



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

MEDIA RELEASE

Fire season comes to a close in NSW

31 March 2020

Today marks the official end to the most devastating bush fire season in the state's history.

NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said this season had been unprecedented in terms of conditions experienced, the loss of lives and property, and the threat to communities across large parts of NSW.

"NSW RFS crews and other agencies have responded to more than 11,400 bush and grass fires that have burnt more than 5.5 million hectares, the equivalent of 6.2% of the state," Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

"Fires this season have destroyed 2,448 homes; however, the great work of firefighters saw 14,481 homes saved."

"This season there were six days where areas across NSW recorded catastrophic fire weather conditions.

"At the height of activity, there was on average around 2,500 firefighters in the field each shift with up to 4,000 on days of increased fire danger and impact.

"We have seen a combined inter-agency response from NSW RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Forestry Corporation NSW, NSW State Emergency Service, NSW Police, NSW Ambulance and the Australian Defence Force come together with our interstate colleagues.

"We must also thank the international response and assistance from Canada, the United States and New Zealand."

Commissioner Fitzsimmons said that most tragically 25 lives were lost, including those of the three NSW RFS volunteers and three US aerial firefighters.

"Our thoughts will forever be with the families and loved ones of all those who lost their lives.

"We especially pay tribute to the families of Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer from the Horsley Park Brigade and Samuel McPaul from the Morven Brigade, along with US aerial firefighters Ian McBeth, Paul Hudson and Rick DeMorgan Jr.

"Their loss has been felt deeply and we honour the sacrifice they made to selflessly protect communities across NSW.

Commissioner Fitzsimmons said all emergency services personnel, especially NSW RFS members, have given so much, spending time away from their families, jobs and loved ones.

"We continue to thank our members' families, colleagues and employers for allowing our volunteers to provide such a great level of protection to the people of NSW.

"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 property."

For more information contact the State Duty Media Officer on 9898 1855
For current incidents or major fire updates visit www.rfs.nsw.gov.au

Commissioner Fitzsimmons has also praised the community for its response across the fire season.

“While we’ve seen unprecedented fire activity, we’ve also seen an unprecedented response from the community – including use of our warnings products like Fires Near Me NSW, and importantly, taking decisive action based on quality media reports and the messages we’ve sent.

“Responding to bush fires is a team effort, and the community across NSW is an important team member.”

“We must also be mindful of all those still enduring the very raw and difficult recovery process as a result of the fires and that efforts are sustained through this very personal challenge.

“While the focus now for all of us is rightly on the Coronavirus response effort, the next bush fire season will begin in only a matter of months, so keep your property prepared and have your bush fire survival plan up to date and discussed with those in your family and household.”

