

MEDIA RELEASE



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

End to one of the worst fire seasons in recent times

3 April 2013

The recent bush fire season will be remembered as one of the most difficult and challenging in many years, NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said.

The official bush fire danger period is now over for most areas, closing a season which saw around 6,000 bush and grass fires.

“This has been the most challenging bush fire season in around a decade, with temperature records broken and the worst fire danger conditions ever experienced,” Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

“Across the season we saw the destruction of 62 homes during bush and grass fires. 57 of those were during January, with 53 in Coonabarabran alone.

“We also saw extensive livestock losses, particularly around Yass and Cooma, and many thousands of hectares of valuable farmland and fencing destroyed.

“In total, an area larger than Greater Sydney, some 1.4 million hectares, was burnt from July to March.

“The losses could have been so much greater if it wasn’t for the work of firefighters, our coordinated firefighting arrangements, the use of aircraft, our ongoing commitment to hazard reduction, and our investment in new technologies.

“Time and time again, we’ve heard from affected areas how the incredible work of firefighters on the ground, backed up by the crews in the air, have helped save people and properties.

“The unique coordinated firefighting arrangements we have in NSW, where firefighters from the NSW RFS, Fire & Rescue NSW, National Parks and State Forests work together, is one of our true strengths.

“While we can never be complacent about the risk of fire, it is a good result that there hasn’t been a single loss of human life despite some of the worst conditions nature has thrown at us.”

Commissioner Fitzsimmons said firefighters, the community and media worked successfully together across the season.

“Our firefighters, from the volunteers of the NSW RFS who so generously give up their time, to the crews from our partner agencies, put in an incredible effort right throughout the season.

“The community’s appetite for information was unprecedented on both traditional and social media, and people took heed of our advice of planning and being prepared.

“The media once again provided valuable support, keeping people up to date and helping them make informed decisions,” Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

EDITORS NOTE: KEY STATISTICS AND PAST MAJOR FIRES COMPARISONS ON PAGE 2

For more details or to arrange an interview with Commissioner Fitzsimmons call 9898 1855.

January 2013 Fires in NSW

- Eight days of Total Fire Ban, including four statewide total fire bans
- First time Catastrophic fire danger ratings had been issued for forested areas, covering large population centres (Illawarra/Shoalhaven, Southern Ranges)
- Around 10,500 firefighters deployed, with many more on standby
- Over 650 individual taskings of aircraft by NSW RFS State Air Desk
- 8.7 million views of the NSW RFS website www.rfs.nsw.gov.au
- 27.6 million impressions on the NSW RFS Facebook page
- 'Fans' of the NSW RFS Facebook page increasing from 25,000 to nearly 100,000
- 15.5 million impressions of NSW RFS information on Twitter, trending 4th globally on 8 January
- 26,300 calls received by the 1800 679 737 Bush Fire Information Line
- 99 Emergency Alert activations, with more than 1,000,000 texts and phone calls sent on 7 January
- NSW RFS Fires Near Me smartphone application downloaded 150,000 times
- Fires Near Me application opened 750,000 times by users
- More than 80,000 detailed fire information searches per hour on 8 January through the application
- More than 50,000 downloads of the Bush Fire Survival Plan from the NSW RFS website

Comparison of past periods of significant fire activity

Date	Deaths	Area (ha)	Losses	Location(s)
Dec 38 – Jan 39	13	73 000	Many houses, pine plantations	Dubbo, Lugarno, Snowy Mountains, Canberra
Nov 51 – Jan 52	11	>4 000 000		Worst affected district around Wagga Wagga and Pilliga in the north-west
Sept 68 – Jan 69	14	> 2 000 000	161 buildings (80 houses)	South Coast (Sept.), much of the coastal and nearby range areas of the state
1974–75	6	4 500 000	50 000 stock, 10 170km fencing	Bourke to Balranald, Cobar Shire, Moolah–Corinya—most of the Western Division
1977–78	3	54 000	49 buildings	Blue Mountains
1978–79	Nil	> 50 000	5 houses, heavy stock loss	Southern Highlands, south-west slopes
1979–80	13	>1 000 000	14 houses	Mudgee, Warringah and Sutherland Shires, majority of council areas, Goulburn and South Coast
1984–85	5	3 500 000	40 000 stock, \$40 million damage	Western Division
1990–91	Nil	>280 000	8 houses, 176,200 livestock, hundreds of km of fencing	Hay, Murrumbidgee, Carrathool; Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai, Cessnock, Hawkesbury, Warringah, Wollondilly, Gosford, Wyong
1991–92	2	30 fires	14 houses	Baulkham Hills, Gosford City, Wyong Shire, Lake Macquarie
Dec 93 – Jan 94	4	>800 000 (>800 fires)	206 houses, 80 other premises	North Coast, Hunter, South Coast, Blue Mountains, Baulkham Hills, Sutherland, most of Royal National Park, Blue Mountains, Warringah–Pittwater
Dec 01 – Jan 02	Nil	744 000 (454 fires)	109 houses; 6000 head of livestock	Greater Sydney, Hunter, North Coast, mid-north coast, Northern Tablelands, Central Tablelands areas
July 02 – Feb 03	3	1 464 000 (459 fires)	86 houses; 3400 stock; 151 days of severe fire activity	Greater Sydney, Hunter, North Coast, Northern Tablelands, Northern Rivers, north-west slopes, north-west plains, Central Tablelands, Southern Tablelands, Illawarra, South Coast
Jan 2013	Nil	650,000 (512 fires)	57 houses, 14,500 livestock, 3,600km of fencing	Coonabarabran, Shoalhaven, Yass, Cooma

Historical data source: National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management 2004