

LIFT-OUT: KEEPING YOURSELF HYDRATED

VOLUME 39 NO. 1/2017

BUSH FIREbulletin

THE JOURNAL OF THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

Next
Generation
PPC

When a fire
hits close
to home

Dehydration
leads to
mistakes

2017

Delivers the worst fire
conditions ever forecast



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IN THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE
WE VALUE

- community and environment
- support, friendship and camaraderie
- knowledge and learning
- integrity and trust
- one team, many players and one purpose
- adaptability and resourcefulness
- mutual respect



Foreword

2017 was a year of records.

Last summer saw more than 200 weather records broken across Australia, with many of those in NSW. The mean temperature across the state was more than 2.5 degrees above average – the hottest since records began.

Some areas, such as Moree, experienced 54 consecutive days where temperatures were 35 degrees or more – again, a record for NSW.

While many of our people had been busy with fire activity right across summer, the conditions peaked in February when Severe, Extreme and Catastrophic fire dangers were experienced across a large swathe of NSW.

There were a number of serious fires which impacted on people, homes, farms, land and infrastructure. In this edition of the *Bulletin*, you will see some of the experiences of these fires, and the remarkable response of our people.

While communities have been deeply affected by these fires it is worth acknowledging a very important fact – no lives were lost during the worst of the conditions.

It is challenging work our members do – both during times of emergency and afterwards, dealing with the practical and emotional fallout once the fires are out. As David Hanzl writes in this issue, sometimes the fires are close to home and it affects us deeply. Indeed, one of our brigade Captains lost his own home while out defending others in the Carwoola fire. Acknowledging the emotional cost on the community and on us as firefighters is as important as counting the cost of infrastructure, in fact, more so. We thank David for his honest words.

The diversified role of the NSW RFS has been on display once again, supporting agencies such as NSW SES and Fire and Rescue NSW. This includes assistance with flooding and further afield with large wild fires in British Columbia. When there is a need our people so often show they are willing and able, and demonstrate great versatility and commitment.

Also in this edition of the *Bulletin* you will read about recent updates to Personal Protective Clothing. Based on feedback from volunteers and staff, and using field trials, the Next Generation PPC will continue to meet high standards on safety and comfort.

I want to thank you for your ongoing work in preparing and protecting communities.

Stay safe,

Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM
NSW RFS Commissioner

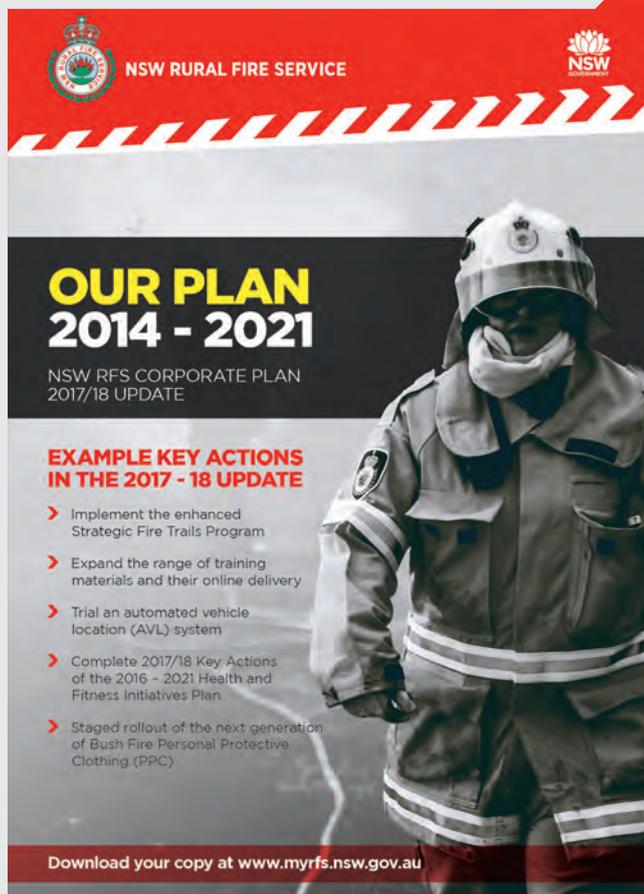


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Corporate Plan Sets Direction



The 2017/18 Update for the NSW RFS Corporate Plan (2014–21) has been released. The plan sets the direction for the Service as well as the context for Directorate, Regional and Section/District Plans within the Service.

Actions of interest include: implementing the enhanced Strategic Fire Trail Program; trialling an automated vehicle location (AVL) system; building and evaluating a National Fire Danger Rating System; analysis of the results from the NSW RFS Health and Fitness Survey to inform future health and fitness initiatives; and the release of new generation PPC.

In addition to the Corporate Plan the updates of both the Next Generation Workforce Plan and the Health and Fitness Initiative Plan and the Community Engagement Strategic Directions have also been released.

For the full suite of activities and actions outlined view the Corporate Plan (2017/2018 Update) on MyRFS.

Scholarships Open for Research in Emergency Services



The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience offers scholarships for emergency management volunteers

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience has a new \$1 million scholarship fund to boost education development opportunities for emergency management volunteers.

The scholarships are available for accredited vocational or higher education studies in emergency management or disaster resilience.

Those who live in a regional or rural area, female volunteers, and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander volunteers, are highly encouraged to apply.

Round 3 applications commence on 2 April 2018. For more information about the scholarships and the application process visit www.aidr.org.au.

Emergency Services Volunteer Memorial Service 8 October 2017



Each year, we pay our respects to our members who have paid the ultimate sacrifice while protecting their community at the Emergency Services Volunteer Memorial Service in Sydney.

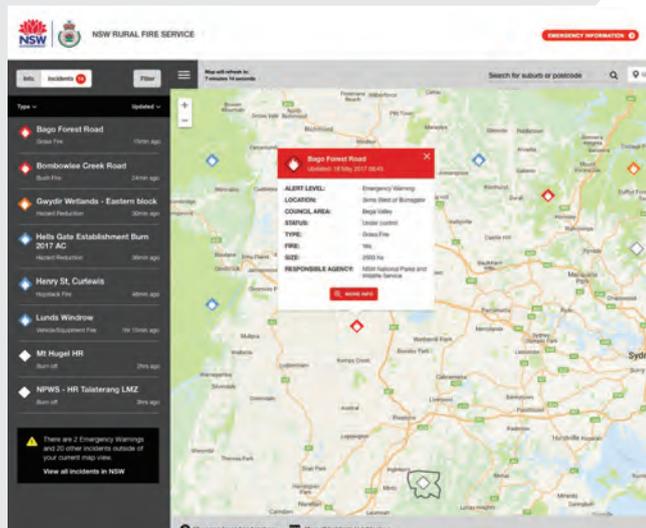
This year's service was held in Sydney at the volunteer memorial near Mrs Macquaries Chair at the Domain.

The names of 71 NSW RFS volunteers are now displayed on the

memorial, and this year the names of Firefighter Jennifer Hankinson and Firefighter Jitte Nieuwenhuis were added. Read more about these members in the Vale section of this issue.

The memorial also contains the names of volunteers from the NSW State Emergency Service, Marine Rescue (including the Volunteer Coast Guard Association and Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol), and the Volunteer Rescue Association.

Fires Near Me Revamp



Since its launch in October 2009, the incident map (re-branded in 2013 as Fires Near Me) on the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) website has played a significant role in keeping the public informed about bush and grass fires across the state. With over three million views throughout the 2016–17 fire season, Fires Near Me has had a facelift, which included, among other things, a full screen map. The map will maintain its core functionality while presenting a more visual and accessible experience. The Fires Near Me app has also been updated to coincide with the online version.

Training Centre for Dubbo



NSW RFS volunteers and staff will have access to a new specialised training facility to be built in Dubbo. The \$9 million facility is a partnership between Dubbo Regional Council and the NSW RFS and is expected to open in 2020.

The training complex will include outdoor areas for practical training as well as classrooms and lecture theatres. The facility will be used for member induction training as well as programs such as incident management, road crash rescue and fire investigation.

Breaking Ground at the New NSW RFS HQ



On 28 April, the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister for Police, Mr Troy Grant, and Deputy Commissioner of the NSW RFS, Rob Rogers, officially broke ground at the new NSW RFS Headquarters.

The new building at 4 Murray Rose Avenue at Sydney Olympic Park will house the State Operations Centre, which operates as the central emergency services coordination point during fire emergencies across the state. "During peak operational times, the State Operations Centre within the headquarters can swell to over 200 multi-agency personnel and this

new facility will enhance inter-agency coordination and collaboration," said the Minister.

Its advanced technologies, intelligence and forecasting systems will provide fire management personnel and the multiple agencies with state of the art resources to help prevent and respond to fire emergencies across NSW.

The building is expected to be completed mid-2018, with the NSW RFS moving in later in the year.



Catastrophic Fire Conditions

2017 started with unprecedented catastrophic fire conditions.

Fuelled by some of the worst conditions ever experienced in NSW, the early months of 2017 were plagued with record-breaking heat and low humidity.

New South Wales was tinder dry as all regions sweltered through one of the hottest summers on record, which by early February saw temperatures consistently rising above 40 degrees across many parts of the state.

Moree, alone, broke the record for 50 days straight of temperatures above 35 degrees, many of which were above 40 degrees.

The conditions peaked on the weekend of 11-12 February. Brigades were on high alert, with teams positioned pre-emptively across the state.

For weeks, crews across the state had been busy dealing with a number of major bush

and grass fires, such as the Jack Ward fire at Harden, the Curraudooley fire near Tarago, fires at Kurri Kurri, the Mulligans Flat fire near Sutton and a fire at Camberwell.

Jack Ward fire, Harden

On Friday 13 January, a single downed power line north of Harden sparked three fast moving grass fires that threatened homes and an industrial estate near Jack Ward Drive, Barwang Road and Demondrille Road.

Eleven crews were initially dispatched and were soon joined by Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) and waterbombing aircraft as the fire went to Emergency Warning alert level.

Hard work and determination resulted in no loss of property or any major disruption to the main southern rail line.

Kurri Kurri fires

On Wednesday 18 January, strong winds pushed a number of fires burning around Kurri Kurri towards the villages of Heddon, Greta and Kurri Kurri, threatening homes in Northcote Street, McLeods Road, Main Road, Bowditch Avenue and Bowden Street.

Fifty-four NSW RFS trucks crewed by 220 members worked with 70 FRNSW firefighters to defend properties and contain the fire.

Mulligans Flat fire, Sutton

Wednesday 18 January was an Extreme fire danger day in the Southern Tablelands Zone. Shortly after 3pm, crews responded to reports of a fast running grass fire burning near Mulligans Flat Road and Read Road at Sutton.

Within minutes, the alert level was raised to a Watch and Act for the village of Sutton, and was soon upgraded to an Emergency Warning.

Almost 160 NSW RFS, ACT RFS and ACTFR firefighters, assisted by eight aircraft, successfully defended homes and were able to contain the fire shortly after 7pm. While no residential dwellings were destroyed, 10 outbuildings were lost.

Camberwell fire

On Tuesday 24 January, a fire was sparked when a tree branch fell on power lines behind a church west of Camberwell, SE of Muswellbrook.

The fire spread quickly under strong westerly winds and threatened properties. An Emergency Warning alert level was put in place and the New England Highway was closed.

Due to the rapid response of local crews and a strike team from Maitland, along with FRNSW crews and the Large Air Tanker Thor, the fire was quickly contained with minimal damage sustained.



Sir Ivan fire

With a number of Total Fire Bans already in force and crews stood up, conditions were forecast to deteriorate even further on the weekend of 11–12 February – Severe fire danger on Saturday worsening to Catastrophic on Sunday in many areas. A pre-emptive S44 was put in place.

Around lunch time on Saturday, a triple zero call reported a fire burning in the vicinity of Sir Ivan Dougherty Drive at Leadville, east of Dunedoo.

On arrival, crews from the Leadville, Dunedoo, Uarbry and Hannahs Bridge brigades reported the fire was spreading quickly to the east. They got to work and were soon joined by additional crews as well as aerial support in the form of the C130 Hercules Large Air Tanker (LAT) and the DC10 Very Large Air Tanker (VLAT).

In total, 13 local crews, two strike teams, a Rapid Aerial Response Team (RART), two LATs, a VLAT, six other waterbombing aircraft, three

graders and two bulldozers worked through the afternoon and night to help slow the spread of the fire. A strategic backburn was put in place overnight.

First light brought the dawn of a catastrophic day. Firefighters worked hard to stop the further spread of fire when it began spotting over containment lines at several locations. By 10am, strengthening winds significantly increased the number of spotters and forced the closure of the Golden Highway.

At 11:37am an Emergency Warning alert level was declared as the fire made a run towards properties. Throughout the afternoon it heavily impacted around the rural communities of Uarbry, Turill, Coolah and Leadville.

Emergency Alert messages were sent to residents on eight separate occasions that afternoon as the fire raced through the region.

Firefighters, farmers and aircraft tried to protect properties but in the catastrophic hot, dry, windy

conditions there was little hope of saving anything in the path of the flames.

As conditions worsened even further, the primary focus shifted to protecting life and ensuring the safety of firefighters.

Leadville RFS captain Stephen Yeo said firefighters were able to save some buildings and livestock by taking calculated risks, but when conditions worsened on Sunday it became evident that resources needed to be positioned behind the fire, not in front of it.

“It’s a small community we live in, and people want to save as much as they can, and there were houses and buildings saved,” Mr Yeo said.

“[But] if something happened while we were protecting an asset and we lost a whole team, I don’t know how the community would go on afterwards.

“Thankfully there was no loss of life, I think that’s one thing we need to be thankful for, there were a lot of losses but

no loss of human life.”

Along with the 35 destroyed homes, the Sire Ivan fire destroyed a community hall and a church, 131 outbuildings, significant agricultural assets including extensive fencing and almost 3000 livestock.

However, against the odds, firefighters were able to save 80 homes.

Strike teams took up position in the town of Cassilis, where a number of townspeople and nearby residents had taken shelter. There were fears on Sunday afternoon that an expected southerly change would push the flank of the fire to the north, engulfing the town.

Fortunately, the southerly passed through earlier than expected and together with the containment lines created by backburning the previous night, resulted in the fire sparing Cassilis, though that same change adversely affected Coolah.

Crews contained the fire on 16 February but work continued for a further 18 days before it



was officially declared out, on 6 March 2017.

Binnalong Road, Boggabri

Following a record run of extreme temperatures, with the mercury at Moree pushing past 35 degrees C for 36 days – a pre-emptive Section 44 was declared for the Narrabri, Moree Plains and Gwydir Local Government Areas.

On Sunday 12 February, as crews to the south continued to work on the Sir Ivan fire, the mercury soared to 47.3 degrees.

At 2:05pm, five tankers and a group officer responded to a fire near Binnalong Road, on the southern side of Boggabri.

Harrowing conditions challenged firefighters from the moment they stepped off their trucks. Pushed by strong winds and burning in just 10 per cent humidity, the fire jumped the Kamilaroi Highway and the Namoi River.

While firefighters and a landholder managed to save one homestead, another home

was destroyed by fire. One firefighter was transported to hospital with burn injuries.

The evening presented further challenges as the forecast southerly change pushed the fire towards homes and the local golf club on the eastern side of Boggabri. Fortunately, crews were able to defend those homes, with only a small shed lost.

Pappinbarra Road, Hollisdale

As dozens of fires raged across the state, crews responded to reports of a new ignition in the vicinity of Pappinbarra Road, near Hollisdale, shortly after 1pm.

Burning in extreme conditions, the fire was soon escalated to Watch and Act alert level and then Emergency Warning alert level at 2:40pm.

More than one hundred firefighters from the NSW Rural Fire Service, FRNSW, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Forests NSW worked to protect properties from being overrun.

While six houses and 11 outbuildings were destroyed, crews were able to save more than 40 homes from destruction in spite of the prevailing hot, strong, gusty winds.

The fire was officially declared out 18 days later, by which time it had burnt 1,200 hectares of private land.

In the months that followed, above average temperatures and dry conditions prevailed across large areas of the state.

In September 2017 alone, there were five Emergency warnings, 15 Watch and Acts and 30 Total Fire Bans declared across six days of Severe fire danger.

During the month, 6,002 NSW RFS members responded to 2,556 bush and grass fires which burnt 51,630 hectares. Six homes were destroyed and two were damaged by the Innes View Road fire at Port Macquarie on Sunday 24 September.

This is a glimpse of the devastation winter's warm and

dry conditions could wreak during the fiery heat of summer.

There have only been two Catastrophic fire danger days in NSW since the ratings system was revised following the 2009 Black Saturday bush fires in Victoria.

We can only hope this season does not bring with it our third Catastrophic day.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Photographer, Kerensa Mitchell, pulled over to the side of the road to take this photo of the smoke from the Kurri Kurri fire. ABOVE LEFT & RIGHT: Sir Ivan fire. Photo by Andrew Micallef. ABOVE CENTRE: Six homes were lost but a further 40 were saved at the Pappinbarra Road fire near Beechwood. Photo by Sean McLoughlin.



The Carwoola/Taliesin Fire: Beyond the Firefight

By David Hanzl, Captain, Stoney Creek Rural Fire Brigade

What's it like to have a fire in your own community?

I didn't really get it before, what it was like to have a fire in your own community. I'm not sure you can. Most of us understand what's involved when we have been deployed to communities to support the local Brigade – frantic efforts to save homes, chasing down a spot fire or escaping grassfire, then surveying the destruction, the blackened landscapes, then days of tiring drudgery associated with patrolling and blacking out – what the media blithely calls “mopping up”. This we are familiar with. But I had never really appreciated how that local Brigade or those residents must be feeling when it was their own community in the path of the fire, when it is their friends' and neighbours' houses burning. Or what happens in the weeks and months after we've all gone home.

But now I do. February 17 wasn't even a bad day. Sure it was a Total Fire Ban – but it was just another warm summer day. The small column of smoke didn't look too bad at first. But then it got away up a hill and into the tea-tree (*Kunzea*) in a rural residential estate on the other side. Within a few hours we had an Emergency Warning issued, eight houses destroyed,

several crews overrun, two firefighters injured, up to 70 tankers deployed from far and wide, evacuation centres and police roadblocks set up, a huge aviation effort deployed and around 3100 hectares burned.

This incident was nowhere near as large as the Sir Ivan fire the week before (where we had a crew deployed); but this was different – for us anyway. Our Sir Ivan crew could only listen in horror as the situation in their district developed while they were deployed elsewhere. Frantic, they were brought home safely the next day and went straight out again to work on *their* fire.

We worked for many hours that day before being withdrawn in the evening for a crew changeover, exhausted and traumatised. Returning to base we found ourselves almost strangers in our own fire station. It had been overtaken, completely transformed into a major staging area. Tankers, logistics, ambulance, police, earthmoving equipment, catering and people of all sorts filled the whole place and we were (rightly) sent off to take our place at the end of the line of tankers.

This is not the sort of attention

you want on your community. Even seeing our fire reported on the news as the biggest disaster in our region since the Canberra bushfires in 2003, I think many of us still did not grasp that a major disaster had just unfolded in our area. I can only guess that we were so shocked at what had happened. I know many of us were emotional then and for a long time afterwards.

Back at the staging area late in the afternoon, I asked our friend Peter, who was Captain of our neighbouring brigade, how his house had fared as it had been right in the fire's path. He simply showed me a picture he had taken of his home burning from end to end. I don't know how he was holding himself together at that moment. He had been helping warn residents and lead the fight and had put a barrier over his own long driveway to prevent firefighters putting themselves at risk trying to save what he knew couldn't be saved. He has since maintained the most remarkable composure and positive outlook to his dreadful situation and his children have followed his lead. Peter has been an inspiration to us all.

Immediate aftermath

But after the fire is mostly out, the strike teams have been sent home (thank you

everyone!), and the media have moved on to the next story (as they should), then there is everything that follows.

In the immediate aftermath, as the local Brigade we were given all the flexibility we needed to be in the burned area working with our community. Thanks to all the support we received from other Brigades, we were spared having to deal with the mopping up work around the perimeter, which is largely invisible to the community. We were able to focus on supporting our neighbours directly which they (and we) appreciated. So we went house to house looking to see what our neighbours needed.

However, there was a lot more than just the firefighting effort we had to think about. Police maintained roadblocks to keep everyone out until it was safe. Obviously residents were anxious to get back in to see if their home was still standing but there were electricity lines down everywhere, trees still burning and not everyone was immediately accounted for. Crews were out repairing damaged electrical and phone infrastructure. Land Services were quickly on scene to look after injured or hungry stock. Wildcare were out looking for injured wildlife. Red Cross operated the evacuation



We worked for many hours that day before being withdrawn in the evening for a crew changeover, exhausted and traumatised.

centres and stayed on long afterwards. Council crews were out surveying damage, right down to replacing the burned street numbers. And yes, there were stickybeaks driving up remote driveways “just to have a look” and even reports of looters. Our firefighting courses don’t deal with this stuff.

And this is the time when community members came out of the woodwork to offer assistance in whatever way they could. There were community meetings (many of these), community debriefs, community recovery planning meetings, After Action Reviews, a Community Appeal and fundraising activities, meetings about how to distribute the funds, an event the community organised to thank the emergency services, articles written for the local community newsletter, media interviews, investigations into injuries and overruns, police investigations for the Coroner, and vice-Regal visits (we were honoured with visits from both the NSW Governor and the Governor General) and we had to be involved in all of it.

Then there was managing social media and the questions about how the fire started, who needed what support, people

with support to offer, why did this or that thing happen or not happen, why is there a fire truck driving down my street? And you also have to look after your own members with debriefing, decompressing and social activity.

Long term aftermath

The community engagement effort long after such an event, while exhausting, is an essential and important opportunity. Understandably, there is huge interest in the community and a desire to understand what happened and learn how to protect themselves in the future. A local Brigade would be crazy to pass up the (unfortunate) opportunity to engage closely. We have been offering fire preparedness workshops, which have been very popular. We are also looking to start up a HotSpots program in our area and the RFS has been prioritising that effort for us. Rebuilding activities by the residents need to be supported with solid advice on making properties as safe as possible.

The Carwoola/Taliesin fire, like most major fires, also attracts other attention as we try to learn what we can. We have hosted two “lessons learned” interactive field trips run by

Region South, and researchers from the Bushfire & Natural Hazard CRC who are currently engaging with residents to learn more about their preparedness.

In fire incidents there are often close calls and sometimes injuries that remind us that life is tenuous and that accidents happen unexpectedly.

In the fires, one of our members was burnt during an overrun and a member from our neighbouring brigade was injured in an MVA between tankers in the smoky confusion. Those events don’t simply go away for those people when the fire is extinguished. Less than an hour earlier they had been at their desk working and suddenly, unexpectedly, they were literally fighting for their lives. The RFS CISS team and other medical and support services responded quickly and very positively for them (and for others like Peter) but there was still much talking and supporting that was needed in the months ahead.

The community, like most Australian communities after a disaster, has responded magnificently with a great positive spirit. It has become much stronger than it was before. Nevertheless, even now, almost a year later, we are

mindful that the community has been scarred and is still fragile. There are subtle psychological issues that are only now beginning to surface. Regular brigade training has resumed (with many new members) but we make sure we give notice to the community if there are going to be fire trucks around for any reason. Or if there is an incident where we are called to respond, the sooner we get advice out to the residents the better because they are watching and wondering.

You can’t come close to thanking everyone who came to help. So many individuals and agencies played a part. I know this is what we do, we go to help others. But this time you all came to help us (I still get emotional even writing this) and for that, on behalf of Stoney Creek Brigade and the Carwoola Community, I thank you.

I think I get it now.

If you or someone you know needs support, the NSW RFS Counselling and Support Service offers a confidential service. Phone 1 800 049 993 and ask for the CISS duty officer to be paged.

The community and the Stoney Creek RFS Bush Fire Brigade gathered when the Governor-General His Excellency Peter Cosgrove and Lady Cosgrove visited the station to present the Governor-General’s medallion for their work fighting the Taliesin Road (Carwoola) fire.





Setting up a Remote Camp in

It was a busy start to the year for Operational and Mitigation Services (OMS), deploying a 300-person base camp in February in Mudgee, a 100-person base camp in remote Packsaddle late March and, a week later, a 500-person base camp in support of flood operations in Lismore.

Supporting multi-agency emergency services exercise – remote Packsaddle

NSW RFS OMS provided a Level 1 base camp for a large multi-agency exercise that took place at remote

Packsaddle in March.

NSW Police Regional Emergency Management Officer (REMO), Far West requested the NSW RFS involvement in the exercise to establish a base camp to support a large Multi-Agency

Emergency Services Exercise. NSW RFS supported this significant field exercise by supplying a base camp to accommodate 100 personnel, over the duration of the exercise.

Titled “Vas Onero”, the exercise involved a coordinated emergency services response to a simulated scenario involving a passenger bus and stock truck collision in a remote location. About 170 personnel attended from a wide range of emergency services and government departments.

As part of this exercise, a newly built highway/runway was also commissioned with the Royal Flying Doctor Service performing a night time landing on that part of the strip for the first time.

Located 200km north of Broken Hill on the Silver City Highway, Packsaddle’s remote location brought logistical challenges for establishing the base camp. The infrastructure was deployed from the state warehouse in Glendenning, some 1300km away. While the exercise was held towards the end of summer,



Drought

temperatures were still averaging 43 degrees in an environment with no natural shade or water. Establishing a self-sufficient water supply for the personnel was a key logistical challenge. OMS deployed 12 specialist personnel, ten base camp tents and associated support infrastructure, a Logistics semi trailer and other vehicles to establish the base camp.

The base camp accommodated personnel from NSW Ambulance, NSW Police, the Ministry of Health, students and lecturers from

the University of Wollongong, Defence Force personnel, NSW RFS volunteers and staff, Local Land Services and more.

In order to meet the logistical challenges of remoteness, water shortage and temperatures, OMS did thorough site assessments and worked with the exercise coordination team. The feedback from those accommodated in the base camp was overwhelmingly positive and reflected the high standard, not only of our base camp infrastructure, but also

the work performed by OMS specialist crews.

OMS were not only able to support our emergency service counterparts with the base camp for this important field exercise, but were also able to validate existing planning arrangements, learn from this exercise, and improve where necessary. Given the uniqueness of the deployment, OMS were also able to use this opportunity to assess current base camp remote area deployment planning and readiness.

OMS will continue to improve its capabilities for future remote operations by learning from the challenges of this deployment.

The crew involved in this rapid base camp deployment at Packsaddle didn't know at the time that exactly one week later, along with other OMS personnel, they would be called upon to establish a base camp at Wollongbar in support of flood operations near Lismore.

TOP: The remote Packsaddle base camp. Photo by NSW SES



And Another Camp in Flooding

Wollongbar TAFE, Lismore

Only a week after remote Packsaddle late in March a 500-person base camp in support of flood operations was set up in Lismore. The NSW RFS is quick to move in and help out.

The NSW RFS established a base camp and Level 3 staging area at the Wollongbar campus of North Coast TAFE. The call from State Operations came to Operational & Mitigation Services (OMS) on Friday evening, 31 March and by Sunday 1800 hours it was

up and ready to receive the expected 350–400 people.

The planning and establishment team arrived at Wollongbar at 11am on Saturday morning, along with the base camp infrastructure that had been transported

overnight from Glendenning. The base camp establishment practices were quickly underway, with a Base Camp Coordinator and Manager appointed and the OMS establishment crews set tasks.

It will be no surprise to hear that it was raining. And raining. To assist with traversing wet, slippery and muddy ground 30 tonnes of sand and additional ground matting had to be used.

The 43 OMS tents were delivered and tent

construction commenced immediately and continued throughout Saturday and into the evening. The crews recommenced at first light on Sunday morning.

As the tents were going up so, too, was other significant base camp infrastructure, including generators and associated power infrastructure, air conditioning units for each tent, more than 30 toilets and showers, and catering capacity for up to 500 people each day.



Rains



All field personnel had to pass through the decontamination process before entering the base camp accommodation and catering areas.

A Level 3 staging area was established with a Staging Area Coordinator appointed to deal with the more than 50 emergency service appliances. Given the nature of the flood clean-up work personnel were undertaking, OMS established a decontamination system at the staging area. All field personnel had to pass through the decontamination process before entering the base

camp accommodation and catering areas.

The Wollongbar Base Camp welcomed its first strike teams at approximately 1800 hours on Sunday 2 April and by 2000 hours it was accommodating 187 NSW RFS firefighters, 72 FRNSW personnel, 30 NSW SES officers, 35 South Australian SES officers, 1 South Australian police officer and 10 South Australian Metropolitan Fire & Rescue

firefighters. Additionally, the OMS team bunked in too. The total number of personnel bedding down in Base Camp Wollongbar on Sunday night was 374.

The inclement weather definitely provided some challenges, but the establishment team got the job done all the while knowing that the local residents were up against far more serious challenges than they were.

LEFT: Base Camp, Wollongbar TAFE, showing tents and associated infrastructure.

Photo by Anthony Wallgate, NSW Fire & Rescue

TOP: Keith Nicholls, almost knee deep in mud, would have appreciated the hot showers back at base camp.

Photo by Ben Shepherd, NSW RFS



Aviation Rescue Crew, from left, Rick Ott, Grahame Horne, Callum Whitford and David Bellantonio
Photo by Grahame Horne.

Down the Wire Crews Help Out in the Floods

By Simon Topp
Operations Officer, Remote Area
Firefighting and Specialised Operations

In March and April 2017, the NSW RFS helped residents of the Far North Coast of NSW deal with serious flooding. Cyclone Debbie's forces hit Queensland, but when the low pressure system moved south it dumped rain on South East Queensland and North East NSW. During March, Lismore recorded over 800mm of rain which brought disastrous flooding.

Ten NSW RFS Strike Teams and local crews assisted the combat agency, the NSW SES, in the floods. Here we profile just one part of the NSW RFS contingent.

The NSW SES had helicopters on standby for seven days during this period. The NSW RFS Aviation Rescue Crew volunteers were just one part of the multi-agency response, and did 28 shifts over this time, undertaking 28 helicopter rescues.

RFS involvement in the floods

The NSW SES initially requested three helicopters for search and rescue. Two NSW

RFS owned BK 117 helicopters – Helitack 201 and Helitack 202, each equipped with a rescue winch – were brought in to help. Three additional helicopters were also deployed to the Far North Coast, increasing the aerial response capability to six search and rescue aircraft. Specialist NSW RFS volunteers were attached to five of these helicopters.

On Thursday 30 March, the first three aircraft arrived at the SES Airbase at Goonellabah. The NSW SES had already taken a number of rescue callouts, but by the afternoon the rain was so intense that no aircraft could fly safely, with visibility down to less than 200 metres. The helicopters and NSW RFS Aviation Crews would have to wait until the following day to get airborne.

While strong winds were challenging on Friday 31 March, the aircraft were still able to get in the air during the morning. Three NSW RFS volunteers recount their experiences of that day.

NSW RFS volunteer David Bellantonio describes his busy Friday: *I arrived at Goonellabah air base Friday morning on-board Helitack 220. We unloaded the aircraft and configured it for possible flood rescues. My colleague Al Madden had already been sent out with Helitack 267 on a mission and it was likely that we would be deployed as well, so I got into my wetsuit straight away and checked and prepped my harness and my gear. Later in the morning, we were given coordinates of a person stranded on a roof top just down river from the Lismore township.*

We flew directly there, completing a thorough check of the entire area but found nothing. Then, called to assist five stranded tourists up river from Lismore township, we arrived at the coordinates to find a group of people waving for assistance on what had become an island. Fortunately, we found a safe place to land. The five tourists had been visiting from Israel. They didn't speak English so they'd had to phone for help via contacts in Israel who in turn notified the Australian authorities. I imagine they were very relieved to see us land.

Two locals were also stranded very close by. We divided everyone into two groups, so we first took a group of four to the air base, then returned for the second group of three.



Winching down from the Helitack 202 for one of the flood rescues



Callum Whitford recalls: *I got to the hotel in Lismore late that first night. In the morning the hotel manager was keen for us to book for a second night, but I'm glad we didn't because by lunchtime my hotel room was completely under water.*

The first day we were grounded. While the SES had plenty of jobs, we were unable to lift because visibility was so poor. The rain was intense and when my raincoat failed me in less than 30 minutes I decided to wear my wetsuit instead.

The rain eased on the second day and we started with a recce flight over Murwillumbah and were able to start searching for people in distress. I noticed a man pulled over on a bridge on the Pacific Highway. He was climbing the railings and appeared to be readying himself to jump into the flood water below. We quickly landed on the bridge. The man turned out to be a VRA volunteer and advised he thought a boat had overturned up stream. We flew search patterns downstream but couldn't locate the boat or any people.

Soon after, we flew into the hills surrounding Murwillumbah to winch out two people who were with someone who had died. The wind conditions were violent – the pilot had to pull full power just to maintain altitude. We couldn't locate the people and would have been unable to winch due to the wind conditions.

That afternoon we helped a family who were stranded with their bus in flood water. When we located them we soon realised we would need to winch the family out. When I winched down from the helicopter into the flood water the water was flowing into the door of the bus. I winched the mum up first and got her in her seatbelt without a hitch, just like training. I went back down to get the kids, but I'd never winched children before. The dad held up his son to keep him out of the flood water so I could get the collar on him. The brave little guy weighed less than twenty kilos, I had him in a bear hug, and I don't think he even weighted the collar. I winched him up and seated him safely next to his mum, then returned to the bus to get their daughter. Despite her age she was an adrenaline junkie – I think she wanted another go! I finally picked up the dad, and with the whole family aboard we flew back to a local TAFE that had been set up as an evacuation centre. I registered them with Red Cross and returned to Coolangatta for refuelling.

It may appear to outsiders that in this type of rescue the one winching down does the hard yards but, in reality, it's a team effort. Kev and Mark, hidden from view in the helicopter, are working harder than me winching down. They are responsible for more than just one life. No rescue could happen without them, yet they seldom receive recognition.

Allen Madden writes: *The flood waters were rising so quickly that by the time between being called out to rescue two people trapped on the roof of their car to the time HT 267 arrived, the people had been forced to move from the roof of their car to the roof of a nearby house. I winched down from the helicopter, secured them one at a time in a rescue harness and winched them into the helicopter. Once all were secure on board HT 267, we transferred them to Kingscliff evacuation centre.*

Some of the people stranded on roofs were not in great shape. When I winched down to help a man who was on the roof of the Condong Bowling Club, an SES boat arrived, so rather than risk lifting the gentleman into the helicopter, we helped him into the SES boat. Another man stranded on a roof in Tumbulgum had a medical condition so we decided not to winch him either, calling in another SES boat instead to transfer him to the hospital.

We then patrolled along the river monitoring isolated farm houses. We landed at a shed where we collected six people and a dog and flew them to the evacuation centre.

Late in the day, just as everyone was leaving for their accommodation, we were called to rescue four people from Tumbulgum. This time I headed out with the RFS Helicopter Helitack 202. We flew to a two-storey house where a family of four were trapped on the top balcony.

Once on the roof, I discussed the options briefly with the parents of the family who were all understandably nervous. We winched the dad into the helicopter first, then their six-year-old son, their three-year-old daughter and, finally, the mother. All went smoothly and we were able to deliver the family safely to the Kingscliff evacuation centre.



Down the Wire training. From left, Callum Whitford, Peter Stevenson and Kathleen Harvey. Photo by Brett Hagan.

About Helicopter "Down the Wire" Operations

The NSW RFS "Down the Wire" programme comprises volunteers who all contribute time and effort not only to operations, but also to the countless hours of training, recertification and travel that these roles demand. All 30 "Down the Wire" volunteers are equally responsible for the success the programme has enjoyed.

The NSW RFS has 30 specialist volunteers – known as "Down the Wire" Technicians. These volunteers are trained and equipped to deploy as crew members on helicopters who can assist in aviation rescue, often in support of other agencies.

Selection and training

Before being authorised as a NSW RFS Aviation Rescue Crew Officer, NSW RFS volunteers undergo a rigorous selection and training programme extending over 12 months. In late 2016, applications were opened to current volunteer Remote Area Operators who had demonstrated experience and commitment in helicopter based operations. Eight positions were available to join the existing 22 volunteers trained and active in helicopter rescue operations. The volunteers had to submit a written application initially. Successful applicants were then invited to attend stage 2 which involved a theory assessment, a swim test and a practical assessment of a helicopter winching cycle. The final eight were selected based on their overall scores from the selection process.

The eight new Aviation Officers undertook initial training over three days at the new training facility in Mogo – the first of four facilities to be established around the state for Remote Area Training. The training consisted of theory then two days of practical training and assessment in rescue winching operations. Throughout 2017 the training programme for the new recruits and existing personnel has continued and will include swift water awareness, underwater helicopter escape training, aviation crew resource management, water winching, air search and rescue and sling load operations.



A robot for sensing burning embers

"We found out that most houses burned down not because of the fire but by the embers. So then we came up with our robot which drives around and senses heat and it beeps when it detects heat."

Brooke and her team proposed that information about embers from the robot in the field would be returned to a central hub providing firefighters early detection of small fires.

By Brooke Watt, Year 6 student, St Ives North Public School

All Primary Schools Now Addressing Bush Fire

By Jacqueline Murphy, Coordinator Community Engagement, NSW RFS

"I learned a lot about bush fires ... (This project) made me realise how dangerous bush fires can actually be... I never realised how close we are to the bush and how susceptible we are to having a bush fire close to us."

Chloe Huang, Year 6 student at St Ives North Public School

In the northern suburbs of Sydney at St Ives North Public School, Years 5 and 6 students have been presented with authentic bush fire related scenarios and asked to come up with innovative solutions.

The results have been remarkable for the students, the school and for the NSW RFS.

Mark Unsworth is Captain of the nearby Ku-Ring-Gai Rural Fire Brigade and attended the

St Ives North Public School three times over the course of the project.

"It's just brilliant," he said. "This project has shown up the kind of ideas, the enthusiasm and the taste for learning these kids have. Rather than our community engagement being focussed on parents and adults, perhaps we should spend more time focussing on kids!"

Studying bush fire now compulsory

The NSW RFS has always valued the role of children in building bush fire resilient communities. This is now even more vital given a change to the curriculum for students in Years 5 and 6 which means that the study of bush fire is now compulsory across NSW.

That means that in NSW alone around 195,000 students will be studying bush fire in depth as part of Geography every two years.

Spread over around 2,600 primary schools these students and their teachers will require resources and guidance to investigate bush fire. The opportunity for brigades to engage with schools is immense.

The NSW RFS has worked closely with the NSW Geography Teachers Association, education sectors, schools, and interested teachers to develop tools in response to this educational change. The Schools page on the NSW RFS website (under the Resources menu) is now filled with information for teachers on bush fire, bush fire planning and

featured multi-media content about a contemporary bush fire event, the October 2013 fires.

The Community Engagement team continue to work on developing a NSW RFS Members pathway on the Schools landing page, along with workshops and written guides.

A short documentary produced by the NSW RFS about the St Ives project called *We Had Massive Ideas!* has been screened at forums and conferences around Australia as an example of best practice and is available on the NSW RFS YouTube channel.

For NSW RFS volunteers, the inclusion of bush fire in the Geography syllabus will present some new, but interesting, challenges. Students will be employing inquiry learning

to study. This means they will be generating their own questions and their own areas of inquiry. This approach makes for some very innovative work from the students. For this reason, it's important that NSW RFS volunteers find out what topics the school and students are interested in before they make a visit to the school.

How St Ives North Public School is breaking new ground

Within the education sector the St Ives North Public School is gaining attention for its innovative approach to the study of bush fire. By bringing the Geography syllabus together with design thinking and science and technology learning the school has created new territory.

St Ives is a bush fire prone area with a history of destructive fires in the late 1960s, 1994 and 2007. Sean Walsh is the IT and Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Coordinator

at the school and saw the long term benefits in the program in terms of bush fire awareness.

"I think we underestimated ... just how little they knew about bush fires in the local environment," he said, "I would say fewer than five percent of families who live on the bush front had a fire plan, that the children were aware of."

"The main thing that the students have learned from my perspective is their role in preparation and survival and recovery from bush fire. [They have learned] that they can be really active agents of change in their local community."

At an end-of-year Showcase in November 2016, teams of 11 and 12-year-old students presented 70 remarkable solutions to bush fire problems. The students presented ideas for preparing and planning for fire, detecting fire, dealing with fire, responding to fire, looking after firefighters, looking after homes, as well as complex

programs for community recovery after large bush fire events. Some of these clever ideas are featured here.

The NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM attended the Showcase.

"It was really, really wonderful," Commissioner Fitzsimmons said. "It reminds me that our future is in safe hands when you see the work of these young people."

Project Firestorm at St Ives North Public School, in partnership with the NSW RFS, won both the NSW and National Schools category of the 2017 Resilient Australia Awards.

This project has shown up the kind of ideas, the enthusiasm and the taste for learning these kids have.

We Had Massive Ideas! is a short documentary created by the NSW RFS about the project. A four-minute or eight-minute version is available on the NSW RFS Youtube channel.



Saving firefighters lives

"What we created is the Heartbeat Pro. It will save firefighters' lives.

Three warning lights on a firefighter's helmet will turn on and off showing the firefighter when they need to get out of the fire because their heart rate is too high. It will be connected by wifi to a chest strap or maybe something on your wrist. When the light goes from yellow, to orange, to red, you need to get out of the fire as soon as possible."

Blake and his team discovered that most deaths of firefighters on the fireground are caused by heart failure. The Heartbeat Pro is a Fitbit-style monitor which gives the firefighters, and their crew leaders, real-time data on their physical fitness.

By Blake Gillian and Brooke Watt, Year 6 students, St Ives North Public School



A smart idea for the local NSW RFS brigade

"We invented shutters for the windows at the local brigade station. They are automatic and they have smoke and heat sensors. You can send a message to the robot and it automatically slides and closes. We had four prototypes and none of them worked until we tried the sliding shutters – that succeeded."

The captain of the local Ku-ring-Gai Brigade, Mark Unsworth, approached the students at St Ives with the problem of how to shut the brigade station fire-proof shutters when the crews were out fighting fires.

By Shir Goodwin and Gemma Walker, Year 6 students, St Ives North Public School



Wee Jasper Valley: Big Bush Fire Risk



Throughout NSW we are lucky to have numerous little pockets of paradise just crying out for holiday-makers, small oases that provide the perfect backdrop for rest and relaxation. The Wee Jasper Valley in Yass is one such spot, although the very ingredients that make this an attractive place to camp – isolation, endless bush and good weather – are also the recipe for devastating bush fires. The good news for campers is that the area has recently been the subject of a comprehensive bush fire safety project by the NSW RFS. Andrew Nicholls, Community Protection Planner & Neighbourhood Safer Places Officer from the Planning & Environment Service Centre, explains.

Wee Jasper is a beautiful, secluded valley just 40 kilometres as the crow flies from Canberra's Black Mountain Tower. It has had a long history of agricultural grazing and cropping, as well as attracting people wanting to 'get away from it all' in the back-waters of Burrinjuck Dam. For the past three decades a network of Crown Land reserves has been managed by the Wee Jasper Reserves Trust. Their focus has been on maintaining camping

facilities for the many people who use the area for a diverse range of recreation pursuits including: camping, caving, mountain biking, bush walking, paddling and fishing.

The Wee Jasper Reserves Trust manage the Carey's Cave Reserve, Billy Grace Reserve, Micalong Creek and the Fitzpatrick Trackhead on the Hume and Hovell Walking Track. During the summer months these reserves are a 'Mecca' for campers with more than 1,000

people visiting the Wee Jasper Valley on any one day. Many choose to camp and soak up the atmosphere for days on end.

Wee Jasper has two Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSPs) – one at the public hall in the village, and the other at the well-known Billy Grace Reserve – about four kilometres south of the village on a 50 hectare reserve.

It is understandable why crowds throng to the area during the summer holiday season,

Australia Day, Canberra Day and Easter; the tranquil river-side setting in this isolated valley is second to none.

Yet when faced with the threat of fire, campers have only the protection of their nylon tent. If a large bush fire should hit the area, the visitors would be badly exposed.

The Canberra fires of 2003 posed a very real threat to the safety of people west of Canberra and in Canberra itself. Campers in Wee Jasper were



The main oval in the centre of the Billy Grace Reserve is the Neighbourhood Safer Place (NSP), and was enhanced by the installation of a sprinkler system to protect campers.

particularly vulnerable and were evacuated, with the benefit of foresight and with the luxury of time to act. Following another fire in the area ten years later, the Cobbler's Road Fire, a fuller picture of the scale and type of threat posed to campers in this isolated valley began to emerge.

A unique bush fire risk

The roads out of Wee Jasper are tenuous. There are three exits and each is greater than 50 kilometres in length. Two of these roads are mostly gravel and wind through dense forest – not an ideal escape route in the face of a bush fire.

The only tar road goes back to Yass, but it is also quite narrow and steep with some tight turns. People using this road to flee a bush fire are likely to find themselves in a very dangerous situation. The risk of a head on collision with on-coming vehicles is markedly increased by the likelihood of

poor visibility, trees on the road, emergency service vehicles responding to the fire, and people travelling various speeds in their bid to escape the fire.

In addition to the road's condition, there is also the condition of the vehicles using it to consider. Tourists and campers come to Wee Jasper with all sorts of gear, and in all sorts of rigs. Some in swags, some with tents, some followed by trailers stacked with lounge chairs and a fridge, and others come with caravans or fifth wheeler set-ups. One of the challenges in any evacuation would be getting this broad range of vehicles out at the same time, a problem compounded by the long, narrow, winding road. All of these factors make this road a poor choice for anyone wanting to get out of Wee Jasper safely.

Under the threat of a large fire, and where time permits,



ABOVE: Steve Bugden commencing the fit-out of the sprinkler irrigation system at Billy Grace Reserve

the Wee Jasper Reserves Trust will close the camping reserves. This will give campers time to pack up and get out of the valley by the recommended route and limit the risk of campers being trapped by fire with the only shelter being their own camping gear. Not all fire situations, however, will provide enough warning or time to get out. A fire that starts close to the village, or impacts the road back to Yass, and threatens campers in Wee Jasper may end up trapping campers.

Increasing community resilience to bush fire

In 2012 the NSW RFS provided some funding for communities to further enhance existing NSPs. This was intended to improve the integrity of NSP

buildings and to reduce the chance of embers getting in. Possible improvements included: ensuring external cladding was sound, attaching ember screens to windows, doors, guttering and vents, as well as adding ember protection to the areas underfloor. For those communities that have NSPs in open spaces, possible improvements included controlling vegetation deemed hazardous to bush fire safety and constructing steel panel fencing and extra signage in grass fire prone areas.

As a result of this program, a project was kick-started to enhance the safety of campers in Wee Jasper. Given sufficient warning, evacuation would always be the best option, but in some circumstances fires

may develop so quickly that evacuation is not possible.

Designing a solution

In such situations, staying would likely be a better option in Wee Jasper, and a lesser risk than evacuating too late.

The concept of an area that was kept green and maintained throughout summer, where campers could shelter from bush fire, was suggested. It was also mooted that sprinklers could be used as overhead sprayers to quell ember attacks. The already identified NSP in the Billy Grace Reserve is an oval. If this grassed oval could be irrigated and kept green in the lead-up to summer, the chance of a fire passing over the oval would be greatly reduced.

If a fire threatened campers in the Wee Jasper valley, the sprinklers would be turned on to maximise the safety of the people sheltering at the NSP.

"Thinking about these options for Billy Grace Reserve has been a good exercise, involving assessing the risk of many people evacuating from bush fire along a winding road back to Yass," said Southern Tablelands Zone Manager, Peter Alley. "This valley and the pressure that hundreds of campers could apply to the road in extreme conditions have caused us to look at a range of alternatives to increase bush fire safety for this type of community," he said.

Camping with confidence

It is likely that people from



ABOVE: The headwaters of Burrinjuck Dam back-up on the Goodradigbee River. The area has long been an attraction for summer campers from Canberra, Sydney and further afield. Attractions like Carey's Cave and other limestone outcrops have attracted generations of speleologists. The Fitzpatrick Track Head on the Hume and Hovel Walking Track, fishing, paddling and more recently agri-tourism has attracted people to the valley.



ABOVE: The first step was selecting a suitable sprinkler head and distribution pattern with the available water pressure.

all four camping areas in the valley will converge on the oval in an emergency, particularly given the lack of NSPs at the camping grounds, so it was important to get it right. A range of options for the oval's safety upgrade were discussed in collaboration with Steve Budgen Plumbing from Yass.

"It was clear from the outset," said Andrew Nicholls, Community Protection Planner and NSP Officer "that Steve had the fire protection and prevention knowledge, with the interests of the Yass Valley people at heart," he said.

"After assessing various combinations of sprinklers, we have ended up with a series of sprinklers on metal risers about 1.5 metres above ground. These are positioned around the outer edge of the oval, with some movable sprinklers on a hose for the centre."

This arrangement limits the number of posts in the oval, allows for an appropriate amount of water use and the system can be turned on quickly. The design also preserves the open area of the field so the annual army camps can continue and a football can still be kicked around.

This fire safety upgrade also gives the NSW RFS greater confidence in the area's ability to cope with a bush fire,

should one hit during the peak season. Commissioning and testing of the sprinkler system commenced in June 2016.

Overcoming technical challenges

Wee Jasper valley has a history of regular interruption to power supply caused by lightning strikes during electrical storms. This can put the water supply in jeopardy and threaten the NSP sprinkler system that is reliant on tank water. A continuous power supply is likely to be achieved by providing a generator, and a system to control grid power reconnection once power comes back on. While solar powered alternatives have been considered, the challenges of battery life and power storage have deemed this solution less reliable.

The system has also been designed to operate, however, without being energised by a pump. Water could be delivered under static pressure from the Billy Grace camping ground header tank – about 40 metres above the camping ground. Isolation valves have been installed as part of this project so the delivery line can be operated to prioritise the NSP irrigation system. Phase Two of the project will see the dilapidated pump shed replaced and the pump lifted above flood level.

Communicating with campers

Ensuring these camping reserves are 'bush fire ready' may also lead to the completion of a Community Protection Plan (CPP). This approach provides important information for campers and visitors on the plan of attack for the area in the event of a major fire. A CPP would mimic those completed in other fire prone communities, and yet be targeted to the local area. This would provide campers and residents with a base level of information to help maximise safety, should bush fire threaten. Information could be printed and provided to campers, or may be publicly displayed on an information board.

The Wee Jasper Reserves Trust has recently completed a Bush Fire Emergency Management and Evacuation Plan for their camping reserves, which will help maximise the safety of visitors and campers to their reserves. Visitor numbers may also continue to rise as the Wee Jasper Reserves Trust can now advertise their facilities as prepared for bush fire, regardless of the isolated location. This type of proactive planning is often requested by organisations like school groups and the scouting association.

Neighbourhood Safer Places

In response to the 2009 Black Saturday Bush Fires in Victoria that claimed 173 lives, and recommendations from the subsequent Royal Commission, the NSW RFS set about establishing Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSPs). Due to their location and separation from bush and long grass an NSP can provide some level of shelter from bush fire if needed.

A network of more than 1,000 NSPs now exists across NSW, with public halls and football fields featuring heavily in the list. To find your local NSP, check the NSW RFS website.

In combination with a personal Bush Fire Survival Plan, NSPs provide a place of last resort when people need to shelter from a bush fire. The essence of the NSP is to enhance people's safety. As such there are no provisions for pets, possessions or conveniences. At an NSP you are most likely going to live, but comfort – even food, water and toilets – are not a consideration. These locations can be used when community members' own plans fail and people need to find a safe alternative. If people plan in advance where they are going to go, and how they are going to get there, they will usually be able to find a more comfortable and appropriate place to shelter from fire.

Sheltering from bush fire could make the difference between surviving a bush fire or perishing from exposure to deadly heat.

The NSW RFS has assessed each NSP site against a range of bush fire safety criteria including the type of vegetation, slope of the land, and how far the site is from bush, grass or forested areas. If a site meets all of the required criteria it will officially be deemed an NSP by the Service.

Furthermore, each site is inspected annually; a requirement set out in the NSW Rural Fires Act. This ensures the site continues to meet the criteria and that neighbouring vegetation is far away enough not to pose a threat to the NSP if a bush fire should hit.



NSW RFS hits Mardi Gras

NSW RFS members came from all over the state to attend the 2017 Mardi Gras parade in Sydney, a celebration of LGBTQIA equality that attracts thousands of spectators. Participation in the parade promotes the NSW RFS as an organisation that accepts members from all walks of life with no discrimination.

NSW RFS member Rita marched again this year and said: "I love the way the RFS accepts all shapes, sizes, ages and gender to its ranks, and this is the main reason that I march

alongside fellow members in the Mardi Gras Parade yearly."

Over 80 attendees came from right across NSW – as far north as the Mid North Coast, as

far south as Far South Coast, and as far west as Chifley – ranging in age from 18 to 75 years. Marchers comprised volunteers, family and friends, and salaried employees.

Family and friends who were supporting volunteers were issued "NSW RFS supporters" shirts.

The NSW RFS gave out rainbow flags and rainbow epaulettes to all participants. Matt said: "The introduction

of the rainbow epaulettes and flags created a massive amount of attention from other emergency services as well as the general public. I felt that this created a whole new avenue of interaction and positive attention for the Service and in turn the trust and respect from the LGBTQIA Community."

Other emergency service agencies approached us asking where they could get their own set of rainbow epaulettes.



A CAT 1 tanker and a 23-seater bus were part of our entry as was RuFuS – an RFS Dalmatian mascot from the Lakes District (now Central Coast) – who was dancing and putting on a bit of a show for the crowd.

Leela said “I love representing the RFS in the Mardi Gras, I feel proud that through marching I am able to show that the RFS is an organization where LGBTQIA people are welcomed”.

ABOVE: RuFuS was a popular addition to the NSW RFS float



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



COMING IN 2018 • NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS 2018

NEW EVENTS AND LOCATION!



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Photo by Nick McKinlay

Feeling Thirsty?

Don't ignore that thirst! Grab yourself a drink of water, especially if you're out in the field. Dehydration and heat stress can significantly reduce firefighters' ability to work effectively in a fire situation. In fact, severe dehydration can be fatal. In the last two fire seasons, there were almost a hundred reported incidents of dehydration and heat stress among NSW RFS members.

What is dehydration?

Our bodies contain a lot of water and we are constantly losing fluids through normal bodily functions. Dehydration occurs when your body doesn't have enough fluids to function normally.

Hot environmental conditions or strenuous exercise put you at particular risk because you lose fluids through sweating, expiration (when you breathe out) and urination. Dehydration reduces blood pressure and, in extreme cases, will lead your body to shut down altogether.

Symptoms of dehydration can range from moderate thirst and tiredness, to cramps and dizziness, through to life threatening complications if your organs start to shut down through low blood flow and oxygen starvation.

How do I know if I'm dehydrated?

The pullout overleaf gives a guide to symptoms of dehydration. With mild dehydration, you will be thirsty and your mouth, lips and tongue will feel dry. You will not be urinating as often and, when you do, you'll notice that your urine is darker than usual (however if you are taking vitamin supplements, your urine colour may be affected). You might have a headache and even feel a bit dizzy or "vague" and lethargic.

With the onset of severe dehydration, these symptoms will get worse. You'll have an increased heart rate, rapid breathing and have a weak rapid pulse. Your legs and arms will start to cramp. The danger at this point is that you will stop thinking clearly and make

poor decisions. If one of your colleagues appears unusually irritable, slow or drowsy, they might well be suffering from severe dehydration. Get them to have a break and grab a drink of water for you both.

Who is at risk?

While everyone can get dehydrated, children and the elderly or those with certain medical conditions, such as diabetes, are more susceptible. Some medical conditions and medications can increase your risk of dehydration and heat stress. Obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes make it more likely that you will dehydrate or have difficulty regulating your body temperature, as will taking diuretics or hypertension medication. If you have any of these conditions, or take these

medications, it's useful to speak with your doctor to ask about the increased risks.

But dehydration can occur in any age group and especially if you are exerting yourself more than usual.

Why are NSW RFS members particularly at risk?

Your PPC protects you from radiant and conductive heat, but its fire retardant properties also reduce your body's ability to dissipate the heat. You'll be pleased to hear that developments in fibre technology mean that the new PPC is a lot lighter and has better breathability.

Firefighters are working in hot environments and doing strenuous activity that increases fluid loss.

Continued on page 28

Dehydration

Dehydration can seriously affect your abilities when attending an incident and, at worst, can cause serious illness or death. Here's how to avoid dehydration, recognise the symptoms and treat it.



EARLY SYMPTOMS

- Thirst
- Dry mouth, lips and tongue
- Feeling faint
- Headache
- Not urinating as often
- Fatigue



SEVERE SYMPTOMS

- Exaggerated early symptoms
- Increased heart rate
- Rapid breathing
- Fast, weak pulse
- Cramping in arms and legs
- Extreme thirst
- Low blood pressure
- Fever
- Feeling faint, confused, irritable or drowsy

Prevent heat-related illness

LISTEN TO YOUR THIRST! DEHYDRATION CAN BE FATAL!

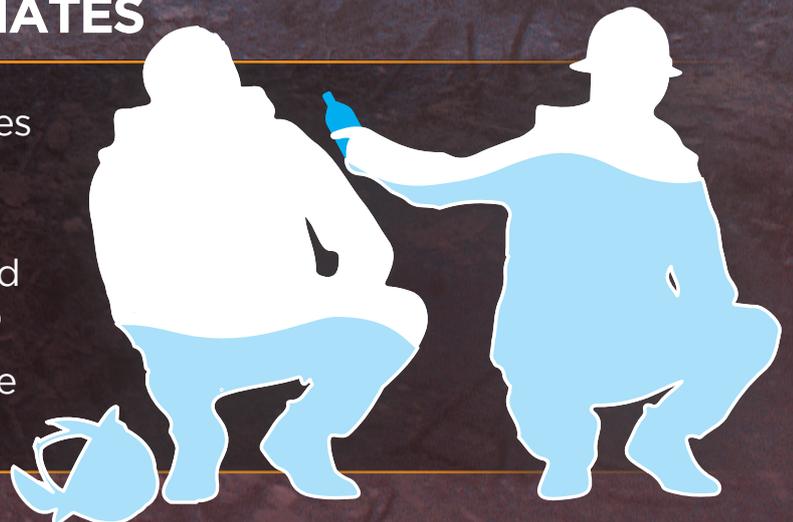
PREVENTION

- Drink often, before you get thirsty
- Eat fluid-rich and carbohydrate-rich foods regularly
- Reduce workload according to conditions
- Watch for signs of heat-related illness
- Take time to acclimatise
- Designate a buddy and ask how they feel periodically
- Take time to rest and cool down
- Sit somewhere cool, rest and rehydrate frequently
- Apply IMSAFER principles



LOOK OUT FOR YOUR MATES

- Look out for each other – does your mate look hot and faint, drowsy or fatigued?
- If you're thirsty, there's a good chance your co-worker is too
- Grab a drink of water and one for your mate, too



Dehydration happens gradually at first, so you might not notice anything more than feeling thirsty. But as you become more dehydrated you will lose energy and focus, everything will be harder to do and you will be more at risk of injury.

Apart from the obviously arduous nature of your tasks, one reason RFS members are particularly in danger is that the symptoms of dehydration or severe heat exhaustion might be mistaken as the stresses of the job: increased heart rate, fatigue, overheating and fuzzy headedness.

And as people concentrate on their tasks they tend to get tunnel vision and may not realise they're thirsty and forget to drink fluids. But if you're thirsty, that's exactly what you need to do. And if you are feeling thirsty, then it's likely your mates around you are too. Look out for each other and prompt them to take a break and get a drink as well.

When you are in a pressured firefighting situation, your priority is saving other people's lives and property. But it's important to remember that you need to look after yourself so you can function effectively during an incident, whether it's on the front line or behind the scenes. Proper hydration improves your tolerance levels in high heat and high stress environments.

What about in winter?

You might associate dehydration only with summer scorchers or fire ground situations, but it doesn't have to be hot for you to get dehydrated. Dehydration

can occur any time you are exerting yourself physically, such as clearing scrub or working on a winter control burn, or attending the site of an emergency at night. Any work involving continuous strenuous physical activity puts you at risk of dehydration, so don't ignore those "I'm thirsty" signs.

How can I prevent dehydration?

Drinking water regularly, eating fluid-rich and carbohydrate-rich foods, avoiding alcohol, coffee and caffeine-rich "energy drinks" are basic steps in avoiding dehydration, especially in hot or high energy situations. It's not unusual for fire fighters to consume 150–200mls of fluid every 20 minutes in order to replace what their bodies lose in a high-exertion fire suppression situation.

Drink more fluids than you would usually, that is drink before you feel thirsty. You know you are well hydrated if your urine is very pale in colour. As part of your PPE, you can get a hydration "backpack" with a refillable bacteria-resistant bladder that you can wear. Also, the new PPC has pockets that are large enough to fit bottles of water as well as radios.

I'm dehydrated! What do I do?

Drink water! If you think someone is dehydrated, get them to sit down and rest in the shade, use a cold pack on the back of their neck and, if they have a temperature and seem drowsy or confused, call for medical assistance immediately as they may need intravenous fluid replacement. If in doubt, always seek medical assistance.

Heat illnesses and dehydration

Dehydration can go hand in hand with heat exhaustion and heat stroke. (Heat stroke is sometimes called "sun stroke" but can actually occur even if you are not exposed to the sun). These serious conditions occur when your body temperature rises to a point where the organs can't function. Fluids help the body control its temperature, but if the body's core temperature rises too high the body can no longer cool itself. The body's mechanisms for sweating stop working effectively and, in extreme cases, heat stroke can occur with convulsions, loss of consciousness and heart failure.

Decreased blood flow reduces the oxygen to your vital organs and is life-threatening. For mild heat stress move out of the sun and sit down in a shaded area or, better still, sit in the truck with the air conditioning on, loosen and remove clothing (while maintaining modesty) and place a wet cloth on the back of the neck. Plunging your hands and forearms into water

will help bring down your body temperature.

If someone is affected, apply first aid techniques and call for medical assistance as necessary.

Be a buddy

The usual advice for coping with extreme heat is to conserve energy and stay out of the sun in the hottest part of the day, but that's unlikely for RFS members in fire season. So remember IMSAFER principles, avoid excessive caffeinated or sugary drinks, keep drinking water, eat fluid-rich and carbohydrate-rich foods and look out for yourself and your mates to make sure they are taking a break, especially when you're on the fire ground.

LEFT: This weather gauge reminds us of the extreme heat conditions in which fire fighters often work. This was in the Pappinbarra fires in February 2017. Photo by Shannon Mason. RIGHT: Photo by Karl Hofman.





Rolling Out the New PPC

Over a hundred NSW RFS members trialling the new personal protective clothing (PPC) have been impressed with its improved fit, weight and breathability. The NSW RFS are planning to progressively roll out the new PPC for the benefit of members.

Background

In September 2014 when the Commissioner instigated a review of the bush fire personal protective clothing (PPC) he wanted to ensure that all members were using PPC that provided maximum protection, comfort and functionality. The NSW RFS Personal Protective Clothing Working Group reviewed the PPC in light of world-class standards, research, members' feedback, firefighting practice and risk. The new PPC had to work for the full variety of members and the diverse activities they undertake.

The trial process

One hundred members trialled the new PPC – fifty from target groups specifically chosen to maximise the garments' exposure in diverse situations and another 50 members chosen at random from those who provided written feedback as part of the pre-trial evidence gathering about existing PPC.

Participants trialled a number of prototype cargo pants, jackets and overpants in a range of fire-safe fabrics (Tecasafe, Karvin and Ecodry) over a period of two years. Each of the selected pilot fabrics addressed the

minimum performance compliance requirements of AS/NZS 4824.

The trials reflected the wide range of activities that members are called on to perform – from responding to an MVA, controlled burns, training, flood response, remote area work, public liaison to attending fire incidents in all kinds of terrain and weather.

Trial participants were encouraged to give active consideration to the garments and to provide honest feedback.

The working group examined the feedback from members, then came up with a wish list of new features they would like to see included within the design of the new PPC.

Improvements in PPC fabric

The garments are designed to

“I really love that the service has committed to female PPC and as a result my PPC fits now. Instead of feeling like I'm dressing up in someone else's PPC, it feels like the PPC belongs to me!”



protect against normal levels of exposure to radiant heat from a fire and survivable fire entrapment / over-run conditions, together with normal wear and tear associated with firefighting and other operational tasks. They do this by being made from a heavy cotton fabric, reinforced at key points such as the knees, and treated with Proban flame retardant. The retardant is designed to prevent the material from self-sustaining a flame.

The current Proban cotton at 340 grams per square metre of fabric is now seen as a "heavy fabric" and while it offers significant protection to the fire fighters during operations, it is now better understood that the weight and weave of the fabric can contribute to the heat related illnesses (that is, heat exhaustion / stroke) of members when working in operational conditions. Analysis of incidents received by the RFS through the WHS Section, indicates that members are more likely to receive an injury/incident from a heat related illness against all other types of injuries, that is, strains, sprains, lacerations, burns etc.

There has been rapid and extensive fabric development in the past five years within the fire-related industry. These next generation fabrics afford comparable protection to the current PPC but are significantly lighter, ranging between 235–270 grams per square metre. These fabrics are inherently fire retardant (that is, they do not need to be treated with a flame retardant). The newer, lighter in weight, fabrics have an increased ability to "wick" (dissipate) water and reduce metabolic heat while at the same time offer a comparable level of protection as the current Proban cotton fabric.

Feedback from members

Bruce Davies from Jerrabomberra Creek and the

"I really like that the service has tried to cater for the needs of all members. We don't always fight large fires, off Cat 1s. I feel like the process of designing this PPC has tried to take into account the diverse nature of our service – from the way we access fires – boats, helicopters, trucks and fleet, to the incidents we attend – fires, storms and floods – just to name a few."

“After being winched in and controlling the fire, the value of the new PPC became very evident. When we took our jackets off to cool down, the two guys with the old gear were dripping with sweat while the two with the new lighter, breathable PPC were dry in comparison”

Lake George RART team said he was sold on the new gear when they had a training day and two members had the trial Ecodry fabric PPC while two others were wearing the old gear.

“On this occasion after being winched in and controlling the fire, the value of the new PPC became very evident. When we took our jackets off to cool down, the two guys with the old gear were dripping with sweat while the two with the new lighter, breathable PPC were dry in comparison. The old fabric in a sweaty environment would stick to your legs, making it even harder to lift your legs over logs, so it was fatiguing.”

In 2015 and 2016 Callum Whitford was part of the Rapid Aerial Response Teams around Lake George near the ACT fighting bush and grass fires in Canberra’s surrounding region. He commented that “while waiting at the airbase for a job, I would normally not wear my existing PPC jacket due to the oppressive heat. However, with the trial PPC, I was able to comfortably wear the PPC jacket throughout the day. The jacket was lightweight,

athletically cut and breathable. This allowed me to decrease my response times, and increased my effectiveness when on the fire ground due to my lower core temperature”.

The fabric is more comfortable against the skin too, commented Kellie Thompson, and is certainly much lighter. Del Mortyne from the Waugoola Brigade noted that the first fabric she trialled was itchy but the subsequent two fabric types were fine.

Andrew Cutler, West Pittwater Brigade Captain, said he appreciates that the new PPC fabric is more breathable and dries quickly, so reducing heat stress for the firefighter. He said that on the fire boats, the crews do a lot of climbing on steep terrain, so really appreciate the lighter fabric and the fact that it dries quickly when wet. The extra weight of the old PPC cotton based fabric when wet added to fatigue and heat exhaustion.

Callum Whitford further recalls the stark contrast between using both old and new PPC in Tasmania: “I distinctly remember fighting fires in

Tasmania in 2013 with the old PPC. We were flown out to a remote area in South West Tasmania in order to fight an underground fire burning through peat. I walked kilometres through these peat bogs, and I would have to hitch up my trousers every time I had to step over a log. It was thoroughly tedious and difficult when carrying portable pumps. As you might imagine, this builds up a sweat. However, once you stopped working you rapidly became cold in the wet cotton PPC, and in an environment like Tasmania this can prove dangerous.

“I was also lugging a chainsaw all day through Tasmanian wilderness in 2013, and had to hitch up my trousers over every log and it got tiring. In 2016 in Tasmania, he was a crew leader of a remote area firefighting team in Cradle Mountain [and wearing the trial PPC].

“I was back again lugging a chainsaw through the Tasmanian wilderness, except this time it felt like I was floating. [The new cut] allowed a great range of motion in my shoulders, allowing me to use

a chainsaw with ease.

“The trial PPC material was lightweight and breathable, and it was quick to dry out. While calling in water bombing from helicopters, I was caught in the drop zone and drenched. Luckily the water in Tasmania is pristine! If I had been wearing the existing PPC, it wouldn’t have dried on the fire ground and my team and I would have needed evacuating. However due to the trial PPC, in under an hour I was dry again, and able to continue fighting the fire.”

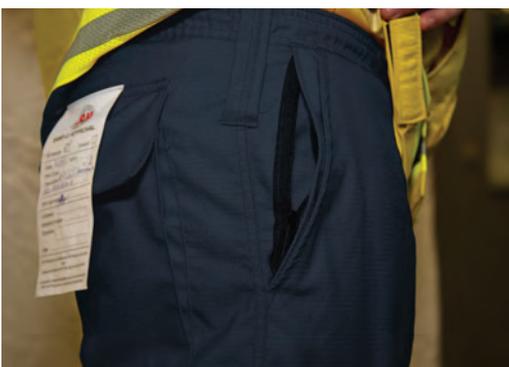
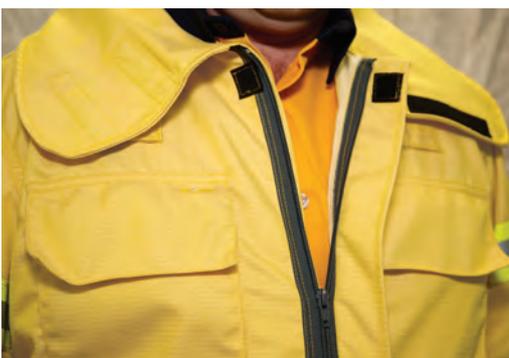
Specific design for women members

As part of the review of the PPC the Commissioner asked the Working Group to design a style that was equally appropriate for women members of the Service, acknowledging that the existing PPC was designed as a unisex garment and that any changes needed to directly reflect the NSW RFS membership.

The cut of the existing PPC impedes movement for many women. RAFT member, Stephanie Looie from the Hornsby–Kuring-gai District) said, “I’m small (160 cms) and light, and have always found the existing PPC unwieldy ... The crotch of the pants came most of the way to my knees ... I’d also have to leave the bottom button of my jacket undone to accommodate my hips and so I could actually move my legs to walk.”

Stephanie trialled a range of the PPC styles that were being considered in different contexts: “I used them both in the Budda Creek/Terra Bora fires in the Hawkesbury, in Tasmania, on RART fires, as well as during training, callouts and hazard reductions with RAFT and my local brigade.

She noticed an improvement in the design immediately. “I think my first “ah hah” moment was when I pulled on the second redesigned jacket. I could actually see my hands sticking out the ends of the



The new PPC has user-friendly features, such as the two-way heavy gauge zip closure on the jacket, improved trouser pockets and roomy radio pockets on the back of the jacket.

sleeves (not just the tips of my fingers). I could do the zip right up, from bottom to top and I could take a full stride. I remember thinking, "Wow, that's what it's supposed to feel like!"

"The second "ah hah" moment, was more of a non-moment. I realised that I had climbed into the truck without having to stop and hitch my pants up. I'd just climbed into the truck, like a normal person."

Better design for movement

Indeed, a large number of trial respondents, men and women, said that the shorter length of the jacket was better for walking and movement, when climbing into trucks and over logs, and when using a McLeod tool or chainsaw.

Callum Whitford commented: "The cut and the non-elastic waistband of the trousers was the big winner for me. The athletic cut of the trousers allowed unrestricted leg movement, and was substantially less fatiguing."

Kellie Thompson who's been a volunteer for five years with the Clarence Town Brigade said she appreciated that the new cut didn't restrict her movement when climbing through fences and thick scrub.

Pockets and other features

Other handy features have been added to the PPC. Michael James said "the bigger cargo pockets make it lots easier to carry bulky items – like an iPad mini". Del Mortyne appreciates that the pockets fit her phone, a bottle of water, gloves, RFS pocket book, a notebook and a torch.

A number of members commented on the radio pockets. Bruce Davies particularly likes the radio pouches on the back of the jacket and the large leg pockets. The radio pockets are designed so you can wear the radios at all times, rather than strapping them to your pack. And with the way they're positioned, you can sit in the truck without them sticking into your back.

Steph Looie was initially sceptical about the radio pockets, "I'm quite short, so I was doubtful that I'd be able to wear two radios and put a pack on top of them without them digging into my back, or that I'd be able to drive the truck without the aerial sticking into me. I was really pleasantly surprised."

Small things make a difference too, such as Velcro around the bottom of the pants, which makes it easier to tighten them. The initial trial gear that Andrew Cutler wore had a drawstring elasticised cuff on the pants, but he found it caught on things in the bush. He gave this feedback in the early trial stages and the new PPC has the Velcro tabs instead. Similarly, the zips were changed to a heavier gauge and the radio pockets enlarged to make it easier to get the radios in and out of the pockets. Del Mortyne said that when she first wore the new yellows to an MVA she noticed she didn't have to take off her jacket or spend time pulling it up to get in the appliance. She could just use the two-way front zip to unzip it from the bottom.

These adjustments after field trials show how important it's been to trial the various versions in actual brigade work.

Do I look big in this?

Even a better designed PPC won't be comfortable if you are wearing the wrong size. You wouldn't expect to be able to run comfortably in joggers that are two sizes too big. It might sound obvious but when you order your new PPC, order the right size. Don't assume you'll take the same size as you wear in footy gear, workwear or tshirts.

The old PPC was bulkier and the overpants were designed to fit over existing clothes. The new cargo pants are designed to be worn on their own, while the cut of the overpants and jacket are different. There's no need to go "up a size" for the overpants. Look at the approved sizing charts, measure yourself and get the right size. Sizing charts are available on the MyRFS website and sizing kits with sample sizes of the new PPC are being sent out to districts progressively. There is the option to get a made-to-measure suit of PPC if the existing sizes don't fit you, but they can take up to six weeks to be made and delivered.

Roll out and delivery

As you can see from the improvements that have been made, everyone is keen to know when the new kit will be delivered. With over 73,000 members needing the new PPC, you can imagine that resupplying everyone will take some time and will require a strategic approach.

The new PPC will be rolled out in stages which is expected



As well as responding to feedback from members, the prototypes had to comply with "Australian Standard AS/NZS 4824 Protective Clothing For Firefighters" which specifies methods of test and minimum performance requirements for protective clothing to be worn in wildland firefighting and associated activities, just as does the existing PPC. The NSW RFS has long undertaken PPC testing at a level more stringent than is required by Australian Standards.

One such additional test regime, was carried out by NSW RFS engineers in conjunction with AFAC and supported by the independent research team at the University of Alberta, Canada and involves the testing of fully assembled PPC garments. This is undertaken in a specialist laboratory on a flash fire thermal mannequin with 110 thermal sensors, designed to measure surface and body temperatures to assess the potential for burn injury in a fire situation.

The NSW RFS has for more than 20 years, undertaken this test regime each time the PPC contract is re-tendered and has included used PPC gathered from the field at the 3, 5 and 10-year points, to test whether there is any degradation of the protection qualities.

This has enabled the NSW RFS to compile a significant history of consistently measured performance data that has been gathered over time.

to span three years, for a number of reasons: to ensure that the stock of existing PPC, which remain compliant is not wasted; to ensure those who most need the new kit receive it, and to spread out the cost. As the safety of our members is paramount, no member will be without protective gear and must not enter a fire ground or other hazardous environment without proper protection.

We are gradually running down existing PPC stock, but timely provision remains a priority. As the existing PPC was never designed to fit the female form – and consequently has significant shortcomings for women members – new PPC will be directed in the first instance to female members who require replacements.

To assist with the transition to next generation PPC, the management of existing stock has changed. Stock will now

be stored centrally at the state warehouse at Glendenning. The warehouse will have extended operating hours to ensure timely delivery of PPC.

Volunteers requiring PPC should contact their district office as is the usual process. The ordering process through SAP is unchanged. But once the order has been processed, PPC will be despatched from the state warehouse at Glendenning via courier and delivered to the fire control centre. The district will notify the member that their PPC has arrived and is available for collection from the fire control centre.

Existing PPC still meets the most stringent standards for protective clothing, so unless your protective gear is damaged, you can keep using it.



Fundraising for Child Protection Unit

The NSW RFS are used to helping out the community and we are really proud to support a cause that helps both children who have been abused and their families.

Bobby Webber has had a really tough start to life. He was abused by his uncle and was admitted to the care of a Child Protection Unit (CPU) at the Randwick Children's Hospital where he and his mother, Elise, have received enormous support.

The Children's Hospital at Westmead also has a Child Protection Unit (CPU), which provides a range of services for vulnerable and abused babies and children, while also supporting their families. Many of these children have suffered multiple forms of abuse including being exposed to family violence, experiences that leave them with terror and fear from living in an unsafe world.

Their parents often want the best for their children but some lack the capacity, knowledge and skills to parent, after experiencing their own childhood traumas.

"Safe to Connect, Play and Grow" Program

The Child Protection Unit has

helped many abused children and now the Unit is hoping to pilot an innovative program called the *Safe to Connect, Play and Grow* program.

This new program, which aims to strengthen relationships and increase positive experiences and play between the carer and child, is based on the latest research about the impact of trauma on brain development and attachment relationships. Current knowledge in this field indicates that early intervention can prevent some of the long term impacts of abuse and neglect on children into adulthood. The program will be run by an occupational therapist and other Allied Health Specialists.

Coffee4Kids

When folks at the NSW RFS heard the Child Protection Unit needed only \$80,000 to get the program off the ground, we thought we can help with that!

The Coffee4Kids Foundation was founded in 2006 by Assistant Commissioner

Steve Yorke, former Assistant Commissioner Mark Croswell, currently the Director General of Emergency Management Australia. NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons is the patron of the Coffee4Kids Foundation.

Over the past months the Coffee4Kids Foundation, supported by the NSW RFS, has held a number of events to raise funds to support the Child Protection Unit and its program.

The Coffee4Kids Charity Ball at Luna Park in Sydney was the primary fundraiser for 2017 and was a celebration of the ten-year anniversary of the Foundation.

Guest speakers included: Detective Chief Inspector Peter Yeomans (Child Abuse Squad, NSW Police Force), Robyn Lamb who heads up the Child Protection Unit at the hospital, and Beth Fulton the occupational therapist with the unit.

The Foundation has held other fundraisers this year, such as a Christmas in July event at NSW RFS headquarters.

At this event, the Coffee4Kids Foundation presented a cheque of \$45,000 to the Child Protection Unit, the

total of funds raised since last year when we made the commitment to support the Unit. Robyn Lamb (Co-head of the CPU) and Beth Fulton from the Children's Hospital at Westmead attended and we were delighted to host Bobby and Elise Webber as well.

If you want to learn more about Bobby's hard start to life, his courage and his mum Elise's strength to help him overcome it, look at C4K Foundation's Facebook page. We are grateful for Emma Husar, Federal Member for Lindsay, for her general support and for putting us in touch with Elise and Bobby Webber.

Play a part in breaking the cycle and consequences of abuse

If you would like to help, you can donate online at www.coffee4kids.org.au/donate Learn more about the C4K Foundation via Instagram and at the C4K Foundation's Facebook page.

ABOVE: The fundraising committee with Elise and Bobby Webber (and Santa) were there when Beth Fulton presented our cheque to Robyn Lamb.

Community Engagement Forums

By Jacqueline Murphy

Every two years, the Community Engagement Team from Headquarters pack their bags and begin travelling around the state to meet with volunteers and staff at the Regional Community Engagement Forums.

One Forum is held for each of the four NSW RFS regions and attracts up to 100 community engagement volunteers to each one. This year the Forums were held in Wyong (Region East), Tamworth (Region North), Temora (Region West) and Batemans Bay (Region South) throughout May and June.

Nearly 300 members participated and they represented 41 of the 45 NSW RFS Districts. Nearly half of the participants had not attended a Community Engagement Forum previously. Participants noted a very obvious and definite shift in the way Community Engagement is moving forward.

The newly appointed Manager Community Engagement, Anthony Bradstreet, was keen to meet volunteers and to hear views on the state of Community Engagement in the NSW RFS. The team have taken an inclusive approach, seeking consultation from the members on the ground to inform the Service's plan for community engagement.

"Being new to the Service, I wanted to meet volunteers and to listen to their interests

and concerns," he said, "The Forums presented an excellent opportunity to consult with members about the direction of Community Engagement for the NSW RFS. We had some rough ideas and a strategy, but throughout the Forums we were able to hear from volunteers and adjust our [strategy] accordingly."

"Over the past few years we heard that Community Engagement has struggled to find a clear direction through a period of instability. The Forums were a chance to listen to members and to build in some of the robust feedback from volunteers."

"It was really gratifying to hear how many members said that they did indeed feel that they were being listened to – because they were. Each week we would take their ideas and re-write or re-adjust the strategy accordingly."

In each of the four Forums Anthony Bradstreet and the other members of the Community Engagement team presented the strategy and some of the key principles and approaches we will be using in the coming years. This included

a presentation on Risk Planning from Aaron Howard, Behavioural Insights by Jacqueline Murphy and How to Demonstrate Effectiveness from Tony Jarrett.

"Having the whole Headquarters team explain our process, thinking and approach is important," Anthony Bradstreet said. "While a lot of great work has been done in the past, we were not always able to explain its value to other parts of the Service. This approach will allow us to take measured, evidence-based decisions and to test and trial our programs as we develop them."

"I am convinced that the result will be greater understanding, value and effectiveness of community engagement and that means more people are safe when it comes to bush fire."

New Community Engagement Directions

After consulting with over 500 people around NSW, the Community Engagement Team has been able to deliver the NSW RFS Community Engagement Strategic Directions 2017–2021.

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons launched the Strategic Direction officially at the Leadership and Young Member Forum in late July 2017.

The NSW RFS Community Engagement Strategic Directions 2017–2021 sets out the Service's plans and approach for community engagement in the years ahead, to ensure our activities are focused on changing behaviour and targeting the people most at risk from the impact of bush fire and other emergencies.

"The Strategic Directions has been really well received and I think the input from the volunteers ensures that it is relevant and useful."

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons was enthusiastic about the new directions. "I encourage you all to be a part of the implementation of the Strategic Direction. Start a conversation with your brigade members. See how you could contribute to preparing your community. When the fire inevitably comes, we are all thankful for your effort to prepare a community. It helps save lives."



Lego and pipe cleaners

Each of the Community Engagement Forums was interactive and featured presentations of best practice and successful programs in the local area. Some of the most effective work going on within NSW was presented, including a program with Indigenous communities on the Far North Coast and the new resources for students in Years 5 and 6 who are now studying bush fire in depth.

Other favourites at the Forums were Glenn O'Rourke's presentation

on the "Guide to Making a Bush Fire Survival Plan" and a presentation on using Lego and pipe cleaners to build Community Protection Plans. As the key Community Engagement event each year, Get Ready Weekend was discussed. Popular talking points were the new table, kits and maps available to those brigades participating in the weekend.

Copies of the Community Engagement Strategic Directions 2017–2021 are available on MyRFS.

The Working with Schools Guide is also available on MyRFS.

Join the Community Engagement Facebook page to stay in touch with the initiatives and growth with NSW RFS Community Engagement.

TOP: Getting familiar with the resources that are available to Community Engagers was part of the Forums.

ABOVE LEFT: The Lego and pipe cleaners exercise had everyone working out the bush fire risk in their local area at the Region South Forum.

ABOVE RIGHT: District Officer Leanne Bell from Lower Hunter Valley, presented at each of the four Forums. Here she is speaking to volunteers at Region East about the Working with Schools Guide.

Photos by Jacqueline Murphy, Melissa McLean and James Morris.



Recognising the Employers who Support our Volunteers

Twelve employers were awarded the Supportive Employer Program Special Commendations to publicly recognise their essential contribution to the volunteering effort of the NSW RFS. These employers have gone "above and beyond" to help the NSW RFS and its volunteers protect the community from bush fires and other emergencies. NSW RFS volunteers nominated their employers for this award to acknowledge their support of their volunteering for the NSW RFS. Businesses range from self-employed, sole traders and small to large businesses/organisations.

When Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons introduced the NSW RFS Special Commendation awards, he said it was important "to promote and thank" these businesses/organisations. Since 2013 when the Supportive Employer Program was established, 60 businesses have received special commendations and 231 have received certificates of thanks for their active support of their employee members.

The NSW RFS depends on employers encouraging their employees to volunteer and providing them flexibility to leave work to attend incidents without financial disadvantage. Businesses can incur financial costs when they release their

employees to attend incidents during work hours, and even more so when employers themselves volunteer to assist. This is especially the case when they are small businesses or a sole trader, such as John Collins of Arakoon Computers in South West Rocks. When he goes out to an incident he closes his business or sometimes his father will come in and run the shop for him.

The Commissioner emphasised that he also wants "to identify and promote the reciprocal benefits" for employers and volunteers. Employers agreed that they benefit from having volunteer members on their staff. Members use and develop skills through volunteering that they then bring back to their work – organisational skills, dependability and team work – skills that feed back into the business.

The Southern Highlands Christian School has a long tradition of supporting NSW RFS volunteers. The principal, Andrew Middleton, received the award on behalf of the school and its board. He said "The school appreciates the Special Commendation but the value of having an association with the Rural Fire Service and its volunteers far outweighs any recognition."

The school sees this relationship as mutually

beneficial and Andrew encourages other employers to support and promote volunteering with the NSW RFS. Megan Moore and Paul Sloan, have been teachers at Southern Highlands Christian School for over 20 years and are active NSW RFS members. Andrew commented that "Megan and Paul bring to the school the RFS trained qualities of teamwork, calmness in a crisis and the ability to see the overall picture of a situation. As a Christian School community, we support and uphold similar values to that of the Rural Fire Service in community involvement, leadership and demonstrating servant-hood."

Nominations for the Supportive Employer Program Special Commendation or Certificate are open all year round with application forms available on MyRFS or the NSW RFS website.

The following employers were acknowledged as Supportive Employers in the ceremony.

Airservices Australia

Airservices Australia is a government-owned organisation providing air traffic control and aviation rescue fire fighting services to the aviation industry. Nominated by David Hanzl, Captain of the Stoney Creek Brigade, Airservices was

nominated for releasing David, a new contract employee, during work time to attend the Taliesin fire where David worked for eight days. As an active volunteer, David is also provided with time off to attend to other incidents as required.

Arakoon Computers

Arakoon Computers is owned by NSW RFS volunteer, John Collins. John is self-employed in South West Rocks providing computer sales, computer upgrades, accessories, support and mobile service and computer repairs. Arakoon Computers is proactive and 100 per cent committed to promoting and supporting NSW RFS call outs and emergency incidents. All four staff members are NSW RFS volunteers and as a result, it is necessary for the business to close its doors during emergencies.

Hawkesbury City Council

Hawkesbury City Council is the largest local government area in metropolitan NSW. Nominated by Bruce Earle a Captain from the Freemans Reach Brigade, the Council provides Special Leave entitlements to Bruce and six other staff members who are NSW RFS volunteers. Bruce has been able to attend to call outs and emergency incidents during weekday work hours along with deployments to other



“Being the owner and sole trader provides both advantages and disadvantages [when volunteering]. There have been times I have had to close the shop to assist with a call out.”
John Collins, Arakoon Computers, South West Rocks

states for the past 30 years.

K-Line Agriculture

K-Line Agriculture began in 1993 and is an Australian-owned family run business, dedicated to the manufacture and supply of quality agricultural machinery. Nominated by Luke Bryant, a Senior Deputy Captain from the Waugoola Brigade, K-Line Agriculture releases Luke and two other staff who are active NSW RFS volunteers during work hours to attend to callouts.

Nowchem

Nowchem is a Chemical and Pharmaceutical manufacturing business located in Nowra in the Shoalhaven region of NSW, Australia. Nowchem produces over 500 specialty chemicals including various cleaning products, disinfectants, water treatment chemicals and topical pharmaceuticals. Nominated by Casey Addison, a Senior Deputy Captain from the Tomerong Rural Fire Brigade, Nowchem provides Casey and another NSW RFS volunteer with paid leave to attend fire emergencies. The organisation also encourages participation in various events including the cadet program which assist the community and youth of the region.

NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet

The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) leads the NSW

public sector to deliver on the Government’s commitments and priorities. DPC was nominated by Matthew Schroder, a Deputy Captain from the Glenhaven Brigade. When pre-emptive strike teams are required, Matthew is able to work from home. Flexibility is also provided by reassigning Matthew’s work duties and accommodating his return to work at short notice.

Public Service Association of NSW

The Public Service Association (PSA) is the public sector union and the proud defender of public services in NSW, representing employees in diverse roles across state government departments, state-owned corporations, schools, universities and TAFE NSW. The PSA was nominated by Greg Corrigan, a Group Captain from the Blue Mountains District, for providing over 25 years of support to Greg’s NSW RFS volunteer activities. This support has extended to periods of time off to attend incidents or activities without any disadvantage to Greg.

Real Aussie Sheds

Real Aussie Sheds is a national developer and supplier of residential, commercial and industrial sheds. Based in the Shoalhaven region, the organisation designs and

constructs granny flats and storage facilities. Real Aussie Sheds was nominated by Ash Charlton from the Wreck Bay Brigade for encouraging staff to join a NSW RFS Brigade. Working in a high-level management position within the company, Ash has never been refused time off from work to attend to incidents, nor has he been financially disadvantaged due to his NSW RFS volunteer commitment.

Scientific Devices Australia

Scientific Devices Australia is a quality certified business for Electronic Test and Measurement Instrumentation. The organisation has been nominated by Christopher Dawes from the Charmhaven Brigade in recognition of its longstanding support of Christopher during his 19 years of activity with NSW RFS.

Southern Highlands Christian School

Southern Highlands Christian School has been educating students from Prep to Year 12 for over thirty years. The school has been nominated by Paul Sloan, a Deputy Captain from Mittagong Brigade, and Megan Moore from Robertson Brigade, for the support provided during numerous deployments. Paul and Megan, both of whom are teachers, have been provided with extended periods of leave

without financial disadvantage. The school also supports the NSW RFS Cadet Program and allows Paul time to plan and conduct courses.

Southern Hospitality Australia Pty Ltd

Southern Hospitality provides products and services to the hospitality business. Nominated by Damien Fear from the Tumbledown Dick Brigade, the organisation regularly demonstrates its support of Damien’s NSW RFS commitment with leave provided without financial disadvantage during periods when it is necessary for Damien to attend deployments and to participate in related activities.

Storage King

Storage King provides simple storage solutions. The organisation has been nominated by Shaun Cox, a Captain from the Clarence Town Brigade. When required, NSW RFS volunteers are provided with extended leave without financial disadvantage. Storage King also supports the community and people who have lost possessions during fire emergencies, by enabling its premises to be a drop off point for donations.

ABOVE CENTRE: John Collins, NSW RFS volunteer and owner of Arakoon Computers

Young People in Emergency Services Awards

An awards ceremony was hosted by the Minister for Emergency Services, the Hon. Troy Grant MP, in April to acknowledge the contribution of young members of the NSW RFS and NSW SES and the students who took part in both services' Secondary School Cadet Programs. The ceremony was held during National Youth Week to reflect the purpose of the Awards in promoting and celebrating youth participation in Emergency Services.

Two NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) young members alongside a cadet from the NSW RFS Secondary School Cadet Program have been recognized for their contributions to their brigade, school and their local communities, as part of the 2017 "Young People in Emergency Services Awards".

The two young volunteers have been named as recipients of the inaugural "Young Volunteer of the Year Award" a newly established annual

awards program comprising two age categories for NSW RFS young members: aged between 12–15 years and 16–25 years. Another award recipient has been named this year's "Cadet of the Year" for outstanding participation in the NSW RFS Secondary School Cadet Program.

The three recipients are:

- **NSW RFS Young Volunteer of the Year in the 12–15 years** – Mr Alexander Slade, Williamtown/Salt Ash Rural Fire Brigade, Region East
- **NSW RFS Young Volunteer of the Year in the 16–25 years** – Ms Elizabeth Butt, Bendick Murrell brigade, Region West
- **NSW RFS Cadet of the Year** – Mr Javen Ricevuto, Balranald Central School, Region South

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said "It is great to see the engagement and commitment of young people in Emergency Service volunteering ... The effort and

enthusiasm of young members in the NSW RFS is significant and the single awards ceremony acknowledges these young leaders' hard work, camaraderie and community participation."

Javen Ricevuto from Balranald Central School (Region South) was named as the winner of NSW RFS Cadet of the Year for 2016.

Coordinator of the Secondary School Cadet Program at Balranald Central School, Frances Medianik, said "nothing was ever too hard for Javen and he would put every effort into completing any task ... he was quick to pick up skills and put them into action ... Javen demonstrated great maturity and an ability to work in a team throughout the Cadet program. He displayed initiative and confidence when he controlled a situation in a simulated car fire scenario; politely asking "members of the public" to leave the area as they were obstructing

firefighting activities."

Alexander Slade, young member from Williamtown/Salt Ash brigade in Region East is the NSW RFS Young Volunteer of the Year for 2016 (12–15 years).

Alexander was chosen for this award based on the nomination from his Captain David Thomas of Williamtown/Salt Ash brigade. Alexander has been an active member of his brigade since joining as junior member in 2014. Captain Thomas said "Alex displayed his enthusiasm, initiative and passion for supporting his Brigade during Pump Station 9 fire at Salt Ash in 2015 through organising relief crews and changeovers without the need for assistance. He displays maturity beyond his years and is a well-regarded member of the Williamtown/Salt Ash team and his community".

Alexander this year turned 16 and has been readily accepted as an Ordinary member by his Brigade.



Elizabeth Butt a young member from Bendick Murrell Brigade in Region West has been awarded the NSW RFS Young Volunteer of the Year for 2016 (16–25 years).

Elizabeth was chosen based on the nomination from her Cadet Coordinator Mr Sam Tout.

“Elizabeth demonstrates emotional intelligence and excellent skills in the areas of communication, team building and first response triage. Elizabeth found her passion for first aid during her time with the South West Slopes Cadets

and has started university studying Para Medicine at CSU Bathurst. The cadet program for Elizabeth enabled her to grow in self-confidence, become part of an active group of young volunteers of different ages and skills and find her passion for future tertiary education”.

Elizabeth was also named Young’s Junior Citizen of the Year in 2016 for her volunteering duties with many local organisations, as well as excelling in the sporting arena.

The evidence gathering period for next year’s Young Volunteer

of the Year awards is open. Details about the application process, forms required and the significant dates are available on MyRFS at the link below <https://www.myrfs.nsw.gov.au/InfoAbout/Membership/YouthParticipationintheNSWRFS/YoungVolunteerAwards.aspx>

For more details, email Volunteer Relations and Workforce Planning volunteer@rfs.nsw.gov.au

ABOVE: Left to right: David Thomas, Captain, Williamtown/ Salt Ash Brigade, Lower Hunter District; the Hon Kate Washington MP, Member for Port Stephens; Alexander Slade; Javen Ricevuto; Elizabeth Butt; The Hon Katrina Hodgkinson MP, Member for Cootamundra; Samuel Tout, Cadet Coordinator, Murringo Brigade, South West Slopes Zone

“It is great to see the engagement and commitment of young people in Emergency Service volunteering ... The effort and enthusiasm of young members in the NSW RFS is significant and the single awards ceremony acknowledges these young leaders’ hard work, camaraderie and community participation.”



NSW RFS Young Leader Scholarship Awarded

On 1 February 2017 Adam Lummis was awarded the inaugural NSW RFS Young Leader Scholarship. The award was established in 2016 to recognise and develop the leadership skills of emerging young leaders in the NSW RFS.

As well as acknowledging their contribution to their brigades and communities, the scholarship gives young leaders the opportunity to develop practical leadership and communication skills by participating as a member of a youth crew aboard the tall ship, the *Young Endeavour*.

The *Young Endeavour* Youth Scheme, in partnership with the Royal Australian Navy, provides

young Australians aged 16–23 with a unique, challenging and inspirational experience at sea aboard the national sail training ship STS *Young Endeavour*.

The inaugural recipient of the award, Adam Lummis, has been a member of Dubbo Headquarters Brigade since he was 12 years old. He has served as Captain of the Orana Cadets and attended two Cadet Championships and three State

Championships with the Orana cadet team.

Cameron Bruce, Senior Deputy Captain of Dubbo Headquarters Brigade, Orana Team supported Adam's application, writing that "Adam's leadership skills are impressive for a man of his age; he shows great support and guidance to any juniors working under him and is an inspiration to those of us somewhat longer in the job". His application was endorsed also by Lyndon Wieland, District Manager of Orana.

During the 11-day voyage in April, Adam lived "between decks" in a close community with other youth crew from

across Australia. A voyage aboard the *Young Endeavour* provided the young NSW RFS member with the opportunity to participate in the challenges of sailing a square-rigged tall ship, learning skills such as how to navigate, keep watch, set and furl sails, climb the 30 metre mast, take the helm and cook in the galley.

Adam wrote the following article to share his experiences aboard the tall ship with other NSW RFS members. Adam also shared his experience with other young members at the Young Members Forum in Wollongong in July.



Sailing a Tall Ship Makes a Young Leader

by Adam Lummis

By receiving the NSW RFS Young Leader Scholarship, I had the amazing opportunity to sail aboard the STS *Young Endeavour* tall ship with a group of 22 young people from all over Australia. Joining us on the trip from 9 April to 19 April 2017 were Royal Australian Navy personnel and the “staffies” who we couldn’t have done without.

Before I set sail I was wondering what I had got myself into! I knew nothing about sailing, I was not going to know anyone else, and I was going to be alone. Once I was aboard the ship, that all changed, the ‘staffies’ made me and the other young people feel right at home. Once all the youth crew were on the ship, we dumped our bags below deck in our rooms, met our roommates and then started the journey.

Before we set sail, the Navy personnel split the youth crew into teams called “watches” and we each took our posts taking watch and keeping the ship sailing overnight to

arrive at our new destination the next morning. I definitely found sailing through the night a challenge – it was pitch black on deck and I couldn’t see anything! The waves were crashing against the side of the ship throwing us all over the place. After just a few minutes, sea sickness claimed its first victims. Thankfully I wasn’t one of them.

Challenges and surprises

During the voyage we faced many challenges, both individually and also as part of our teams. Most of the teams had one thing in common – not having the personnel available to set and furl the sails when needed as so many were seasick.

Generally, our days were quite long. We didn’t have many hours sleep each night, but the experience sure made up for that! So many interesting things happened on board, I can’t even begin to explain, from watching the sunrise over the ocean to swimming with jellyfish. I remember every morning waking up to

an amazing breakfast. The food the chef prepared was delicious; I was honestly very surprised by the food we ate on board.

Communication is the key

While on board, we had to create effective communication between our own teams. Without good communication we wouldn’t have been able to work collectively to sail the tall ship and navigate our journey. From the smallest tasks to the largest, no matter what, you always needed effective communication to get the job done right.

Bringing the skills home

I will share the communication skills I’ve gained from this experience with other young members of the service and also my community. I am helping to train the Orana cadets and I will pass these communication skills down to them as best I can to help them in any situation. The leadership skills I learned from this experience have definitely improved the way I would

manage my crew. I’ve learnt that communication is the key to get the job done effectively.

By the end of this journey, I had made a new family. I will never forget the friendships that were made. If we can spend 11 days sailing a tall ship together, I’m pretty sure we can get through anything together!

This was such an amazing experience, meeting great people and developing skills that will assist me for life and in my time in the NSW RFS in so many ways. I strongly recommend this opportunity to other members in the future. It doesn’t matter where you come from, you won’t know unless you give it a go!

There will be an opportunity to apply for the Young Leader Scholarship for next year. The dates are being finalised, so keep a look out on MyRFS in the coming months for updates.

ABOVE: The *Young Endeavour* enters Sydney Harbour with the youth crew on high.



The Season Begins

By Matt Sun

If August/September were any indication of the summer to come, then firefighters across the state may be extremely busy in the 2017/18 season.

NSW Rural Fire Service members worked on more than 2,500 bush or grass fires that burnt over 50,000 hectares in August and September.

Many of the fires occurred in areas that the Bushfire & Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre have forecast to have Above Normal bush fire potential this season.

Following a warm and dry winter, rising temperatures and gusting winds pushed a number of areas into Severe fire danger, resulting in 30 Total Fire Bans being declared across six days.

The township of Delta in the state's upper west broke the state record for hottest day in September when the mercury reached 41.3 degrees on Wednesday 27.

There were some stark

contrasts – snow fell at Barrington Tops in the Hunter Valley one day after an Emergency Warning fire near Cessnock impacted homes near Leggetts Drive and destroyed rolling stock at the Richmond Vale Rail Museum.

But for the most part, hot and dry conditions prevailed across the landscape and at the peak of activity, crews were dealing with more than 100 fires across the state.

Five fires reached Emergency Warning alert level and 15 Watch & Act level as fires impacted and threatened properties, including six homes destroyed and two damaged by the Innes View Road fire at Port Macquarie on Sunday 24 September.

The fire, which burnt more than 950 hectares in the Killabakh Nature Reserve, threatened

a number of properties along Innes View Road, Colling Road and Misty View Road.

Other significant fires in September included the Red Hill fire at Beacon Hill, the Dunns Creek Road fire at Eurobodalla, the Aerodrome Road fire near Tuncurry, the Chichester fire, the Belbora fire east of Gloucester, the Mount George fire, the Seams Road fire at Kempsey, the McKell Avenue fire in the Royal National Park at Sutherland and the Filter Road fire at Nowra.

Fires in the Tenterfield LGA at Cullens Creek, Plumbargo and Rivertree areas burnt out over 1200 hectares in rugged and steep bush over nine days and was a multi-agency exercise with aerial and RAFT support.

Residents in the Jervis Bay and Wreck Bay villages were put on alert on September 14 as the Summercloud Bay fire moved north towards homes.

Fortunately, the Large Air Tanker, Thor, was able to lay

down retardant control lines which helped halt the spread of the fire in coordination with significant backburning. The fire ultimately burnt out more than 1700 hectares of the Booderee National Park and took several days to bring under control.

The Filter Road fire at Nowra on Monday 25 September was of considerable concern to local residents, particularly those living on Filter Road who watched flames quickly spread to the north through bush land across the road from their homes.

More than 150 firefighters, aided by the LAT Thor, worked to contain the fire, which also impacted residents in a number of streets as it moved towards West Street.

As was the case at Jervis Bay, Thor proved to be an invaluable asset, undertaking 38 missions and dropping 570,000 litres of product during September. Thor was also deployed to Tasmania to assist with the St Helens fire.



Thirty Total Fire Bans were declared across six days, five Fire Emergency Warnings and 15 Watch and Act alerts were issued in September.



TOP LEFT: Kearsley 1 appliance on Leggetts Dr, Richmond Vale. Photo by Justin Wilson (JW MEDIA)
TOP: The southern peninsula of Jarvis Bay with ruins of the historic Cape St George lighthouse, now surrounded by blackened heath. Photo by Maree Clout, Jarvis Bay Through My Eyes
RIGHT: The Richmond Vale Railway Museum was devastated by fire in September. Photo by Stuart O'Keefe



Australian Fire Service Medal Recipients 2017

Australia Day 2017

The AFSM is the highest honour in the fire fighting profession and recognises distinguished service by a member of an Australian fire service. Thirteen outstanding members were nominated by people and communities they have served and have been awarded this honour in 2017. The Australian Fire Service Medals are announced across Australia on Australia Day and on the Queen's Birthday weekend.



**Captain
Harvey Bailey,**
Dapto Rural Fire Brigade,
Illawarra

Mr Bailey joined the Dapto Bush Fire Brigade in September 1974 and became involved in all aspects of the Brigade right from the start. He was elected as Equipment Officer and then Senior Deputy Captain before being elected Captain in July 1979, a position he still holds today.

He has attended a large variety of fires and other incidents both locally and across NSW including fires around Grafton, Coonabarabran, Burrinjuck Dam and Canberra, as well as assisting with the clean-up following several hail storms around Sydney and the 1998 floods in Wollongong.

Mr Bailey has been instrumental in assisting others, not only within the Dapto Brigade, but many Brigades across the Illawarra and other Districts, passing on his knowledge in firefighting and also assisting and mentoring other Brigade Officers and Captains to fulfil their potential.



**Deputy Group Captain
Graham Bennett,**
Thirlmere and Milton Rural Fire
Brigades, Southern Highlands

Mr Bennett joined the NSW Rural Fire Service in November 1983 and has been a life member of Thirlmere Brigade since 2009.

He has attended a range of incidents including local fires, motor vehicle accidents, structure fires and hazard reductions as well as out-of-area and out-of-state incidents.

He has been an active member of the Thirlmere Brigade, serving as Captain for 11 years, Senior Deputy Captain for eight years, Deputy Captain for nine years, Deputy Group Captain for over one year as well as Training Officer for two years. He has also held the positions of President and Vice President.

He is very involved with Community Engagement programs and conducts demonstrations and information sessions at the local school, clubs, field days and retirement villages and he has encouraged the local community to have their Bush Fire Survival Plan completed and ready to enact.

In 2013 Mr Bennett joined Milton Brigade as his secondary brigade and in 2014 attained the position of Deputy Captain.



**Superintendent
John Cullen,**
District Manager,
Far South Coast

Mr Cullen commenced his career in bush fire fighting in 1977 as a Local Council Brigade Member. In November 1993 he joined the Department of Bushfire Services as Deputy Fire Control Officer, later becoming the Fire Control Officer for the Bega Valley in 2002. In 2009 he became the Far South Coast District Manager, a position he still holds today.

He has provided over 39 years of dedicated service and particularly during the 1990s he worked on a large number of notable fires at Nowra, Wagga Wagga, Coonabarabran, Armidale and the Snowy Mountains. More recently he undertook the role of Incident Controller at the Brogo, Millingandi and Corn Trail Fires and in 2002 he received a Commissioner's Commendation for his work at the Nowra fires.



**Group Captain
James Fahey,**
Westleigh and Hornsby Rural Fire
Brigades, Hornsby / Ku-ring-gai

Mr Fahey has been a key member of the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai District of the NSW Rural Fire Service for 45 years and has held many positions ranging from Brigade member to Captain of Headquarters (later Hornsby) Brigade and for the past 26 years as a District Group Captain. In all of these roles he has displayed dedication, enthusiasm and leadership well beyond that normally expected.

He originally joined the Elouera Bush Fire Brigade in 1971 and was soon appointed Deputy Captain. Along with a small group of colleagues he revitalised the District's Headquarters Brigade through attracting new members, advocating for and receiving fire-fighting vehicles and a brigade station, and by setting high standards in training and participation by its members.

His leadership is best exemplified in the major campaign fires experienced across the state in 1994 and 2003 where he led strike teams, sectors and divisions under conditions of incredible danger and over prolonged periods. In doing so, many lives and homes were saved. He was also involved in operations associated with the 1991 Northern suburbs storm and the 1998 hailstorm in the eastern suburbs of Sydney.



**Group Captain
John Kjoller,**
March Rural Fire Brigade,
Canobolas

Mr Kjoller has been a dedicated member of the NSW Rural Fire Service since joining the Mullion Brigade as a teenager under the guidance of other family members. He transferred to the March Brigade in 1994.

He has attended numerous fires over his 50 years with the NSW RFS and has been involved with every major fire in the Canobolas District. He held the role of Deputy Group Captain for the Cabonne and Orange Districts for many years until the zoning of the Orange, Cabonne and Blayney LGAs. He was elected as Group Captain for the Canobolas Zone in 2005, a role he still holds.

Mr Kjoller was also Senior Deputy Captain for the March Brigade for several years before taking on the Captain's role in 1998, which he still occupies.



**Group Captain
Trevor Penfold,**
Pinnacle Rural Fire Brigade,
Bland / Temora

Mr Penfold joined the NSW Bush Fire Service in 1978 and has been an active member of the Trungley Hall and Pinnacle Brigades for more than 38 years. On 10 March 2013 he was presented a 30 year Long Service medal by the Commissioner.

During his long career he has held the positions of Brigade President, Permit Issuing Officer, Deputy Captain and Brigade Captain and in 2013 was nominated, and accepted, the Group Captain position to represent Narraburra, Morangarell and Pinnacle Brigades.

As one of the ten Group Captains within the Zone he takes every opportunity to attend all the Senior Management Team and Liaison Committee meetings to contribute to the strategic planning of the Zone. He is also the volunteer representative and elected Chairperson for the Bland Temora Zone Bush Fire Management Committee.



Australian Fire Service Medal Recipients 2017

Queen's Birthday Honours

The AFSM is the highest honour in the fire fighting profession and recognises distinguished service by a member of an Australian fire service. Thirteen outstanding members were nominated by people and communities they have served and have been awarded this honour in 2017. The Australian Fire Service Medals are announced across Australia on Australia Day and on the Queen's Birthday weekend.



Group Captain Alan Tucker,
Clarence Valley, Region North

Group Captain Alan Tucker joined the NSW RFS as a volunteer member of the Southampton Rural Fire Brigade in April 1976. After 40 years he still serves with dedication and distinction as a frontline firefighter and senior field officer.

Group Captain Tucker's Service history includes roles of Brigade Captain and Senior Deputy Captain of the Southampton Rural Fire Brigade and seven years as a Group Captain for the Clarence Valley Zone. As a leader he sets an outstanding example for others to follow and always gets the best from his team, particularly during times of extreme pressure.

Through over 40 years of volunteer service Group Captain Tucker has proven himself a highly capable firefighter and Divisional Commander, making significant contributions during major bush fire campaigns including, but not limited to, the 1986 Waterview Heights fire west of Grafton, the 1994 North Coast Bush Fire Emergency, the Christmas 2001 bush fires and the October 2002 Clarence Valley Bush Fire Emergency that directly affected his local brigade area. He has also been involved in a number of interstate deployments including the tragic 2009 Victorian Bush Fires.



Captain Peter Brougham,
Lower North Coast, Region North

During 40 years of active service, Captain Peter Brougham has shown exceptional dedication to the NSW RFS, his brigade and the community. His detailed knowledge of the local area is invaluable when locating and fighting fires in remote bushland areas of the Nambucca Valley. He has shown an untiring devotion to the protection of people, property and the environment, both locally and interstate.

Captain Brougham has willingly undertaken out of area work confidently and competently, providing leadership and effective control in difficult situations, together with a keen ability to assess risks to his crew and to take appropriate action. His fellow firefighters are inspired by his leadership and example.

Captain Brougham received an Australian Fire Service Medal for his wealth of experience, enduring commitment to the NSW RFS and concern for the welfare and safety of his community.



Group Captain/Director Kelly Browne,
Sutherland/NSW RFS Headquarters, Region East

Group Captain Kelly Browne joined the Waterfall Rural Fire Brigade in February 1989 and was elected a Group Captain in the Sutherland District in 2014.

Group Captain Browne has been involved in fighting many types of fires and has gained the respect and friendship of many members of the Service across the state during her appointments to various field command roles, both locally and out of area Section 44 bush fire emergencies. In 2004 she was commended for her actions, contributions and leadership at the Waterfall Train Accident.

Group Captain Browne is also the NSW RFS Chief Information Officer. As a salaried staff member she also undertakes operational support activities within the State Operations Centre including logistical coordination and major incident coordination.

Previously a Board member and now President of the Women and Firefighting Australasia (WAFAs) organisation, Group Captain Browne takes an active leadership role in promoting the abilities and capabilities of women, regardless of the task at hand. This is demonstrated by the requests from other groups to share the expertise, challenges and successes in promoting diversity and addressing the challenges faced by women within the sector.



**Group Captain
Craig Burley,
Hawkesbury, Region East**

Group Captain Craig Burley first joined Wilberforce Brigade in 1988 where he rose to the rank of Captain. In 1993, Craig was appointed as a Group Captain, a rank he still holds. Craig moved to the Colo Heights area and joined the local Brigade in 2010. Group Captain Burley has served on the Senior Management Team Committee for many years. Craig has also served the Hawkesbury District on the Bush Fire Management Committee and was elected Chairman on 23 May 2013, which he continues to serve.

Group Captain Burley is a qualified Air Attack Supervisor and has been deployed to many parts of the state to undertake this role. He has gained several qualifications in the aviation sector that includes Helicopter Winch Skills, Incendiary Operations Supervisor, Helicopter Insertion Techniques, Aviation Radio Operator, Air Observer and Remote Area Firefighter. He has also been on deployment to the United States, Botswana and Indonesia.

Group Captain Burley has been awarded the Long Service medal for 15 years and 20 years of service and has also been awarded the National Medal in 2005.



**Deputy Group Captain
Robert Cox,
Mid North Coast, Region North**

Deputy Group Captain Robert (Rob) Cox started his firefighting career as a volunteer in a Western Sydney Brigade around 1989.

After more than a decade in the Mid North Coast district, Deputy Group Captain Cox has shown extraordinary dedication. He spent many years as a leader and trainer in the Clarence Valley, and continued with that dedication following his transfer to Coffs Harbour. He has spent more than 22 years training fellow firefighters, and in doing so has generously shared his time, knowledge and experience.

Deputy Group Captain Cox has held a number of leadership roles with the NSW RFS, including Deputy Group Captain in the Mid North Coast District since 2014, and previously in the Clarence Valley District from 2004 to 2007. He served as the Corindi/Red Rock Brigade Captain and Deputy Captain for 11 years, and had other key roles including Brigade President, Permit Officer, Training Officer, Vice President, Community Engagement Officer and Brigade Mitigation Officer.

Deputy Group Captain Cox has been Divisional Commander in numerous campaigns, including the 1994 Halfway Creek area fires and the 2001 Dirty Creek Range area fires, where crews protected 20 houses with extremely limited tanker resources.



**Firefighter
Rex Fuge,
Mid Lachlan Valley Team,
Region West**

Firefighter Rex Guskett Fuge officially joined the Carrawandool Rural Fire Brigade in 1950 and transferred to Lake Rural Fire Brigade in 2006. He is still an active member of the NSW Rural Fire Service and continues to provide a wealth of knowledge to the local area and is a current member of the Mid Lachlan Valley Team Bush Fire Management Committee.

Firefighter Fuge has been a long service Captain of the West Plains Rural Fire Brigade and a current member of the Lake Brigade in the Forbes local government area.

He has always been keen on aviation and owns his own plane. During a fire in Wirrinya he flew the Fire Control Officer around the area so he could get an overall view to better inform his tactical decision making. This occurred well before aircraft were commonly used as they are today and was done at his own expense.

Firefighter Fuge has always been supportive of the NSW RFS. His involvement and ongoing contribution is highly respected.



**Group Captain
David Loft,
Lake George Zone, Region South**

Group Captain David Loft has been a volunteer with the New South Wales Rural Fire Service since 1996 and has undertaken a range of roles including firefighter, Deputy Group Captain, Captain and currently Group Captain. For many years he has provided leadership to local brigades operationally, through training and volunteer administration.

Operationally, Group Captain Loft has undertaken the role of Incident Controller at numerous local fires in the Queanbeyan/Palerang local government areas and has led fire fighters as a strike team leader within the local area, across NSW and interstate, notably in 2006 and 2009 in Victoria. Group Captain Loft has also provided leadership within incident management teams where he has fulfilled the roles of operations, planning and safety officer.

Group Captain Loft mentors local volunteers aspiring to leadership roles within the NSW RFS and provides specialist training locally in rural fire driving and across the state.



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE
HEADQUARTERS
15 CARTER STREET



St Florian's Day Awards

The Valla and Valla Beach Rural Fire Brigades, Lower North Coast Zone, Region North, received a Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Unit) for their work attending motor vehicle accidents and associated fatalities and serious injuries on the Pacific Highway.

May 4 is St Florian's Day, named after the Patron Saint of Firefighters. It's also known as International Firefighters Day. Each St Florian's Day, the NSW RFS holds its annual internal bravery and service awards. This year, 12 individual and 11 group recipients were acknowledged by the Commissioner.

Drawn from the Service's districts, regions and headquarters, these recipients are presented with awards in recognition of outstanding bravery or service.

Commissioner's Commendation for Service (Individual)

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

Firefighter Susanne Barker
Illawarra Community Safety Brigade, Illawarra Zone, Region East

Captain Peter Brougham Valla Rural Fire Brigade, Lower North Coast Zone, Region North

Captain Michael Cantwell
Manna Mount Rural Fire Brigade, Mid Lachlan Valley Team, Region West

Deputy Group Captain Robert Cox Corindi/Red Rock Rural Fire Brigade, Mid North Coast Team, Region North

Inspector Anthony Jarrett (deceased) Lower North Coast Zone, Region North

Group Captain Andrew Macdonald Catherine Field Rural Fire Brigade, Macarthur Zone, Region East

Deputy Captain Sidney (Lionel) Smith AFSM
Kenthurst Rural Fire Brigade, The Hills District, Region East

Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Individual)

Awarded to recognise service or outstanding actions in relation to fire service duties, administrative leadership, or exemplary performance of a specific project or task. The Certificate of Commendation may be awarded to an individual or unit for service beyond the scope of responsibility normally expected of that person or unit in their assigned duties and is therefore worthy of acknowledgement and commendation.

Mrs Tracie Bahun Regional Services, NSW RFS Headquarters

Superintendent Timothy Carroll Lake George Zone, Region South

Deputy Captain Rachel Hessenberger Sussex Inlet Rural Fire Brigade, Shoalhaven Zone, Region South

Deputy Group Captain Rick Jones Duffys Forest Rural Fire Brigade, Warringah Pittwater, Region East

Mrs Roslyn ten Brink Liverpool Range Zone, Region North

Commissioner's Unit Citation for Service

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

Krawarree Rural Fire Brigade
Lake George Zone, Region South

Mungindi Rural Fire Brigade
Namoi Gwydir Team, Region North

Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation (Unit)

Awarded to recognise service or outstanding actions in relation to fire service duties, administrative leadership, or exemplary performance of a specific project or task. The Certificate of Commendation may be awarded to an individual or unit for service beyond the scope of responsibility normally expected of that person or unit in their assigned duties and is therefore worthy of acknowledgement and commendation.

Bedgerebong, Burcher, Jemalong, Lake, Manna Mount, South Gipps, Warroo, Blowclear-Wamboyne, Winnunga, Ungarie Rural Fire Brigades, Helitack 201, Helitack 220 and Down the Wire Technicians

Coonabarabran Squad Volunteer Rescue Association

Corporate Communications Group NSW RFS Headquarters for "I am Fire" public awareness campaign and Guide to making a bush fire survival plan

Down the Wire Technicians

Hornsby Support, Cowan, Westleigh, Cherrybrook, Ku-ring-gai and Duffys Forest Rural Fire Brigades Hornsby Ku-ring-gai and Warringah Pittwater Districts, Region East

Namoi Gwydir Team State Championships Local Volunteers Namoi Gwydir Team, Region North

Namoi Gwydir Team Region North

NSW Rural Fire Service State Championships Committee

Valla and Valla Beach Rural Fire Brigades Lower North Coast Zone, Region North

The NSW RFS website has detailed information about the recipients' citations www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/newsandmedia

VALE

Jitte

Nieuwenhuis

4 February 1937 – 28 November 2016

Brigade: Krawarree



A much loved and valued fire fighter and Equipment Officer, Jitte Nieuwenhuis from the Krawarree Rural Fire Brigade, passed away on 27 November 2016.

Everyone was devastated with the sudden and unexpected loss of a man who was loved and admired for his generosity and commitment to family and community.

Jean and Jitte were married for 60 years and settled in the Krawarree area (located about an hour south of Braidwood), after moving from the Wollongong region some 21 years ago. Jean has spoken of how much the Krawarree RFS and community meant to the both of them and she takes comfort in knowing that, while Jitte loved nothing more than being with her and his family, he was with members of his RFS family when he passed, who too loved and cared for him and did all they could to help him.

Jitte and three fellow members, Wayne, Robert and Brian, went to a call of vehicle on fire in the remote Bendethra camping ground in the Deua NP. After a long and slow drive in their two Cat 7s down the 4WD trail to the area they extinguished what was left of the vehicle fire. When they were about to head back out, Jitte indicated

to his colleagues that he was feeling unwell and had some chest pains. His fellow crew immediately tended to Jitte and radioed for ambulance assistance. However, Jitte's condition deteriorated and after two hours of his fellow crew administering first aid, Jitte was unable to be revived.

Jitte's fellow brigade members had great respect for him and his work. They admired his focus on ensuring that everything was in optimum working order. Jitte had an extraordinary energy for and commitment to lending a hand to help neighbours, friends and the broader community in all manner of tasks and activities, whether that be with machinery, pumps, farm work or his time with the RFS. NSW RFS Commissioner Fitzsimmons and NSW RFS members joined family and friends for a memorial service at the Krawarree RF Station on 5 December, 2016.

At a ceremony in Canberra in April 2017, Jitte's name was added to the National Memorial for Fire and Emergency Services Personnel and, in Sydney, to the Emergency Services Volunteer Memorial. He was also awarded the Commissioner's Commendation for Service.

Everyone was devastated with the sudden and unexpected loss of a man who was loved and admired for his generosity and commitment to family and community.

VALE Anthony Jarrett

17 July 1962 – 29 January 2017

Brigade: Macksville



Inspector Anthony (Tony) Jarrett, better known as TJ, passed away on January 29 after a brief battle with an aggressive form of cancer. He was a young 54.

The service was held on Monday 6 February, with Senior Chaplain Ian Spall presiding, and NSW RFS members forming a guard of honour for their much loved colleague. Members from many services attended the memorial service: NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers and staff, NSW Police, NSW Fire and Rescue, NSW Forests, National Parks and Wildlife Service and members of the NSW Ambulance Service.

Tony was a proud father of his three sons, Trent, Beau and Zac, and a younger brother to David, Brian and Peter. Tony's mother, Shirley Jarrett, aged 92 spoke at his service.

A large crowd of family, friends and colleagues gathered after the service to swap stories and remember their mate. TJ is remembered as a man who loved his children, his work, the Sharks footy team and

A large crowd of family, friends and colleagues gathered after the service to swap stories and remember their mate. TJ is remembered as a man who loved his children, his work, the Sharks footy team and watching car racing.

watching car racing. He would say things like "she'll be right mate, they will get over it..." Many people acknowledged Tony's cheeky sense of humour and caring, generous nature, his leadership and mentoring role in the Service.

TJ first joined the NSW RFS in the Sutherland Shire, Loftus RFB, when he was just 15, and this year he would have reached 40 years continuous and dedicated service to volunteers and communities across NSW.

TJ commenced a leadership role in the NSW RFS with his

appointment as Honorary DFCO for the Nambucca Shire. Soon thereafter his skills and ability were recognised with full time employment in Macksville.

So committed in service to his local volunteers and fellow staff, TJ performed Christmas Duty to allow others to enjoy the festive season with their families. Christmas last year, was the first Christmas he had had off in 12 years.

TJ will be missed by members in the Mid North Coast and beyond who will be greatly feeling the loss of a great friend and colleague.

In May 2017, Tony received the Commissioner's Commendation for Service.

VALE Jennifer Hankinson

7 May 1950 – 5 June 2017

Brigade: Northern Rivers Aviation Support
Brigade and Alstonville Brigade



On Monday June 5, 2017, we lost a much loved, valued and respected member, Ms Jennifer Hankinson. Jenny was a very dedicated member of the Northern Rivers Aviation Support Brigade, Casino team, and the Alstonville Brigade in Far North Coast. Jenny was also an active member of the SES Ballina Unit, SES CISS Team and RFS CISS District Team.

On Sunday June 4, Jenny, along with some of her fellow crew went to the Casino air base to undertake some routine maintenance when Jenny suffered a significant, unexpected and irreversible brain bleed and collapsed. Despite the extraordinary efforts of her fellow crew, Anthony, Mark and Lyndsay, along with Ambulance Service Paramedics and hospital teams, Jenny passed away the next day in hospital.

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, Superintendent Michael Brett, our senior chaplains and others visited Jenny's family at Lismore hospital and some of our team at the Northern Rivers FCC and the Alstonville Station.

Jenny's daughter Laurel and her family were just so grateful and appreciative of the fact that

Jenny was with her RFS mates and not alone at the time she collapsed. Jenny's family came to the brigade station the night she died (just remarkable really given the circumstances, but so special and valuable for all affected), thanked the members for all they've done over the years by being such a huge part of Jenny's life, and shared and heard a few stories.

While Laurel and the family knew the RFS was a huge part of Jenny's life, I don't think they realized just how active she was and how much everyone relied on Jenny and loved spending time with her, no matter the task, job or time of day.

Fellow members described her as a truly special and unique person who had a wonderful sense of humour, an unwavering devotion to service and caring for others both within the brigade and broader community, and a stamina and endurance matched by nobody else. She simply could not sit around and rest and had to be busy doing something, invariably for others.

It was an understandably emotional night mixed with tears, a few laughs and wonderful stories of time spent with Jen. The one thing that was abundantly clear was just

how much Jen will be missed.

Laurel also confirmed that if it wasn't for the extraordinary efforts of her fellow crew, the donation of Jenny's organs, that is now providing life and hope to at least four other families, would not have been possible. The view was unanimous, that even in death Jenny was still giving to benefit others and she would have wanted nothing else.

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons gave the valedictory address during the service which was conducted by NSW RFS Senior Chaplain Ian Spall. NSW RFS members formed an honour guard for the procession at Jennifer's funeral in Ballina.

Jennifer's name was added to the NSW Emergency Service Volunteers Memorial at Mrs Macquaries Chair in Sydney. She was also awarded the Commissioner's Commendation for Service.

Fellow members described her as a truly special and unique person who had a wonderful sense of humour, an unwavering devotion to service and caring for others both within the brigade and broader community, and a stamina and endurance matched by nobody else.

Our *Bulletin* History from Trove

Discussions about PPC have been going on for a long time. See what they were saying in 1980 in the *Bush Fire Bulletin* volume 2 number 2

FIRE FIGHTING: Are you dressed for the job?



FIRE FIGHTER

"In 1978, the Bush Fire Council adopted a standard design of protective clothing for Bush Fire Brigade personnel. According to this standard, the well-dressed fire fighter should be wearing 'a yellow, cotton, heavy-weight cover-all with full trouser pockets (giving access to undergarment pockets), and one breast pocket with the flap secured'. All fastenings on this elegant outfit should be secured by press studs.

"Unfortunately, the purchase of protective clothing can not be charged against the Bush Fire Fighting Fund: the Fund has to give priority to the purchase of essential fire fighting equipment and simply has insufficient resources to provide clothing for over 60,000 volunteer fire fighters as well.

It's No Picnic!

"Obtaining a standard in protective clothing for all volunteer bushfire brigades is important, but not as important as making sure that anyone who turns up to fight a fire is at least wearing protective clothing of some kind.

"Admittedly it is not always possible to don the standard overalls when a fire breaks out unexpectedly but wherever possible this should be done. It is not a case of style but one of safety. Shorts and thongs are no protection against radiant heat and flying embers...

"If your brigade does not already have supplies of overalls (preferably the

standard yellow variety) try to get hold of some as soon as possible.

"If you have non-brigade acquaintances you could one day find yourself fighting alongside at a fire, make sure they too know of the need for protective clothing and will not turn out to the fire as though they were going for their Sunday picnic."



PICNICKER

BUSH FIREbulletin

onTrove



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. Type in your search term
2. Click 'Go'

You will be taken to the *Bush Fire Bulletin*'s archive on the National Library of Australia's Trove website

3. A range of articles will be offered for selection
4. Click on the green View Online box on right to view the article

You can print, download or simply read online.

To initiate another search return to the search box on the *Bush Fire Bulletin* page on the NSW RFS website.

Or leave the search terms ("nla.obj-284283986" OR "nla.obj-284265362") in the search box to stay within the *Bush Fire Bulletin* archive.

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Cover photo "Southern Belle", the Very Large Air Tanker (VLAT), was a valuable resource fighting the Lower Boro Road fire near Queanbeyan in December 2016. Here the VLAT drops retardant on the southern flank of the fire and casts an eerie shadow against the smoke. Photo taken by Nick Hornbuckle, a member of the Lake George Royal Fire Brigade.