub fires – 9,200
- > Total hectares burnt - 168,687
- > 6 homes destroyed, 9 homes damaged
- > The statutory 2014/15 BFDP began on 1 October 2014 and ends today, 31 March 2015
- > Fifty-five LGAs commenced the BFDP up to two months early due to hot and dry conditions
- > Twelve LGAs ended the BFDP up to one month early due to mild conditions
- > Thirteen LGAs extended the BFDP until 30 April 2015 due to ongoing dry conditions

	Victoria <i>December & January 2015</i>	South Australia <i>January 2015</i>	Western Australia <i>February 2015</i>
NSW Rural Fire Service	174	463	89
Fire and Rescue NSW	2	2	3
National Parks and Wildlife Service	2	7	27
Forestry Corporation	0	0	7
Ambulance NSW	0	7	8
Total	162	479	134

