

# BUSH FIRE bulletin



The journal of the  
**NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE**



## EARLY FIRES HIT HARD

- PROJECT FIRESTORM
- NEW TRAINING ACADEMY FOR DUBBO
- TASMANIAN DEPLOYMENT

➤ **LAT LIFTOUT**  
737 'MARIE BASHIR'  
SPEC SHEET



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The 2019/20 fire season started early with increased fire activity in August



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A pioneering BNHCRC project is shedding light on the role of spot fires in the spread of bush fire

# BUSH FIRE bulletin

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# FOREWORD



The start to the 2019/20 fire season has been extremely busy, as much of NSW struggles with prolonged drought. Fire activity has been particularly significant in the north of the state – fires in Region North have already burnt out more than 500,000 hectares this season, which is twice the area typically burnt in the entire season for Region North in recent years.

Warm and windy conditions in August saw large and damaging fires around Armidale, Tenterfield, Port Macquarie and Yamba. September brought little respite, and at the time of writing, intense fire activity has continued into November.

Already this season has seen more than 100 homes and 290 outbuildings lost to fire, with the bulk of these losses occurring in the Long Gully Road and Busbys Flat Road fires in September and October. However it is a great credit to the hard work and dedication of our members and partner agencies that more than 1,200 homes and 1,000 outbuildings have been saved.

The Busbys Flat Road fire proved devastating to the town of Rappville, where many homes and infrastructure assets were lost. The local timber mill was destroyed, more than 350 power poles needed to be replaced and the North Coast rail line was damaged by fire. The region's farmers, many already experiencing the effects of prolonged drought, suffered the loss of 1,784 livestock due to fire.

The Long Gully Road fire also saw the tragic loss of two lives after a property near Coongbar was destroyed by fire. This is a truly awful and difficult situation for all involved and most importantly, the families, loved ones and friends of those lost.

Having spoken to the crews who were in the area that day, as well as the Incident Management Team running the fire, I know it has affected them greatly and I sincerely thank them for their professionalism and commitment under difficult circumstances.

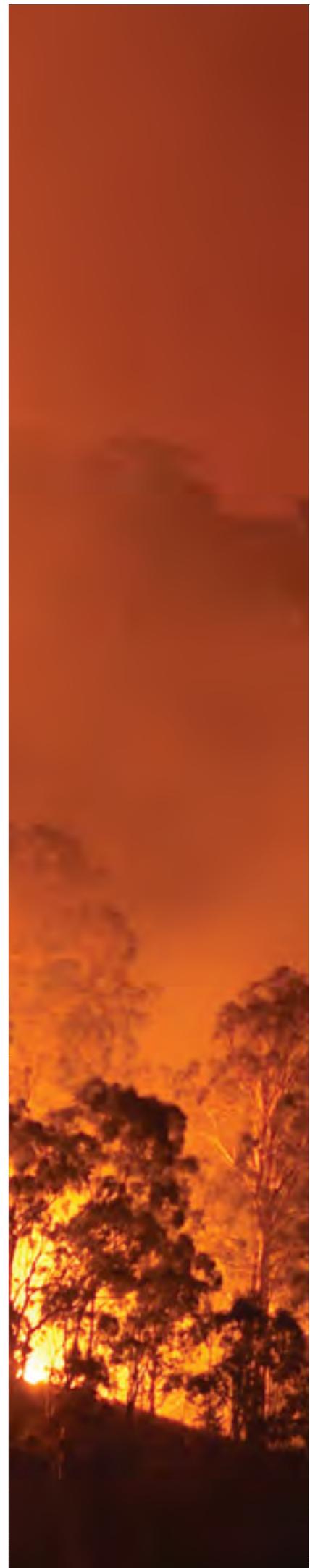
In August, we took delivery of a new 737 Large Air Tanker that will be available to combat fires all year round. The 'Marie Bashir' – named after the state's first female Governor – was quickly into the action, deployed to support firefighting efforts on the ground in the north of the state less than a week after it landed. By the end of October, the 'Marie Bashir' had already undertaken 33 taskings and 135 missions.

The NSW RFS is also progressing with several important changes at the moment, namely the establishment of the new Area Management Model to replace the existing regional model and the rollout of the new Our Plan: Strategic Direction 2019-24. Both of these initiatives are very important to the future of the Service, and you can find out more about them in this issue of the Bulletin.

As we head into summer, I urge all members to stay safe and thank you all for your continued service, no matter the role you perform in the NSW RFS.

Regards,

Shane Fitzsimmons AFSM  
Commissioner





# ▶ WINTER FIRES RAVAGE NORTHERN NSW

The 2019/20 fire season started early as dry and windy conditions saw increased fire activity across the state, particularly in the north.

With 95 percent of NSW drought affected and persistent dry and warm conditions across the state, nine local government areas (LGAs) started the Bush Fire Danger Period on 1 August, with a further 12 LGAs starting on 17 August.

The weekend of 10-11 August brought strong to gale force north-westerly winds ahead of a front, increasing fire dangers. Warnings were issued for fires burning in the Kempsey, Clarence Valley and Richmond Valley areas and 285 firefighters and 113 appliances were deployed over that weekend. By the end of the week, four homes and nine outbuildings had been destroyed.

The NSW RFS's new 737 Large Air Tanker (LAT) made its maiden run less than a week after arriving in Australia, deployed to a fire burning at Lindfield Park Road in Port Macquarie on 8 August that had flared and was running through drought-parched wetlands. In order to limit the spread, the LAT was used to drop retardant lines.



The LAT carried out multiple missions over the following days as fire activity increased in the north of the state. You can read more about the LAT and its arrival on page 24.



**Main image:** Old Station Road fire, Kempsey. Photo by Morgan Fraser. **Left:** Hazard reduction in Western Sydney Parklands. Photo by Daniel Walters. **Right:** Blackbutt Road fire, Kremnos. Photo by Ali Stewart.

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This makes the fire hard to access, difficult to extinguish and produces large amounts of smoke. In a fresh attempt to extinguish the underground peat fire, the NSW RFS has – in conjunction with the Department of Primary Industries, NSW Health, Port Macquarie Hastings Council and the Environmental Protection Authority – developed a plan to rehydrate the wetlands.

The rehydration of the wetland area will involve the delivery of 30 megalitres of reclaimed water to raise the water level within the wetlands. To achieve this, a 2.4km pipeline was constructed to move the water to a number of points within the wetlands.

It is expected that the process to rehydrate the wetlands will take a minimum of 50 days, with the water quality to be closely monitored due to the environmentally sensitive nature of the area and to ensure no risk to health.

The Lindfield Park Road Fire flared up multiple times over July and August despite being contained, as burning continued underground in peat subsoils.

With warm and dry conditions forecast to continue for spring, the 2019/20 fire season has the potential to be a very active one. ■

# in FOCUS

## > ONGOING FIRES IN NORTHERN NSW

In September and October, the north of the state experienced several destructive fires that impacted areas such as Drake, Busbys Flat, Rappville and Tenterfield.

As of late October, more than 100 homes were destroyed and, tragically, two lives were lost. As the fires are still burning at time of printing, we will bring you more extended coverage of these fires in the next issue of the Bush Fire Bulletin.

Photo by Daniel Walters.



## > EMPLOYERS RECOGNISED FOR SUPPORTING VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

In July, the NSW RFS honoured those businesses that have gone above and beyond to allow employees who are volunteer firefighters help the community.

The Supportive Employer Program, which was launched in 2013, recognises businesses who generously grant volunteers leave to attend emergency incidents during work hours, without financial disadvantage. NSW RFS Senior Assistant Commissioner Bruce McDonald presented Supportive Employers Awards to 12 businesses in recognition of their vital contribution to firefighting and emergency response efforts.

“I know having staff called away at short notice, having to down tools in the middle of a job or leaving the office for extended periods puts pressure on workplace productivity,” said Senior Assistant Commissioner

McDonald. “I would like to thank all employers who provide leave to NSW RFS volunteers.

“While the time and effort that volunteers put in is clearly visible, this couldn’t happen without supportive employers behind the scenes.”

The 2019 Supportive Employer Award recipients included Bakers Delight Port Central, Batterline Earth Moving, Country Wide Mechanical, DHL Supply Chain, Embella Jewellery, Locate and Map, Meadows Family Restaurants (trading as McDonald’s Macarthur Square), Nielsen TAM Australia, Northern Co-operative Meat Company Ltd, The Westport Club, Varley Vehicles and Wollongong Emergency Family Housing.





## ➤ FIREFIGHTERS OF HAWKESBURY TEST THEIR SKILLS

The Hawkesbury District Championships were held on Sunday August 11 at Macquarie Park in Wilberforce, bringing together more than 400 volunteer firefighters from all brigades of the Hawkesbury District to compete in a range of challenging, real-life scenarios.

Firefighters refined their skills ahead of the fire season by competing in scenarios including simulated overrun, bush and grass fires, pumping and first aid, and were tested on leadership, teamwork and decision making.

Congratulations to Tennyson Brigade, who took out first place on the day, with Colo Heights Brigade in second, Oakville Brigade in third and Freemans Reach Brigade in fourth.

## ➤ NSW RFS MEMBERS COMMENDED FOR SELFLESS SERVICE

The 2019 Rotary District and Clubs of NSW Emergency Services Community Awards (RESCA) were announced at a ceremony on 2 August. The awards acknowledge and celebrate the NSW emergency service personnel who have selflessly gone above and beyond their call of duty.

Eddie Newbury, Captain of Copmanhurst Brigade, was named NSW RFS Officer of the Year for his tireless approach to improve the welfare of his community and the compassionate leadership he showed in assisting a homeless family to find stable accommodation. Finalists for the award included Lindi Kingdom of Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai Catering Brigade, Vicki Matthews of Coonabarabran Catering Brigade and Warwick Teasdale of Killcare/Wagstaffe Brigade.

Young member Alyssa Grady of the Illawarra Cadet Brigade was also a finalist for the Dorothy Hennessy Emergency Services Youth Scholarship, which provides funding for volunteers under the age of 21 to access training and educational materials or equipment.

Also at the ceremony, Superintendent Brian Graham AFSM was presented with a Paul Harris Fellowship by Rotary in recognition of his work with RESCA as well as the Vocational Training Teams (VTT) program in Vanuatu. The VTT program, a collaborative effort between the NSW RFS and other emergency services agencies, helped train and build a local emergency service and rescue capacity in Vanuatu.

Congratulations to the winners and finalists for their exceptional work.





# ▶ RAW EMOTION

## ▶ THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF TABULAM, TENTERFIELD

*By Chris Garlick*

The impact of a fire is often counted in numerical terms. How many homes are lost? How much stock is lost? What is the cost to rebuild? What we don't measure is how great the impact is on the community, our volunteers and all those who have an emotional investment in fighting such significant fires.

I was deployed to northern NSW in February following days of tireless fighting by local crews, out-of-area crews and a large number of aircraft.

At Headquarters, we were in awe at some of the stories that were coming out of the fire-ravaged area. We wanted to capture these stories so that the broader membership and public could understand what the people in these areas were experiencing. These were stories of bravery, selflessness and remarkable feats of firefighting.

I left Sydney in the rain.





## AND TINGHA

**Main photo:** A car yard in Tingha. Photo by Chris Garlick.  
**Left:** The fire at Tabulam. Photo by Troy Middlebrook.  
**Right:** The Tingha Plateau fire. Photo by Andrew Flakelar.



It wasn't until I crossed the Great Dividing Range, around Gloucester, that I witnessed how dry and barren the landscape was. There was no trace of moisture for as far as the eye could see. I stopped on multiple occasions because cattle were grazing close to the road, an attempt to get as much nourishment as they could.

This was the moment that I got a true appreciation for the hardship many Australians, including our volunteers, were going through. It was sobering.

### TENTERFIELD

I arrived at the Tenterfield Fire Control Centre shortly after shift handover. It was abuzz with activity.

I met briefly with the team in the Public Liaison Unit, the Incident Controller and a few familiar faces that I had not seen for a while.

The mood was frantic. People were reaching their limit and becoming exhausted. This isn't uncommon given the limited resources, the scale of the fires and the length of the operation.

**Left:** The Bruxner Highway, near Tabulam. Photo by Troy Middlebrook. **Right:** The town of Tingha. Photo by Brayden Vickery.



The Public Liaison Unit had picked up on a number of issues that were brewing. The community was becoming restless. After so long, they understandably just wanted some normality.

### **TABULAM**

After about an hour's drive from Tenterfield, I arrived at Tabulam and found an out-of-area Strike Team from Sutherland on the side of the road, ready to receive their assignments.

I spoke briefly to the Strike Team Leader, they were ready to assist a broken community in whatever way they could. The community had not experienced an event like this in years, some not at all. Like so many across NSW, they thought that it wouldn't happen to them.

The local Divisional Commander, also the local Captain, had been in the field for days. His neighbour had lost property as a result of the Bruxner Road fire, yet day after day, the Captain would be out helping his community. His mates.

### **JUBULLUM COMMUNITY**

This Aboriginal community, about five kilometres west of Tabulam, was one of the first to be impacted by the fire.

The drive into the community was surreal. On the corner sat a bright untouched garden feature in front of a house. It was a cheerful beacon in a scorched landscape.

The houses in the community were largely untouched, although surrounded by charred earth littered with burnt leaves falling from the trees in the gentle breeze.



As I drove around the community, I noticed groups of people working around their properties. From chainsaws buzzing, people moving things from house to house or kids riding their bikes oblivious to the seriousness of the fire, there was something going on against the black and charred landscape.

It was evident that while fire had been a part of Aboriginal culture for many years, this event hit home. It made them realise its ferocity and fierce impact on life and property. It strengthened their view to work closer with the NSW RFS, to help understand our role within the community and to also pass on to us the benefits of cultural burning.

### **TINGHA**

When you're in the State Operations Centre, or Fire Control Centre, you often see aerial footage of a fire and the destruction it causes. When you see so much of it, you often detach yourself from the incident as a coping mechanism.

I remember seeing the aerial vision the morning that the Tingha Plateau fire took a run towards the township. On the edge of the township, there was a car yard with what looked to be close to one hundred cars.

We watched on as the fire ripped through the yard, fearing the worst for what was in its path.

The day I drove into Tingha via Gilgai, I saw this car yard. I stopped and the ash was flowing through the cars with the gentle breeze. The cars, in various states, were lifeless shells destined for scrap metal.

It was someone's livelihood. In a matter of minutes, it was snatched from them.

**Top and Bottom:** The Tingha Plateau Fire.  
Both photos by Andrew Flakelar.

I sat down with a Deputy Group Officer to have a chat about his experience from the days of the Tingha Plateau fire. He spoke as if it was the first opportunity he had to sit down and process the events of the preceding few days.

With raw emotion, he described the efforts of his troops that went into battle to protect the community, including escorting a physically ill person out of their house as the fire approached. That house was later destroyed.

He told me how well the Tingha Brigade banded together for a common cause to defend their small town from the fierceness of the fire. They put in long hours, day and night, to get the job done.

The NSW Governor had visited Tingha the day before I arrived. There were images of battle-hardened firefighters breaking down in tears as they realised what had occurred. It was unprecedented for this small community and the experience had rocked them to the core.

A leader with more than 30 years of experience had been reduced to tears, he had never experienced anything like it.

The Tingha community was broken. Their resolve, even days after the fire, was solid. They made a pact to band together and help each other through the most difficult time they had endured in their memory.



### THE DRIVE HOME

The seven-hour drive home gave plenty of opportunity to think about the effects of fire in a broader scale – what it does to the community, to our volunteers and to the mental state of all people on all levels who need to deal with the response and recovery to such significant events.

The ‘sandstone curtain’ is a term often thrown around the organisation to describe the gulf between the coast and the bush. This experience has highlighted how diverse we are as an organisation and now, more than ever, is an important time to band together and help each other out. ■





Each year, 200,000 students across the state study bush fires as a compulsory part of the Year Five and Six syllabus. The NSW RFS, in partnership with the Department of Education, has developed an exciting new engagement program to engage and educate these students – **Project Firestorm**.

Project Firestorm is an interactive new way for students to become leaders and advocates in bush fire preparation, survival and recovery. It empowers them to become active agents of change in their communities.

The project focuses on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, with students designing and developing ideas and solutions for bush fire management issues.

The new website [www.projectfirestorm.com.au](http://www.projectfirestorm.com.au) is an expansion of original material developed by St Ives North Public School in collaboration with their local Ku-ring-gai Brigade. It features a new team of superheroes inspired by real students from the program, *The Firestormers*.

#### SOME OF THE IDEAS DEVELOPED BY STUDENTS WHO HAVE TRIALLED THE PROGRAM INCLUDE:

- a 'crawler' robot equipped with infrared that could crawl up and down the outside of houses and identify and extinguish hotspots and spot fires
- an LED system combined with a Fitbit and integrated into goggles that warns the wearer when it is time to rest or if they are experiencing warning signs for cardiovascular distress
- an earphone connected to the brigade radio by Bluetooth that rural volunteers could wear when operating farm machinery or in noisy environments to ensure they hear radio communications

**Left:** The Firestormers characters each represent a different level of the program and guide students in developing their ideas. The characters are (from left to right): Sonar, M-Power, Mavric, Rez-Q and Robotica.

The NSW RFS approached the school teachers involved and the Department of Education to help scale the project across the state, and it has now been trialled in well over 30 schools over the last two years.

“Project Firestorm is an opportunity for the NSW RFS to help students understand the complexity of disasters and how they can affect their local community,” says Anthony Bradstreet, Manager Community Engagement at NSW RFS. “The program focuses on problem-solving and encourages students to be innovative in finding solutions for bush fire challenges in their community.

“It’s important that children in the state realise that they have a role to play when it comes to fire preparation and survival. Not everything is done by the emergency services – there is a shared responsibility with the community that these students can also serve with creative new ideas.

#### HOW ARE LOCAL BRIGADES INVOLVED?

NSW RFS members have a crucial role supporting their local schools who participate in Project Firestorm. Schools running the program could ask their local brigade to give a Firestormer Briefing (presentation on bush fires) and can also provide expert knowledge as mentors to help students complete their individual projects.

Finally, brigades can help students showcase their final projects to members and the community by heading along to a school event or inviting students to present them at Get Ready Weekend events! Training is available for Community Engagement Facilitators by contacting [community.engagement@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:community.engagement@rfs.nsw.gov.au).

“Project Firestorm allows us to reach these students and do it in a way that is engaging and entertaining, while still being educational.”

Project Firestorm is flexible and can be delivered by teachers to their class in a day, a week or a term. Schools are encouraged to organise a showcase of student ideas at the end of the course with NSW RFS involvement, perhaps even at their Get Ready Weekend event.

And these ideas aren’t just for the classroom – the NSW RFS wants to harness the best ideas. Teachers can submit outstanding ideas or inventions to the NSW RFS for a Commissioner’s Award, where these ideas could be turned into reality.

The innovative project has also attracted the attention of researchers for its application of research, hands-on approach and successes engaging children.

“The most effective bush fire education programs involve mutually beneficial partnerships between schools and brigades,” says Dr Briony Towers, a Research Fellow at RMIT and lead researcher for the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC) child-centred disaster risk reduction project. “Brigades can support schools to deliver authentic learning experiences, while schools can support the community engagement strategies of brigades.”

“Project Firestorm has all the elements of an effective program – it is action-oriented, allows opportunities for deep learning and reflection from the children and provides valuable opportunities for their genuine participation in bush fire risk management.” ■

 **Want to join *The Firestormers*? Head to [www.projectfirestorm.com.au](http://www.projectfirestorm.com.au) to find out more!**

# NEW TRAINING ACADEMY IN DUBBO

In July, Acting Commissioner Rob Rogers and Minister for Police and Emergency Services the Hon David Elliott MP officially opened stage one of the new NSW RFS Training Academy in Dubbo.

The state-of-the-art academy is a first in the history of the NSW RFS. It will provide centralised, specialist training and education for NSW RFS members that has traditionally been delivered at a range of sites across the state.

The NSW RFS partnered with Dubbo Regional Council to build the facility, with construction commencing in November 2018.

Stage one of the project - comprising the administration and training facilities, one accommodation block, catering and housekeeping, gymnasium, covered outdoor learning areas and an outdoor

carpark - was completed in July 2019. Stage two will be opened in 2020.

“It’s a very proud day for not only the team here, but everyone involved in making this happen over the last 18 months,” said Assistant Commissioner Peter McKechnie.

“The Academy is a tremendous facility for all of us at the NSW RFS, all of our emergency service colleagues and for the community of Dubbo.”

Adjacent to Dubbo Regional Airport and close to the Orana Fire Control Centre and State Mitigation facilities, the Academy includes a large



**Left:** Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers with Mayor of Dubbo Ben Shields, Member for Dubbo Dugald Saunders and Minister for Police and Emergency Services David Elliott. **Right:** The new Training Academy.



auditorium, lecture rooms, indoor and outdoor training areas, a gym, a commercial kitchen and comfortable accommodation in 97 individual air-conditioned rooms.

The Academy will be a ‘home away from home’ for NSW RFS members, with first-class amenities and excellent training facilities ensuring that members are comfortable and want to return to the Academy in the future. Training began almost immediately, with the Academy hosting its first course less than a week after the opening.

“Part of the experience of coming here isn’t just the front of the classroom,” said Peter. “It’s also about being able to get to know your colleagues and go away having learnt something, improved your skills and developed relationships throughout the organisation.” ■

## WHAT IS IN THE TRAINING ACADEMY?

### STAGE ONE (OPEN NOW):

- Accommodation Block A (31 rooms)
- Administration and training facilities
- Catering and housekeeping services
- Covered outdoor learning areas
- Gymnasium
- Carpark for 50 cars

### STAGE TWO (OPEN 2021):

- Accommodation Blocks B and C (taking total accommodation to 97 rooms)
- Storage facility
- Additional parking

## WHAT WILL IT BE USED FOR?

The Academy will be the primary senior volunteer and staff training facility for the NSW RFS, and also the location for the Learning and Development, Operational Doctrine and Regional Services South and West Teams.

All teams that need to undertake overnight training will be targeted to conduct training at Dubbo, unless it is

solely for a specific geographic area.

It will be used by NSW RFS members from across the state – as well as other emergency services personnel – in areas such as incident and district management, road crash rescue and fire investigation.

The Academy will not replace local volunteer training at the District level.



# WOMEN IN THE NSW RFS

## > RIVERINA WOMEN TAKE CHARGE AT NEW FORUM

*By Vivien Thomson AFSM, District Assistant Riverina Zone*

The NSW RFS Riverina Zone recently held a Women's Leadership and Decision Making Forum in Wagga Wagga, aimed at encouraging women of all ages and at all levels within an organisation to develop skills in leadership and problem solving.

When we talk about leadership, the majority of people believe it is the person up the front making all the decisions. True leadership can come from any level and can, at times, be unassuming. With this in mind, we designed a training course that discussed leadership in a different light and encouraged a broader understanding – especially when it comes to making decisions under pressure.

The program began with a Q&A session with women from four branches of the emergency services: NSW RFS, NSW Ambulance, NSW Police and a Major from the local Army Base. This was a chance for the participants to ask the hard questions and get frank and truthful answers from experienced women in leadership. This was a way to begin the thought processes that we were diving into the next day.

Day two began with team building and our perceptions of leadership. We focused on the latest in brain science and EQ, resilience, stress management and decision making under pressure, followed by some activities.

The NSW RFS Riverina Zone encompasses four local government areas and has over 2,200 volunteers within its 69 brigades. Overall there are 273 women, or approximately 12.4 percent of volunteers.

The feedback from the women was outstanding. We had a full age range from teenagers to seniors and for some it was a light bulb moment – they could clearly see where they could use the skills in many parts of their lives. For others, they will use the skills to adopt changes for the better. The value of this style of course is best left to one attendee's comments:

“Absolutely incredible forum. I learnt so much that I can apply to my day-to-day life. I feel so empowered to want to take on a leadership role. I feel more confident. I would love to come to the next one. I would love to encourage my station to do some leadership forums.” ■

**Main photo:** Team building exercises at the Forum.  
Photo by Vivien Thomson.

## ➤ CHIFLEY/LITHGOW ZONE ELECTS FOUR NEW FEMALE CAPTAINS

The first half of 2019 was historic for the Chifley/Lithgow Zone, with four new female captains welcomed to brigades in the area.

### **PHILLIPA JARRETT, FREEMANTLE BRIGADE**

Phillipa moved to the area in 2000 and joined the Freemantle Brigade in 2002. After being named the brigade's first female Deputy Captain in 2005 and being elevated to Senior Deputy Captain in 2013, Phillipa was unanimously elected as the first female Captain in the 80-year history of the Freemantle Brigade. During her time at Freemantle, Phillipa has been a driving force in shaping and directing the brigade with a focus on regular training and station nights.

### **MICHELLE SWANN, BLACK SPRINGS BRIGADE**

After growing up in the Blue Mountains and almost losing her childhood home to bush fires, Michelle joined the Black Springs Brigade in 2008 and became active in fire activities. Michelle held the positions of Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain and Treasurer before her election to Captain. All four of Michelle's children are involved in the NSW RFS in the area, and her particular focus on community engagement and education is already having positive results in the community.

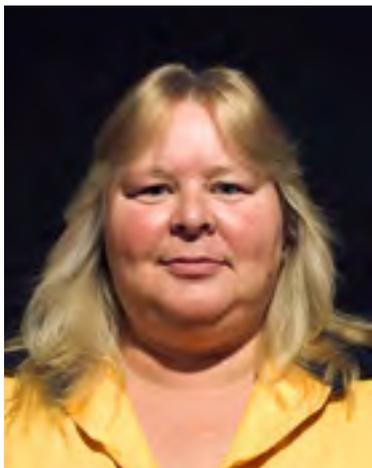
### **JULIA KIRWAN, LITHGOW COMMUNICATIONS BRIGADE**

Julia moved to Dargan in 2007 and was quick to join the Dargan Brigade, attracted by the sense of community involvement. Soon after, Julia joined the Lithgow Communications Brigade and was heavily involved in community engagement work before her elevation to Captain this year. With a background in public education and OH&S management, Julia is well-placed to organise and develop her brigade as they embrace new communications technology.

### **MICHELLE 'SHELLY' DYMOND, DARK CORNER BRIGADE**

Shelly joined the Dark Corner Brigade in 2011 after moving to the area from the city, and was quick to embrace as much training as she could to better protect her community from fire. After holding the positions of Treasurer and Deputy Captain, Shelly was encouraged to stand for Captain and was duly elected earlier this year. One of her aims for the future is to consolidate her brigade in the face of the challenges of recruiting and retaining the younger generation of firefighters.

**Below (left to right):** Phillipa Jarrett, Michelle Swann, Julia Kirwan, Michelle Dymond.



# WOMEN IN THE NSW RFS

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## ➤ NARRABRI WOMEN LEARN HOW TO BE BUSH FIRE READY



Volunteers from Narrabri Rural Fire Brigade have developed a Women's Bush Fire Preparedness workshop program aimed at helping women on rural properties make a bush fire survival plan and giving them practical skills and confidence to put that plan into action.

Thirty-five local women attended the two workshops in August to learn about where they can find fire-related information, what that information means, how to prepare their properties for fire season and how to survive during bush fires. Attendees were also taught how to use pumps and generators, and participated in a range of live fire exercises.

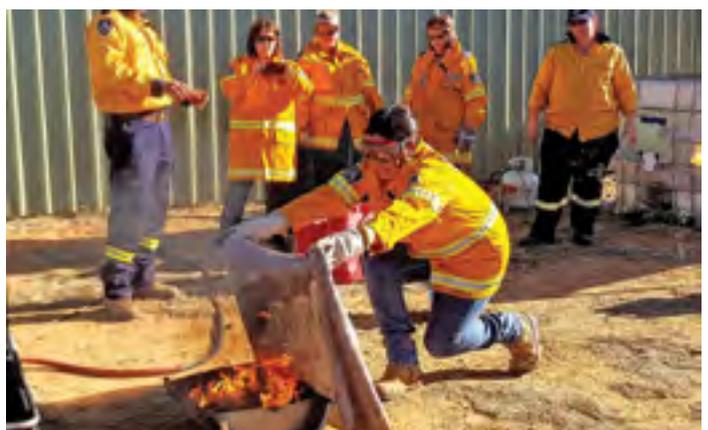
The workshops were targeted at women – particularly those living in areas of high bush fire risk around Narrabri – because women are often the ones who are home at the time of a fire and have to make decisions regarding their family's safety.

The feedback from participants was very positive, with many grateful to have the opportunity to attend and learn about fire safety. Every attendee reported that they would go home and implement changes based on the workshops, and most reported a significant increase in their knowledge of bush fire preparedness.

Thanks to this overwhelmingly positive response, Narrabri Brigade is planning to hold the workshops again in the future in alliance with community groups to ensure they reach as many women as possible. ■

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**Images:** Rural women learning about bush fire management. All photos courtesy of Megan Davies.





## ➤ FAR SOUTH COAST BRIGADES WELCOME FIRST FEMALE CAPTAINS

Two brigades in the Far South Coast District recently elected their first-ever female captains.



**Top:** Robyn Reynolds. Photo courtesy of Pambula Brigade.  
**Bottom:** Sophie Taylor. Photo courtesy of Narooma Brigade.

Pambula Brigade voted in Robyn Reynolds as Captain in July, while in May Sophie Taylor became not only the first woman elected Captain of Narooma Brigade, but also the youngest ever Captain.

Robyn has been a member of Pambula Brigade since 1999, holding positions including Treasurer, Secretary, Deputy Captain and Brigade Training Officer. She is well-known as an instructor with the Far South Coast Training team, where she has earned the affectionate nickname 'Drill Sergeant'. Robyn is Pambula's first female captain in its 67-year history.

Sophie joined the Narooma Brigade in 2009 as a 16-year-old cadet and her passion for the Brigade increased as she became old enough to participate in callouts, including at major incidents such as the Sir Ivan Fire at Coonabarabran, the Lismore floods and the Tathra fire in 2018. Sophie became a Deputy Captain in 2012 and then a Senior Deputy Captain in 2017 before her election to the role of Captain in 2019. At the age of 26, Sophie is also the youngest captain in Narooma Brigade's 80-year history.

Congratulations to the new captains on their elections. ■



## ALL-INDIGENOUS MITIGATION CREWS TAKE TO FAR WEST

In May, mitigation operations in the Far West got a few new faces as two Mitigation Crews made up entirely of indigenous members began work in Bourke and Brewarrina.



The all-indigenous crews, like all Mitigation crews, work in regional and remote communities performing a number of roles such as preparing areas for hazard reduction by volunteer brigades, assisting community members, providing community education and delivering specialist support to the district.

Since the start of 2018, the NSW RFS has been working on the ground in Bourke and Brewarrina with Aboriginal Affairs, local indigenous working parties and elders to develop the program and recruit new members for the crews.



“Indigenous communities are very close, particularly small communities, and the involvement of the local indigenous authorities such as the Ngemba (Brewarrina) and Bourke Working Parties was crucial and hugely helpful,” explains Area Operations Officer – West, Danny Busch. “As a result, we formed a very strong relationship with the local Aboriginal Working Parties and they really guided the NSW RFS through the process of working with indigenous communities.”

The existence of the all-indigenous crews not only helps the NSW RFS serve and interact with indigenous communities in the Far West, but also provides the Service with an understanding and appreciation of areas of indigenous cultural significance.

“We don’t fully appreciate the cultural significance of the landscape as indigenous people do, particularly around sacred sites and men’s and women’s business sites – we might have a list or

map of these sites but that doesn’t capture the spiritual significance of the site and country,” says Assistant Commissioner Steve Yorke. “These crews understand the sensitivity of certain areas to indigenous culture and what it means to indigenous people.”

Since their induction, the all-indigenous NSW RFS Mitigation Crews have been busy with AIDER and mitigation works around Bourke. They have also been deployed to assist with hazard reduction burning in Dubbo and Coonabarabran and Asset Protection Works in Cobar.

Although the all-indigenous crews were only inducted a few months ago, the program has strengthened relationships between the NSW RFS and local indigenous communities and has the potential to be expanded across the state. Similar crews may soon be seen elsewhere in NSW with areas including Bega and Coffs Harbour expressing an interest in the program. ■

**Images:** The indigenous Mitigation crews take to the field in the Far West. All photos courtesy of Danny Busch.



# FROM FOUR TO SEVEN: AREAS REPLACING REGIONS

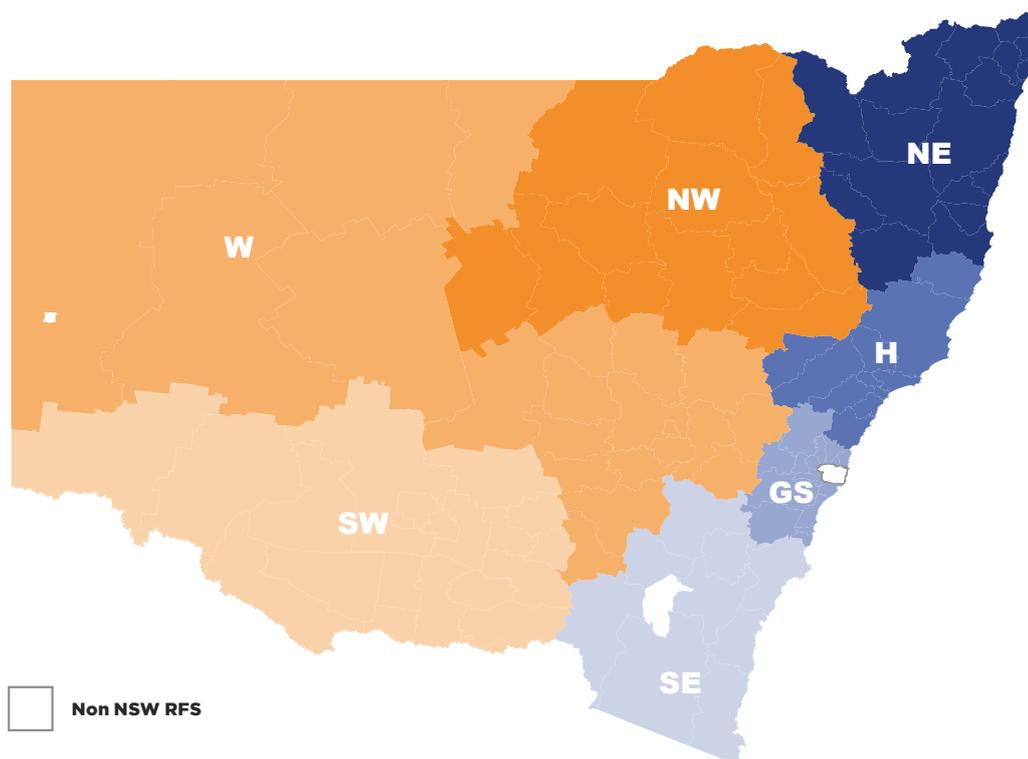
In May, the NSW RFS announced the establishment of a new Area Management Model to replace the existing regional model and improve service delivery across the state.

The Area Management Model was developed after a NSW RFS survey identified a perceived disconnection between district staff and management across all four regions. Following extensive consultation with and feedback from NSW RFS staff and representative groups, the new structure converts the existing four regions to seven new 'Areas': South Western, North Western, Western, North Eastern, South Eastern, Hunter and Greater Sydney.

Implementation of the Area Management Model is expected to commence from November, and will replace the current structure of the Regional Offices, State Mitigation Services and the Operational and Mitigation Services (OMS) Business Unit. However, it will not affect volunteer members in brigades.

Areas will be implemented in a staged approach from November 2019 to minimise disruption to staff and ensure business continuity during the transition period. By October, almost all staff members affected by the realignments received outcomes following an expression of interest and placement process. The vast majority of affected staff members (85 percent) have been assigned to roles in the new structures.

In October, the NSW RFS progressed to external recruitment for roles that remain vacant. Recruitment for the Area structure is being managed in a staged approach, commencing with the Area Commander roles and vacancies for the North Eastern and North Western areas. Vacancies continue to be advertised via <https://iworkfor.nsw.gov.au> and members are encouraged to apply.



## WHY THE CHANGE?

The new Area Management Model is designed to deliver more localised decision-making and greater visibility of local issues, with more direct support to districts and brigades by reducing the geographic spread within each Area. Area Commanders will be responsible for a range of 4-10 districts, rather than the current range of 8-15 districts for Regional Managers.

With new work localities in each Area (see table below), there will be an increase in the number of NSW RFS support staff located in regional NSW. This will allow District Managers to improve services for and increase the focus on volunteers and their work. Additionally, there will be significant operational efficiencies through the combination of the Mitigation Crews and regional and district staff in one reporting structure within Areas. ■

## WHAT ELSE IS CHANGING?

- State Mitigation crews will become an Area Resource but their work locations will not change.
- The Remote Area Firefighting and Specialised Operations section in OMS (excluding Heavy Plant Coordinator) have been moved to Response and Coordination group (Operational Support Section).
- The Technical Officer – Auto Mechanical roles will be moved from the Operational Resources and Transport Section in OMS to the Area Management Model.
- The role of Director OMS will be moved to the Infrastructure Services Directorate, along with the remaining Operational Resources and Transport Section (including management of the State Warehouse) and Heavy Plant Coordinator.
- The title of Director Regions North and East will change to Director Areas South East, and Director Regions South and West will change to Director Areas North West. Director Areas South East will oversee South Eastern, Greater Sydney, Hunter and Fire Trails, while Director Areas North West will oversee: North Eastern, North Western, Western, South Western and the Training Academy.
- The role of Manager Major Projects (currently part of the Coordinated Risk Management group) will not form part of the Area Management Model, and the functions of the role will be subsumed under the responsibility of Director Areas North West.

AREA NAME	OFFICE LOCALITY	DISTRICTS AND MITIGATION CREWS
North Eastern NE	<b>Coffs Harbour</b>	Northern Rivers, Far North Coast, Clarence Valley, Northern Tablelands, Mid North Coast, Lower North Coast, New England, Mitigation Crews (Casino, Glen Innes and Urunga)
Hunter H	<b>Lake Macquarie</b>	Lower Hunter, Hunter Valley, Central Coast, Mid Coast, Mitigation Crews (Taree, Maitland and Wyong)
Greater Sydney GS	<b>Glendenning</b>	Southern Highlands, Illawarra, Macarthur, Cumberland, Hawkesbury, Sutherland, Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai, The Hills, Northern Beaches, Blue Mountains, Mitigation Crews (Water NSW and Mittagong)
South Eastern SE	<b>Moruya</b>	Monaro, Lake George, Far South Coast, Southern Tablelands, Riverina Highlands, Shoalhaven, Mitigation Crews (Nowra, Batemans Bay, Cooma, Braidwood and Bega)
North Western NW	<b>Tamworth</b>	North West, Namoi/Gwydir, Liverpool Range, Castlereagh, Tamworth, Mitigation Crews (Tamworth and Coonabarabran)
Western W	<b>Cowra</b>	Far West, Orana, Mid Lachlan Valley, Canobolas, Cudgegong, South West Slopes, Chifley Lithgow, Mitigation Crews (Dubbo, Mudgee, Orange, Bathurst, Oberon, Bourke and Brewarrina)
South Eastern SE	<b>Moruya</b>	Monaro, Lake George, Far South Coast, Southern Tablelands, Riverina Highlands, Shoalhaven, Mitigation Crews (Nowra, Batemans Bay, Cooma, Braidwood and Bega)



# AN EXTENDED DEPLOYMENT

At the beginning of the year, more than 370 NSW RFS members were deployed to Tasmania to fight fires that were the worst the state had seen in over 50 years. The 11-week deployment was the longest out-of-state deployment since the 2009 Black Saturday bush fires in Victoria, and saw firefighters working in some of the most rugged and difficult terrain in the country.

**Top:** RAFT deployment Delta arduous firefighters after their first shift in Tasmania. **Bottom:** RAFT deployment Charlie in action in Tasmania.



**This page clockwise from top:** The Tasmanian fires from the air, photo by Andrew McDonald; On the ground after the fire, photo by Alex Murphy; A NSW RFS helicopter accesses a remote burnt out area, photo by Andrew McDonald; RAFT deployment Charlie in action.



- THE FIRES WERE STARTED BY LIGHTNING STRIKES IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY AND BURNT 210,000 HECTARES, OR 3 PERCENT OF THE STATE OF TASMANIA
- MORE THAN 95,000 HECTARES OF TASMANIA'S WORLD WILDERNESS HERITAGE AREA WERE BURNT
- THE NSW RFS PERSONNEL INCLUDED 221 VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS
- THE NSW RFS COORDINATED THE DEPLOYMENT OF 682 PERSONNEL TO TASMANIA, OF WHICH 371 WERE NSW RFS MEMBERS





# A PERMANENT LAT FOR NSW

For the first time ever, the NSW RFS now has a 737 Large Air Tanker (LAT) permanently on hand to attend fire incidents across the state.

Officially named the 'Marie Bashir' after NSW's first female governor, the LAT arrived in NSW in late July and will be permanently based at the RAAF base in Richmond. Owned by the NSW RFS and operated by Canadian company Coulson Aviation, it is the first LAT to be available year-round in Australia.

With its two lead planes (arriving in Australia in early 2020), the LAT will support NSW RFS crews on the ground by providing fast, flexible and effective firefighting options. The LAT has the capacity to deliver 15,000 litres of water or fire suppressant in 2.2 seconds. It can also be configured to transport 72 firefighters to a number of regional airports in the state in less than an hour.



**Top left:** The 'Marie Bashir' in action. Photo by Ned Dawson. **Top right and bottom right:** Photos by James Morris. **Bottom left:** (from left to right), Member for Hawkesbury Robyn Preston, Minister for

Police and Emergency Services David Elliott, Dame Marie Bashir, Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers and Britt Coulson of Coulson Aviation.



The LAT joins an existing NSW RFS aerial team of three helicopters, 31 contract aircraft and more than 100 'call when needed' aircraft.

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The LAT was quickly put into action, deployed to the Lindfield Park Road fire in Port Macquarie less than a week after its official launch. It was deployed on several more missions in northern NSW in August and September as fire activity increased.

The LAT joins an existing aerial crew of three helicopters and 31 contract aircraft, with over 100 additional firefighting aircraft available on 'call when needed' arrangements. ■

# 737 LARGE AIR TANKER (LAT)

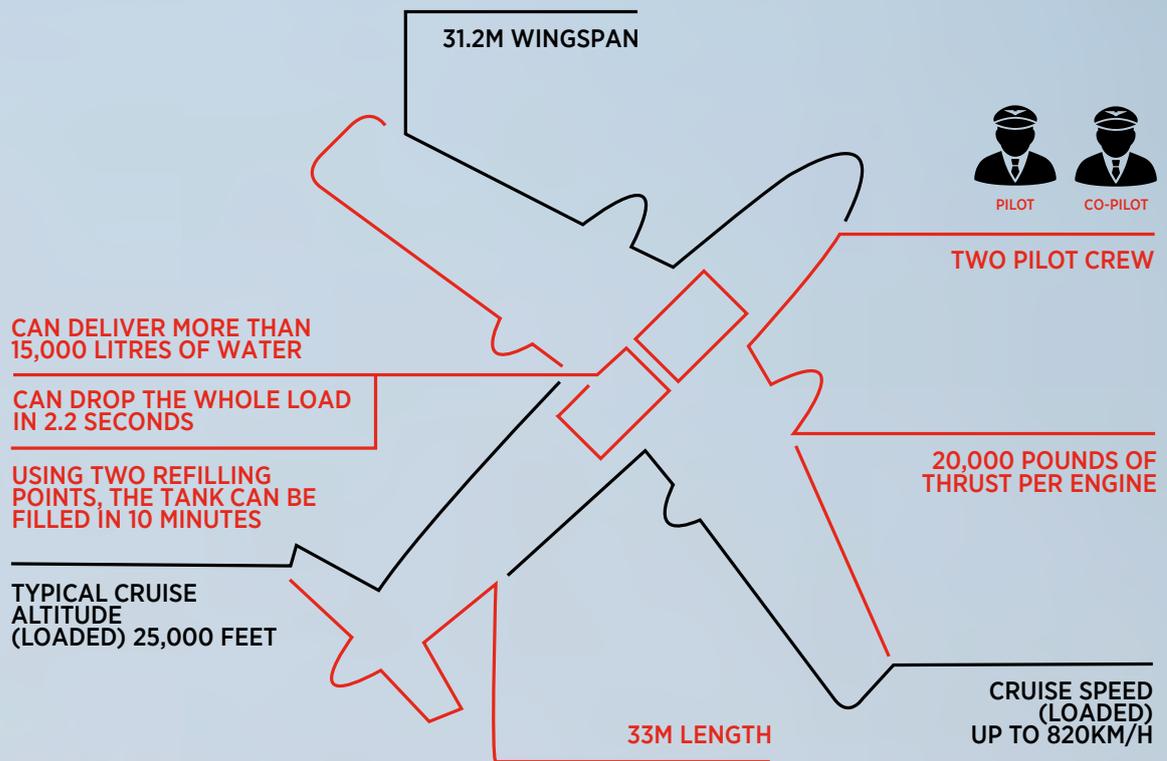
## ‘Marie Bashir’

The ‘Marie Bashir’ was unveiled at the RAAF base in Richmond in August 2019, the first LAT to be available year-round to fight fires in Australia. It can operate from a number of regional airports and reach any location in NSW in an hour.



LAST FIRE SEASON THE 737 ‘GAIA’ PERFORMED OVER 125 DROPS DELIVERING OVER 1.8 MILLION LITRES, SUPPORTING FIREFIGHTERS IN NSW, QUEENSLAND, VICTORIA, THE ACT AND TASMANIA

BY THE END OF OCTOBER, THE ‘MARIE BASHIR’ HAS ALREADY FLOWN MORE THAN 135 MISSIONS AND DELIVERED OVER 1.45 MILLION LITRES OF RETARDANT



737 DOESN'T HAVE GEAR DOORS. INSTEAD, THE WHEELS HAVE HUB CAPS ON THE OUTSIDE, AND THE GEAR WELLS HAVE BRUSHES ON THEM TO CREATE AN AERODYNAMIC SEAL



IT CAN BE CONFIGURED TO TRANSPORT 72 FIREFIGHTERS



2+ FIRE AGENCY RADIOS, SATELLITE TRACKING

# GET READY FOR DEVASTATING FIRES



PREPARE



DISCUSS



KNOW



KEEP

## IT'S A FACT.

If you and your property are well prepared, you stand a better chance of surviving bush and grass fires.

Join your community to ensure that your home, property and livelihood are protected by following the Four Simple Steps to getting ready for fire.



PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

[www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au)



## ➤ **FALLEN MEMBERS HONOURED**

A memorial service was held in Canberra in May to remember those NSW RFS members who have died in the line of duty.

The annual service at the National Emergency Services Memorial honours the thousands of people who have served in Australia's emergency services organisations. The Memorial is located in Kings Park on the shore of Lake Burley Griffin and is designed as a place of celebration as well as reflection, a visual expression of the experiences of emergency services personnel.

The Memorial site includes a Memorial Wall, unveiled in 2018, which holds the names of 528 personnel who have paid the ultimate sacrifice while protecting others.

This year, in addition to the many NSW RFS members whose names are etched on the memorial, the families of four members and personnel were presented with memorial medals:

- Pilot Allan Tull, who died as a result of

a helicopter crash while working on the Kingiman fire near Ulladulla on 17 August 2018;

- Peter Mills of the Central Coast Communications Brigade, who suffered a cardiac arrest at a Brigade Communications meeting on 19 September 2018;
- Colin Eather, Captain of Marrangaroo Brigade, who died while on operational duties at the Scotmans Hill fire, near Lithgow on 2 December 1997;
- Ted Hughes, Captain of Wallerawang Brigade, who, along with Colin Eather, died at Scotmans Hill on 2 December 1997.

The NSW RFS provides a number of members of the NSW RFS Protocol Unit, including the State and Deputy State Protocol Officers, to support the Memorial Service with the presentation of medallions, laying of wreaths and flag duties. ■

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**We remember and thank the men and women who have paid the ultimate price in protecting others.**



# OUR PLAN | STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2019-2024

Following extensive consultation and collaboration with our leaders and other stakeholders over recent months, we have developed the NSW RFS Strategic Direction 2019-2024, more fittingly named Our Plan. Our Plan includes four key pillars that will guide us to get our capability right.

Every member of the Service has a valuable contribution to Our Plan. By working together, we will be able to focus on projects and programs of work that will link to the four pillars and drive desired outcomes for the future.

## Our vision

To provide a world standard of excellence in the provision of a volunteer-based community fire and emergency service.

## Our purpose

To protect the community and our environment by minimising the impact of fire and other emergencies.



### Vibrant and Sustainable Membership

Safe and inclusive workplace where members can be at their best

#### Strategies

- Embed a culture of safe and inclusive practices for member health and wellbeing
- Strengthen current and future leadership capability at all levels
- Grow membership capability through deliberate attraction, engagement and development



### Resilient Communities and Valued Partnerships

Stronger communities better able to prepare, respond and recover

#### Strategies

- Advance our understanding of at risk communities and deliver effective public safety and environmental protection programs
- Boost community capability and capacity to prepare for and be responsive to bush fire and other emergencies
- Partner with other agencies and stakeholders to prepare for, prevent and recover from bush fire and other emergencies



### Service Delivery Readiness and Agility

Trusted and credible provision of public safety services

#### Strategies

- Ensure a community centred approach to service delivery
- Embed a risk based approach to resource planning and allocation
- Shape standards and practices to be responsive to changes in the natural and built environment

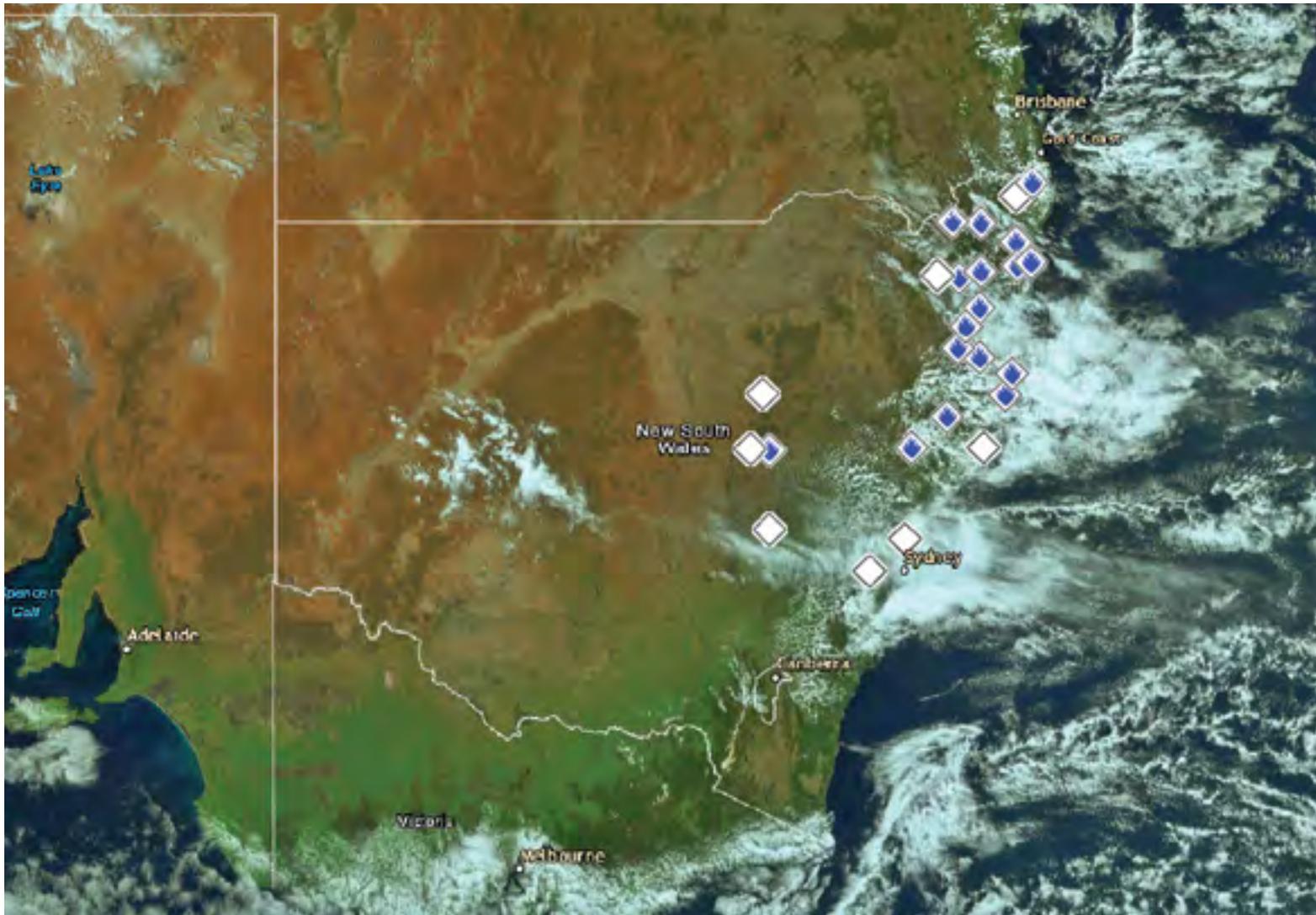


### Research, Innovation and Technology

Better outcomes through applied research, innovation and technology

#### Strategies

- Leverage research and member perspectives for better ways of working
- Lift our digital capacity through cohesive and future focused Information Communication Technology
- Adopt a user-led approach to ensure fit for purpose business systems and processes



## New online portal to help detect and monitor fires

The NSW RFS and partner agencies use a range of predictive tools and services to help monitor and manage bush and grass fires across the state.

One of these is the Fire Weather Portal, which can be used by all NSW RFS members and has recently been upgraded to deliver more accurate and timely observations regarding fires and weather conditions.

A new and highly configurable web application called the Observation and Warning Portal (OWP) has been added to the Fire Weather Portal, displaying satellite imagery, surface weather observations, rain radar reflectivity, Bureau of Meteorology weather warnings and mapped firefighting information.

A user can create their own unique collection of weather intelligence in the OWP, suitable for their current situation and local conditions. These unique displays can be saved in your browser so that they can be quickly loaded again when needed.

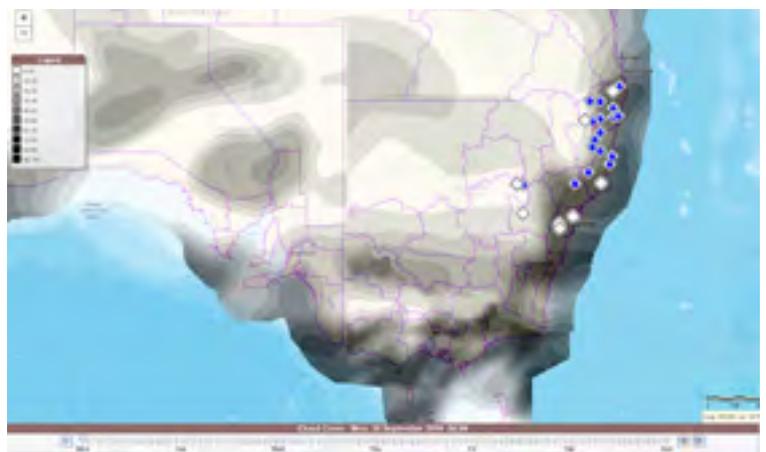
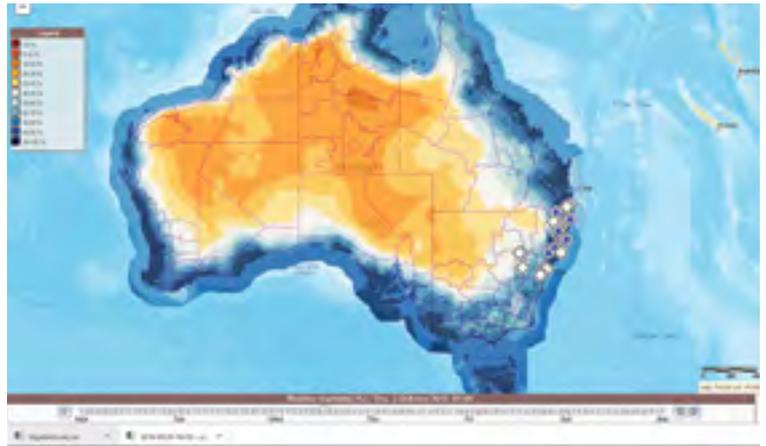
The OWP displays updated satellite data every 10 minutes, with a 30-minute delay between the

observation completing and when it is displayed. This satellite data provides imagery that includes:

- **Surface Temperature observations**, which can help identify the approximate location of fires as well as provide an indication of whether that fire is increasing in intensity and size or decreasing in intensity and slowing down.
- **Day and Night imagery** that is useful for observing a fire's smoke column and can help to locate a fire and indicate if the fire is escalating or de-escalating. This imagery is also useful to observe cloud, fog and dust storms.



**Photos:** The OWP showing (from top to bottom) relative humidity, cloud cover, satellite imagery of a fire north of Rockhampton and cloud top temperature imagery.



- **Cloud Top Temperature imagery**, which makes areas of cold cloud more obvious. This is useful to identify clouds escalating vertically through the atmosphere and can help identify thunderstorms forming.
- **Water Vapour imagery**, which displays upper-level (approximately 8-12km above sea level) water vapour and is useful for identifying the triggers for thunderstorm generation.

It is important to note that these features require interpretation and are not a replacement for information from the fireground. They should be constantly assessed against all information sources to form incident intelligence.

The OWP also displays an extensive range of relevant Bureau of Meteorology warnings including Severe Weather Warnings, Heatwave Forecasts, Flood and Marine Warnings, River Observations and Cyclone and Tsunami Warnings, as well as extended forecast information and 10-minute surface weather observations.

Some 10-minute observations displayed do not conform to the standard method of calculating Fire Danger, but are displayed because they are still extremely useful and, when interpreted correctly, can enhance safety on the fireground. These observations provide more timely information about changes in wind direction and weather conditions.

As always, all available information sources should be utilised and considered to build the intelligence which assists decision making. Validation by personnel in the field is vital and must never be overlooked, but these tools can help to inform and keep our members safe. ■

- **The Fire Weather Portal** is accessible within ICON via the Planning tab, or alternatively within MyRFS in the Resources tab and via this address:  
[www.myrfs.nsw.gov.au/fireweather/index.htm](http://www.myrfs.nsw.gov.au/fireweather/index.htm)



# SPOT FIRES

## A DYNAMIC INTERACTION

A pioneering Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC project has helped analysts to understand the role of spot fires and pyroconvective interactions in affecting the behavior and spread of bush fires.

Interactions between individual spot fires and other parts of the main fire perimeter can increase local rates of spread, in unexpected directions. This has the potential to produce broad, flaming zones that can entrap firefighters, and increase the likelihood of extreme bush fires.

The research by Associate Professor Jason Sharples (University of NSW), Dr James Hilton and Dr Andrew Sullivan (CSIRO) improves predictive capacity.

### FINDINGS FILL KNOWLEDGE GAP

Current fire simulation methods do not account for dynamic modes of fire propagation (see definitions) that are driven by complex interactions between the fire and the local atmosphere. Nor can they explain basic fire spread patterns, such as the observed parabolic rounding at the head of a wind-driven fire line. This project developed modelling techniques that address these shortcomings.

Fire behaviour in dry eucalypt forests in Australia is characterised by spot fires – new fires ignited by the transport of burning debris, such as bark, ahead of an existing fire. This also, to a lesser extent, applies to many other vegetation types. Under most burning conditions, spot fires have little influence on the

overall spread of a fire, except where spot fires can overcome hurdles, such as topography or breaks in vegetation. However, in severe bush fires, spot fires can become the dominant propagation cause – the fire spreads as a cascade of spot fires that forms a ‘pseudo’ front, way ahead of the main fire front.

It is well known that multiple, individual fires can affect the behaviour and spread of all fires. Similarly, different parts of a single fire line can influence each other, particularly when the fire line develops certain configurations. In such instances, fire spread is driven by the combination of external influences, such as wind and terrain, and intrinsic effects that arise when different fires or different parts of a fire interact through pyroconvective (and other) processes (see definitions). In some cases, intrinsic effects can become significant and result in distinctly dynamic modes of fire propagation, such as in junction fires, where fires meet and merge.

These dynamic modes challenge an assumption behind all existing operational fire behaviour models – that fires spread at a quasi-steady rate (see definitions). These operational models also assume that different fires, or different parts of a single fire line, essentially burn independently; this

# In severe bush fires, spot fires can become the dominant propagation cause.

**Left:** An experimental separated v-shaped fire conducted in the CSIRO Pyrotron. Photo by Andrew Sullivan, CSIRO.

neglects any potential influence of intrinsic effects. These models do not account for potential dynamic interactions, which may significantly influence the spread of a fire.

## WHAT DOES THIS RESEARCH MEAN?

This research offers fire managers and fire behaviour analysts the ability to model landscape-scale fire spread, incorporating dynamic fire behaviours, using a faster than real-time simulator. Not only is it more cost-effective but it fills the knowledge gap: current simulators do not see the potential influence of dynamic interactions. The inability of these current models to accurately predict fire behaviours can place firefighters at risk and hinder effective warnings to the public.

The recognition that fires can mutually influence each other's spread has been used in a variety of contexts, such as prescribed burning and back burning. This research provides a theoretical basis for such practices, enabling a much better understanding of their effects.

By accounting for pyroconvective interactions between different fires or different parts of a fire line, this research improves the estimation of the overall power of a fire.

When combined with research into the atmosphere's role, it can alert forecasters to the likelihood of a fire transitioning into a more extreme event, such as a pyrocumulonimbus storm (see definitions). This could better inform burning operations and help to avoid unexpected fire blow-ups. This knowledge is critical to fully understand fire spread and to further develop areas such as building codes in bush fire prone areas.

Ultimately, the research enables the modelling of key aspects of fire behaviour that was previously only possible using computationally expensive, coupled models. This model allows for complex modes of fire propagation to be simulated within operational timeframes.

The research team is discussing the potential uses of this research with end users, including use in training materials to enhance firefighters' understanding of fire behaviour potential and equipping fire behaviour analysts with technological tools to assess the likely progression of bush fires and their potential for escalation.

A more detailed explanation of this study is in the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC *Hazard Note* <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/hazardnotes/61> ■

## DEFINITIONS

### Dynamic fire propagation

Fire spread that abruptly changes its rate and intensity, without any significant changes in ambient environmental conditions.

### Pyroconvection

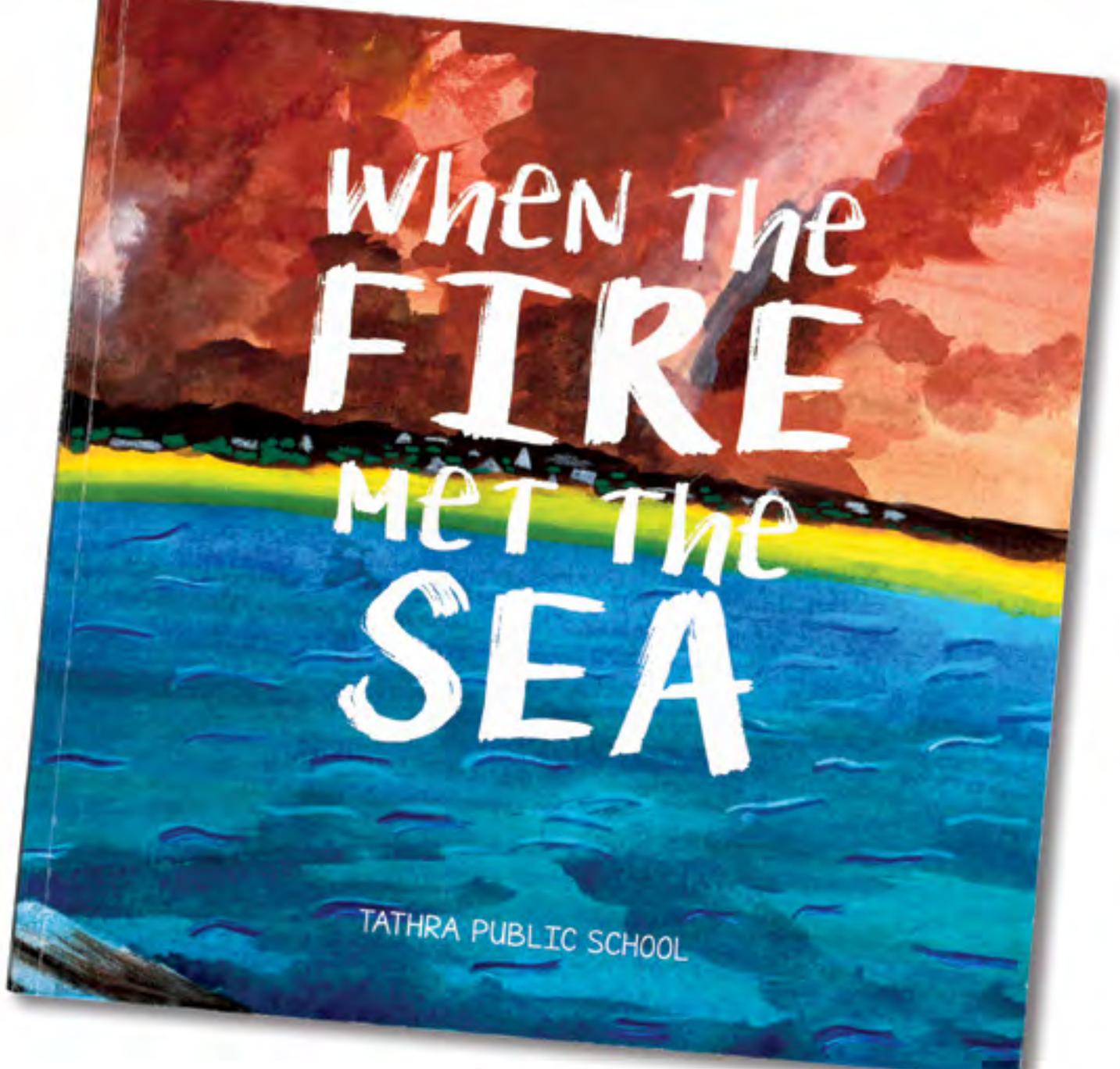
The buoyant movement of fire-heated air, as distinct from normal atmospheric convection that mainly arises from solar heating and produces effects such as thermal winds, atmospheric instability and thunderstorms.

### Quasi-steady rate of spread

A fire spreading from a point-source origin will increase its rate of forward spread until it reaches a more or less constant spread rate for the prevailing conditions.

### Pyrocumulonimbus storm

Fire-fuelled thunderstorm clouds are commonly known as pyrocumulonimbus clouds. These clouds form when the extreme heat of a fire causes air to quickly rise in the smoke plume. As the plume rises and cools, it forms a cloud that can cause unpredictable changes in fire behavior and trigger lightning and thunderstorms.



## ➤ WHEN THE FIRE MET THE SEA

After their small community was hit by devastating fires in March 2018, the students of Tathra Public School have published a book that vividly expresses the events of that day and the recovery that followed.



On Sunday 18 March 2018, the town of Tathra on the Far South Coast was hit by a sudden and devastating fire that burned approximately 1,000ha and destroyed 65 homes. The day was unusually hot and windy before the fire started around midday when power lines blew over in the locality of Reedy Swamp near Bega.

By 4pm, the fire reached Tathra with little warning for residents. The town was evacuated and although 65 homes were lost and a further 48 damaged, there was no loss of life and 810 homes were saved by the efforts of 150 firefighters.

Tathra Public School was in the direct line of the fire and although the school buildings were saved, most

# “Five students lost their homes, but they were all impacted by the fires.”

**Top left and below:** The artwork and words of the children of Tathra Public School.

**Bottom left:** Some of the authors and artists at the launch of the book.

of the trees on the property, the school vegetable garden and some play areas were destroyed. For the children of the school, the fire was an extremely traumatic experience and Principal Lisa Freedman wanted to give them the opportunity to express themselves.

“We were looking for an outlet where the kids could talk, draw or write about their experiences as they chose,” said Ms Freedman. “Five students lost their homes, but they were all impacted by the fires.”

With financial support from Bega Rotary Club and Dick Smith, the school embarked on a project to publish *When the Fire Met the Sea* – a book capturing that fateful day from the perspective of the students.

“It’s an historic record of that day for the school,” says Ms Freedman. “While there were only 16 children who contributed their words and illustrations, the book represents the feelings of the entire community.”

For the children who had to return to school and confront a surrounding environment of



charred earth and blackened trees, being a part of the team that created, developed and published the book proved to be a cathartic experience.

“All the children said they were really glad they did it,” says Ms Freedman. “One student said that seeing the book printed was the

final piece in the jigsaw puzzle of the whole fire event.”

*When the Fire Met the Sea* can be borrowed from the NSW RFS library or bought by contacting Tathra Public School. Sales of the book are helping to fund the rebuild of the natural areas of the school. ■

# in FOCUS

## ► YOUNG VOLUNTEERS HONOURED

In May, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the Hon David Elliott MP, hosted a combined ceremony for the NSW RFS and NSW SES at Parliament House in Sydney to announce the 2019 Young People in Emergency Services Awards.

The awards form part of National Volunteer Week and recognise the achievements of members under the age of 25 who volunteer with their local SES Unit or Rural Fire Brigade.

Congratulations to the 2019 Cadet of the Year, NSW RFS cadet Olivia Cole (Bowral High School), and 2019 Young Volunteer of the Year winners Charlie Ross (Northern Tablelands Cadets) and Thomas Breed (Coleambally Brigade).

Congratulations also to NSW SES winners, cadets Seleana Murphy (Bulahdelah Central School) and Lucca De Almeida (Mullumbimby High School) and volunteer Peter Christensen (NSW SES Harden Unit).



## ► YOUNG LEADERS ENJOY HIGH SEAS ADVENTURE

The two winners of the 2019 NSW RFS Young Leader Scholarship recently participated in an 11-day voyage as part of the Young Endeavour Youth Scheme.

Aboard the STS Young Endeavour, the two scholarship winners - Jessie McMaster of the Falconbridge Brigade in the Blue Mountains and Kieren McGrath of the Kentucky Brigade in the New England area - experienced the challenges of sailing a tall ship with 22 other youths from around Australia.

## ► NEW FCC IN DENILIQVIN

In August the NSW RFS officially opened the new Fire Control Centre (FCC) for the Mid Murray Zone in Deniliquin.

The new facility will provide members in the Mid Murray Zone with an improved capacity to handle vehicle movements, brigade station maintenance and firefighting across the zone.

Built with an investment of almost \$5.2 million, the new FCC features a general office area and operations area for major incidents, two training rooms, kitchen and dining facilities and five bay sheds for equipment and vehicle storage.





## ► CHARITY BALL RAISES \$50K

The NSW RFS raises funds for the **Coffee4Kids Foundation** through a range of activities from lunches and brigade fundraisers to a salary sacrifice program.

In August, the Coffee4Kids Charity Ball was held at Darling Harbour – a great night was had by all and more than \$50,000 was raised for the Child Protection Unit at Westmead Children’s Hospital!

A huge thank you to all the NSW RFS members and Coffee4Kids supporters who gave so generously to this fantastic cause.

“This is the third year the Scholarship has been offered to support the development of our young volunteers and I’m sure like previous winners, this voyage has seen our young members acquire new skills and a confidence that they will take back to their brigades,” said Commissioner Fitzsimmons.

Jessie and Kieren learnt valuable team building, communication and leadership skills, and look forward to sharing their experiences with young members across their districts.



## ► CUDDLY ADDITIONS TO BRIGADES

You might’ve noticed some cuddly faces appearing at brigades across the state this year. 2,500 Gentle Bears have been distributed to 46 brigades by icare NSW and third-party claims administrator Gallagher Bassett, the creator of the Gentle Bears program.

The bears, a familiar sight among emergency services across Australia, are an initiative to improve the mental health of children (and sometimes even adults) experiencing distressing situations. The Gentle Bears are stored in NSW RFS appliances and can give comfort to people suffering trauma by allowing them to latch onto a safe and reassuring object.



# VOLUNTEERS LOOK SKYWARD TO ASSIST PREDICTIONS



The NSW RFS owns and manages a fleet of five Portable Atmospheric Sounding Systems, also known as weather balloons. Housed in trailers and deployed to key strategic areas around the state, the balloons take atmospheric readings to assist Planning and Predictive Services, State Mitigation Services and the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM).

Atmospheric sounding balloons are used to detect dangerous fire weather and can provide a snapshot of the atmosphere and how certain weather may be influencing a fire. They travel up to 22 kilometres high and hundreds of kilometres across land, and may pass through multiple layers of the atmosphere.

Data captured by the balloons includes temperature, dewpoint, wind direction and wind strength. This data can indicate things such as atmospheric stability, possible inversions, inversion characteristics, mixing heights and atmospheric dryness – all features commonly seen in some of the country's most severe fires.

The data from the weather balloons can be interpreted to help understand the likelihood and severity of these conditions impacting on fire behaviour. It may also assist Fire Behaviour Analysts in predicting fire behaviour should a fire start in proximity to the sounding. All this information is analysed by our embedded NSW RFS - BoM Meteorologist, as well as Fire Behaviour Analysts who report and communicate key weather information.

Recently, fire activity and increased demand have stretched resources and made it more challenging to deploy the balloons. This has prompted a trial using volunteer members to support and supervise a sounding for the first time.

Piloting in Region South, volunteer members from the Lake George and Cooma support brigades were trained by Regional Fire Behaviour Analysts. Since then, volunteer crews have conducted several balloon releases which have assisted in bush fire behaviour predictions and thunderstorm forecasting.

Given the success of the pilot group, the model may be rolled out to the remaining areas in the coming months.

Future additions to the volunteer capability may include deploying portable weather stations, fuel moisture reading, fuel type, fuel loading and fuel structure analysis and monitoring fire behaviour. ■

**Weather balloons can travel up to 22 kilometres high and hundreds of kilometres across land.**

**Above:** A volunteer releases a weather balloon in Collector, near Goulburn. Photo by James Morris.

# CADET PROGRAM CELEBRATES 10,000 GRADUATES

A graduation ceremony at Camden Haven High School in August marked a significant milestone for the Secondary School Cadet Program (SSCP), with the 10,000th student graduating from the successful and popular program.

The SSCP was launched in 2004 as a community education tool to engage students in volunteering and bush fire safety.

The program is traditionally delivered by NSW RFS members and run during school hours for two-hour sessions over a 10-week period. It offers secondary school students the opportunity to develop practical leadership and teamwork skills and a sense of community responsibility and service.

Initiated by Inspector Paul McGrath from Cumberland District, the program began with just 60 students and five schools in its first year. It has grown quickly and now encompasses more than 800 graduates each year, with 2019 marking the highest ever participation rate for the program.

Since its launch, the program has diversified to include a variety of courses and delivery methods that include intensive face-to-face training for home-schooled students, programs for students who are disengaged in the classroom and programs for schools

that cater to children with intellectual or physical disabilities.

For students, it is a practical, hands-on course that gets them out of the classroom and teaches them about fire behaviour and equipment, the role of the emergency services in the community, first aid and fire safety in the home. Feedback from teachers and school principals indicates the value in teaching students practical skills, encouraging community-mindedness and providing an introduction to the emergency services.

The program also has the added benefits of promoting NSW RFS in the community and easing the path for young people to transition from cadets into NSW RFS membership. There are numerous examples of students participating in the SSCP who have gone onto ranking positions or staff roles within brigades. In the Clarence Valley District, two Deputy Captains and one Senior Deputy Captain all graduated from the program in 2013. ■

**Below:** The cadets at Camden Haven High School celebrate the 10,000 milestone. Photo courtesy of Paul Cunningham.





## BRIGADE IN PROFILE



# COAL AND CANDLE RFB

**YEAR BRIGADE FORMED:** 1958

**CURRENT CAPTAIN:** Chelsea Varga

**CURRENT PRESIDENT:** Bill Dunlop

**DISTRICT:** Northern Beaches, Region East

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

Coal and Candle Brigade was established in 1958 by Ku-ring-gai Chase Trust ranger Col Green following dramatic and destructive fires in the area in the 1940s and 1950s. At the time, the original station was a humble series of three sheds located in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park at Illawong Bay in Coal and Candle Creek. In 1972, the station was relocated to a dedicated council reserve adjacent to the Park boundary at Terrey Hills. Brigade members played a very significant role in fundraising, surveying, constructing and outfitting the new building.

Following major fires in the area in 1979 and 1994, and increasing membership and demands on training, the station was expanded to incorporate a meeting and training room, modern kitchen and expanded tanker bays. Once again, brigade members played a major role in securing funds, planning approvals and construction with additional support also provided from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), NSW RFS and Warringah Council.

One long-term member of the brigade, Dr Ken Hughes AFSM, was awarded an Order of the Medal of Australia in 2018 bringing the total number of significant community awards to brigade members to 149 including three AFSMs, 43 national medal awards and a horde of long service medals and clasps.

In more modern times, the brigade is very proud of the fact that several female members have been elected and supported in leadership roles within the brigade. Since 2013, the brigade has continuously elected three female captains, and female members continue to occupy many positions in the brigade.

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

The brigade was the first known bush fire brigade to be established in a national park. Indeed, the first two captains of the brigade (Col Green and Peter Moore) were both Trust rangers at the time, and later became National Parks rangers when the National Parks and Wildlife Service was established in 1967.

Notable brigade members in the early days included entrepreneur and philanthropist Dick Smith, now Chief Justice and former Minister for the Environment the Hon. Tim Moore and major retailer Rob Pallin of Paddy Pallin Pty Ltd, all of whom joined the brigade as Rover scouts in the early 1960's and have great memories from that period. The brigade also has a strong connection with the NPWS with many members either coming from NPWS to the brigade, or the brigade being a stepping stone into employment with the NPWS.

### What type of area do you cover?

The brigade boundary is focused on the West Head section of Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park which includes a major marina, park visitor infrastructure such as management trails, walking tracks and lookouts and very high visitor numbers. Our brigade area contains large areas of tall shrubland, woodland and forest which has carried many large



**Left:** The Brigade attending a fire at Bantry Bay Rd in Seaforth in February 1977. **Right:** The new Brigade Station opening in 1974/75. **Below:** Brigade members at the 60th anniversary dinner earlier this year. All photos courtesy of Coal and Candle Brigade.



fires in the past (1943/44, 1946/47, 1958/59, 1965/66, 1979, 1994, 2003 and 2013) and which have threatened the adjoining residential areas of Cottage Point, Terrey Hills, West Pittwater, Bayview, Church Point and Ingleside.

**What are some unique features of your community?**

Our community is essentially the visitors to the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. Our brigade area is very well known for the outstanding views, great walking tracks, diversity of vegetation and abundance of Aboriginal rock art and occupational deposits in the area, all of which are sensitive to the application of inappropriate fire regimes and high impact fire management activities.

**What vehicles do you have?**

The brigade has progressed a long way from the original 1940's Chevrolet Blitz Wagons, and former Austin, Leyland, Bedford and International AB160 trucks and a donated and bullet-holed WWII Land Rover, to now operate two Cat 1's and a Toyota Hilux twin cab personnel carrier.

**What type of training do you conduct and how do you go about doing this?**

The brigade conducts regular training and area familiarisation exercises every two weeks as part of Duty Crew days, with the OIC leading a structured

refresher training program. The brigade conducts its own bush firefighting training, assessment and re-certification programs, such as for Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus (CABA), and from time to time organises joint brigade training activities. ■

**A MAJOR MILESTONE**

The Coal and Candle brigade recently celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a dinner being held for current and former members and supporters in April this year. A new life member, Pauline-Lavinia Burgess, was formally announced at the dinner.

The brigade also recently worked with author and local historian Ian Jacobs to publish a book titled *A History of the Coal and Candle Rural Fire Brigade: Humble in Bearing, Heroic in Deed. 60 Years on*. This book examines the formation of the brigade in 1958 and its gradual development and growth over the next 60 years to become an effective and well-respected team of skilled volunteers who are focused on community safety.



# FIREFIGHTERS PUT THROUGH THEIR PACES AT REGION NORTH EXERCISE

Storms and a nearby Section 44 weren't enough to dampen spirits at this year's Region North Exercise in March, with over 300 NSW RFS members participating in two days of intense drills and exercises in Glen Innes.

Crews from Region North, Region East, Region West and the QFES were allocated into 12 strike teams and participated in a range of scenarios including basic skills, vehicle maintenance, counter terrorism and practical pumping.

The drills followed the 'Explain, Demonstrate, Practice' methodology, ensuring that crews were taught and refreshed skills in line with NSW RFS fireground procedures and protocols.

The success of the event would not have been possible without the hard work and support of NSW Ambulance, NSW Police, Fire and Rescue NSW and Essential Energy. Special mention must go to the Catering Team, who not only had the responsibility for feeding participants, but also the firefighting crews and Incident Management Team for the nearby Section 44 in Tenterfield.

**Above and below:** Firefighters are put through their paces at the Region North Exercise. All photos courtesy of Angela Daly.





Following the drills, several crews and members were recognised for outstanding performance:

- **ALAN BRINKWORTH PERPETUAL TROPHY FOR BEST PERFORMING CREW**  
North West Support, Coonamble
- **TONY JARRETT AWARD FOR BEST STRIKE TEAM LEADER**  
Arlene Fletcher, New England District
- **BEST CREW LEADER AWARD**  
Isabelle Meyers, Gilgandra
- **COMMITTEE ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD**  
Pat Bradley, New England District (Scenario Marshal)

- **COMMITTEE ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD**  
Ross Cole and Rick Tedut, Northern Rivers
- **OUTSTANDING CREW MEMBER AWARD**  
Megan Karam, Northern Rivers
- **OUTSTANDING SUPPORT PERSON**  
Jason Jarrett, Northern Tablelands
- **BEST PRESENTED APPLIANCE**  
Orara 1, Mid North Coast
- **BEST PRESENTED APPLIANCE (RUNNER UP)**  
Gilgandra 1, Castlereagh
- **BEST PRESENTED APPLIANCE (RUNNER UP)**  
Uki 7, Far North Coast
- **VEHICLE ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD**  
Gladefield Maryvale, QFES
- **VEHICLE ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD**  
Diamond Beach, Mid Coast



Congratulations to all members who took part in the event, and stay tuned for details about the 20th anniversary of the Region North Exercise in 2020. ■



# AUSTRALIAN FIRE SERVICE MEDALS 2019

The Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) is awarded for distinguished service by a member of an Australian fire service.

Congratulations to the eight NSW RFS members who were recognised for their contributions to their local communities as part of the 2019 Queen's Birthday celebrations.

## **FIREFIGHTER LARRY BAGNELL**

Cumberland Zone, Region East

Mr Bagnell joined Castlereagh Brigade in 1975 where he has held the positions of Secretary/Treasurer, Training Officer, Senior Deputy Captain, Deputy Group Captain and Group Captain.

Over a 45-year career with the NSW RFS, Mr Bagnell has attended many fires within the Cumberland Zone and has led many strike teams throughout NSW as well as South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia and more recently to Queensland.

He also led numerous storm damage strike teams in and around the state while assisting the NSW SES. He has voluntarily project managed the construction of the Londonderry Rural Fire Station, the extensions to the Castlereagh, Llandilo, Berkshire Park and Wallacia Rural Fire Stations and alterations to the Cumberland Training Centre.

## **GROUP CAPTAIN WILLIAM RICHARD EADE**

Orana Team, Region West

Mr Eade joined the Stuart Town Brigade in 1960 and has served with distinction over the past 59 years. In 1990 he was appointed Group Captain in the Wellington Council area, a position he still holds today.

He has attended many major fires in the district, and has assisted the NSW RFS and his community as a Sector and Divisional Commander and Strike Team Leader at many major incidents.

Over the years and the many incidents he has been involved in, he has shown strong leadership, dedication, commitment and support for the training and development of the volunteers, producing results well above what is expected on and off the fire ground.

## **GROUP CAPTAIN PETER GEOFFREY EVANS**

Sutherland District, Region East

Mr Evans joined Headquarters Brigade in 1980 and within the brigade structure, he has held numerous leadership positions for over 20 years, culminating in the election to the role of Group Captain in 2000 – a position he currently holds.

His knowledge, skills and experience have proven invaluable in managing incidents within and outside the Sutherland Shire District. As a Strike Team Leader, he has led the Sutherland Shire contingency and NSW RFS Task Forces to many out of area fires including the Canberra Fires in 2003, to Victoria in 2009 and to South Australia in 2015.

He is also a highly valuable and dedicated member of the NSW RFS Sutherland Shire District Training Committee, and has been instructing and assessing the Bush Firefighter and Crew Leader courses for many years.

## **GROUP CAPTAIN ROBERT JOHN FIELD**

South West Slopes Zone,  
Region West

Mr Field joined the NSW RFS in December 1963 as a member of the then Jones Creek Brigade. Brigade amalgamations saw him become a member of the North Gundagai Brigade, where he has held the positions of Brigade Captain, Brigade President and Brigade Training Officer.

He currently holds the position of Group Captain (Gundagai Group West), a role he has held since 2001. He represents volunteers of the South West Slopes Zone within the Senior Management Team and is a strong advocate for the betterment of equipment and training for volunteers across the Zone.

Group Captain Field has always made himself available for an operational response, particularly during periods of high fire danger. He has demonstrated fireground leadership to the highest level, and is highly respected among volunteers.

## **GROUP CAPTAIN WALTER REGINALD GATELY**

Mid North Coast Team,  
Region North

Mr Gately joined the Bruxner Park Brigade in August 1964 and has provided committed service to the NSW RFS since that time.

He has been a Group Captain since 2004 and a reliable leader of out-of-area strike teams.

He has faced many challenges and has continually shown strong dedication to the NSW RFS. He regularly responds to emergencies of all kinds at all

times and, beyond the Brigade, he undertakes numerous functions in the district and is the President of the RFS Branch.

He is still serving with the Mid North Coast Support Brigade, and is involved with community education, training, fire permits, the BFMC, the Fire Trail Working Group and fundraising.

## **GROUP CAPTAIN GEOFFREY JOHN SELWOOD**

Canobolas Zone, Region West

Mr Selwood joined the Springside Brigade in 1968 and in 1995 was voted Group Captain for the Orange District, a role which he still holds today. In early 2000 he became a member of the Clifton Grove-Ophir Brigade and took on the role of Deputy Captain in 2002. He was instrumental in the Mount Canoblas fires in 1986 and was vital in efforts to establish containment lines which resulted in the control of the blaze.

He is passionate about community education and has spent many weekends attending local and out-of-area events, going to the farming community in the Clifton Grove district to spread the message for bush fire survival. He also regularly assists with training and is a great mentor to the Clifton Grove-Ophir Brigade's younger members.

## **CAPTAIN ROBERT BRIAN THATCHER**

Far South Coast, Region South

Mr Thatcher joined the Jellat Brigade in 1958 and over the ensuing 60 years he has been a pivotal member of the Brigade, taking on several administrative and operational roles which culminated in his appointment as Captain in 2000.

He has been the backbone of the Jellat Brigade for the past 19 years in his roles of either Captain, President or Vice-President and has led the Brigade through major reform.

He has been instrumental in the mentoring of all members of the Brigade and is the public face of the Jellat Brigade, taking all opportunities to be involved in community engagement and awareness activities such as the Get Ready Weekend, Australia Day and ANZAC Day activities.

## **VELMA ELAINE WALKER** Shoalhaven District, Region South

Ms Walker has been a member of the NSW RFS for 29 years. She commenced her service with the Huskisson Brigade in 1990 and was made a life member in 2000.

She has volunteered her time, skills and experience to the District Office, assisting staff with various tasks, requests and clerical administrative duties and her dedication and commitment are of the highest calibre.

She has been deployed to numerous major bush fires in the area and other emergency response incidents where she has fulfilled the role of logistical officer in incident management teams.

She displays the highest standard of professionalism at all times and her enthusiasm is renowned among staff and volunteers alike.



## ST FLORIANS DAY BRAVERY & SERVICE AWARDS 2019

The fourth of May is the Feast Day of St Florian, patron saint of firefighters, and International Firefighters' Day. On this day each year, the NSW RFS holds an internal awards ceremony to recognise the bravery and outstanding service of volunteers and members.

This year, Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons was joined by Police and Emergency Services Minister David Elliott to honour 21 individual NSW RFS members and 11 teams with awards.

"Today we take this opportunity to thank our NSW RFS volunteers for their ongoing hard work and professionalism," said Commissioner Fitzsimmons. "These men and women serve our communities and selflessly respond to all manner of fire and emergencies.

"We pay tribute to those brave members whose dedication continues to protect lives and property of this great state."

The Commissioner paid special tribute to former Commissioner Philip Koperberg, who was awarded



a Commissioner's Commendation for Service, and recognised the commitment of the Ridgeway and Queanbeyan City Brigades, who were involved in firefighting operations during the Kingiman fire in August 2018.





## 2019 RECIPIENTS

### Commissioner's Commendation for Service (individual)

- Firefighter Brian Baker – Bulli Brigade, Illawarra, Region East
- Group Captain Paul Bourne – Yarrhapinni/Stuarts Point, Lower North Coast, Region North
- Superintendent Victoria Campbell – Central Coast, Region East
- Captain Sharon Hedley – Hunter Valley Support, Hunter Valley, Region East
- Group Captain Clinton Jessop-Smith – Cumberland, Region East
- Mr Philip Christian Koperberg – Former Commissioner NSW RFS
- Senior Assistant Commissioner Bruce McDonald – Infrastructure Services, NSW RFS Headquarters
- Assistant Commissioner Peter McKecknie – Director Regional Services South West, Operations
- Mr Aidan Moore – Infrastructure Services, NSW RFS Headquarters
- District Officer Albert Pipan – Lower Hunter, Region East
- Retired Group Captain Rodney Purcell – Brungle Brigade, Riverina Highlands, Region South
- Inspector Benjamin Shepherd – Corporate Communications, NSW RFS Headquarters

### Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (individual):

- Mr Richard Angel – Infrastructure Services, NSW RFS Headquarters
- Captain Danielle Brice – Eurobodalla Volunteer Operational Support and Tuross Head Brigades, Far South Coast, Region South
- Firefighter Ryan Hutchinson – Benwerrin Brigade, Lower Hunter, Region East

- Firefighter Veronica Jones – Benwerrin Brigade, Lower Hunter, Region East
- Firefighter Daryl Meppem – Davidson Brigade, Northern Beaches, Region East
- Firefighter Stuart Mitchell – Ebenezer Brigade, Hawkesbury, Region East
- District Officer Matthew Reeves – Illawarra, Region East
- Captain Catering Adam Rutter – Hawkesbury Catering and Oakville Brigades, Hawkesbury, Region East
- Mr Matthew White – Infrastructure Services, NSW RFS Headquarters

### Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (unit):

- Bega Valley Brigades – Far South Coast, Region South
- Botswana Fire Management Program
- Central Coast Communications Brigade – Central Coast, Region East
- Ellerston Brigade – Liverpool Range, Region North
- HQ Relocation Teams (Building Services, Communication Systems, Information Communications Technology, Corporate Communications) – NSW RFS Headquarters
- Illawarra Communications After Hours Team – Illawarra Communication, Illawarra, Region East
- Ingleside 1A and Ingleside 1B – Northern Beaches, Region East
- Kenthurst RFB Hazard Reduction Crew – The Hills, Region East
- Road Crash Rescue Program – Remote Area Firefighting and Specialised Operations, Operations
- Your Health Matters (YHM) Working Group – NSW RFS Headquarters

### Commissioner's Unit Citation for Service:

- Ridgeway and Queanbeyan City Rural Fire Brigades – Lake George, Region South

# WILLIAM ERNEST “BILL” HURDITCH

## 1929 – 2019

Bill Hurditch, Chief Coordinator of the Bush Fire Council from 1970-1986, passed away peacefully on 27 July 2019 aged 90. Over a 17-year career at the helm of the then-NSW Bush Fire Council, Bill was instrumental in the development and expansion of the organisation that had a staff of just four when he started.

After 21 years at the Forestry Commission of NSW, Bill was appointed to the newly-created position of Bush Fire Control Officer and Officer-in-Charge of the Bush Fire Branch of the Chief Secretary’s Department in 1970, with the responsibility for the development of an extensive fire prevention publicity and education campaign.

Following amendments to the Bush Fires Act, Bill was named Chief Coordinator of the newly-formed Bush Fire Council, the precursor to the modern NSW RFS. As Chief Coordinator, Bill was given independent powers to coordinate the resources of existing bush firefighting bodies and establish an emergency organisation available for immediate action during bush fire incidents.

A firm believer in a decentralised firefighting system, Bill has heavily involved in major changes to the organisation from 1970 onwards. The changes were designed to give local communities responsibility and control in firefighting through the establishment of the Bush Fire Coordinating



Committee (BFCC) and local Bush Fire Management Management Committees. In his time at the organisation, Bill was also responsible for the appointment of Regional Officers and the creation of positions of Training Coordinator and Senior Education Officer.

Bill was a much-respected and appreciated Chief Coordinator and held the position until his retirement in 1986. At the time, he was described in an article in the Bush Fire Bulletin commemorating his service as “in the truest sense of the word, the founding member of the current organisation”.

Bill was the much-loved husband of Allison (deceased) and is survived by his children Chris, John and Libby.

# CAPTAIN PETER SHEARER

1955 – 2019

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Photo by Simon Bennett.

Peter Shearer, Captain of the Wilton Brigade, passed away in June this year at the age of 64, after 50 years of service with the NSW RFS.

Peter joined the Wilton Brigade in 1968 and filled a number of leadership positions over his time with the brigade, serving as Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain and Captain.

Over his many years of service he was instrumental in obtaining new equipment and raising funds for his brigade, always quick to donate his time when needed.

Peter was generous in sharing his knowledge and his experience with his fellow firefighters, and his loss will be felt deeply by his brigade and the Wilton community.

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A well-respected figure in the Southern Highlands District and a highly regarded firefighter and leader, Peter served as Divisional Commander and Sector Leader in many local campaign fires. He mentored and encouraged countless local young people to become brigade members and frequently championed women's involvement in the NSW RFS.

Peter was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal during the 2018 Queen's Birthday Honours for his dedicated service to the NSW RFS and his tireless support of the Wilton community.

He was farewelled by more than 300 people at Tahmoor's St Anthony's Catholic Church, with his fellow firefighters forming a guard of honour for the funeral procession.

# OUR BUSH FIRE bulletin HISTORY

## COMPUTER FOR BLUE MOUNTAINS

Fire controllers will soon be using a mini computer to help them fight bush fires on the Blue Mountains.

The computer will be installed in the bush fire control centre at Katoomba and will have a memory holding 20 000 items of information.

Amongst the stored information will be details of past fires and their behaviour.

Telephone numbers of brigade members and their "call out" priority will also be listed.

Information about tankers, their water carrying capacity and equipment will also be logged.

Controllers will call up their information on a visual display terminal.

The unit, called a micro computer, will be installed in January and will be part of an extensive upgrading of the control centre.

Meanwhile the Blue Mountains Bush Fire Service this week put into service a \$40,000 mobile control room.

The van will be used when Blue

Mountains Brigades go deep into isolated regions of the Great Dividing Range or are asked to help other services at major fires

The control room has radio links to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Forestry Commission, State Emergency Services and the Fire Brigade as well as its own network.

A plot board takes up one wall of the van while benches and a large map table occupy further areas.

There is a small kitchen at one end.

Outside a telescopic pole can hoist a base radio serial 25 metres.

The mobile control room was purchased with some of the \$100,000 allocated by the State Government to the service following last December's disastrous mountain fires.

One girl lost her life and 51 buildings were destroyed in the fires.

Also purchased were five new personnel carrying vehicles pumps, radio equipment, small gear and the mini computer.



*Blue Mountains Bushfire Services new \$40,000 mobile control room. Seen at work in the new unit are . . . at map table Phil Koperberg, FCO . . . his assistant Mr Vince Ward at the plot board. Council officer Dennis Deane is on the radio.*

# BUSH FIRE bulletin on Trove



The NSW RFS has joined forces with the National Library of Australia to digitise the entire collection of the Bush Fire Bulletin dating back to September 1952.

All editions of the Bush Fire Bulletin are available online and are fully searchable, making this huge historical archive easily accessible.

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons has praised the chance to make the Bush Fire Bulletin so accessible.

“The skill and dedication of our volunteer service has been recorded in the pages of the Bush Fire Bulletin,

informing and bringing to life the important work our members undertake,” Commissioner Fitzsimmons said. “I am very proud that this history of the NSW RFS will be available for all of Australia and the world to see.”

Search place names, brigade names, dates and fire-related topics such as “fire trails”.

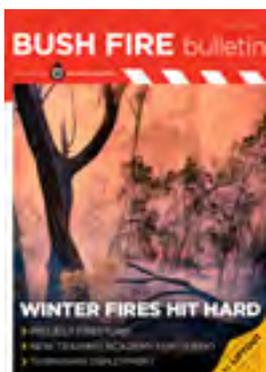
## HOW TO SEARCH BUSH FIRE BULLETIN ON TROVE

1. On the Library page of the NSW RFS website, use the search box for Trove.
2. Type in your search term
3. Click “Go”. You will be taken to the Bush Fire Bulletin’s archive on the National Library of Australia’s Trove website
4. A range of articles will be offered for selection
5. Click on the green View Online box on right to view the article.
6. You can print, download or simply read online.
7. To initiate another search return to the search box on the Library page on the NSW RFS website.
8. Or leave the search terms (“nla.obj-284283986” OR “nla.obj-284265362”) in the search box to stay within the Bush Fire Bulletin archive.

*S*

## BUSH FIRE bulletin

EMAIL YOUR DETAILS TO [Bush.Fire.Bulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Bush.Fire.Bulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au) TO RECEIVE THE **BUSH FIRE BULLETIN** DIRECT TO YOUR HOME OR TO UPDATE YOUR DETAILS.



Or cut out and mail to:

**Bush Fire Bulletin  
NSW RURAL FIRE  
SERVICE**

Reply Paid 67059  
Locked Bag 17  
Granville NSW 2142  
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(Please include any post-nominals)

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NSW RFS Member

# BUSH FIRE bulletin

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Cover photo: The 'Marie Bashir' Large Air Tanker drops a line of retardant ahead of the Failford Rd fire at Darawank just north of Tuncurry in late October 2019. Photo by Ned Dawson.



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