



RFS

District Information Pack

Castlereagh

Castlereagh Zone covers approximately 17,500 square kilometres. Major population centres are Coonabarabran (population 2537) and Gilgandra (2600) with a number of smaller towns and villages throughout the zone. Industries include agriculture (grazing and dryland farming), tourism, forestry (logging) and retail.

The zone has 61 NSW RFS brigades and approximately 1,500 volunteers. Many brigades are rural and remote rural. Farm fire units are common. CABA is provided by FRNSW.

Visiting crews will interact with local farm based fire units and land holders who will be undertaking local firefighting activities on theirs and neighbour's properties. They are a valuable source of local information, fire history and a resource. Land owners/managers can also prioritise assets to be protected on their properties.

Fences in agricultural areas should only be cut as a last resort and not for convenience of access.

The bush fire season generally runs from October to March. Mid November to end of December is typically the worst months for large fires. In the south fire activity can continue until February – March during dryer years.

Large numbers of absentee landowners in remote areas, an ageing population, particularly in rural areas, an increase in commuting workers leaving properties in pursuit of work, and an increase in rural residential subdivisions in fire prone areas have been identified as potentially impacting on the ability of certain sections of the community to prepare themselves for bush fire.

The main sources of ignition in the Castlereagh area are:

- lightning
- escaped from legal burns
- farm machinery
- incendiaries
- campfires

Due to the varied nature of the terrain in Castlereagh Zone crews need to ensure they remain aware of local weather and wind conditions in the locations they are operating. The area also regularly records humidity below 10% during the Fire Danger Period and numerous days with FDR's at Very High.

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1.1. Contact Information

District Office Address:	111 Saleyards Road, Coonabarabran NSW 2357
District Office Phone:	02 6826 6300
After Hours Contact:	Via State Operations on 02 8741 5400
A PSN Radio Channel:	110 CSTLR A
B PSN Radio Channel:	210 CSTLR B
PMR Channel:	2209 CSTLR P– Primary Dispatch Channel
ESO Conversion Chart:	Please see file in folder for relevant conversion information
Fire Weather Forecast Area:	North Western & Upper Central West Plains
Local Government Area:	Warrumbungle, Gilgandra

1.2. Topography

North of Coonabarabran the topography includes farming land and large areas of State Conservation Areas, State Forests and National Parks including the Pilliga (over 500,000 hectares' complex of parks). Much of this country is rugged with ridgelines up to 700m. The terrain off road is often sandy resulting in challenging driving conditions. The area has a history of large intense fires.

West of Coonabarabran is the Warrumbungle National Park with elevations to 1,200m. This is a rugged area with numerous rocky outcrops and poor vehicular access in places. The area has a history of intense fire in 2013 Wambelong Fire.

The area North East of Castlereagh Zone and South of Coonabarabran has is a higher percentage of farming land. There are also large areas of State Conservation Areas, State Forests and National Parks. Throughout the region terrain elevations can be as high at 1,000m. This area also has a history of large fires a recent example is the 2017 Sir Ivan Fire near Leadville.

1.3. Vegetation

Castlereagh Zone has a high percentage of agricultural land with sheep and cattle production and dryland cropping primary activities. The Zone has a long history of commercial logging.

Vegetation includes pasture, standing cereal crops and stubble (post-harvest). During the harvest months of November and December the standing cereal crops increase fuel loads and fire potential in agricultural areas.

To the West of the Zone is the Warrumbungle National Park which is joined by a series of parks and forested areas to the Pilliga complex of State Forests, State Conservation Areas and National Parks in the North. This is a rugged area of dry sclerophyll forest, remnant vegetation and grassy woodland with a history of large fires. Forest in the Pilliga is often referred to as "Pilliga Scrub" which is characterised by native white cypress and ironbark forests.

The South of the Zone is a mix of agricultural land with large areas of dry sclerophyll forest, remnant vegetation and grassy woodland.

1.4. Climate

The typical / average climate in the Castlereagh area does not vary much across the area with warm to hot temperatures with winds normally from the western sector during the summer with cool to cold dryer winter period.

Summer rainfall is generally in the form of severe electrical storms caused by cold fronts moving in from the west. Dry lightning storms can also occur during dryer seasonal conditions across much of the area.

1.5. Average Weather Data

Summary of major climate statistics recorded at Coonabarabran (Showgrounds) recorded by the BoM (last updated 19 April 2024)

Element (Mean)	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Max Temp (°C)	24.3	27.8	30.5	31.8	30.7	28.2	23.9	19.3	15.7	14.9	16.9	20.5
Min Temp (°C)	7.2	10.6	13.3	15.1	14.7	11.9	7.1	3.3	1.4	0.1	0.9	3.6
Rainfall (mm)	59.4	66.4	70.2	89.4	81.0	65.3	51.6	52.6	56.5	54.4	51.9	50.6
3pm Temp (°C)	22.6	26.0	28.6	29.8	28.9	26.8	22.5	17.9	14.5	13.7	15.5	19.1
3pm wind (km/h)	12.7	12.7	11.7	11.5	11.0	10.8	10.5	10.6	11.1	11.3	12.8	13.0
3pm RH (%)	38	36	34	37	40	41	44	50	56	54	47	41

Summary of major climate statistics recorded at Gilgandra (Chelmsford Avenue) recorded by the BoM (last updated 09 April 2024)

Element (Mean)	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Max Temp (°C)	25.2	29.0	31.9	33.1	32.2	29.8	24.8	20.0	16.4	15.6	17.2	21.0
Min Temp (°C)	9.4	12.6	15.9	17.3	17.4	14.6	10.3	6.1	3.9	2.5	3.4	5.9
Rainfall (mm)	47.3	49.1	54.1	64.1	52.9	49.3	40.1	42.0	45.9	42.6	39.3	40.1
3pm Temp (°C)	No data available											
3pm wind (km/h)												
3pm RH (%)												

1.6. Known Radio Comms Blackspots

- Golden Highway from Dunedoo to Cassilis. Comms can be very patchy all along the highway.
- Talbragar Brigade area along the Talbragar River from Yarrawonga Rd west to Coolah Creek Rd in the east.

1.7. Hazards

1.7.1. Fire Behaviour

Castlereagh Zone has a history of large fires which in unfavourable conditions can be extremely intense, spread very quickly and threaten nearby properties. Crews need to remain situationally aware at all times. Crews need to beware of the direction with fire spread in Pilliga, this area fire can turn from SE direction to N & NW direction and is known as the left-hand turn.

1.7.2. Sand Driving

In many areas of the Zone sand creates challenging driving conditions for NSW RFS appliances. This is particularly relevant to the Pilliga area where bogging occurs often. Crews need to be competent in sand driving before venturing off formed roads.

1.7.3. Crops

Between November to December harvest is undertaken in agricultural land. Standing crops provide increased fuel loads and fire intensity. Crews need to be aware that the Grass Fire Danger Index (GFDI) in cropping country prior to and during harvest may be locally higher than published. At other times of the year (post-harvest) there is a layer of stubble in paddocks that will carry fire in the right conditions.

1.7.4. Weather

Fire weather during the BFDP is generally FDR's of Very High or above, with November to January having the worst fire weather. It is not uncommon to experience Severe FDR's with TOBAN's.

1.8. Land Management Authorities

Land Manager	% of Area
National Parks & Wildlife Service	9.94
Forestry Corporation of NSW	3.39
Department of Lands	1.89
Local Government	0.25
Private	84.03
All other	0.50

For more specific data on the Castlereagh Zone, please follow the link to the Castlereagh Bush Fire Risk Management Plan [here](#).

Note: This link will only work with internet coverage.

For further information regarding the Castlereagh District Information pack, please contact the Operational Improvement team via **email at** **operational.improvement@rfs.nsw.gov.au**

