

BUSH FIRE bulletin



The journal of the
NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



FOCUS ON NEW PRIORITIES

- BR9 HELMET ROLLOUT BEGINS
- INNOVATIONS IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
- EXPANDED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS

**LIFTOUT: CAD AND STATUS
PANELS EXPLAINED**





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FOREWORD

We recently marked the end of our quietest fire season in a decade. Just 30,000 hectares of NSW were burnt and we did not have a single Section 44 declaration all season – the last time that happened was in 2010/11. It is certainly a welcome relief after the prolonged and devastating fire season of 2019/20.

The relatively low level of fire activity in NSW has given the Service the time to focus on the nine priorities I identified in July 2020. I am pleased to report significant progress has been made on a number of these priorities.

Our new Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system went live in February 2021 in two districts and is progressively being rolled out to the remaining districts on centralised dispatch. CAD is one of the biggest internal system changes the Service has ever seen and will enhance our response to incidents – ensuring the community receives the help it needs in a timely way.

The RFS ACTIV app was released in December 2020 and has already been downloaded by more than 22,000 members. If you haven't already downloaded RFS ACTIV I encourage you to do so as it helps your local brigade manage attendance and also helps our Dispatch Operators.

The rollout of new Pac Fire BR9 helmets to our volunteers began in March 2021. Distribution of these helmets to all our members will occur over the coming months and you can find out more details about this on page 28 of this magazine.

While we have made great progress on many of the nine priorities, there is still much work to be done. This is especially the case for the priorities concerning respiratory protection for our members and the design of fire appliances. I hope to share our progress on these fronts with you soon.

Although NSW has had a relatively calm 2020/21 fire season, unfortunately the same isn't true for our colleagues in Western Australia. Following a request for assistance from the WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the NSW RFS was able to quickly mobilise its Large Air Tanker and a lead plane within hours in early February 2021. With the assistance of the RAAF, 150 bags of retardant were also moved to WA to help fight severe fires in the southwest of the state.

As we move out of the fire season, it is once again time for us to focus our efforts on hazard reduction. Significant rainfall in many parts of NSW over the past few months has led to considerable grass and vegetation growth, and this will need to be proactively managed by landholders, communities and the Service. It is also important we manage the many parts of the state that escaped the destructive fires of the 2019/20 season.

The way the NSW RFS operates has also been greatly affected over the last year by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It has forced us to innovate and find new ways to deliver training and information and engage with our communities. I am especially proud of the way our members have adapted to these challenges with enthusiasm and continued to provide the outstanding service the NSW RFS is renowned for.

Regards,

Rob Rogers AFSM
Commissioner





HELP FROM THE AIR

Though many NSW residents were happy to see rain over summer after catastrophic fires the previous year, the rainfall did bring problems of its own.

In the north of the state, storms in December 2020 and January 2021 brought heavy falls that caused rivers to overflow and flood low lying areas. Several communities were isolated and needed either air supply drops or evacuation.

The NSW RFS was called in to assist the NSW SES, with the Service's helicopters and volunteer Aviation Rescue Crew assisting with a number of people movements and emergency food supply drops along the North Coast.

During this period, the NSW RFS crews undertook 60 shifts with a total of 21 deployments and 28 rescues.

Heavy rain across much of the state in March saw widespread flooding and an ever greater relief effort. These efforts will be covered in more depth in the next edition of the Bush Fire Bulletin.



Photos: NSW RFS Aviation Rescue Crew members evacuating North Coast residents isolated by floods and performing supply drops to those in need. All photos by Mitchell Gibbs, NSW RFS.



NSW PROVIDES AERIAL ASSISTANCE TO WA



While NSW was blessed with a relatively quiet 2020/21 fire season, unfortunately the same could not be said for Western Australia. The state experienced several significant fires in January and February 2021, with the NSW RFS providing assistance to our western counterparts on more than one occasion.

The NSW RFS, with the assistance of the ADF, supplied 150 bags of urgently-needed aerial fire retardant to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services WA (DFES) across January and February. The bags of retardant were loaded onto ADF transport aircraft at RAAF Base Richmond and flown to WA airports to be used in firefighting operations.

Then on 2 February, following a request from WA, the 'Marie Bashir' Large Air Tanker (LAT) and accompanying lead plane FS201 were sent west to help firefighters battling the Wooroloo fire, northeast of Perth. The next day a second LAT - Bomber 137 - followed to provide further aerial assistance.

Over the course of a week in early February the Wooroloo fire burned 10,900 hectares and destroyed 86 homes before it was contained on 6 February. Despite some of the worst fire conditions seen in WA in decades, the hard work

of more than 800 firefighters and emergency services personnel each day managed to save a further 195 homes in the line of the fire. ■

Above: The 'Marie Bashir' LAT dropping retardant ahead of the Wooroloo fire near Perth. Photo by DFES Incident Photographer Morten Boe. **Below:** Aerial fire retardant on board an ADF C-17A Globemaster aircraft at RAAF Base Richmond. Photo by LSIS Richard Cordell, courtesy of ADF.





TRAINING GOES ON DESPITE COVID-19

Although COVID-19 disrupted many facets of NSW RFS operations in 2020, essential training still had to continue.

One example was the Operate in Remote Environments (ORE) course, the foundation level course for remote area operations.

Modified COVID-safe ORE courses were held in 2020 teaching firefighters how to operate in remote environments. This involves camping out in the bush overnight, navigation, survival, communication and dry firefighting training.

The ORE course provides members with the knowledge and skills to plan, prepare and operate in remote or isolated environments as Remote Area Operators with minimal support.

Remote Area Operators are members of Remote Area Units/Brigades, established by districts who have a specific requirement for combating fires in remote areas.

Members of these units are selected and managed by the District, however the training is typically managed at a state level. ■

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Photos: NSW RFS members participating in an ORE course near Lidsdale in August 2020. All photos by Ian Turnbull, NSW RFS.
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BRIGADE IN PROFILE

WRECK BAY BRIGADE

BY ELLE DALY – ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS COORDINATOR

Established in 1987, the Wreck Bay Brigade operated as an all-Indigenous brigade for decades, with a majority of members belonging to Yuin Country. This is something Yuin man and Wreck Bay Brigade volunteer, Jackson Brown, is very proud of.

“Nothing makes us more proud than to be one of the few Indigenous brigades in Australia,” says Jackson. “It puts us in a position where we can protect our mob, engage with them and teach them about fire safety.”

In recent times, Wreck Bay Brigade has welcomed new volunteers from a variety of backgrounds. This has not detracted from the brigade’s ability to engage, but has helped the crew to remain vibrant and innovative.

Engagement activity with the local Indigenous community has been stronger than ever – genuine and continuous. The most recent community event was Christmas 2020, in which the brigade hosted a Santa Run in Wreck Bay and Jervis Bay Village, and the annual Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council (WBACC) Christmas Tree Party.

NAIDOC Week, Reconciliation Week and other significant dates are always an important time for the brigade, who play a big part at these events. Local volunteers believe it sends a clear message that the NSW RFS stands in solidarity with Indigenous Australians to work towards reconciliation.

Over the years, this Indigenous crew has fought side by side with other brigades against fires across Australia. However, protecting their local community has always been their highest priority and is what kept them motivated through the toughest fire season they have seen – the 2019/20 Black Summer.

Wreck Bay volunteers fought tirelessly against fires along the south coast of NSW last fire season,

including the devastating Currowan fire which burnt more than 314,000ha (roughly two-thirds of the Shoalhaven District) and destroyed 312 homes.

In contrast, the 2020/21 summer was largely a welcome relief from severe fires – with one exception. The Booderee fire started in late January just north of Wreck Bay and burnt 340 hectares before being extinguished a few days later. The fire went to Watch and Act, and although no homes were lost, it certainly kept the brigade busy protecting their community.

The quieter summer has allowed the brigade to focus on community engagement and education. Recently, the brigade worked in collaboration with the WBACC and training business FERST Training, hosting community workshops to develop an Emergency Management Plan for Wreck Bay Village.

“Wreck Bay is technically located in the ACT while Wreck Bay Brigade is a part of the NSW RFS, so it can be a bit of legal minefield for the crew,” says Jackson. “The most important thing is the support we get from the local community.

“They support us because we have always been here for them. It makes them feel safe, to know they have a local brigade with so many Indigenous members. They know their lives will be our priority.”

Jackson remembers many occasions when he and his brigade made a significant difference to their local community, and times when they have proudly represented Aboriginal Australia within the NSW RFS.

Left and below:Wreck Bay Brigade members fighting the Currowan fire in December 2019. Photos by Dion Georgopolous. **Right:** A Wreck Bay crew member fights the Booderee fire on their own patch in January 2021. Photo by Jackson Brown.

“One of my favourite memories, after 20 years of volunteering, was the time our indigenous brigade attended the parade along George Street in Sydney to honour NSW RFS firefighters following the 2001/02 fire season,” says Jackson. “The Captain at the time was Uncle Phillip McLeod. There was a mix-up and our brigade had not had a sign made for us like the others.

“We hand wrote ‘Wreck Bay Brigade’ on a big cardboard sign and joined the march, while also flying the Aboriginal flag. The support we got from the crowd was something I will never forget – the cheers were deafening.

“As we walked around the corner toward the end of the march, the politicians who were attending were sitting down, but when they saw our little brigade, with our humble handwritten sign and the Aboriginal flag, they gave us a standing ovation and the support from the crowd exploded.

“I remember the look on Uncle Phillip’s face to this day – he was shining with pride. We had never felt so celebrated and so accepted regardless of skin colour or background. In that moment, we felt like we truly belonged.”

The NSW RFS recognises the unique impact Wreck Bay Brigade has made on their local Indigenous community over the years, and for their efforts since their establishment. ■



WRECK BAY BRIGADE

ESTABLISHED: 1987

CURRENT CAPTAIN: AJ Roberts

DISTRICT: Shoalhaven, Area South Eastern

Wreck Bay Brigade provides protection for the Jervis Bay Village and Wreck Bay Community area as well as the surrounding Booderee National Park, which accommodates roughly 450,000 visitors annually.

THIS ARTICLE IS DEDICATED TO:

Uncle Greg Williams

First Wreck Bay Brigade Captain

Without him, there would be no
Wreck Bay Brigade.

May he rest peacefully in the Dreamtime.

14/01/58 – 22/12/20



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE TRAINING ACADEMY



FOCUS ON ABORIGINAL ENGAGEMENT FOR CFLOS

In a first for the NSW RFS, last year the Community Engagement team hosted Community Field Liaison Officer (CFLO) training specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people in the Service. Twenty ATSI-identifying people from around NSW gathered on 16 August 2020 to attend the workshop at the NSW RFS Training Academy in Dubbo.

The purpose of the workshop was to train the participants in the CFLO competency and to seek their input on how to better engage with Aboriginal people and communities regarding bush fire preparedness. The course also served to establish a group of NSW RFS members who can ensure culturally safe and considerate engagement with rural and remote Aboriginal communities during fire operations.

The role of a CFLO is core to the on-ground engagement between the NSW RFS and the community before, during and after a fire. Typically, this role is undertaken during times of heightened levels of fire activity and is an important conduit for conveying information to communities near to or in the path of a bush fire.

The CFLOs are the field support for the Community Liaison Officer, which is a role within the Incident Management Team (IMT) structure. CFLOs conduct doorknocks, set up community information hubs, help arrange community meetings, deliver community newsletters and assist police with evacuations.

As well as sharing bush fire information, the CFLO also gathers information and intelligence from the

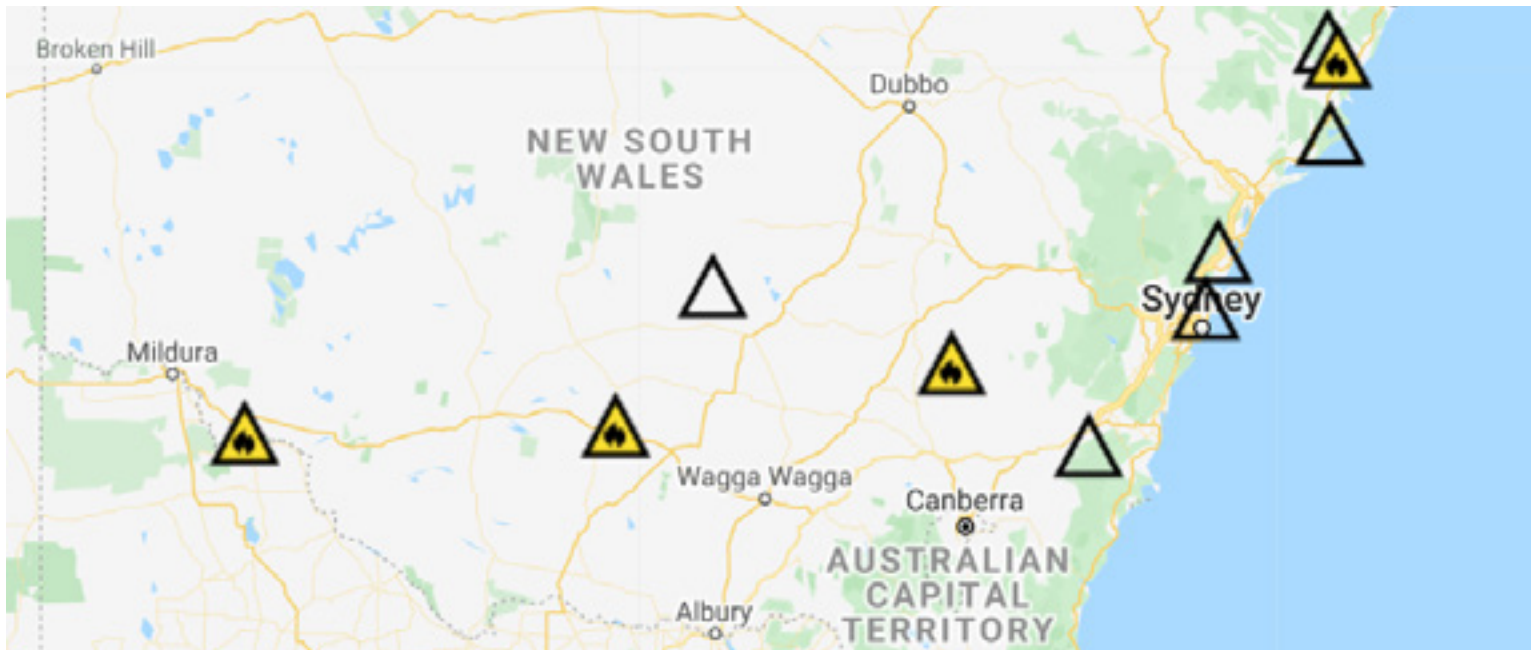
field which is fed back into the IMT. They may also act as escorts for media crews in the area.

In communities with high populations of Indigenous people, such as Discrete Aboriginal Communities, it is important that cultural differences are considered. These differences will vary between and within communities, so it's crucial to involve people who have the experience, skills and local knowledge to navigate these complexities during times of heightened stress.

Aboriginal communities in NSW are often exposed to the threat of fire, such as the Jubullum community in northern NSW during the Tingha Plateau fire in February 2019. It is hoped that these newly-trained CFLOs will be able to act as efficient and valuable links between affected Aboriginal communities and the NSW RFS in times of need.

Involving Indigenous members as CFLOs will also significantly improve the Service's interaction with these communities by providing emotional, social, cultural and spiritual support to our Indigenous community members. ■

Photo: The participants in the CFLO course at the NSW RFS Training Academy in Dubbo.



> WARNING SYSTEM GETS A MAKEOVER

You may have recently noticed a few changes to systems such as Fires Near Me and ICON. In late 2020, the NSW RFS implemented new icons and colour schemes to communicate incidents and warnings to the community. The changes were in line with the recommendations of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and part of a nationwide initiative, the Australian Warning System.

The Australian Warning System was endorsed by Commissioners and Chief Officers of emergency services across the country, to bring consistency to the way information and warnings are displayed in Australia, especially in border areas.

The new three-level warning framework has been applied to five hazards: bush fire, flood, cyclone, extreme heat and severe weather. As part of the change, all states and agencies will now use the same symbols, wording and colour scheme across all public-facing products.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT?

Members of the community will now see different icons for Advice, Watch and Act and Emergency Warning in products like Fires Near Me NSW and on the NSW RFS website. NSW RFS members will also notice the same changes in operational systems such as the Common Operating Picture and ICON.

As you can see in the image above, the physical look of the bush fire icon has changed slightly and is now in a triangular frame rather than a diamond. Most significantly, the colours associated with the alert levels have changed. Advice level warnings are

now displayed in yellow, Watch and Act in orange and Emergency Warning remains red.

WHY THE CHANGE?

The Australian Warning System is aimed at increasing consistency across different hazards at a national level, so that people living in border areas or who are travelling can expect a consistent approach to the communication of warnings.

The System, including the icons, has been developed using extensive community research in all states and territories. Recent reviews and inquiries, including the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, recommended the Australian Warning System be implemented as soon as possible to improve consistency.

A number of other changes are in development, including the display of cross-border incidents in Fires Near Me NSW, to improve the communication of incidents in border areas. Community engagement resources have been developed nationally to support the implementation of the new icons and educate the community about the change. ■

THREE EMERGENCY ICONS



EMERGENCY WARNING



WATCH AND ACT



ADVICE



SHANE FITZSIMMONS NAMED NSW AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Former NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons was announced as NSW Australian of the Year at a ceremony at Luna Park in November 2020, in recognition of his exemplary leadership and empathetic presence as Commissioner during the devastating 2019/20 bush fire season.

Shane became a familiar face to people across NSW and Australia as he informed and calmed the public in daily press conferences, liaised with government leaders and provided comfort to the colleagues and family members of firefighters who lost their lives in service to others.

“Working alongside Shane during last season’s bush fires was an unforgettable experience,” said NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian. “In times of devastation and great heartache, he remained authentic and excelled in his role both operationally and emotionally.”

Photo: Shane briefing the media during the height of fire activity in December 2019. Photo by Anthony Clark.

Shane served 35 years in the NSW RFS as a volunteer and staff member, including more than 12 years as Commissioner. In April 2020 he resigned from the NSW RFS to take up the position of Commissioner of Resilience NSW.

“Shane led the NSW RFS and our community through the toughest fire season we’ve ever experienced,” said Commissioner Rob Rogers. “The Service owes him a debt of gratitude for his poise and leadership during our darkest hours. It was a privilege to work with him.”

On Australia Day, the 2021 Australian of the Year was named as Grace Tame of Tasmania, a 26-year-old advocate for survivors of sexual assault. ■



BUXTON MEMBER CROWNED NSW VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

NSW RFS volunteer Kim Hill of the Buxton Brigade was crowned the 2020 NSW Adult Volunteer of the Year for her unwavering support of communities impacted by bush fire in the Macarthur and Southern Highlands regions.

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards are an annual program run by The Centre for Volunteering that recognises the outstanding work of volunteers in every region across NSW.

Kim was chosen as the winner from more than 100,000 nominees for the awards across 25 regions in NSW, and received the award in front of 400 special guests at the virtual awards ceremony.

Kim was one of many volunteers who dropped everything to protect lives, property and her own community during the unprecedented and devastating 2019/20 fire season.

Her leadership, coordination and logistical expertise helped form the backbone of the Buxton Brigade's response to the Green Wattle Creek fire.

She was forced to evacuate her own family and was told her home was lost, only to return to her burnt out street to find it still standing.

She stayed to put out spot fires and flare ups, while her husband worked with other volunteers fighting across many different fire fronts.

However, Kim's volunteering continued for many months after the fire was beaten. She joined with the Picton Country Women's Association to run the Balmoral Village Recovery Hub, a place for people to access support, referrals to other services and donations to help them rebuild their lives. She gave countless hours in coordinating the hub and managing and distributing donations to those in need.

Kim's commitment to her community continued with her work to help deliver the Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer Memorial Playground in Buxton, which you can read more about on page 35. Kim helped raise more than \$200,000 towards the memorial, coordinated donations and also managed the project.

Kim was also named Wollondilly Citizen of the Year at a ceremony on Australia Day 2021, further recognition for her tireless work on behalf of her community and outstanding contribution to the NSW RFS. ■

Photo: Kim Hill with Prime Minister Scott Morrison at the opening of the Memorial Playground in Buxton. Photo courtesy of Kim Hill.



FIGHTING FIRES FROM CA VIA QUARANTINE

BY KELWYN WHITE - MANAGER COMMUNITY RISK, AREA SOUTH EASTERN

Canadian firefighter Kevin Parkinson's dream came true when he was deployed to Australia during the 2019/20 fire season. He felt so welcomed and appreciated in Australia that he moved across the world to take up an opportunity as a Planning and Fire Behaviour Officer with NSW RFS Area South Eastern just 12 months later.

Kevin was one of 34 Alberta staff chosen to come down and assist Australia in its time of need during the devastating fires of 2019/20. For Kevin, the experience proved to be challenging but rewarding.

"Since I started fighting fires back in 1994, I had always wanted to come down and fight fires in Australia, previously it just never happened," said Kevin. "Coming into a new system is always difficult, especially when it is as busy as it was.

"I spent my entire 31-day deployment based in the Moruya Fire Control Centre as an Operations Officer, which was great as I was able to build a good relationship with local and other international staff."

Kevin found the transition into the NSW RFS system quite simple as the command and operations structures in Australia and Canada are so similar, coupled with the fact he was deployed alongside staff from Canada that he already knew.

"To show how small the fire world is, I was stationed with a woman from Ontario who had actually just spent 36 days working on fires in my district during our summer," said Kevin. "Everyone was amazing - they were all very friendly, helpful and made the transition so much easier.

"One thing for me that made a huge difference was that I wasn't just part of a team but part of the family. It was definitely a challenging deployment, and there were some very active and difficult fire days, but everyone blended together so well it all went as smoothly as you could hope."

Kevin brings 26 years of fire industry experience with him from Canada. He started his career in 1994, where he worked for a contract company for six years in British Columbia.

He then moved to Alberta, spending the next 20 years of his career in a range of roles including as a Rapattack Initial Attack Firefighter, a Wildfire Ranger, Wildfire Technologist and Operation Officer.

As a Wildfire Operation Officer for the last decade, Kevin was responsible for the entire operations of a wildfire district 5.6 million hectares in size, overseeing nine permanent staff and 120 contract staff during the fire season.

When Kevin returned home to Alberta in February 2020, he reflected on his time in Australia and reached out to a number of NSW RFS staff to find out if there were any career opportunities.



NADA TO AUSTRALIA,

“To be honest, a very large motivator for my decision was the people within the NSW RFS and the communities,” said Kevin. “I have never felt so welcomed and appreciated like I did while down here. The pride of the staff and volunteers was just amazing, and the resilience showed how amazing everyone is.

“When I got back home in early February, I was showing my wife and family pictures, telling them stories of how people went above and beyond to make you feel welcomed, and we talked about the option of moving.

“Granted, looking at pictures of the tropical scenery and beaches compared to the minus 30°C and four feet of snow outside at the time may have helped make the decision easier for all.

“I also thought that my 26 years of wildfire experience and training would possibly be a benefit to the NSW RFS, and that all the knowledge and experience here within the NSW RFS would be a benefit and would also provide some new challenges for me as well.”

Kevin applied to work for the NSW RFS during the Area Management Model recruitment in early 2020 and underwent the recruitment virtually. After his successful application, there were some hurdles

to overcome such as visa approvals and then COVID-19 restrictions.

“COVID-19 has slowed things down. Trying to find a flight was a huge challenge and has delayed my family being able to join me. I was able to get a flight for myself and land in Sydney on Christmas Day 2020 and start my 14-day quarantine, but my family had to wait until the beginning of February 2021 before we could fly them down.

“Doing 14 days alone in a hotel is a challenge, but the world of technology allowed me to get all the little things finalised and still keep in touch with family and friends.”

Having negated all the difficulties of moving halfway across the world during a global pandemic, Kevin is finally in place in the Area South Eastern office at Batemans Bay and excited to start his career with the NSW RFS. ■

Top left: Kevin Parkinson at NSW RFS Headquarters. Photo by Greg Allan. **Above:** Kevin (centre) with NSW RFS staff, NPWS staff and Canadian firefighters on deployment at the Moruya FCC in January 2020. Photo courtesy of Kelwyn White. **Right:** Kevin at a fire in Canada. Photo courtesy of Kevin Parkinson.





NO SIZZLE, BUT GET READY WEEKEND SOARED

BY JACQUELINE MURPHY, ACTING MANAGER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The traditional Get Ready Weekend sausage sizzle was off limits in 2020, but physical and health guidelines did not stop the enthusiasm of Get Ready Weekend.

Despite the many challenges of 2020, brigades across NSW embraced the event and a total of 496 events were held.

In collaboration with NSW Health, the NSW RFS issued a COVID-safe plan for all Get Ready Weekend face-to-face events.

The guidelines discouraged the service of food and high touch-point activities, such as allowing children to climb on the fire truck and anything that encouraged a crowd to gather. A total of 20 people were allowed to attend events at any given time.

Brigades were given the choice to host Get Ready Weekend as either a face-to-face event, an online meeting or they could choose to conduct a social media campaign.

A total of 405 face-to-face events still went ahead, and for the first time, more than 40 online meetings were held by brigades and 311 social media campaigns were run.

While some brigades in the north of the state held their events in August, most face-to-face events were focused on the weekend of 19-20 September.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECT

The use of social media as a central tool in the Get Ready Weekend approach in 2020 meant that the messaging reached different audiences and in some cases many more people.

On average, brigade Facebook pages have a reach of around 2,000 people, meaning the total reach of the Get Ready Weekend for 2020 could be in the area of three quarters of a million people via brigade Facebook pages alone. The total reach for the Get Ready campaign was likely around 1.5 million NSW residents.

Brendan Shannon from Windellama Brigade in the Southern Tablelands shared a typical situation.

“We had our message go to more than 1,000 people via social media,” said Brendan. “Compare this to the last ten years when our total contacts for Get Ready Day would be less than 50.”

The reach of Get Ready Weekend in some other areas expanded exponentially. At Pokolbin Brigade in the Hunter Valley, Deputy Captain Lewis Drayton reported that the brigade commonly welcomed between five and 30 people to the brigade station



Previous page: A four-legged friend gets into the spirit of Get Ready Weekend at Darlington Brigade. Photo by Kim Behringer. **Top:** Goolmangar Brigade set up shop at the local general store. Photo by Shannon Lee. **Left:** Physical distancing efforts at Avoca Brigade. Photo by Andrew Neale.



ONLINE MEETINGS

Online meetings were held live or pre-recorded. Yarramundi Brigade in the Blue Mountains used a generous dose of good humour to reach their community, engaging with more than 4,500 residents.

Other brigades innovated to provide interesting and engaging content for their communities. Engadine Brigade held a Q&A session online and Marsden Park Brigade did videos throughout the day on topics such as myths about grass fires and preparing your home.

Wamberal Brigade prepared several educational videos before the event and did a video interview with local media as well.

FACE-TO-FACE EVENTS AND NEW CHALLENGES

In some areas, face-to-face events were still held and proved to be as successful as ever. Wedderburn Brigade cooked their own special fire safety biscuits and Gunning Fish River Brigade managed to inspire some community members to join the NSW RFS.

Some brigades like Burrawang in the Southern Highlands and Katoomba in the Blue Mountains tried a different approach altogether. These brigades, using websites and social media channels, issued 'challenges' to their communities to get ready and provided weekly tips on how to prepare themselves for fire season.

The success of Get Ready Weekend 2020 was a credit to the creativity and dedication of many passionate NSW RFS members who turned what could have been a difficult situation into a new way of working with communities. ■

for Get Ready Weekend. In 2020, however, it was a different story.

"We ran a big social media campaign which achieved more than 20,000 engagements online," he said.

"We also engaged with two local newspapers that ran articles on the brigade and the event, as well as the NBN news crew arriving to cover the event."

It was a credit to the creativity and dedication of many passionate NSW RFS members who turned lemons into lemonade and found new ways to work with communities about their preparedness for bush fire.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

The Community Engagement team at NSW RFS Headquarters provided comprehensive 'how-to' kits covering social media 101, online meetings, how to host a Facebook Live event; and guidance on running a social media campaign including all the posts, images and text.

Tools for launching a Get Ready Weekend were well received and the whole social media campaign took about an hour to set up.

Brigades used a social media posting schedule provided in the 'how-to' guide, which allowed them to schedule posts for the whole month of September. Posts could also be localised to suit the needs or risks in their communities.

Make sure you save the date for this year's Get Ready Weekend - to be held 11-12 September 2021.



LOOK AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

The 2019/20 fire season undoubtedly had a significant effect on the mental health of many of our members, and the subsequent floods and COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the usual way in which the Service comes together and holds recovery activities. In response to this, and as a result of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and increased government funding, the NSW RFS is continuing to enhance the mental health services offered to members.

Following the findings of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry, the NSW Government announced \$16 million in funding for improved mental health provision for the NSW RFS. This funding will go towards increased resourcing with 17 new positions, including the recruitment of an occupational psychologist, occupational health specialist, two psychologists for each Area Command and the expansion of the existing Critical Incident Support Services (CISS) and Peer Support programs. Recruitment for the psychologist positions began in January 2021.

On these pages you can find out about several new mental health initiatives for NSW RFS members and how you can access these resources.

JOINT AGENCY INITIATIVE

Resilience NSW is funding a Joint Agency Initiative for the NSW RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW and NSW SES to develop a mental health program for members impacted by the 2019/20 fires, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, floods and other natural disasters. The program aims to strengthen access to support services, improve mental health education and member resilience and strengthen leaders' capability to support a mentally healthy workplace.

One of the initiatives on offer to all members is a series of webinars created by the NSW RFS Member Assistance Provider, Benestar.

The webinars aim to help you build good mental health and are on a variety of topics, all less than ten minutes in length. Webinar topics include stress management and mindfulness, creating better sleep habits, understanding the link between food and mood and strategies for relationship and family challenges (to be released in May 2021).

The Commissioners of the three agencies involved also came together in a recent video to speak about the events of the last 18 months and pledge their commitment to the mental health of members. You can watch the video from the three Commissioners and the webinars at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/wellbeing-resources.

To make an appointment with the Member Assistance Program please call Benestar on **1300 360 364**.

BUSH FIRE SUPPORT SERVICE

The NSW RFS has partnered with Black Dog Institute in their development of the Bush Fire Support Service – a new program to support the mental health of Australia's emergency support workers.

The Bush Fire Support Service has been designed to complement existing health services, ensuring that trauma-informed mental health support is available Australia-wide. For the first time, emergency service workers and their adult family members will have access to free specialist one-on-one psychological mental health care via Telehealth, regardless of their geographical location.

There are a few different ways to access the service:

- You can complete a confidential online mental health assessment via the website, which is designed to link people with the most appropriate support
- The website also includes a variety of tailored mental health resources
- The service offers up to 12 one-on-one psychological mental health care sessions with experts, free of charge via Telehealth

As part of the program, GPs in bush fire-affected areas will also receive accredited professional development in mental health care. You can visit www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/bush-fire-support-service/ for more information, or call **(02) 8627 3314** to speak to the Black Dog Institute's Bush Fire Support Team.

ARE THEY TRIPLE OK?

R U OK? recently released a wealth of resources to help the family and friends of emergency services personnel know when and how to intervene and support someone who might be struggling. The resources provide those working in emergency services roles and their families and friends with simple tips and tools for how to have an R U OK? conversation.

The free digital and printable resources include a conversation guide and personal stories from emergency services staff and volunteers that demonstrate the life-changing impact of an R U OK? conversation. You can download the resources and join the online emergency services community at www.ruok.org.au/triple-ok.

FORTEM AUSTRALIA

Wellbeing specialists Fortem Australia have launched a series of free mental health support programs for first responder families across NSW. Fortem runs a range of wellbeing and community engagement activities – from walking groups and coffee catch ups to surfing lessons and painting workshops – in cities and regional areas.

All Fortem activities, events and programs are tailored to help first responder families discover the benefits of incorporating simple lifestyle changes to their days. The activities are free to all NSW RFS members, offering a chance to relax and connect with other first responder families and form the vital support networks needed for good mental health.

Fortem also offers free clinical psychological and mental health support services to first responder families. You can contact Fortem on **1300 33 95 94** or visit their website at www.fortemaustralia.org.au to find a support activity near you.



The existing CISS, Peer Support and Chaplaincy and Family Support Programs are all still available for NSW RFS members and their immediate families in need of support or struggling to deal with traumatic events and critical incidents. You can call **1800 049 933** to speak to the CISS and Chaplaincy and Family Support teams at any time of the day.

➤ NSW RFS VOLUNTEERS WIN PRESTIGIOUS NATIONAL ROTARY AWARDS

Wendy Roberts from Crossroads Brigade (Shoalhaven) was recently announced as the 2020 Rotary National Emergency Service Community Awards (RESCA) national volunteer of the year. The Awards were announced in November at a special ceremony at Government House in Canberra, where Wendy was presented with her award by Governor-General David Hurley and Mrs Hurley.

A member for 58 years, Wendy has helped with welfare, logistics and fundraising and has attended many fire incidents as a member of the Erowal Bay Brigade, now amalgamated to form the Crossroads Brigade. Wendy is also involved with many other community organisations such as the Girl Guides and Meals on Wheels.

The Rotary Emergency Community Service Awards are designed to recognise emergency service personnel

whom have gone above and beyond their call of duty and reflected the Rotary motto of "Service Above Self".

"As a valued member of the NSW RFS for almost six decades, Wendy's dedication is inspiring and I thank her and all finalists for the commitment they make to helping communities across the state," said Commissioner Rogers.

Theodore Scholl of the Rappville Brigade was also announced as the winner of the Dorothy Hennessy Emergency Services Youth scholarship at the ceremony, recognising his unwavering efforts in supporting his brigade, communications, training and his community.

Congratulations to all finalists across the emergency services including NSW RFS state finalists, Robert John Cole (Loftus), Mark Eglington AFSM (Far North Coast) and Velma Walker AFSM (Shoalhaven).

➤ GENEROUS DONATION FROM UAE



Following the catastrophic 2019/20 bush fire season, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Government committed to donating seven bulk water tankers to Australian fire services. Emergency Management Australia secured three of the vehicles for the NSW RFS, which were handed over in February by His Excellency Abdulla Al Subousi, UAE Ambassador, to NSW RFS Commissioner Rob Rogers at Varley Group, Tomago.

The three tankers will serve communities in the Hunter Valley, Cooma Monaro and Castlereagh districts. With each vehicle worth more than \$370,000, the NSW RFS sincerely thanks the UAE for their generous donation to assist Australia's emergency services and protect communities across NSW and the country.

➤ HEFFERNAN NEW CFA CHIEF

In November 2020 the Victorian Government announced NSW RFS Assistant Commissioner Jason Heffernan as the new Chief Officer of the Country Fire Authority (CFA).

Jason served more than 20 years with the NSW RFS, starting as a volunteer firefighter and fulfilling a number of roles including in District and Regional management, as Director of Regional Services and Director of Response and Coordination. Prior to his CFA appointment, Jason was Director of Area Operations and had recently filled the role of Acting Executive Director Operations and as Deputy Commissioner.

We thank Jason for his excellent work with the NSW RFS, and wish him all the best in his new role with the CFA.



▶ ROLLOUT OF NEW AND UPGRADED TRUCKS BEGINS

The NSW Government has committed to deliver 200 new and upgraded fire trucks and vehicles to brigades across the state by July 2021. Overall, more than 340 fire trucks and vehicles are being built and upgraded for the NSW RFS and Fire and Rescue NSW following the devastating 2019/20 bush fires, which saw 71 NSW RFS vehicles destroyed.

The new and upgraded vehicles are part of the Government's previously announced \$45 million investment to enhance the state's firefighting capability in response to last fire season. The rollout has already commenced, with 23 new and refurbished trucks already deployed to some of the most at risk areas across NSW. "Ensuring our members have the most modern equipment and resources to protect local communities has been, and will remain, a key priority," said Commissioner Rogers.

"This program will enable brigades to continue their outstanding work and the updates and new technology will ensure our firefighters are safe while undertaking their important roles."



▶ NSW RFS LIBRARY CELEBRATES 20 YEARS



In February 2021, the NSW RFS Library celebrated 20 years of serving volunteers and staff. First opened in 2001 at what was then the NSW RFS Headquarters in Rosehill, the library has grown significantly over the last two decades.

Now situated at the NSW RFS Headquarters in Sydney Olympic Park, the library has several thousand active library members, the largest collection of wildfire literature internationally in one spot, online research journals, eBooks and audiobooks, and delivers hundreds of books each year right across Australia.

The NSW RFS Library is open to all NSW RFS members and members of the public. You can find out how to join by emailing rfs.library@rfs.nsw.gov.au.

▶ VOLUNTEERS ASSIST WITH COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS ACROSS NSW

As the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions changed our lives during the last year, NSW RFS members were on hand to help out in many different ways.

During the Northern Beaches outbreak in Sydney in December 2020, volunteers from Northern Beaches brigades (pictured) manned testing clinics to assist NSW Health in processing and organising members of the public who needed a test.

Brigades along the Victorian border also had a role to play when border restrictions were imposed on multiple occasions in 2020, with logistical and catering support provided to agencies such as NSW Police.





CREATING A COMMUNITY THAT IS ANIMAL-READY DURING EMERGENCIES

BY BETHANY PATCH, BUSHFIRE AND NATURAL HAZARDS CRC

During a disaster, animal owners are responsible for their animals – whether it be one cat or hundreds of cattle. By focusing on the crucial role of communities in animal emergency management, research is helping people protect and manage their animals more effectively during bush fires, floods and storms.

When an emergency hits, there are two very broad groups of community members who need to respond – people without animals and people with animals, whether that be cats, dogs, chickens, horses or livestock. With 62 percent of Australian households in this second category, many people’s decision making and behaviour will be significantly affected by their animals.

In an Australian first, the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC’s ‘Managing animals in disasters’ project has taken a community-to-community approach to enhance animal awareness and preparedness.

This involves working closely with communities to create new groups – called Animal Ready Communities (ARCs) – that foster closer bonds between animal owners and emergency services. These new groups are helping to increase preparedness, build resilience and change the way people plan for emergencies with their animals in Australia.

Led by Associate Professor Mel Taylor at Macquarie University, the CRC research team worked with a community-led group in the Blue Mountains called Blue Animal Ready Community (Blue ARC).

“People feel responsible for their animals. They understand the vulnerability of their animals in natural hazard emergencies and want to plan for them,” A/Prof Taylor said. “Networks are essential. While academics aren’t the drivers, we can be the glue.”

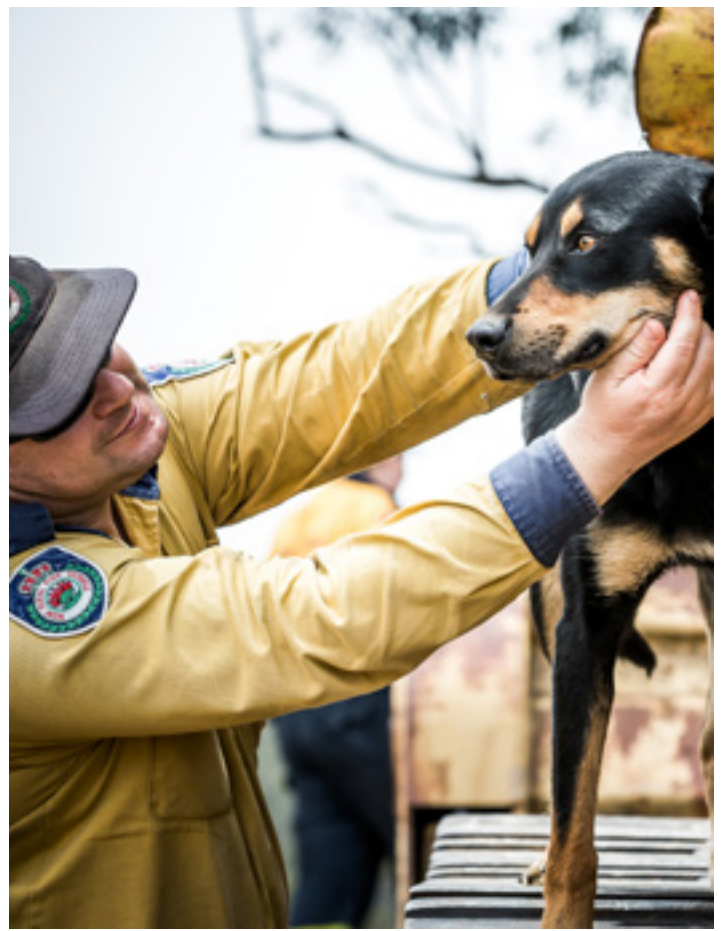
The researchers’ experiences with Blue ARC, the first group of its kind, are now being used to create other ARCs across Australia.

The Blue Mountains in NSW is regarded as one of the most bush fire-prone areas in the world, having been devastated by the 2013 and 2019/20 bush fires, and so was a great candidate for the development of the first ARC. Bush fire research indicates that animal ownership contributes to delaying evacuation or failing to evacuate during a bush fire. As such, one of the main aims of the Blue ARC group was to work directly with the community, beginning a dialogue with emergency services and supporting agencies to address local barriers to preparedness and planning for animals.

The Blue ARC group now actively supports community resilience in emergency events through better awareness, preparedness, planning and response for companion animals, livestock and native wildlife.



Previous page: NSW RFS crew rescues goats from the Bees Nest fire near Armidale in September 2019. Photo courtesy of Copacabana Brigade. **Top left:** Horses near Bilpin during the Gaspers Mountain



fire in December 2019. Photo by Ned Dawson. **Top right:** A dog on the fireground at the Green Wattle Creek fire in December 2019. Photo by Sharon Quandt.

Several NSW RFS brigades across the Blue Mountains are now using the resources developed by Blue ARC, as well as Springwood Neighbourhood Centre and the Mountains Community Resource Network.

To enable the development of ARCs in other communities, the researchers contributed to a NSW SES-led project called 'Ohana', producing a new website called Get Ready Animals (www.ses.nsw.gov.au/get-ready-animals), which was launched in August 2020 and funded by Resilience NSW.

The Get Ready Animals website is a one-stop shop for managing animals during disasters, providing guides on how to bring community groups together around key animal-related concerns, animal emergency plans, checklists for grab-and-go bags for pets, resources to help care for wildlife impacted by disasters and many other resources, information and plans.

Key to animal emergency management is identifying people, resources and safe locations, developing and practicing local plans and working with local emergency services, agencies and councils to build community capability and support resilience.

The Get Ready Animals site includes a guide called How to Build an Animal Ready Community, which distils much of the research A/Prof Taylor's team completed into an accessible ARC-building template for other communities to improve their animal emergency management.

These resources have since been used and expanded in the creation of a new Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley ARC in NSW, which has a greater focus on flood emergencies and large animal ownership.

The Get Ready Animals website received a NSW Resilience Australia award in 2020, recognising the importance of public messaging that allows communities and animal groups to become more prepared and self-reliant.

In addition to the Get Ready Animals website, A/Prof Taylor's research has recently contributed to two tailored booklets to help people in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley and the Blue Mountains prepare themselves and their animals for an emergency. Called Keeping Your Animals Safe in an Emergency, these booklets and more information about A/Prof Taylor's research can be accessed on the CRC's website - www.bnhcrc.com.au/research/animalsindisasters.

These guides were co-developed with key organisations within each community, with input from NSW SES, NSW DPI, Infrastructure NSW, Greater Sydney Local Land Services, Hawkesbury City Council and NSW RFS, as well as Blue ARC, the Mountains Community Resource Network and Agnes Banks Equine Clinic.

Projects such as this one, with an Australia-centric and community-focused approach, are contributing to a changing mentality of emergency management solely as an individual issue. ■



FROM THE ASHES

When James Kitto's house just outside West Wyalong burnt down in November 2020, he found a new appreciation for the Service and the work that is done after a fire is extinguished.

A TRAGIC LOSS

A long-serving member of the Tallimba Brigade in the Bland Temora Zone, James had only recently moved to West Wyalong when the fire occurred.

The fire at the Kitto household started early in the morning on Saturday 21 November, the result of an electrical fault in an unoccupied bedroom.

James was woken at around 0700hrs by one of the kids running down the hall and yelling that there was smoke coming over the top of a bedroom door. Luckily the bedroom was empty, however children were sleeping in a room across the hall and in other rooms in the house.

A Triple Zero call quickly brought trucks and tankers from both Fire and Rescue NSW and the local NSW RFS, but the fire had spread quickly into the roof and already engulfed half the house. The quick work of firefighters slowed the spread and allowed James and his family to save things like photos and small belongings before the fire spread. But unfortunately, the house could not be saved.

HELP FROM THE SERVICE

After speaking to the local NSW RFS members who attended the fire, James received a call later that day from Senior Chaplain Ian Spall to check on his welfare and offer support.

As part of the NSW RFS Chaplaincy and Family Support program, Ian and his team assist

members and their families when times are tough. This involves building relationships, lending a sympathetic ear, finding resources for people in need and standing with people in difficult times, as well as visiting members in hospital and performing crisis or suicide interventions.

In the course of several conversations over the next few days, James found Ian "a very understanding bloke", who was able to provide some much needed support. Ian also arranged some financial support for James and his family from the RFS Welfare Fund. These funds proved critical in keeping the family going in the immediate aftermath of the fire before the insurance claims were paid.

"Receiving the funds a day or two after the fire was very handy because we were in the lurch a little bit for a while," says James. "It was nice to feel a part of an organisation that actually does something after the fire as well."

For James it was eye-opening to be on the "other side" of a fire and see a side of the Service he had not previously considered despite decades of volunteering.

"From my point of view, I observed the evolution of the NSW RFS over 30-40 years a bit cynically," says James. "I thought that all the local blokes getting together and helping each other fight fires was as effective a way as any, without the bureaucracy around it."



Previous page: The damage to the Kitto family house from the fire.
Above: NSW RFS and Fire and Rescue NSW responding to the fire.
Below: NSW RFS fire investigators inspect the damage.
All photos courtesy of James Kitto.

“But then over time you see the bigger events and the intensity of fires and you’ve got to be much better organised and have much better equipment to face it. My personal experience with my own house helped me to see that the NSW RFS is not a faceless organisation; there’s actually people there and they do care and truly try to do the right thing for people in need.”

“To some extent it’s probably not an obvious facet of what the NSW RFS does – it’s not getting out there with flashing lights and hoses and putting fires out, but the aftermath lasts a lot longer than the fire. So to be there and give people a hand afterwards is pretty important.”

DRIVE TO SERVE REKINDLED

James and his family have moved into a friend’s house in town for a few months while they begin the rebuilding process and figure out where they will live. But for James, the experience has only strengthened his desire to be a part of the Service with his new brigade at West Wyalong.

“I’m 55 and I might only have a few years in the Service left, but for me it’s more about getting involved and being a part of the system rather than sitting back and saying it’s a waste of time. Hopefully I’m still useful for a little bit.” ■



You can contact the Chaplaincy and Family Support team on 1800 049 933 for a confidential discussion. Requests for assistance are welcomed from any member within the NSW RFS and their immediate family members.



FOCUSING ON WHAT MATTERS MOST

In May 2020 Commissioner Rob Rogers announced nine immediate priorities for the NSW RFS in the wake of the 2019/20 fire season. These priority projects focus on allowing members to operate safely and effectively, better connect with the Service and work together to best serve the community.

Since the priorities were announced, much progress has been made on a number of different fronts. The next few pages will go into depth on some of the strides we have made in the technological space, particularly in developing an integrated dispatch system.

You can also read more about the rollout of new helmets for members - one of the nine priorities - on page 28.

The Service has launched a new page on our website to keep members up to date with the progress on the nine priorities. This online resource has a section on each of our priority projects, so you can access the latest updates and related information at any time. You can visit the portal at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/priority-projects.

One priority project that members may have already noticed influencing their operational activity is the new Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system.

The new CAD system will improve our response time by recommending the closest, most appropriate resources to respond to incidents. CAD will give the

Service better integration with other emergency services, and the ability to dispatch more efficiently.

This is a large change for the organisation, and starts to bring together a number of the priority projects including RFS ACTIV and the Mobile Data Terminal project that is currently underway.

What is CAD?

CAD is an integrated dispatch system that will bring together our existing dispatch processes and systems to enhance the way we respond to emergency incidents.

This computerised call receipt and dispatch system will help streamline our dispatch process and improve our response time by automatically ensuring the closest, most appropriate resources are dispatched.

Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) will provide CAD with real-time data on the location and availability of appliances whenever they are within a Government Radio Network (GRN) coverage area.

The liftout on page 26 explains how CAD works and how it integrates with the status panels in trucks.

When will it be rolled out?

CAD went live for the Cudgegong and the Northern Beaches districts on 24 February 2021 and will be rolled out to the remaining 16 districts that are currently on Centralised Dispatch by mid April 2021.

If you are in one of the 27 districts not yet on Centralised Dispatch, your district will be gradually moved to the new dispatch system over a three-year period and you'll receive more information as we approach this phase.

What will this mean for our members?

Members will still be notified to attend incidents in the same way, as well as via RFS ACTIV, however they will be able to respond to incidents more efficiently as the Communications Operators will have better visibility on brigades' response capability. Brigades will continue being able to provide operational advice to support responses as required.

CAD and the use of status panels will reduce radio traffic while providing live information to districts and brigades in regards to vehicle status. Additionally, status panels will serve as a tool to provide a quicker notification of vehicle status updates (for brigades within the GRN footprint) to respond to incidents.

Photo below: Commissioner Rob Rogers watching CAD go live at NSW RFS HQ.

Work is underway for CAD to be integrated with RFS ACTIV to provide real-time availability of members attending incidents.

How are status panels integrated?

Once CAD goes live in your district, for those with GRN coverage, the status panels in trucks will be activated and available for use. Coverage for status panels will continue to improve in line with the NSW Telco Authority's work to enhance GRN coverage and capacity.

Your brigade will receive information from the district before go-live. For a guide on how to use status panels, refer to the liftout on the next page.

More information

To learn more about CAD and status panels, visit our new priorities webpage at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/priority-projects, which has FAQs and other resources such as fact sheets and videos. If you have any questions, contact your district in the first instance.

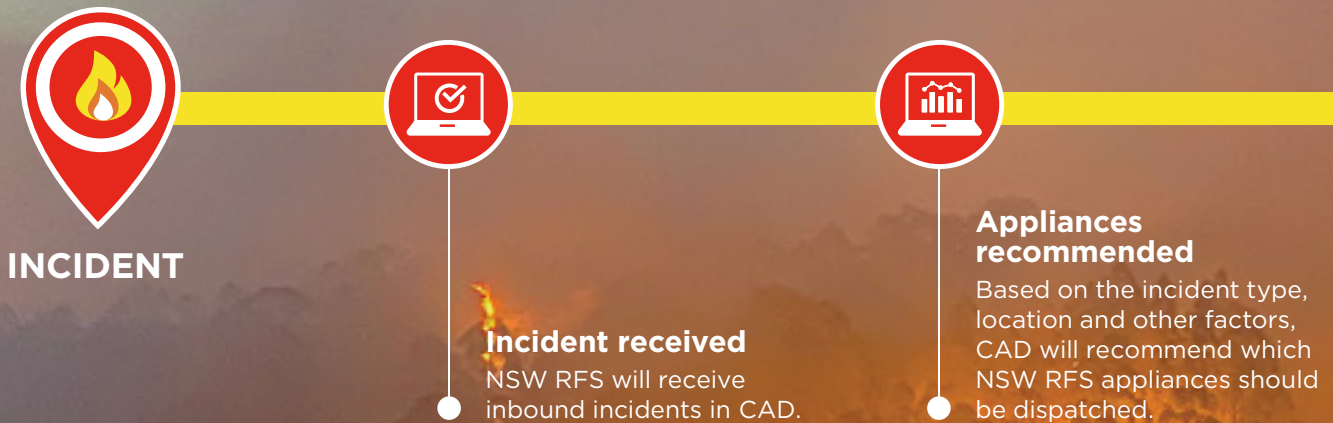
Alternatively, you can email the team at cad@rfs.nsw.gov.au. ■

Members will get regular updates on the priority projects via MyRFS, the priority projects eBulletin and NSW RFS Connect.



CAD AND STATUS PANELS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

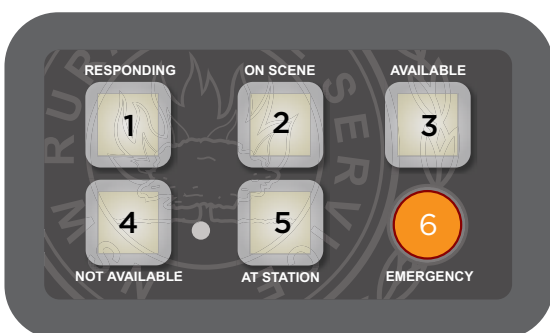
How will CAD work?



STATUS PANELS

As CAD rolls out to each of the 18 Centralised Dispatch districts, the status panels will also go live at the same time. This will be an optional tool to use, in addition to the existing radio network and communications, for providing appliance status updates. Using the status panels will promote an action in the CAD system.

Each button on the status panel has a specific meaning:



- 1 Responding:**
Vehicle is mobilised and on the way to scene of incident
- 2 On scene:**
Vehicle has arrived at scene of incident
- 3 Available:**
Vehicle is on air and ready to immediately respond to an incident with the appropriate crew
- 4 Not available:**
Vehicle is not able to be assigned to an incident (e.g. due to insufficient crew not on board)
- 5 At station:**
Vehicle is closed at the station and unmanned (i.e. off air) - members are available for regular callout, if required
- 6 Emergency:**
Vehicle is in a state of duress

As part of the Commissioner's nine priority projects, the NSW RFS is moving to Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD), a new integrated dispatch system that will improve our response time to incidents by ensuring the nearest, most appropriate resources are dispatched. Once your district goes live with CAD, the status panels you may have noticed in your vehicles will also become fully operational.



Appliances dispatched

Appliances will now be dispatched based on the closest, most appropriate and capable resources, using real-time data in CAD, to improve our response time to incidents.

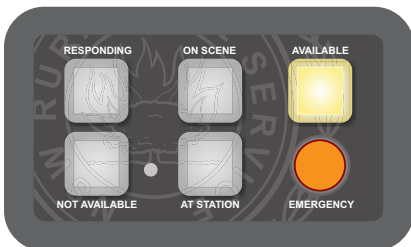


Brigade of Jurisdiction and Duty Officer paged

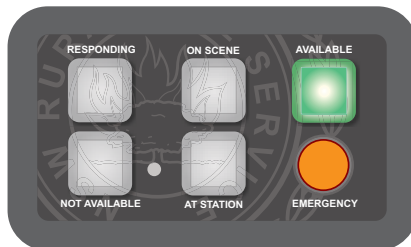
The Brigade of Jurisdiction and District Duty Operations Officers will be alerted for every incident to maintain situational awareness.



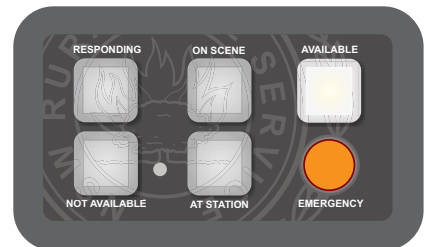
HOW DO I USE THE STATUS PANEL?



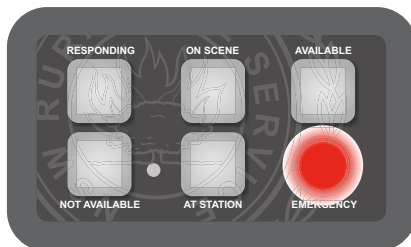
To send a status update, press the appropriate button and it will **GLOW YELLOW** to show that the status update has been queued.



When the status has been successfully sent, the button will **GLOW GREEN** for up to 5 minutes.

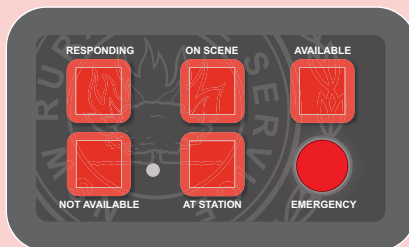


When the keypad has been idle for 5 minutes, the keypad status buttons will **GLOW WHITE**.



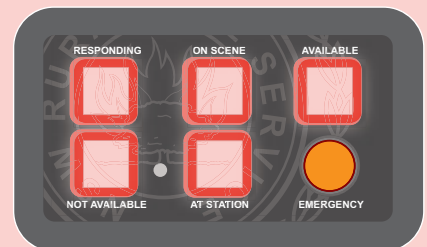
To send an emergency alert, **push and hold the ORANGE EMERGENCY BUTTON** until it flashes. To cancel the alert, push and hold the button until it stops flashing.

ERROR CONDITIONS



The Keypad buttons **GLOW RED** when the radio is not on a GRN channel, the radio is out of range or the radio is still powering up.

No status updates can be sent at the time. To fix this condition, ensure the radio is switched to a GRN channel and wait for it to be within radio range.



The keypad buttons **FLASH RED** when the keypad can't communicate with the radio. No status updates can be sent at this time.

To fix this condition, check the cable between the keypad and the radio is connected properly, then turn the radio off then on again. Contact technical support if this problem persists.



BR9 HELMET ROLL

Last year Commissioner Rob Rogers announced his nine priorities for the NSW RFS and one of these was to improve the head protection available to our members. This priority project became a reality in March 2021 as the Service began distributing specialised NSW RFS Pacific BR9 Wildland Helmets to volunteers.

The purchase and initial distribution of the helmets was funded as part of the \$70 million allocated from the NSW RFS and Brigades Donations Fund to improve equipment and resources for volunteers. This funding was made possible by the extraordinary generosity of the national and international community following the 2019/20 fire season.

Each brigade across the state received a helmet request form in late December 2020, which allowed brigades to indicate the required volumes. Based on the data received, the distribution process for the helmets began in March 2021 following a 'first in, first out' model guided by the date and time submission of each brigade's request.

Due to the magnitude of the roll out and the supplier's manufacturing limitations, the distribution will be managed on a continual basis until all requests are fulfilled.

NSW RFS PACIFIC BR9 WILDLAND HELMET

Manufactured by Pac Fire, the helmet features a DuPont™ Kevlar® reinforced fibreglass composite shell that provides integral strength and penetration protection. The lightweight shell is chemical and UV resistant, with inherent heat and flame resistance.

The helmet also includes premium reflective trim, a clear clip-on face shield, a base for a torch, earmuff brackets, rear goggle straps, goggle mounting posts, an adjustable headband, a three-point chin strap, a flame resistant neck protector and a quick release buckle.

The NSW RFS Pacific BR9 differs from the standard, publicly-available BR9, in that it includes two rear goggle straps (to secure and retain single strap goggles), four pieces of reflective trim on the crown of the helmet and a NSW RFS service decal.

Helmets will also come standard with a visor, six-point cradle, carry bag and neck flap. An allocation of torches and ear muffs will be made available to each firefighting appliance for brigade use.

The current issued helmet (the HF46) remains fit for purpose and will continue to be available on the NSW RFS catalogue for the foreseeable future.

ACCESSORIES

Approved accessories for the BR9 helmets are available for purchase on the NSW RFS Helmet Hub portal (see next page for more information). Please note that any other attachments procured outside of these means could potentially void the helmet warranty and its structural integrity.



OUT BEGINS

HELMET HUB

Now that the helmet rollout has begun, NSW RFS members will have access to the Helmet Hub portal. This is an online portal for members to register their helmets, access instructional videos and information about care and maintenance, and provide feedback on improvements and performance.

Members can also download the manual and product specifications, register for alerts, complete a damage report and even submit their own photos.

You can access Helmet Hub by scanning the QR code on the inside of your helmet, or by visiting www.pacfire.com.au/nsw-rfs-resource-centre. ■



Photo: Members from the New England and Northern Tablelands districts receive their new BR9 helmets. Photo by Liz Ferris.



OAKVILLE VICTORIOUS AT VERY DIFFERENT STATE CHAMPS

Like many events in 2020, the NSW RFS State Championships looked very different from normal thanks to COVID-19. Despite this, and thanks to plenty of hard work from all involved, the Championships went off without a hitch as the Oakville Brigade took out top honours.

With a range of challenging scenarios that test leadership, teamwork and core skills, the Championships – held every two years – provide a platform for members to showcase their talents to their fellow members as well as the broader community. But the 2020 edition was a little different.

To ensure that the Championships were COVID-safe and able to proceed, a two-round format was introduced. This format featured an online-only Round 1 where brigades were able to complete a series of challenges within their own patch, under strict competition conditions, and submit a video to be scored remotely by an expert panel.

The new format allowed brigades that hadn't previously competed at the Championships to

give it a go, with several making it through to the Grand Finale. In Round 1, each of the teams had to complete three specially-designed scenarios that they were able to setup locally using standard equipment common to all brigades.

While this remote approach meant that the scenarios may have lacked a little of the grandeur that teams have come to expect at the State Championships, it didn't stop the Marshals from delivering some very challenging exercises.

It's expected that Scenario 3 – Bucket – will remain the stuff of nightmares for many teams for years to come. Though it is worth noting that both the eventual overall winners, Oakville (Senior) and Thurgoona (Junior), were among the small number of teams to successfully complete this task.

Photos: NSW RFS crews take part in the State Championships Grand Finale at The Oaks. All photos by James Morris.



Following the online rounds, 12 teams from across the state progressed to the Grand Finale, held in September 2020 simultaneously across three sites at Inverell, The Oaks and Balldale. The brigades were put through their paces by a new set of challenging scenarios, with Oakville taking out the seniors and Thurgoona the juniors.

Oakville held off second-placed Mt Keira and third-placed Ku-ring-gai to claim the trophy, adding to their first place finishes in the 1998, 2004, 2006 and 2018 Championships.

In the junior category, Thurgoona triumphed over the Mamre Cadets in second and the Narrabri Juniors in third.

The scenarios, tasks and a full list of the final results are available on the State Championships online portal at www.rfsstatechampionships.com.au.

Congratulations to all of the competing brigades that willingly adhered to the strict COVID-safe guidelines to ensure the Service was able to again showcase the amazing skills and abilities of its volunteers.

A massive shout out must also go to all the volunteers and staff who worked tirelessly to make this event possible. This truly dedicated team have given up their time to not only marshal, judge, arrange logistics and design scenarios over the weekend, but have spent the last two years planning, replanning and replanning again to ensure they were able to deliver this important event. ■



RAINBOW FLAT RISES AGAIN



In November 2019 the Hillville fire ravaged 31,200 hectares of the Mid Coast and destroyed the modest single-storey Rainbow Flat Brigade station that had stood since 1982. Fourteen months later, a bright, new two-bay station has risen in its place.

Stuart Robb, District Officer Learning and Development for the Mid Coast District, was also the Public Liaison Officer during the Hillville fire. He says the new station is welcomed by the 33 Rainbow Flat Brigade members and the communities they serve.

“On the night of 8 November 2019 when the fire jumped the Pacific Highway and took out the station, crews were out working on other fires in the area and were unaware the station was threatened,” says Stuart.

“Sadly, a lot of important memorabilia such as trophies, pendants, photos and handwritten minutes were lost and damaged in the fire, but at least the brigade now has a new place to call home.”

The new two-bay station (replacing the previous one-bay station) comes with a kitchen, change

room and facilities, a meeting/training room and a larger capacity water supply. It is a welcome replacement of the demountable which was stationed on the site after the fires.

Robert Derbyshire, Captain of the Rainbow Flat Brigade, said the build took a little longer than usual thanks to the pandemic. Local tradies were stretched across the area working on home renovations and materials took longer to arrive from overseas.

“During the rebuild, the brigade’s Cat 7 tanker was stationed on a member’s property up the road, so it is great it now has a permanent home again,” says Robert.

With plenty of room, showers and space to meet and train, he said the team were delighted with their new digs.

Previous page: Rainbow Flat Brigade members with Commissioner Rogers at the opening of the new station. **Below:** The destroyed station in the aftermath of the Hillville fire in November 2019. **Bottom:** Brigade members in front of the new station. All photos courtesy of NSW RFS Mid Coast.



“It’s great,” says Robert. “It far exceeds what we had!”

Mid Coast District has been busy during an unusually quiet fire season, with the 2019/20 bush fires attracting more than 700 applicants keen to join (or re-join) the Service. From these, 300 new recruits have now been put through their training, with five new members and three transfers welcomed to Rainbow Flat Brigade this season.

The new station was funded by Mid Coast Council, NSW RFS and insurance, and was officially opened on 27 February 2021 at an event attended by Commissioner Rob Rogers, District staff and brigade members.

“This excellent new station is a modern, standalone, fit-for-purpose building that is greatly welcomed by the volunteers and the communities they serve,” said Commissioner Rogers.

“After a year operating out of a temporary demountable building and storing the brigade’s tanker on a neighbouring property, this new building is greatly welcomed and will assist with vehicle housing, training and the fighting of fires locally.”



US AIRMEN HONOURED AT PEAK VIEW



Saturday 23 January 2021 marked the one-year anniversary of the tragic death of three American air crew killed when their Large Air Tanker crashed near Cooma.

The three men, Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, were honoured at a memorial service at Peak View attended by local firefighters and emergency services personnel, as well as Australian and American dignitaries.

The three experienced aviators were working on the Coulson Aviation-owned Lockheed C-130 Hercules (call sign Bomber 134) in firefighting operations at the Good Good fire when it crashed on the afternoon of 23 January 2020.

The memorial event was organised by the Peak View Brigade – the closest NSW RFS brigade to the crash site. Members of the brigade have remained in contact with the families of the three American men and consulted with the families on the design and wording of two memorial plaques created at the crash site and the Peak View Brigade station.

The NSW RFS will never forget the sacrifice made by Ian McBeth, Paul Hudson and Rick DeMorgan Jr in the act of protecting NSW communities from fire, and these memorials will remind all who visit of their courage and service. ■



Main photo: The memorial plaque at the crash site.
Above: The memorial at the Peak View Brigade station.
Photos by James Morris.



PLAYGROUND HONOURS LOST FIREFIGHTING FATHERS

Nearly a year after Deputy Captain Geoff Keaton and Firefighter Andrew O'Dwyer of the Horsley Park Brigade were tragically killed fighting the Green Wattle Creek fire, a memorial playground has been opened in Buxton in their honour.

The Fire Truck Memorial Playground at Telopea Park in Buxton was opened on 5 December 2020, featuring fire truck-themed climbing and play equipment. Hosted by Wollondilly Shire Council, the event included a Welcome to Country, smoking ceremony and heartfelt addresses from Prime Minister Scott Morrison and NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian recognising and acknowledging the sacrifice of the fallen firefighters and the significance of such a fitting community project.

The opening was also attended by the families of Geoff and Andrew, members of the Horsley Park Brigade and a long list of dignitaries including NSW RFS Commissioner Rob Rogers and Resilience NSW Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons.

"The new fire truck playground will serve as an ongoing reminder to the Buxton community of the sacrifice that was made to protect their village during the devastating Green Wattle Creek Fire," said Wollondilly Mayor Robert Khan. ■



Photos: All photos by Kelly Browne.



RIVERINA BRIGADES BAND TOGETHER TO BUY PRIME MOVER

BY BRADLEY STEWART - OPERATIONAL OFFICER L2, RIVERINA ZONE

The 2019/20 fire season reinforced the importance of having mobile bulk water available to brigades and districts across the state. Following the season, and thanks to the generous donations made to the NSW RFS and Brigades Donations Fund, ten brigades in the Riverina Zone decided to pool their donations and purchase a prime mover.

For the past 25 years the NSW RFS Riverina Zone has maintained three Cat 13 bulk water trailers within the zone, with two trailers located in Junee and one in Wagga Wagga. The Wagga Wagga Cat 13 trailer, call sign 'Riverina Bulk Water', has a capacity of 30,000 litres and is currently stationed at Lake Albert Rural Fire Station.

Riverina Bulk Water has been a vital resource to the Riverina Zone and adjoining fire districts for many years. In 2018, Riverina Bulk Water and one other bulk water trailer had enhancement works completed to the 30,000-litre bulk water trailers. These works included the installation of heavy-duty transfer pumps to give the trailers a significant increase in capability, including flow rates up to 97m³/h, heads up to 69m, suction heads up to 8m and electric start units available upon request.

2019 was Australia's driest year on record, and in the three years up to January 2020 around a third of Australia and 96 percent of NSW had serious or severe rainfall deficiencies. This reduced rainfall

had a significant impact on water availability at the Dunns Road fire in 2019/20, with many farm dams, creeks and other water sources being depleted well before the fire due to the 'big dry'.

Riverina Bulk Water undertook 14 continuous days of fire operations at the Dunns Road Fire, starting on 28 December 2019. The Dunns Road fire burnt for 50 days, burning through 330,000 hectares of private and public land, destroying more than 180 homes and killing thousands of livestock. Due to the poor availability of water at the Dunns Road fire, Riverina Bulk Water was invaluable in providing a water solution to firefighters on the fireground and reducing time wasted in seeking out and replenishing water.

At one stage during the Dunns Road fire in Tumbarumba, the town water supply was completely exhausted. Authorities excavated a waterhole in normally shallow Tumbarumba Creek, utilising a flood pump to keep vital water supplies flowing for firefighters (see photo right).

Main (at left): The new prime mover purchased by the Riverina brigades. **Bottom:** Tumbarumba Creek is excavated to supply much-needed water to fight the Dunns Road fire in January 2020. Photos by Bradley Stewart.

Riverina Bulk Water and the dedicated volunteers have proven to be a critical local resource, providing timely, cost effective water supply to frontline appliances in a wide variety of fire-related situations across the wider area.

The Riverina Zone had not previously owned a prime mover in the Wagga Wagga LGA and as such was heavily reliant on a third party to assist with towing the tanker trailer. This void was filled for the past 25 years by Hartwigs Trucks, who generously donated a prime mover each fire season.

Following the sale of the Wagga Wagga Hartwigs Trucks franchise, the Riverina Zone was at a loss for how to tow their trailer before a collection of brigades hit upon an idea.

In March 2020, the NSW RFS and Brigades Donations Fund initiated a program that provided grants of up to \$10,000 per brigade for the purchase of firefighting equipment, facilities, training and resources for brigades and districts. These funds were available thanks to the generosity of the Australian and international community following the 2019/20 bush fire season, with more than \$100 million donated.

While many Riverina Zone brigades made good use of the grants to acquire items of need for their respective brigades, ten local brigades elected to pool their individual allocations and create a \$100,000 fund to purchase a second-hand prime mover. The funds were also used to fit out the vehicle with appropriate warning devices and other livery as well as radios, smart devices and other items necessary to safely operate on a fireground.

After researching various options, the Riverina Zone settled on a 2016 Mack Granite 4910 with a low line sleeper and m-drive transmission. The prime mover has a seating capacity for two, fuel capacity of 350 litres and a GVM well in excess of what is required to safely tow the bulk water trailer.

The Riverina Zone would like to thank our local brigades who contributed funding towards the acquisition of this valuable resource, as well as Wagga Trucks for helping source a quality vehicle. This purchase of course would not have been possible without the assistance of the NSW RFS and Brigades Donations Fund and the generosity of people all over the world. ■





MITIGATION CREW LEADERS SHARPEN SKILLS AT FIRST EVER FORUM

BY MICHELE COOPER,
AREA COMMANDER, AREA NORTH EASTERN

NSW RFS Mitigation Crew Leaders from across the state met for the first time since the program's inception at the NSW RFS Training Academy in Dubbo in December 2020. More than 90 staff participated in a two-day forum aimed at developing leadership in our crew leaders, building capability and ensuring a strong and healthy safety culture.

Mitigation crews across the seven Area Commands undertake a variety of tasks including hazard reduction, mitigation works and the Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents (AIDER) program, as well as provide crucial statewide operational support. The crews set up base camps during large incidents and campaign fires, assist with loading the Large Air Tanker and have undertaken building impact assessments during fires and flooding events.

These crews are often on the frontline and engaging with our communities on preparedness, fuel reduction around homes and reiterating the importance of having a bush fire survival plan. With such a diverse and expanding role, and considering the role mitigation will play in achieving the outcomes of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry, it is pertinent we invest in this large and diverse group.

The crew leader forum at Dubbo followed three themes: leadership, capability and safety. The long-term aims of bringing this group together annually is to ensure we are continually developing and strengthening our people's leadership skills, embedding a healthy and strong safety culture and continually advancing and improving our capability.

The group was provided initial training in crucial conversations and how to manage conflict, then undertook a course on personality discovery. This course helped to establish if the crew leaders were dominant, influencing, steady or conscientious in their behaviour and how this might influence the way they work and interact with their teams.

Plenty of work was also done on safety in the workplace and what a healthy safety culture looks like. James Wood, an internationally recognised and award-winning safety speaker, shared his



Top left and right (in breakout box): Mitigation crew members in action. **Below:** The Mitigation Crew Leader training at the NSW RFS Training Academy in Dubbo. Photo by Michele Cooper.

experience of a workplace injury that left him with a broken back and permanent spinal cord damage. His message that he had done the task “100 times before” resonated within the room – that split-second decision changed his life forever.

The two-day event ended with the group agreeing on a shared vision of “excellence in our people, work and culture”, and the commitment to draft a plan that focused on leadership, safety and capability in the Area Mitigation program.

Aside from the more formal outcome of a strategic plan, the feedback from the forum was very positive with a commitment to hold an annual forum to develop crews further and ensure the mitigation program achieves and exceeds its goals. ■



Since July 2020 the statewide mitigation program has achieved a number of targets including:

- **3,300 kilometres of mitigation works** (about the same distance as Sydney to Darwin)
- **715 mitigation jobs** (an average of about 19 jobs per week since July 2020)
- **More than 26,000 properties** protected (roughly the same number of dwellings as in the town of Port Macquarie)





PANDEMIC CAN'T STOP PROGRAM TO EMPOWER YOUNG WOMEN

When COVID-19 restrictions threatened to halt delivery of the Girls on Fire program – a collaboration between NSW RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW, NSW Parks and Wildlife Service and Air Services Australia – organisers had to get creative.

The Girls on Fire camp launched in 2018, empowering girls and young women by teaching them firefighting and emergency services skills, increasing their confidence and resilience and encouraging problem-solving, teamwork and leadership. The camp also introduces them to the possibility of a career or volunteering in the fire and emergency services.

The 2020 program included online learning, a virtual workshop and a one-day practical component delivered face-to-face following COVID-safe guidelines, conducted in Yarramundi, Newcastle, Dubbo and Mogo.

Peter Jones, Deputy Captain of Kurrajong Brigade, together with Phil Hurst, a Group Captain at Hawkesbury, helped coordinate two of the practical days and provide equipment such as tankers and bulk water. Peter was immensely relieved to see the

program go ahead after it was cancelled in 2019 due to the 2019/20 fire season.

“COVID-19 meant we needed to do things differently, with social distancing limiting the number of participants we could have, lots of hand sanitiser and the week-long camp being replaced with a one-day practical component,” said Peter. “However, it has once again proved such a valuable demonstration to girls of what they are capable of and what they could pursue as a career if they wanted to.”

Overall, 67 girls took part, ranging in age from 15 to 19. Another 64 volunteers from the five participating agencies participated as mentors and activity facilitators to provide the girls with an incredible learning opportunity.

Each program had a slightly different session plan with activities including rural and urban firefighting scenarios, remote access firefighting, managing fire



with hand tools, burnover drills, road crash rescue, breathing apparatus skills, structural search and rescue, extinguishers and fun games incorporating wet hose drills and giant swings.

All program activities included structural elements from each of the services such as working in platoons, wearing structural and rural PPC and responding to simulated scenarios in the various fire appliances.

One of the founders of Girls on Fire, Fire and Rescue NSW's Bronnie Mackintosh, said the 2020 program pivoted to become the Girls Fire and Resilience Program and was focused on regional areas.

“The hope was to return to areas such as Wauchope and Mogo to assist with recovery efforts from last season’s fires,” she said. “Unfortunately Wauchope didn’t end up going ahead, but Mogo did, and the final program held at the Eurobodalla Fire Training Centre in November was one of the most successful we have run.

“Several participants had lost homes or business in the fires and had joined the program so they could learn how to help their communities recover and prepare for future adversities.

“It also provides an opportunity for existing emergency services personnel to develop their leadership skills by volunteering as mentors or activity facilitators during the program.”

Photos: All photos by Conor Deans.

The 2020 program had the luxury of a program manager for the first time: Patsy Marshall from the NSW RFS, who provided all the business, logistics and operations support, with additional assistance from NSW RFS staff including Beth Slender from the Area Western Command and Dez White from the Castlereagh District Office. The NSW Forestry Corporation also participated as a guest ahead of a future partnership in 2021.

The success of the program has laid a platform for 2021, which will see the program expanded to new regional settings and additional Sydney locations. It will also be extended to a three-day weekend in May – global pandemic permitting! ■





OVER - CLEAR - CLEAR TO YOU

BY DAVID HANZL - SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN,
CARWOOLA BRIGADE

We're always trying to do a bit better on the fireground, aren't we?
Trying to be just a little bit more informed, more effective, safer?
Trying to learn something new each time we're out with the NSW RFS?

So here are a few tips that might help you understand what you hear on the Service's GRN and PMR radio networks.

You've probably heard people saying "CLEAR", "OVER" or even sometimes "CLEAR TO YOU" interchangeably. But they're not meant to be interchangeable terms. Actually, they each have specific meanings and it's important we understand the difference.

PROWORDS

For professional radio operators these are known as 'prowords'. Prowords are words that have a specific meaning on a controlled radio network.

Why are prowords important? Because on a busy network, such as our dispatch network, we need to keep the radio traffic as brief and as clear as possible to hear and understand the intent of the message.

Therefore we have a small number of words that are intended to help us by having known meanings and that are easily heard over a radio.

In the military, which is where many of these practices and conventions come from, there are hundreds of prowords - a thick manual full of them. For NSW RFS purposes we're getting off lightly; there are only a couple of dozen prowords that are commonly used. Here's three of them:

- **OVER:** I have finished speaking - I AM expecting a response from you
- **CLEAR:** I have finished speaking - I AM NOT expecting a response from you
- **CLEAR TO YOU:** I have finished speaking to you - I AM NOT expecting a reply - I am now going to call another callsign immediately

If you use the proword "CLEAR", you are essentially indicating that the channel is now clear for others to speak. But, when we are speaking on the dispatch network, the only other callsign we are speaking to is the Communications Centre (FIRECOM) and we need to confirm they've heard what we said - the conversation isn't over just because you've said what you wanted to say.

Photos: All photos by Sharon Quandt.

Therefore, when we finish speaking we should normally say “OVER”, *not* “CLEAR”.

Generally, the only callsign that declares the channel “CLEAR” for others to speak is FIRECOM.

If you stop reading now, that’s ok; you’ve learned something useful. If you want to dig just a little deeper and discover why you don’t say “CLEAR TO YOU” on the dispatch network, let’s have a look at another basic concept.

CONTROLLED NETWORKS

Earlier in this article, you may have noticed I used the term ‘controlled network’. This is a really important concept. For most of us, our introduction to having anything to do with radios was with Citizen Band (CB) radios. This is an ‘uncontrolled network’, meaning that when you pick up a CB, you can turn it on, choose a channel and just start talking to whomever you want, whenever you want.

As long as they are within range, you’re in business. There is nobody on the network who decides who has priority to speak. As you can imagine, a network like this could sometimes get quite chaotic.

A controlled network however, is very different. There are rules. On a controlled network there is a Network Control Station (NCS). In a NSW RFS context, the NCS is FIRECOM. All calls go through the NCS and you are not free to talk to whomever you want. If you want a message passed to another callsign, you ask the NCS to do that for you.

Let’s think back to what the “CLEAR TO YOU” proword refers to:

- I have finished speaking to you
- I AM NOT expecting a reply
- I am now going to call another callsign immediately

That last bit is really important and, if we remember the rules of a controlled network, it should be obvious that “CLEAR TO YOU” would normally only be used by FIRECOM. That’s why you will hear FIRECOM say things like: “*ROGER Carwoola 1, CLEAR TO YOU, Lake George Duty, did you COPY that last transmission?*”



If you aren’t calling someone else immediately, you don’t use this proword.

CLEAR VS OUT

As an aside, you may also occasionally hear people using the proword “OUT”. This is the military equivalent of “CLEAR” and means the same thing.

If you hear it on the radio, it usually indicates an ex-military member who has slipped into their old ways. It took me years to both let it go and to get out of the habit! In the NSW RFS, we use “CLEAR”.

So now, when you hear someone in a movie saying “OVER and OUT!”, you know they’re a bit confused. What they are effectively saying is: “*I’m finished speaking, I DO expect a response and I do NOT expect a response from you*”.

CONCLUSION

If we’re using these words incorrectly on the radio, why don’t the FIRECOM operators correct us? Well, that’s because they’re professional and experienced radio operators.

They know that we’re all volunteers, we’re not professional operators, we don’t all know the correct procedures, we don’t practice this all the time and we make mistakes. They are professional enough to help us with our calls and, as long as the *intent* of your message is clear, that’s probably the main thing.

So, while *they* don’t get hung up over technically correct procedure, maybe we volunteers can do a bit better ourselves. ■

VALE

JAMES RAYMOND 'JIM' SHANAHAN 1954 – 2020

On 9 October 2020 Deputy Captain Jim Shanahan of the Hill End Brigade suffered a heart attack on active duty after attending a vehicle fire in Hill End in the Chifley/Lithgow District. His fellow volunteers provided initial medical assistance and were supported by NSW SES members, NSW Police officers and NSW Ambulance paramedics, however Jim tragically passed away.

Jim was a much-loved member of Hill End Brigade with more than 30 years of service and was President and Deputy Captain of the brigade at the time of his passing. He joined the Hill End Brigade in 1990 and quickly became a valued and respected member. In 2002 he took on the role of President and in 2003 was voted in as a Deputy Captain.

In 2009 Jim took on the role of Senior Deputy Captain and remained in that role until August last year, when he decided to step back slightly from his brigade duties and took on the role of Deputy Captain again.

During his time as Senior Deputy Captain, Jim was the cornerstone of the brigade, taking as much of the load as possible off the Captain at incidents and carrying out a great deal of the support work required to keep the brigade ticking over. At incidents his calm manner and common sense approach would put brigade members and others involved at ease, with everyone more than willing for Jim to take the lead and delegate tasks.



Jim was a person who always put his own problems last, continually focused on assisting members of the very tight-knit Hill End community. Jim and his wife Gaye initiated a 'War on Waste' program that not only raised significant funds for the brigade and the local school, but saved thousands of cans and bottles from ending up in landfill. Their efforts started a fundraising movement in Hill End that continues to grow today.

Jim served energetically as the brigade's training officer for the last ten years and happily took on the mentoring of new members who joined the brigade, making training days an informative and social event. Anyone who checked the brigade's sign-on book on any given day would probably find Jim's name, as he was a regular fixture undertaking maintenance on the equipment around the station.

He was a quiet achiever and true gentleman and was the glue that held the brigade and Hill End community together. Jim will forever be remembered as a man who loved life, his family and his community.

He is survived by his wife Gaye, two children and six grandchildren.

VALE

JOANNE GAFFEY

1947-2021

The NSW RFS lost a valued member in early February when Joanne Gaffey of the Gosford Catering Brigade died after suffering a significant stroke while on active duty.

Joanne was undertaking tasks at the Gosford Catering Brigade station on Thursday 4 February 2021 when the stroke occurred and was rushed to hospital by Intensive Care Paramedics for emergency surgery. Tragically, she did not regain consciousness and passed away on Saturday 6 February 2021 surrounded by her family.

Joanne joined the NSW RFS in November 2014 and soon completed training in food handling and bush fire support to assist with catering duties in the brigade kitchen as well as on the fire line. She was also an approved driver for the brigade and qualified in first aid, holding the position of Brigade First Aid Officer for the past two years.

Joanne was a very capable member of the Gosford Catering Brigade, quick to learn the trade and help others. She always undertook her catering duties with a smile, and her bright and bubbly personality always made her a pleasure to be around. Joanne was reliable with any task she was given, nothing was ever too hard, and she was always ready to chip in and go the extra mile when the pace of activity increased.

Over the course of her time in the Service, Joanne assisted with catering duties for a range of events including training, hazard reduction burns, ceremonial events and operational incidents. During the 2019/20 fire season, Joanne provided outstanding service in the provision of catering on the fire line for the Three Mile fire, as well as a range of other fires that impacted the Central Coast area. Her efforts were recognised recently when she was presented with the Premier's Bushfire Emergency Citation.



The NSW RFS offers the deepest condolences to Joanne's family and friends, fellow crew and brigade members. The Service is extending every assistance possible to Joanne's family and fellow members at this difficult time.

Joanne was laid to rest on 13 February 2021 at a service at Palmdale Memorial Park, surrounded by family and friends.



MEMORIAL FOR FALLEN VOLUNTEERS

The names of eight NSW RFS members were added to the Emergency Service Volunteers Memorial at a service in Sydney in October 2020. The annual service at Mrs Macquarie’s Chair commemorates volunteers who made the ultimate sacrifice in order to protect their communities.

There are now 102 names enshrined on the memorial, recognising volunteers from the NSW RFS, NSW SES, Marine Rescue NSW and the NSW Volunteer Rescue Association, as well as predecessor organisations.

Of the eight NSW RFS names added to the memorial, four lost their lives fighting the devastating 2019/20 bushfires – Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O’Dwyer, Samuel McPaul and Colin Burns. The names of four volunteers who died as a result of work-related illnesses were also added – Michael Maria, Phillip Bell, Ian Long and Robert Panitz.

The 2020 service was particularly poignant as it occurred just days after the loss of NSW RFS volunteer Jim Shanahan, whose name, along with

Joanne Gaffey’s, will be added to the memorial for the 2021 service. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, attendance to the memorial service was strictly limited and priority was given to the families of those members whose names were added.

“The men and women who volunteer put service above self, often prioritising the safety of their community above their own. Our state owes them all a debt of gratitude,” said Minister for Police and Emergency Services David Elliott.

“While we do everything we can to ensure the safety of our emergency services members, tragically, sometimes these men and women do not make it home. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten.” ■

AUSTRALIAN FIRE SERVICE MEDALS 2021



The Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) is awarded for distinguished service by a member of an Australian fire service. Congratulations to the seven NSW RFS members who were awarded an AFSM as part of the 2021 Australia Day Honours, recognising their commitment to the community.

DARREN BREUST

Group Captain
Bland Temora,
Area South Western

Group Captain Darren Breust joined the Tara-Bectric Brigade in 1987 and held the positions of Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain and Captain with the brigade.

With his father, Group Captain Breust was actively involved in building the Tara-Bectric Brigade's beloved 6x6 International fire tanker, which they housed on their property until it was decommissioned and replaced with a new Category 3 tanker.

In 2007, Group Captain Breust was nominated and elected Group Captain for Bland Temora Zone. Since being elected he has represented Bland Temora Zone volunteers on the Zone's Bush Fire Management Committee, Liaison Committee and Senior Management team.

On the fireground, Group Captain Breust is well respected and leads by example. He has an excellent work ethic and appreciation of the volunteer culture. When he responds to local incidents or out-of-area Section 44 deployments as a Strike team leader, Group Captain Breust has taken on roles and responsibilities over and above that expected of him.

He constantly works towards continuous improvement and is focused on achieving the best results for our volunteers, the NSW RFS and the wider community.

GUY DUCKWORTH

Inspector
Mid Coast,
Area Hunter

Inspector Guy Duckworth joined the Davidson Bush Fire Brigade in 1984, before transferring to Belrose Brigade in 1987 and holding the positions of Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain and Captain. He was then elected as a Deputy Group Captain in 1997, a position he held until moving to a salaried position within the Service.

In 1998 he was appointed to the rank of Inspector and Deputy Fire Control Officer for the Byron Shire Council. In 2000, he became Deputy Fire Control Officer for Port Macquarie-Hastings District and is now the 2IC and District Coordinator for Response Coordination and Infrastructure for the Mid Coast District.

Inspector Duckworth has been an inspirational leader and mentor to members in the District. His guidance and input to the Senior Management Team has been invaluable, consistently contributing to the strategic management plans that have developed modern, well-equipped brigades.

Inspector Duckworth's operational experience is extensive. He has been an Incident Controller and undertaken incident management positions all over Australia during fire emergencies. He is regarded as a very experience operator, leading strike teams into Canberra during the 2003 fires.



AUSTRALIAN FIRE

GLEN HOWE

Group Captain
Central Coast,
Area Hunter

Group Captain Glen Howe initially joined the Kariong Brigade in 1978, and has held the positions of Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain and Captain since then. He was elected to Group Captain in 1993, a position he still holds today.

Throughout his 42 years of service, Group Captain Howe has shown exceptional leadership skill in operations, brigade management, training and mentoring. He has assisted with numerous local significant incidents (mostly in an operational command role) including major bush fires of 1979, 1983, 1988, 1991, 1994, 2001, 2002 and 2019.

During the unprecedented fires of the 2019/20 season, Group Captain Howe was an integral part of the effort to protect the Central Coast community.

He led the forward operational response for the Three Mile fire to protect the communities of Kulnura, Mangrove and Spencer, and commanded the field operations for 11 of the first 14 days that were the most critical in this response.

Group Captain Howe has been a member of the District Senior Management Team for 27 years and has provided significant contribution to the strategic direction of the District. He also actively assists with the annual District program of training and hazard reduction burns.

THOMAS (JOHN) MARSHALL

Captain
Cudgegong,
Area Western

Captain John Marshall began his lifelong commitment to the community and emergency services in 1964 when he joined the NSW Fire Brigades at the age of 19. He remained with the organisation for 39 years and held the position of Station Officer before retiring.

In 1990 John joined the NSW RFS Kurrajong Brigade, where he held the positions of Captain, Treasurer and President, before joining the Bogee Brigade in 2008, where he currently holds the position of Captain. The brigade has experienced a depletion in membership over recent years and without his continued determination, the brigade would have been forced to fold.

Over the years, Captain Marshall has attended a number of notable emergency incidents including the Thredbo Disaster, Black Saturday and Canberra Fires. Most recently he played a significant role in the Gaspers Mountain and Kerry Ridge fires. At the age of 74, he led crews as Divisional Commander without absence for many weeks, withstanding the extreme weather and the unprecedented fire conditions.

Captain Marshall successfully organised and implemented strategies that led to saving the lives, properties and livelihoods of the members of his local community. Despite the limited resources available to him, he

continued to work tirelessly without grievance or fuss and was able to frequently execute crucial firefighting strategies with minimal time and resources.

Over the years, Captain Marshall has assisted in training the NSW SES and NSW RFS in rope, caving and confined space rescue.

He was also part of the fire protection team at the 2000 Sydney Olympics and, during his time with the NSW Fire Brigades, helped to develop a water recycling valve for pumps known as the 'Marshall Valve'.

KENNETH ARTHUR PULLEN

Group Captain
Hawkesbury,
Area Greater Sydney

Group Captain Kenneth Pullen has been a member of the NSW RFS for more than 36 years, joining the Yarramundi Brigade in 1984.

He has served in the positions of President, Secretary, Deputy Captain, and Senior Deputy Captain and rose to the rank of Captain in 1990; a position he held for 12 years. He was made a Life Member of the Yarramundi Brigade in 2002 and received the National Medal in 2004.

In 2006 Group Captain Pullen joined Kurrajong Brigade and has been actively involved in various roles, including as Treasurer, President and Permit Officer. He was appointed to the position of Deputy Group Captain in 2008 and in 2015 he was appointed to the rank of Group Captain.

Group Captain Pullen has attended numerous fires within the District over his years of

SERVICE MEDALS 2021

service and several out-of-area commitments. He is an integral part of the District Incident Management Team and the District's Training Team.

Not only has Group Captain Pullen given dedicated service to the Hawkesbury community, he is well-respected in the larger NSW RFS community.

Many NSW RFS members applaud his leadership skills and Group Captain Pullen is only too happy to pass on his knowledge to those seeking guidance.

DENNIS ANDREW STANNARD

Captain
Shoalhaven,
Area South Eastern

Captain Dennis Stannard has been an active member of the NSW RFS since joining the Sanctuary Point Brigade in 1978. Throughout his period of service as both a volunteer and staff member, Captain Stannard has demonstrated exceptional leadership, commitment and achievement in many areas.

As a staff member, Captain Stannard played an integral role in the successful pilot program of Mitigation Support Services within the NSW RFS Shoalhaven District and was instrumental in the expansion of the model across the state.

Since joining the Wandandian Brigade in 1984, Captain Stannard has held leadership roles as Deputy Captain and Captain for a combined period of 17 years. His leadership capability also saw him elected to the role of Deputy Group and Group Officer.

In 2003, Captain Stannard received the Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation in recognition of his exemplary service during the 2001/02 fire season.

Captain Stannard has also attended numerous incidents within the Shoalhaven District, and most recently, played a key role in the 2019/20 Currowan fire as a Heavy Plant Supervisor, Sector Commander and Divisional Commander.

During this fire, Captain Stannard was instrumental in the protection of the Sussex Inlet, Cudmirrah, Jerrawangala and Wandandian areas.

Captain Stannard also demonstrated exemplary courage and leadership on 31 December 2019, when he played a key field role in prioritising and deploying firefighting resources from all agencies into and within the Conjola area.

Notably on this day, Captain Stannard selflessly entered an area being directly impacted by fire during catastrophic fire danger conditions and successfully rescued two firefighters from an overturned fire tanker.

ALICE STRUTT

Captain
Lower North Coast,
Area North Eastern

Captain Alice Strutt has been a member of the NSW RFS for more than 38 years, joining the Temagog Brigade in August 1981. She has held the roles of Senior Deputy Captain and Captain.

When Captain Strutt arrived in Temagog in 1981, it wasn't the 'done thing' for women to fight fires. Not satisfied with providing a support role to the local brigades, Captain Strutt was determined to show her capacity as a frontline firefighter. In 1990 she was one of the first women on the coast to complete the Basic Firefighter (BF) training, later to become a BF trainer for new members.

In 2008 Captain Strutt joined the Lower North Coast Communications Brigade, and was Brigade Captain up until 2020. She is also the founding member of the Lower North Coast Aviation Brigade. It was Captain Strutt's role in communications that saw her deployed to many major fire and flood events across the state.

During the 2019/2020 fires, Captain Strutt stayed on shift all night with the Communications Brigade, as the Carrai East fire was impacting the nearby Willawarrin community.

With the main road closed west of Kempsey, she was unable to return home and chose to sleep in her car, before returning to the Fire Control Centre for her next shift. The following week the same fire impacted the Temagog area – the third time Captain Strutt's property had experienced fire over the past 40 years.

Not only has Captain Strutt demonstrated commitment and leadership across a range of operational and support roles, she has proven to be a great ambassador for all female firefighters alike. ■



2020 IN THE BORDERLANDS: FROM FIRES TO BORDER CLOSURES

BY TIM BUTCHER - AREA COMMANDER, AREA SOUTH WESTERN

To say 2020 was turbulent for Area South Western would be an understatement. The year brought us challenges, tragedy, mayhem and has tested our resilience like no other.

2020 began with many of our districts still combating fires in what was the worst fire season NSW has ever encountered. Districts in our area sent more than 80 strike teams away across the season to Queensland, the North Coast, Central Coast, Sydney, Southern Highlands, Southern Tablelands and the South Coast before we were fighting fires in our own area and then into Victoria on 'splash and dash' missions.

The mammoth efforts by our volunteers and districts alike resulted in pure exhaustion felt across the entire state. However, coupled with this fatigue was a feeling of determination, pride, gratitude and camaraderie.

As our weary firefighters were finally able to rest, and district staff finally able to breathe, the new Area Management Model was introduced in February and Area South Western was established with a great mix of existing NSW RFS staff and new staff who had joined from external employers. Just as we were getting to know each other, COVID-19 took hold and we were restricted from physically working together.

Instead, we taught, learned, supported, engaged and built our team through a virtual platform. We used new technologies for the first time and had Group Captains logging on from home to meet and discuss matters that usually would have involved hours of driving. The normalising of video conferencing and the keenness of our South Western volunteers means we now have more input in practical firefighting directions than we have ever been able to achieve before.

A new complexity then emerged in March 2020 as our Victorian neighbours were restricted from accessing NSW. This harked back to the early days of Federation, when states agreed that customs practices and border controls were counter-productive to modern life. The passage and movement of goods across borders has been a daily activity for many in our area over the last 200 years.

The border closure had a direct impact on a number of our teams, as we have members residing on both sides of the border. When the restrictions were enacted, our staff were divided yet again and to a new level. Southern NSW and northeast



Main (at left): The new South Western Area Command building.
Above: Tabletop Brigade of the Southern Border District preparing food for Victoria Police officers manning the border checkpoint.

Below: Table Top Brigade Border Checkpoint. Photos above and below courtesy of Victoria Police.

Victoria were (and still are) trying to recover from the 2019/20 fires under COVID-19 restrictions that have slowed our return to normality.

With the firm restrictions in Victoria, we had many members – both volunteers and staff – navigating some incredible challenges including being socially isolated, working from home, home-schooling children, border crossing issues and in some cases serious illnesses.

Our new Area Command office was ready by July 2020, but it was September 2020 before we could unite as a team. Despite the restrictions, we were still able to support our members and develop processes to allow successful implementation of the NSW RFS strategies within our Area.

As we entered 2021 under a new Victorian border closure system, we were glad to put 2020 in the rear view mirror. But we did so knowing it taught us resilience and galvanised our culture and history in the South West. We grew with each other and have amalgamated to drive home the Area Management Model and support our districts.

We'd like to say a big thank you to all the volunteers and staff that helped pull things together over a difficult year for all. ■



OUR BUSH FIRE HISTORY bulletin

Bush Fire Bulletin,
Winter, 1968

Sutherland Shire fire control officer Mr Ray Watchorn has devised a helmet colour-coding system which enables quick identification of bush fire brigade officers and members.

The helmets are neat, easily identified from a distance, and communicate the wearer's official status. This ensures that the wearer generally receives his entitled respect from brigade officers and members, other services, and the public.

Brigades in Sutherland Shire began to use helmets 7 years ago. Ray Watchorn was group captain at the time and, when appointed fire control officer soon after, established the colour-coding system.

Sutherland's helmet colour-coding works this way:

- Fire control officer—grey with "F.C.O." in red;
- Group captain—yellow with "G.C." in red on sides;
- Senior deputy group captain—yellow with "SENIOR DEPUTY" in red over "G.C." in red;
- Deputy group captain—yellow with "DEPUTY" in red over "G.C." in black;
- Captain—red;
- Senior deputy captain—white with a one-inch red band lengthwise over the crown;
- Deputy captain—white with "DEPUTY" in black on sides;
- Members—white;
- Brigade first-aid officer—white with a red Maltese cross on sides;
- Area first-aid and safety instructor—green, with a red Maltese cross on white circular background on sides, with "AREA" above and "INSTRUCTOR" in white below;
- H.Q. radio communications officer—green, with antenna and radio waves in black on white circular background, with "AREA" or "H.Q." above "COMMUNICATIONS" in white below;
- H.Q. equipment maintenance officer—green, with "H.Q." above "MAINTENANCE" in white on sides.

All helmets bear the Bush Fire Committee's adhesive designation tabs on the front of the crown just above the brim; immediately above is the N.S.W. Bush Fire Brigades insignia.

The name of the shire may be printed or dyno-taped on sides of the helmet, but addition of paintings and cartoons and the like—which to some have a hill-billy flavour—is strictly taboo.



Helmets for fire control officer and group captains are in grey (F.C.O.) and yellow (see text)



Brigade captain wears red helmet, and deputies and members wear white



Radio, equipment and first-aid men have green helmets

BUSH FIRE bulletin

ON TROVE



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

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

This collection brings to life the important work our members have undertaken over the years and makes the history of the NSW RFS available for all of Australia and the world to see.

You can search place names, brigade names, dates and fire-related topics such as “fire trails” or “large air tanker”.

TROVE

HOW TO SEARCH BUSH FIRE BULLETIN ON TROVE

On the Library page of the NSW RFS website, you will find links to browse the various collections of the Bush Fire Bulletin.

You can also search for articles on a particular topic (such as the town of Merriwa) by using the link provided and following the instructions.

BUSH FIRE bulletin

EMAIL YOUR DETAILS TO BUSH.FIRE.BULLETIN@RFS.NSW.GOV.AU TO RECEIVE THE **BUSH FIRE BULLETIN** DIRECT TO YOUR HOME OR TO UPDATE YOUR DETAILS.



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BUSH FIRE bulletin

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Cover photo: Captain Michael Williams (centre) and firefighters Amanda Courtney and Jason Jarrett pose with their new BR9 helmets at Armidale. Photo by Inspector Liz Ferris.



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