



THE JOURNAL OF THE

**RFS**

# BUSH FIRE

B U L L E T I N

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**Acknowledgement of Country**

The NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this country and their continued connection to land, sea and culture. We pay our respects to the resilience and strength of Elders past, present and future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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# FOREWORD



In July I announced I would be stepping down as Commissioner of the RFS following the 2024/25 fire season. I have been a proud member of the RFS since joining the Belrose Brigade in 1979 and it has been an incredible journey serving alongside so many amazing members over the years. The RFS today looks nothing like when I first joined, and I am immensely proud of what the Service has accomplished in my time here.

It has been the greatest honour to serve as Commissioner since 2020. The RFS has navigated some of the most challenging fire and flood seasons in the past five years, and an added global pandemic to boot, and there is still so much important work to do in the coming months. As always, our focus as an organisation will be on supporting our members in every way we can.

To be a member of the RFS is to be part of a rich tradition in which both men and women have contributed throughout the organisation's long history. Without a diverse membership, a volunteer-based emergency service risks becoming less able to fulfil its role in protecting the community. It is in the interests of every member and the whole community to foster an inclusive and welcoming culture.

In this issue, we celebrate the many impressive and vibrant women in the RFS, who each day are actively contributing across the organisation in a range of roles. Although just a handful of those are here, what this diverse array of women has in common is their dedication to their work and a commitment to serving their communities.

Another area of focus this year has been our Indigenous programs and the key role they play in increasing the inclusion and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the RFS. We have had some successful engagement outcomes recently during NAIDOC Week and through initiatives such as the establishment of a new Aboriginal Support Network Group and our support for cultural burns.

In May we celebrated the bravery and service of more than 50 RFS volunteers, salaried members and teams at the St Florian's Day Awards. Among those honoured was Firefighter Mackenzie Scott of the Eglington Brigade, who received a Commendation for Bravery after rescuing her mother and another firefighter in an incident.

Only 16 at the time, Mackenzie had been a volunteer for only nine months when the truck she was in rolled while responding to a grass fire near Bathurst in central west NSW in September 2023. Despite her injuries, she managed to free her mother and another crew member, performing first aid and assisting three members still trapped inside until paramedics arrived.

The selfless actions, courage and dedication we see within the Service from so many individuals each day are to be celebrated and commended.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our members for their unwavering commitment to the Service and their communities. Please ensure you take care of yourselves and each other during the fire season.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Rogers', written over a light blue grid background.

Rob Rogers AFSM  
Commissioner

X @RobRFS



# TEN YEARS OF HELICOPTER SEARCH AND RESCUE

The RFS has been performing search and rescue work for 10 years, with the Service's Aviation Rescue Crew members and fleet of helicopters combining to conduct rescue operations year-round in all types of conditions.

## THE AIRCRAFT

The RFS owns an advanced fleet of aircraft that fulfill a range of roles, from water-bombing to lead plane duties, aerial scanning, search and rescue and firefighter transport. Having access to such a fleet allows the Service to respond to emergencies faster and more efficiently wherever they occur, saving lives and serving the community.

Adding to our search and rescue assets, in June 2023 the RFS took delivery of an additional Bell 412 helicopter at the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base in Richmond. This was in addition to the procurement of two new helicopters in 2021.

The new twin turbine helicopter, which replaced the BK117 (HT201), was the fifth Bell 412 to be acquired. Carrying up to seven passengers, it's primarily used for search and rescue operations and to winch remote aerial firefighting teams in and out of difficult to access locations.

Additionally, these aircraft are fitted with a FLIR camera and mission console that can live stream video, conduct thermal imaging and capture mapping data.

Dispatched at a moment's notice, the Bell 412 can be configured with a water bucket or a mounted tank that can hold 1,420 litres of water.

The RFS now has the biggest aviation firefighting fleet in the country, with a permanent fleet of four fixed-wing and seven helicopters with two Black Hawks being operationalised at its disposal year-round.

## THE PEOPLE

The RFS currently has 46 Aviation Rescue Crew (ARC) personnel – a mix of volunteer and staff members. ARC members are recruited when needed and, historically, those with helicopter winching experience through Remote Area Operations streams have been offered the chance to apply.

Applications involve written tasks, interviews, swim tests and helicopter assessments. All operational ARC members must pass the swim test that includes (among other tasks) a 200m swim in less than four and a half minutes, a 15m underwater swim and a mannequin drag swim.

ARC members must hold a Certificate III in Aviation (Rescue Crew Officer), which the RFS is able to provide.

The Certificate III is delivered over a 12-month period and involves training in rescue winching, flood rescue, air search, crew resource management, sling loading and helicopter underwater escape. Ongoing ARC members must perform re-certifications at least every six months to remain current.

## THE JOB

On the job, an ARC member is part of a three-person team who are joined by a pilot and Aircraft Officer onboard.

The RFS has rescue helicopters on standby every day of the year, which are deployed to fire incidents for intelligence and bush fire rescue operations.



## EUGOWRA FLOODS



In November 2022, after a night of torrential rain, a severe flash flood impacted the small town of Eugowra in the Central West, destroying many homes and businesses.

The RFS was undertaking a full-scale rescue operation by 1000hrs, and despite horrendous conditions on the day, our aviation crew managed to assist many trapped residents.

Additionally, RFS helicopters are provided to other agencies such as NSW Police for land search operations or to the SES for flood rescue duties.

RFS helicopters and ARC members can perform lifesaving rescues by landing, hovering or winching. In the past three years, the RFS has performed 3,020 rescue helicopter shifts and undertaken 648 rescue missions and 192 rescues.

Some notable incidents that had significant involvement of RFS helicopter rescue operations were:

- 2019/20 bush fire season (51 rescues)
- 2022 Lismore flood (71 rescues)
- 2022 Eugowra flood (67 rescues)

## THE RFS AERIAL FIREFIGHTING FLEET

For the 2024/25 bush fire season, the RFS will be contracting a total of 22 aircraft. This includes two Large Air Tankers (LATs), 10 medium helicopters (seven of which are winch equipped for rescue operations), eight Single Engine Air Tankers (SEAT), one fixed-wing line scanning aircraft and one fixed-wing air attack/lead plane aircraft in support of LAT operations out of Dubbo Airport.

In addition to these 22 services, the RFS also manages and operates on behalf of NAFC the National LAT and National Lead Plane services throughout the summer. A combined total of 226 aircraft were available on a 'call when needed' arrangement during the 2023/24 fire season.

## TIMELINE OF RFS AERIAL SEARCH AND RESCUE

**2011** - During the devastating Queensland floods, an RFS volunteer joined the crew of HT220 and was deployed north of the NSW border to assist. All involved received numerous honours and awards for assisting with multiple rescues in such challenging conditions.

**2014** - The RFS formalised initial training in helicopter rescue winching. Following this, the first intake of 'Down the Wire' technicians took place with a total of 16 volunteers passing through training from existing Remote Area Units. The RFS took ownership of its first medium helicopter in 2014, which became HT201.

“ At the heart of aviation rescue, people need help, so we try to get them out of the situation they’re in.”



**2015** - An additional eight recruits were deployed to flooding events on behalf of the SES. Technicians were issued a Personal Flotation Device (PFD), wetsuits, water boots, gloves and a Swiftwater helmet. Water rescue winch training was introduced after all personnel undertook Swiftwater Awareness and Helicopter Underwater Escape Training (HUET). The RFS took ownership of its second medium helicopter, HT202, a BK117.

**2016** - Protocol shifted away from upright rescue winching of victims, to the introduction of the seated ‘hypo lift’ technique.

**2017** - The formal qualification Certificate III in Aviation (Rescue Crewman) was rolled out.

**2019** - Six new recruits were part of the response to the 2019/20 bush fire season, with numerous deployments and missions with the Australian Defence Force, which was enlisted to provide aircraft.

**2020** - The RFS purchased two Bell 412EP helicopters with Coulson Australia engaged to operate them. Donated funds received were put towards purchasing another helicopter, operated by CareFlight. In late 2020, the RFS released an EOI for an additional 12 ARC members.

**2021** - Much of the year was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread flooding. Training for existing ARC included winching, searching, communications and crew resource management. All Bell 412s were fitted with the FLIR camera system and mission console to enable thermal detection, live streaming, mapping and night operations.

**2022** - The RFS completed its longest running helicopter rescue operations, covering 87 days continuously, after flooding in the Far West. ARC members were employed to provide regular coverage on our helicopters with the RFS crewing at least one helicopter on a seven-days-a-week basis. The towns of Lismore and Eugowra required ARC support in two devastating floods.

**2023** - In December, the RFS opened the new \$8 million state-of-the-art Aviation Centre of Excellence. The Centre is home to four aerial training flight simulators for personnel to hone their skills in helicopters and winching in a controlled environment. The latest technology recreates realistic scenarios to help aircrews respond to different emergency situations.

**2024** - A team of 12 RFS Aviation Rescue members are equipped with new gear for nighttime winch rescues. Training sessions are under way, giving the aerial specialists a chance to practice their nighttime protocols under supervision.

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Previous page, main photo: RFS ARCs conducting rescue winching. Photo by Connor Lambert. Left: Photo courtesy Illawarra Sutherland RAFT Training. Following top left: Tova Gallagher, ARC Coordinator of the Aviation Rotary Wing. Following top right: Stephanie Looi flying with Defence on an Army MRH-90 in the 2019/20 fire season.



## PROFILES

Both Tova Gallagher, of the Londonderry and Blaxland Ridge Brigades, and Stephanie Looi, Deputy Captain of Hornsby Brigade, have been a part of the Aviation Rescue Program for the past 10 years.

As an active volunteer remote area firefighter in the Hawkesbury and living next to the Wollemi National Park, Tova is often deployed with her RAFT team in remote land search as well as aviation firefighting.

“My role as an ARC has taken me all over NSW and interstate,” says Tova. “We’ve followed floods along the coast and inland as the floodwaters have moved through the Artesian Basin, and fires from the north to the south of the state.

“We are always busy searching for missing people, doing building and asset impact assessments, gathering aerial intelligence, delivering food, fuel and moving people. We have worked with every agency from Defence to SES, QFES, NSW DPI and NSW Police.”

Tova transitioned into a paid role in early 2021, becoming the first RFS Aviation Officer of the Aviation Rescue Crew, and is now the Coordinator of Aviation Rotary Wing.

“ARC volunteers and staff undertake search and rescue year-round,” says Tova.

“They supervise all Helicopter Insertion Techniques training throughout NSW each year and undertake their own regular ARC training as well as operating the FLIR camera on our helicopters.

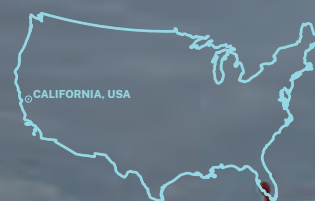
“My career highlights include working with Defence on Black Hawk and MRH90 helicopters, developing realistic search and rescue training scenarios and performing night water bombing.”

“It’s hard to believe that when the program started it was essentially around extraction of firefighters in imminent danger, and our method of mapping a fire was to use tracking on our phones and fly over the fire perimeter,” says Stephanie. “There have been so many advancements in the past 10 years.

“Today, the program is constantly evolving – we spend a lot of time teaching, assessing and flying training missions to ensure we can integrate and transition safely between operating the camera to winning.

“At the heart of aviation rescue, people need help, so we try to get them out of the situation they’re in. As an ARC team, although we’re spread throughout the state and rarely work together, we’re a tight-knit group.”

# RFS ATTENDS INNOVATIVE US AIR ATTACK TRAINING COURSE



CAL FIRE and the US Forest Service have run their national Aerial Supervision/AAS training program for more than 41 years. Students, who are experienced aviation experts within their local fire agencies, come from across the country to attend the California Aerial Supervision Academy.

The highly esteemed course offers a select group an intensive 10-day program at CAL FIRE and US Forest Service locations. Upon completion, those who attend are given ongoing assistance in air attack missions for 12 months following, to enable them to build upon their acquired skills.

Air Attack Supervisor, Steve Hartgrove, one of two new salaried RFS AAS, was chosen to attend as a development opportunity.

“We saw it as a great opportunity to learn new teaching techniques to incorporate into our own courses, while observing operational processes to inform our current practices. CAL FIRE is an impressive organisation that takes their training very seriously – with a small class consisting of only 18 students receiving one-on-one mentoring by 28 experienced instructors”, says Steve.

The first week of the course was held in Sacramento and was mainly theory based with some flights and use of the flight simulator, sandpit exercises and target description

exercises, leading into the second week at Redding where flight evaluation commenced.

On arrival at the bases, Steve and Andrew were impressed by the scale of CAL FIRE’s enormous fleet of more than 77 aircraft, and by the diversity of experiences of their instructors and fellow students.

“The students had varying experience in the aviation industry; Audrey was a smokejumper, Brad a lead plane pilot and Frank a Heli-tack program boss, just to name a few,” says Steve. “All were striving to be Air Attack Supervisors in their own right. The instructors came from across the United States and had more than 500 years of combined experience in the aviation field.”

Typically, students were paired up and allocated a coach, who was with them for the entirety of the two-week program. Working after hours and during breaks, the coaches were there to assist on missions and all aspects of training.



In April 2024, RFS Aviation Officers Steve Hartgrove and Andrew Beville travelled to California to observe training methods in the esteemed CAL FIRE Air Attack Supervisors Course (AAS).



Steve Hartgrove and Andrew Beville attend the CAL FIRE and US Forest Service Aerial Supervision/AAS training program. Both images taken at the Redding Air-Attack base in California.





“Although not all students make the cut to be AAS, the instructors do everything they can to give the class the best opportunity to get through,” says Andrew.

In the first week’s exercises, the group focused on learning the skills of target description and airspace management while developing aerial strategies and tactics, which involved two students role playing bomber pilots and Air Attack Supervisors. After this, the students broke into groups and covered mapping, sandpit exercises, simulator training, airspace management, fire chemicals (retardant gels and foam), orientation flights and how to manage an incident within an incident.

During the second week’s training, students attended the Redding US Forest Service Air Attack base, which is home to smoke jumpers, air attack pilots, initial attack crews and loading crews, while housing multiple firebombing aircraft – both rotary wing and fixed wing.

“Week two started with a brief from a Smokejumping Supervisor on expectations and how to integrate their jump missions within the aircraft separation stack,” says Steve.

“We covered the different roles of Aerial Supervisors, followed by briefings of the flight assessment missions that were to be conducted throughout the rest of the week.

“Each student had to be assessed on three separate flying missions, these were conducted in either the Beechcraft King Air or the OV-10 Bronco lead planes.

## SMOKEJUMPERS

Smokejumpers provide highly-trained, experienced firefighters and leadership for quick initial attack on wildland fires in remote areas. Firefighting tools, food and water are dropped by parachute to the firefighters after they land near the fire, making them self-sufficient for the first 48 hours.





“The mission assessment was evaluated by numerous sections – the bomber pilots had a checklist, as did the radio operators and the pilots of the air attack platform.

“The primary assessors were on-site at a place they called the Buckhorn where they watched, listened and role-played during student’s missions to see that all objectives were met. The final day was a theory assessment, followed by a debrief.

“The trip was a great opportunity for us to learn from some of the best,” says Steve. “Through our experiences in the US, we plan to work with the RFS to implement several innovative training approaches to aviation courses into the future, delivering new streamlined training activities to the Air Attacks Supervisors course experience.”

Top left: Front seat of the Cal fires OV-10. Top right: Andrew looking at the Modular Airborne Firefighting System (MAFFS) inside the C130. Bottom left: Cal fire OV-10 fleet. Bottom right: A C130 with the MAFFS system. Photos by Steve Hartgrove and Andrew Beville.

## CAL FIRE

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) is a US state agency responsible for protecting timber from improper logging activities as well as protecting the state’s grass, brush and trees from wildland fire.





# FIREFIGHTING GOATS CONTINUE TO GRAZE

Herds of firefighting goats are chewing through hectares of fuel as the RFS continues its hazard reduction grazing program in the small rural town of Drake, 44km east of Tenterfield NSW.

Goats are natural foragers and have an incredible appetite for weeds, grasses, shrubs and other vegetation that contribute to the build-up of fuel loads. By strategically deploying goat herds, we can create firebreaks and significantly reduce the risk of bush fires.

Over the past few years, goats have been grazing between different patches of undergrowth through high-risk areas in NSW. Grazing has proven to be particularly useful where conventional fire reduction methods such as burning or clearing are challenging.

With NSW having experienced prolonged wet conditions that hampered contemporary burning and mechanical hazard reduction activities, the goats have been successful in clearing high fuel loads in and around the Northern Tablelands and different locations across NSW.

As the goat brigade continues chewing for several months, it's estimated that each group of goats can eat around a full hectare in a week or two depending on numbers.

Danny Busch, Preparedness Lead in Area Operations, believes the goats have a strong future in hazard reduction for several reasons.

"This alternate mitigation strategy provides an important advantage in that it can be implemented rain, hail or shine," he says. "The optimal herd size to use is usually 100 to 150 goats, which we refer to as 'crash grazing', then we'll section off an area with a fence and the goats will chew whatever they want to eat."

Contrary to popular thought, goats will not eat everything, but they will eat most weeds and grasses.

Photos by Danny Busch.

"The goats have been able to venture into more challenging areas with thick foliage in the village of Drake where they are currently keeping the fuel load down to manageable levels," Danny says.

"Northeastern Area Command have driven and managed the deployment of goats in Drake to a very successful outcome with the ultimate goal to complete the largest amount of hazard reduction for our communities as possible, and anything that allows us to achieve that is positive."

Looking to the future, using goats, sheep or cattle to graze and manage fuel loads provides an alternative option for hazard reduction for the RFS and landholders alike.

## CONSIDERING GOATS

Before putting the goats into a site, a site analysis should be done to ensure they will eat the vegetation.

If they consume the surface fuels, near surface fuels and elevated fuels, this is particularly beneficial, especially near properties.

If vegetation is higher than 1.5 metres, it is advisable to cut the loads down to a manageable length.





# THE FACTS AROUND SUGARCANE BURNING

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Each year, the RFS provides NSW sugarcane growers with exemptions so farmers can conduct the time critical activity of pre-harvest burning. Through educating the community about what to expect, brigades can help to alleviate public concerns and reduce unnecessary callouts.

Sugarcane burning season is generally carried out from June to December, often occurring across the Far North Coast where crops are present. Most farmers burn at times when the wind is low, such as the early morning and late afternoon, to minimise inconvenience to neighbours and nearby communities.

Although mechanical harvesters are now commonplace and some crops are cut 'green', a large majority of farmers still choose to carry out regular burns. In NSW, most of the cane is burned prior to harvest. This is carried out to remove all loose and dead leaves, dried out weeds and extraneous matter to facilitate the harvest operation. Pre-harvest burns are usually fast, hot fires, with a large updraught that carries ash particles high into the air.

For many years the RFS has acknowledged the critical nature of the use of fire in the sugarcane harvesting process and to maintain supply to the sugar mills.

To facilitate this, NSW sugarcane growers are provided with exemptions in times of elevated fire danger, including during a Total Fire Ban (TOBAN), with certain conditions applied.

The NSW sugarcane industry acknowledges the importance of the exemptions provided and has demonstrated a continued excellent safety record in the exercise of those exemptions.

Although common practice, each year the RFS receives many calls from members of the public who are not aware of sugarcane burning protocol. By educating the community about these planned burns, RFS brigades can decrease the time spent answering queries and callouts.

Brigades in areas affected by sugarcane burning are encouraged to discuss what to expect with their community, reminding residents and holiday makers that fires may be prevalent when travelling through affected areas at certain times of the year.

Useful information for the community may include:

- Stay alert for tractors and harvesters moving on the roads
- Don't pull up on the side of the road when a cane fire is being lit – the heat from a cane fire is very intense
- Always ask permission before venturing onto farm properties
- Please only report unattended fires, to assist in unnecessary callouts for volunteers

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**For further information please contact your local Fire Control Centre:**

**Clarence Valley:** [Clarence.Valley@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Clarence.Valley@rfs.nsw.gov.au)

**Far North Coast:** [FarNorthCoast@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:FarNorthCoast@rfs.nsw.gov.au)

**Northern Rivers:** [Northern.Rivers@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Northern.Rivers@rfs.nsw.gov.au)

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Above: Sugarcane burn in NSW's Far North Coast.  
Photo supplied by the RFS.

# SPOTLIGHT ON WOMEN IN THE RFS

Each day, thousands of women, from different backgrounds and circumstances, actively contribute to the RFS in a range of roles.

They live on the coast, the city and in remote outback areas. Some are students, some are in the workforce and others are retired.

Across the state, what this diverse array of women has in common is their dedication to the Service and their commitment to serving their communities.

In this edition of the *Bush Fire Bulletin*, we've profiled just a handful of the amazing women in the RFS. We hope you enjoy their stories.





“ Have fun, make wonderful memories... ”

Ali Stewart

Ali Stewart with her daughter Matilda, after returning from a deployment to Kremnos, NSW in 2019.

## ALI STEWART

Senior Deputy Captain and Secretary,  
Moonee Brigade, Coffs Coast

### How long have you been a member?

I joined Moonee in 2018 and then Woolgoolga in the Coffs Coast District. I've held a number of positions such as Secretary, First Aid Officer, Community Engagement Officer, Social Media Administrator, Deputy Captain (at both Moonee and Woolgoolga) and Senior Deputy Captain.

### What made you want to join?

I wanted to contribute to my community, make a difference and be a positive role model for my children. I had seen how much my husband, Will, enjoyed the RFS and I really admired what he was achieving in his roles. My father, Don, was a Police Officer and is an influential and inspirational part of my life, so going into the emergency services field, even as a volunteer, seemed like the right path.

Will and I being in separate brigades worked out well, as one of us was always home with the kids. I left Woolgoolga in 2022 and became active in Moonee once the kids could stay home by themselves. My son Ollie has now followed in our footsteps and passed his BF in February 2024.

### Skills

I'm very passionate about Community Engagement, and like speaking about fire plans and answering any queries or concerns the public may have surrounding preparedness. Arming the community with information that will help them get their properties bush fire ready and make decisions that will protect their families is so very important.

I'm quite handy with a pencil and tablet, having created colouring sheets for events and sharing them online for others to use. It was lovely to get positive feedback from other brigades and see some creations the children had made. I enjoy being a leader and have had some wonderful mentors over the years that have helped shape the Senior Deputy Captain I am today.

### I'd like to say...

The RFS is full of exceptional human beings and many of them have become a second family. I have such a supportive network of people surrounding me from my crew and fellow firefighters to the Group Officers, the staff at the Coffs Coast FCC and the many people who have supported me from Northeastern Area Command and other districts. Take every opportunity that's presented to you, whether it be a local workshop or a chance to travel to forums, and grab any of those qualifications that you can gain with two hands.

### Lastly...

Have fun, make wonderful memories, and remember... you are strong, and you are capable.



“ Helping your community and learning new skills is very rewarding

**Kathy Barnes**

## **KATHY BARNES**

**Senior Deputy Captain,  
Lavington Brigade, Southern Border**

**How long have you been a member?**

I joined 25 years ago.

**What made you want to join?**

My grandfather had a farm in Charleroi, Victoria and was a member of the CFA. He had the fire truck every Christmas holidays, and his Landcruiser during the hotter months always had a firefighting unit on it. From a very young age we learnt to how to use the appliances, we were taught to be actively involved and to help your fellow neighbours and community.

My father was also a CFA member and a member of the RFS as we lived in Lavington. Seeing what my family did to help the community made me want to help too.

**Skills**

I worked my way through the basic level training and once I had more fireground experience and picked up some mentors along the way, I ventured into leadership skills and instructing and assessing.

My set of skills are varied, from Advanced Firefighter, Crew Leader, Group Leader, Prescribe Burning Supervisor, Rural Fire Driver, Training Instructor and Assessor, to leading people, conducting briefings and debriefs and trimming felled trees. There are endless courses and workshops that you can do.

**I'd like to say...**

Every little bit counts and is valued. Helping your community and learning new skills is very rewarding. You gain a wonderful friendship group of like-minded people who are there for you and your family, should you need it.

**Lastly...**

My favourite part of my role within the RFS is our Juniors Program, which we have been running for seven years. Being involved with the Juniors keeps me on my toes (so many questions), makes me laugh and makes me remember why I joined the RFS.





## SALLY ELVIDGE

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Senior Deputy Captain at Arcadia Brigade,  
Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai

**How long have you been a member?**

I joined the RFS in 2005.

**What made you want to join?**

I have always had a passion to help others and thought this would be a great way to serve my local community and help people in their time of need.

**Skills**

I have learnt so many skills during my time in the RFS, everything from firefighting, first aid, leadership and people management to specialist skills including IMT roles, breathing apparatus, structural firefighting and driving the brigade's tankers and pumpers. I drive the Cat 9s, Cat 1s and the Cat 6, which requires a Heavy Vehicle Licence.

**I'd like to say...**

What you can learn in the RFS is something you can't get in many other places. Every person that joins brings their own unique skills, which is perfect for a team environment and that's what makes us work so well together.

No matter who you are, or what background you have, you can do anything when you put your mind to it with some enthusiasm, training and practice.

**Lastly...**

I feel so privileged to be a part of this organisation and to be able to support my crew with their RFS journey and of course, supporting my community with passion, enthusiasm and a smile!



## ALESHA BUCKLEY

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Captain, Moulamein Town Brigade,  
Mid Murray

**How long have you been a member?**

I have been a member of the RFS since 2005. I became Captain in 2022, having previously held the position of Secretary. Currently, I am also a Road Crash Rescue Operator and firefighter.

**What made you want to join?**

I joined with my husband as both our fathers were members at the time, and we wanted to give back to the community. Back then, it was more of a male-based Brigade, but lately we have had a lot of new female members join.

**Skills**

Unfortunately, we see a lot of road accidents and often females can be more nurturing in these circumstances, making them better suited to work in these areas. We are 70km from the nearest town and must be self-sufficient, that's why we started the rescue operation side of the Brigade. It has become a valuable addition to our service, having attended countless accidents since it started.

**I'd like to say...**

During the 2022 floods we became a place for the community to come and have a chat and feel safe. I love my little town and don't think I'll ever leave the RFS, it's such an asset to have.

With the support of our District Office, we are becoming one of the best-trained brigades and I am extremely proud of our members who show such commitment to the community.

# BEST LOOKING SHEDS IN TOWN

A recent initiative funded by the Federal Government's Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants Program has helped transform several regional brigade stations into stunning works of art.



'Paint the Town', a special project organised by Southern Tablelands Arts and funded by the Grants Program, has brought nationally established artists and local talent together to create murals in the form of street art.

Featured in the local municipalities of Wollondilly, Wingecaribee, Upper Lachlan and Goulburn Mulwaree, the initiative has inspired artists to reflect on the community's journey to recovery since the 2019/20 Black Summer fires.

Several different sites, including local RFS brigade stations, were chosen to showcase the large murals.

## WINGELLO BRIGADE

The first of the RFS shed makeovers to be unveiled back in January 2023 was the Wingello Brigade's (pictured right), by 'Paint the Town' Creative Director and artist Joe Quilter.

Commissioned by the Wingello Village Association, these bold and colourful interpretations pay tribute to the local RFS members who have supported the community and feature black cockatoos and the natural environment.

Artist Joe Quilter understands the powerful role art can play in the community, with many examples of his work featured across NSW and around his home region of Wollondilly.

## HILL TOP BRIGADE

In February 2024, Hill Top Brigade proudly unveiled their new mural by local artist Samuel Hall as part of the 'Paint the Town' initiative, depicting long standing members John Matters and Brian Coates (pictured above).

Hill Top Brigade Captain Ian Coates was involved in the artwork from inception to finish.

"Local legends John and Brian helped raise funds and build the RFS station and combined have both been volunteers





for 70 years, still active to this day,” he said. “During their volunteer careers, John and Brian were responsible for so much of the Brigade’s success and our training.”

“In the 2000/01 fires they led bulldozers from Buxton to Hill Top at night, making a trail for crews to back burn from.

“In the 2019/20 Black Summer fires, they once again led the bulldozers, Brian in the Hill Top area and John in Colo Vale,” he said. “They have worked at flood damage, storms and lots more, we could write a book on their antics.”

## BUNGONIA BRIGADE

In June 2024, the latest mural in the ‘Paint the Town’ initiative was completed on the RFS Bungonia Brigade’s station.

Artist Jodie Munday created a mural (pictured on the following page) that transformed the station into a colourful vista that reflects the community’s gratitude to local RFS volunteers, while paying homage to the artist’s Indigenous background and connection to the land.

Her work includes elements from native plants, animals and our rural lifestyle and represents renewal of the area after bush fire.

The wombat is particularly relevant in the work, being prevalent in the area and the mascot of the Bungonia Brigade. With connections to Country and an Aboriginal, Celtic and British heritage, Jodie’s style combines both contemporary and stylistic shapes and patterns.



Above: Artist Samuel Hall poses with John Matters and Brian Coates in front of his mural featuring the two firefighters from the Hilltop brigade.  
 Below left: Another local mural in Hill Top by Samuel Hall.  
 Below right: Artist Joe Quilter’s mural on the Wingello Brigade’s building.  
 Photos courtesy of RFS members.



**RIVERINA COUNCIL INITIATIVE HONOURS  
RFS MEMBERS**

In March 2023, Australian artist Alex Sugar – well-known for his work depicting native Australian flora and fauna – was commissioned to complete a large-scale mural on the Humula Brigade station.

Completed in late 2023, the work entitled ‘In This Together’, is part of the Wagga Wagga City Council Public Art Plan 2022-2026, which includes projects targeting village communities.

Above: Artist Jodie Munday’s mural on the Bungonia Brigade station.  
Below: Artist Alex Sugar’s mural entitled ‘In This Together’, on the Humula Brigade station. Photo by Tayla Martin.

Local community members nominated the Humula Brigade station as the proposed site, then selected Alex to design and paint the large murals representing the spirit of the town and the Brigade.

The result is a colourful depiction (pictured below) that honours the service of local RFS firefighters and highlights their relationship with the natural environment.

The murals feature a volunteer carrying a joey from the fire, king parrots soaring away and the Erickson S-64 Air-Crane helicopter, nicknamed ‘Elvis’, that has been integral to fighting major bush fires in the area over recent years.





# FOR OUR ELDERS: RFS CELEBRATES NAIDOC WEEK

NAIDOC Week, held each year from 7 to 14 July, celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Each year during NAIDOC Week, Australians are encouraged to listen, learn and engage in meaningful dialogue, fostering a society where the wisdom and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are valued and respected.

In 2024, the RFS celebrated NAIDOC Week by connecting with the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters within the areas in which we operate at community events across the state.

On Tuesday 9 July, Commissioner Rob Rogers and several RFS members took part in the Wangal Walk, located at the Murama Healing Space, Newington Armory, in Sydney Olympic Park.

Led by Indigenous community organisation Indigenise, the RFS members participated in a guided tour on Wangal Country, exploring the public art installations that acknowledge the Wangal and depict the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples during the Frontier Wars and Stolen Generations.

Natalie Francis, RFS Diversity and Inclusion Programs Lead, was part of the group and shared her experience of the walk.

“It was a privilege to listen to Dr John Hunter of Indigenise talking about our shared history and experiences and the importance of coming together to heal,” says Natalie.

“We experienced a smoking ceremony, while John discussed the antibacterial qualities of the eucalyptus

gum leaves and how the smoke can be used to aid physical and mental wellbeing and how we need to acknowledge the past to walk together into the future.

“During John’s talk, a flock of black cockatoos circled above us, which was incredibly special. It felt like a nod from Country that this is the beginning of a wonderful and productive partnership with custodians in our local area.”

Participants also had the opportunity to reflect afterwards on the connection to Country and the importance of listening and sharing experience and knowledge at the Yarning Circle.

For more information on the Wangal Walk, visit: [thewangalwalk.com.au](http://thewangalwalk.com.au)

Photos by Alanna Rados





# MIDDLETON BRIGADE UNVEILS ANZAC TRIBUTE

Ahead of ANZAC Day 2024, Western Sydney's Middleton Brigade unveiled new artwork on its truck, paying homage to a hero. Flight Sergeant Rawdon 'Ron' Middleton VC, the Brigade's namesake, served as a Stirling bomber pilot in 149 Squadron of the Royal Air Force during World War Two. Chris McGraw, Captain of Middleton Brigade, was instrumental in the project and described the process below.

## **How did you come up with the idea to wrap the truck?**

Prior to Anzac Day 2023, the idea to pay respect to Rawdon Middleton VC was born after seeing another ANZAC tribute wrap on a truck. The RFS had previously designed wraps for Indigenous communities as well as for the Pride Mardi Gras march.

Middleton Brigade President Frank Bono suggested the idea and subsequently the Brigade Executive all endorsed the project, with the Macarthur District office providing assistance and approval.

An original concept collage of Rawdon 'Ron' Middleton VC (who the wrap is based on) was developed and our District helped the Brigade gain approval from Engineering and the Commissioner's Office.

Once installation dates had been confirmed the unveiling of the wrap was scheduled for 22 March 2024, allowing completion by ANZAC Day 2024.

From the idea first being raised to the Middleton 1A appliance being wrapped, the project took about 18 months.

## **What has been the reaction to the truck?**

The reaction on social media and from the general public has been very positive.

We had three personnel from the Royal Australian Air Force 22 Squadron attend the unveiling and they have been extremely supportive of the tribute to our namesake.



## THE HISTORY OF FLIGHT SERGEANT RAWDON 'RON' MIDDLETON VC

### 1916 – 1942

Rawdon Middleton was born on 22 July 1916 in Sydney. His family moved to the western districts of NSW when he was young and he attended school in Dubbo.

He enlisted in the RAAF in 1940 under the Empire Air Training Scheme. Having learnt to fly at Narromine, Middleton was sent to Canada to continue his instruction. After reaching Britain in 1941 he was promoted to Flight Sergeant in December that year.

In 1942 Middleton was posted to 149 Squadron of the Royal Air Force and began his operational career. His first operational flights, to the Ruhr, were as second pilot in Stirling bombers, but by July he had become first pilot. His first operation as captain of an aircraft was to Düsseldorf.

On 28 November 1942 he took off on his 29th operation, to the Fiat works in Turin, Italy. Middleton's aircraft was struck by flak over the target – one shell exploded in the cockpit, wounding Middleton in the face and destroying his right eye.

The same shell also wounded the second pilot and wireless operator. Middleton lost consciousness and the aircraft dived to just 800 feet before the second pilot brought it under control. They were hit by more flak as they tried to escape the target.

When Middleton regained consciousness, he began the long and gruelling flight back over the Alps towards England, knowing that his damaged aircraft had insufficient fuel to complete the journey.

The crew discussed the possibility of abandoning the aircraft or trying to land in northern France, but Middleton decided to head for England where his crew would have the chance to bail out.

As they approached the French coast the Stirling was again hit by flak but flew on. Once over the English coast with only five minutes of fuel left, Middleton ordered the crew to abandon the aircraft. Five men left the stricken plane, with two remaining on board to help Middleton before attempting to parachute to safety. Unfortunately, both were drowned.

The Stirling then crashed into the sea, killing Middleton. He was only one operation away from completing his first tour and being rotated off combat operations.

Middleton was buried in a churchyard in Suffolk, UK, with full military honours. His bravery was recorded in the British and Australian press and earned him a posthumous Victoria Cross.

*References: RFS and the Australian War Memorial*

### MIDDLETON BRIGADE

- Middleton Brigade was formed in 2017 as a result of the merger of Hoxton Park and Austral Brigades
- The new Brigade was named after the newly-formed suburb of Middleton, which was seen as a neutral name.

Left: Artwork displaying Flight Sergeant Rawdon 'Ron' Middleton VC, the Brigade's namesake. Above: Members of the Middleton Brigade proudly stand with their truck. Photos courtesy of RFS.



# NEW INITIATIVES SUPPORT INDIGENOUS MEMBERS

Indigenous programs play a key role in increasing the inclusion and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the RFS.

Jamie Bertram, RFS Aboriginal Programs Coordinator, believes it is crucial to create an environment that is culturally safe and respectful for the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members.

“By closely observing Indigenous culture, we are showing respect for their traditions, history, diversity and their connection to Country,” says Jamie.

“Although it has been challenging to engage, recruit and retain Aboriginal members in the RFS in recent years, our Area Operations team is achieving successful engagement outcomes by supporting the establishment of the Aboriginal Support Network

Group, who recently held their inaugural face-to-face workshop at the Dubbo Training Academy.”

When Elders and Indigenous groups recently met at the workshop, discussions centred on challenges and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, including cultural burning, collaboration with other agencies and organisations, recruitment and retention, training and Incident Management. The group also spent time on Country with Tubba-Gah-Wiradjuri Elder Uncle Lewis Burns.

Moving forward, the RFS plans to hold network meetings during the year with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander





## MITIGATION CREWS WEAR THEIR SHIRTS WITH PRIDE

In 2024, RFS First Nations Mitigation crews across NSW unveiled their new Indigenous shirts, designed to promote a sense of belonging in our RFS community. Members have been seen wearing the shirt with pride at recent brigade networking and community engagement events, Reconciliation Week ceremonies and the inaugural mitigation Yarn Up at the State Training Academy.

In September 2023, Area Operations partnered with Kamilaroi artist Dan Evans and Jesse Green to create a shirt showcasing a contemporary Aboriginal artwork about the growth of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crews within the RFS.

Dan Evans, who is the owner of Walkabout Warriors, is a proud Kamilaroi man who started out painting stories about his own journey through life. This led him to be a passionate advocate for mental health and the power of standing as one through community support, culture and fostering a sense of belonging. Dan painted a piece reflecting the development and expansion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mitigation crews, which became the design for the Service's Mitigation shirts.

Jesse Green, a proud Badtjala/Gunditjmara/Woppaburra man, also passionate about bridging the cultural gap, took Dan's artwork then designed, printed and manufactured the shirts using local Aboriginal staff.

The story of the dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Mitigation crews within the RFS is a developing one. First forming in Brewarrina and Bourke in 2019, the RFS now has Indigenous crews in Macksville, Taree, Coffs Harbour, Urunga, Moree, Tamworth, Bega, Nowra, Tumut, Albury, Griffith, Wagga and Dubbo. There are also additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working in Armidale, Batemans Bay, Coonabarabran, Cowra, Forbes, Heathcote, Katoomba, Maitland and Bargo.

"In response to feedback that our Fire Control Centres can be daunting for new indigenous candidates, we hope that these shirts will be worn to create a sense of inclusiveness for potential new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff," says Danny Busch, Preparedness Lead of Area Operations.

"The value of these Crew Members and Leaders within our communities is vital to furthering our partnerships with local Aboriginal communities for the purpose of bush fire mitigation and overall engagement. We look forward to nurturing our current and future relationships with Aboriginal communities to both learn from them and provide bush fire mitigation services tailored to their needs."

Mitigation crew members. Discussions will be centred around initiatives and projects, and On Country discussions and workshops.

Jamie is working on cultural awareness training for members, Bush Fire Safety Programs near remote Aboriginal communities and villages, community engagement and more traditional burning programs.

"We hope to take a lead from local Aboriginal fire practitioners and communities with the support of brigades and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mitigation crew members," he says. "We should be adaptable and inclusive, inviting Elders and other Indigenous community leaders to join our Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander crew members."

The RFS is currently looking to strengthen partnerships with Aboriginal Ranger Teams, Local Aboriginal Lands Councils and Aboriginal Corporations.

"Developing and maintaining a strong network of key Aboriginal partners and stakeholders to assist with the engagement and facilitation of Aboriginal programs will assist us in understanding the values of Aboriginal communities," says Jamie. "We are committed to working alongside and walking together to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"By communicating stories, achievements and goals, we help to bridge the gap."

For more information or to get involved please contact our RFS Aboriginal Programs Coordinator, Jamie Bertram, at [jamie.bertram@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:jamie.bertram@rfs.nsw.gov.au).

Left: Mitigation Crew proudly wearing their new shirts at the Inaugural Indigenous Yarn Up. Photos courtesy of RFS.



# VEHICLE GIFTED TO SUPPORT CULTURAL BURNS

A Local Aboriginal Land Council has received a boost in its work carrying out important cultural burns and bush fire mitigation on the Far South Coast, with the delivery of a firefighting vehicle.

In May 2024, RFS Deputy Commissioner Peter McKechnie handed over the keys to the vehicle to the Merrimans Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) in a ceremony at Wallaga Lake.

The four-wheel drive Cat 9 vehicle is fitted with a 600-litre water tank and pressurised fire pumping gear and hoses that can be used to extinguish fires. The vehicle has solid off-road capabilities and will be suitable for use in the various terrains the LALC faces when undertaking its important work.

A new home for the appliance was found after the Cultural Fire Management Unit within the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) approached the RFS on behalf of the Merrimans LALC with the request for a firefighting appliance.

“We are pleased to be able to provide the LALC with a used purpose-built firefighting vehicle, which it can now use to carry out its statutory obligations relating to bush fire,” says Peter. “This is a great example of Government departments working together to achieve a positive outcome for local communities.

“The RFS has committed to bring the community together, our goal is to teach the community about mitigating fire risks. Cultural Burning has been a part of Country for millennia and we can all learn about its benefits.

“Through this partnership and ongoing training, we will continue to grow as an organisation in regional and rural communities, learning new skills while we build on these important relationships.”

Merrimans Local Aboriginal Land Council Acting CEO, Amanda Foster, welcomed the new addition.

“It is absolutely outstanding to get this vehicle, which will allow the LALC to move forward on a number of fronts including bush fire mitigation, undertaking our cultural burning practices and I’m sure other uses,” says Ms Foster.

“We have land including in remote areas that needs to be managed, so the arrival of this tanker comes at a good time.”

Minister for Emergency Services Jihad Dib says it was great to see a vehicle re-purposed for further community use after its retirement from the RFS fleet.

“We must make the most of every opportunity to minimise the impact of fires on NSW communities, and I am pleased to see this vehicle go to good use,” Minister Dib said.



Main photo: Deputy Commissioner Peter McKechnie hands over the keys of the Cat 9 to Merrimans LALC. Above: RFS members and LALC representatives. Photos courtesy of RFS.



# YOUNG MEMBERS REPRESENT OUR FUTURE

Taylor Mureau is one of many young members building her skills and leadership experience by taking part in the RFS Young Members Group. The Young Members Group assists in planning and delivering youth-related projects and aims to build relationships between members (staff and volunteer) from across the Service.

Taylor Mureau is Vice President of Woombah Brigade in the Clarence Valley District. In July 2024 she was selected through a competitive EOI process for the RFS Young Members Group, a role she will hold for two years.

## **How long have you been a member?**

I have been a member of Woombah Brigade since 2020, joining when I was 22 years old.

## **What made you want to join?**

Initially, I was just tagging along with some friends. I thought it could be fun and wanted to give back to my community and protect the place I love. At first, I didn't think I had the abilities to be on the fireground, but my Captain at the time showed me tremendous support and gave me the confidence to become a firefighter. Now it's such a large part of my life, my crew have become like family.

## **Your favourite experiences as a young member?**

Achievements like being accepted to the Young Member Leadership College and having the opportunity to go to Sydney.

I've gained such valuable knowledge, learning from some amazing speakers with other people my own age from across the state.

## **Any stories that stand out?**

At the 2023 Nymboida fires, after hours of work out on the fireground, all crews came together to have dinner and discuss stories and life advice.

It was great to look around and see so many like-minded people, who are more than happy to be giving up their time to come together and protect their community.

## **How do you see the Service in the future?**

I would like to see more young members joining the RFS, it's the most welcoming and supportive community of people I have ever met.

## **What is the best part of being in the RFS?**

I like to keep busy, I am learning to drive the firetrucks, working on Crew Leader courses and jobs. I also run the cadets course and assist with training our new recruits.

On a personal level, I have an autistic five-year-old son and my involvement in the Service has brought him so much joy, he loves the trucks. It's a wonderful feeling to be part of something that my son is proud to see his Mum doing.

When I joined, it inspired my older sister to join Fire and Rescue NSW, and my partner and many of my friends are also firefighters.

My 30-year-old Captain is a great role model and I'm incredibly inspired by her. Being a member has given me such a wide range of knowledge, skills and confidence that I have used in my personal life. I feel a great sense of belonging in the RFS, and can't imagine my life without it, it's so incredibly rewarding in so many ways.

Above: Taylor Mureau and her son. Photo courtesy of RFS.

# NATIONAL ALL-HAZARDS

LABELS		POINT			
<b>DT</b>	Division Name	DC	Divisional Command	EA	Evacuation Area Confirmed
<b>ST</b>	Sector Name		Divisional Boundary	EA	Evacuation Area Proposed
<b>AT</b>	Annotation	SC	Sector Command	EC	Evacuation Centre Confirmed
<b>SN</b>	Safety Note		Sector Boundary	EC	Evacuation Centre Proposed
<b>POINT</b>		BC	Base Camp Proposed		Smoke Hazard Sign
	Fire Incident Unconfirmed	BC	Base Camp Confirmed		Property Damage Unconfirmed
	Fire Incident Confirmed	SA	Staging Area Proposed		Property Damage Confirmed
	Vehicle Incident Unconfirmed	SA	Staging Area Confirmed		Tree Down Unconfirmed
	Vehicle Incident Confirmed	AA	Assembly Area Proposed		Tree Down Confirmed
	Flood Incident Unconfirmed	AA	Assembly Area Confirmed		Livestock Relief Unconfirmed
	Flood Incident Confirmed		Air Base Proposed		Livestock Relief Confirmed
	Other Incident Unconfirmed	AIR	Air Base Confirmed		Road Closure Proposed
	Other Incident Confirmed		Helibase Proposed		Road Closure Confirmed
	Fire Origin Unconfirmed		Helibase Confirmed		Flooded Property Unconfirmed
<b>F</b> →	Fire Direction	H	Helipad Proposed		Flooded Property Confirmed
<b>W</b> →	Wind Direction	H	Helipad Confirmed		Boat Rescue Unconfirmed
	Spot Fire Unconfirmed	POL	Police Motor Vehicle		Boat Rescue Confirmed
	Spot Fire Confirmed	FIRE	Fire Appliance		Other Incident Point
	Spot Fire Predicted	AMB	Ambulance Location Proposed		Custom Point
	Hotspot	AMB	Ambulance Location Confirmed		Asset
	Hydrant Point	SES	SES Motor Vehicle		Asset Hazmat
W	Water Point		Plant		Asset Defendable
WH	Water Point Helicopter		Portable Communications		Asset Not Defendable
WV	Water Point Vehicle		Mobile Weather Station		Asset Potentially Defendable
CC	Control Centre Unconfirmed	RAFT	RAFT Crews		Endangered Fauna

# MAPPING SYMBOLOGY

POINT					
	Control Centre Confirmed		Medical		Endangered Flora
	Access Point Proposed		Escape Route Proposed		Historic Site
	Access Point Confirmed		Escape Route Confirmed		Indigenous Site
	Control Point Confirmed		Refuge Area Proposed		Threatened Asset
	Control Point Unconfirmed		Refuge Area Confirmed		Information Point
POLYGON	LINE	HAZARD REDUCTION			
	Burnt Area		Fire Edge Predicted		HR Proposed Burn Area
	Proposed Burn Area		Fire Edge Going		HR Actual Burnt Area
	Previous Burnt Area		Fire Edge Inactive		Hazard Reduction Proposal Point
	HR Proposed Burn Area		Fire Edge Contained		Hazard Reduction Actual Point
	HR Actual Burnt Area		Control Line Proposed		Hazard Reduction Ignition Direction
	Flooded Area Predicted		Control Liner Completed		Burn in progress Sign
	Flooded Area Confirmed		Fence Line	FIRE INVESTIGATION	
	Other Incident Area		Machine Cut Track		Fire Investigation Label Small
	Emergency Aleret		Track		Fire Investigation Label Medium
	Fire Exclusion Zone		Backburn Line Proposed		Fire Investigation Label Large
	Mechanical Exclusion Zone		Backburn Line Burning		Advancing Fire
FLIGHT PLAN PALETTE		Backburn Line Completed		Lateral Fire	
	Flight Plan Waypoint		Aerial Ignition Planned		Backing Fire
	Flight Plan Route		Aerial Ignition Complete		Reference
		Arrow Thin		Evidence	
		Arrow Thick		Tree	
		Distance Line		Intewrest	
		Aerial Containment Line Complete		Photograph	
		Aerial Containment Line Planned		Fire Origin Confirmed	

## NEW FIRE AND EMERGENCY OPERATIONS FACILITY FOR CUDGEGONG

A new \$12.2 million Fire Control Centre and Emergency Operations Centre has opened in Cudgong, and will support the District's 28 brigades, more than 1,300 volunteer members and various agencies during major incidents such as fires, floods and severe storms.

The centre is the third co-located purpose-built RFS facility, after Armidale and Tamworth, and has the technology, space and functionality to enable RFS staff to manage emergency incidents more efficiently and increase the level of safety and community protection.

Situated close to Mudgee Airport, the facility's location allows for close access to Air Base Operations and, in addition to office and operational areas, also houses a five-bay mitigation shed and stores building.



## WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS OF THE STATE YOUNG MEMBERS GROUP

In July, following a competitive EOI process, seven new members of the RFS State Young Members Group (YMG) were announced. These members will be part of the Group for the next two years, playing an important role in consulting on projects and advocating for young people in the RFS.

Sponsored by the RFSA, the YMG was established in 2010 to give voice to young volunteers aged 18–30. The group meets with key stakeholders and represents the interests of the young members who volunteer their time to the Service.

All current members of the YMG are Angela Skelly (Chairperson) Gwandalan Brigade, Central Coast; Blake Bano (Deputy Chairperson), Plumpton Brigade, Cumberland; Jessica Fabreschi, Basin View Brigade, Shoalhaven; Caleb Kennedy, Faulconbridge Brigade, Blue Mountains; Taylor Mureau, Woombah Brigade, Clarence Valley; Harry Turner, Gol Gol Brigade, Lower Western; Jordan Townsend, Tuncurry Brigade, Mid Coast; Sarah Dewar, Merimbula Brigade, Far South Coast; Jacqueline Wilson, Theresa Park Brigade, Southern Highlands; Keejana Zhang-MacKellar, Weethalle Brigade, Bland Temora.

For further information on the Young Members Group, or to request to add an item to the agenda for their next meeting, please contact [youthparticipation@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:youthparticipation@rfs.nsw.gov.au).



## VIKI CAMPBELL APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF STATE OPERATIONS

The RFS is pleased to announce that Viki Campbell has been appointed as the new Director of State Operations and elevated to the rank of Assistant Commissioner.

Viki is highly respected and has extensive experience in Emergency Management, previously working with NSW Ambulance before joining the RFS. Over the years she has undertaken several Senior roles during significant fires within NSW, interstate and overseas, as well as holding the positions of Major Incident Coordinator, State Duty Officer, Manager Operation Business and Procurement and District Manager of the Central Coast.



## THE COMMISSIONER'S VOLUNTEER FORUM

On 26-28 July in Coffs Harbour, Commissioner Rob Rogers hosted the 2024 Commissioner's Volunteer Forum, where volunteer members from across the state gathered to discuss successes and challenges and inform RFS priorities for the next five years.

Each RFS District was invited to send three volunteer members to the Forum, giving each representative the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and provide insights into the future.

The Forum provided the participants an opportunity to share their views on what we get right and wrong, what we should do more of and what we can do better. As we strive to set new standards of excellence and adapt and improve as an organisation, it is vital that the input, experience and knowledge of our frontline volunteer members is heard.

The information gathered prioritises the needs of our members and helps to shape the future of our Service's strategic direction.



## NEW CONTRACT FOR RFS AERIAL FLEET

The RFS recently signed a new 10-year aviation contract with Coulson Aviation Australia (a five-year contract plus five-year option), to oversee the management, operation and maintenance of the entire RFS aerial fleet.

The fleet includes 11 aircraft – a 737 large air tanker (LAT), two Cessna Citations, six Bell-412 helicopters, a Chinook helicopter and a Beechcraft Super King Air, and will be overseen primarily by Australian crews.

Global demand for trained air service crews is high as many are deployed to fight fires that are becoming more challenging to control. Building local fleet and aviation teams will minimise the need for aviation support from international personnel as the bush fire seasons in the northern and southern hemispheres increasingly overlap.

The new contract will also help develop the next generation of aviation personnel in NSW, with an expansion of the apprenticeship program attached to the RFS fleet. Providing training for local crews in advanced firefighting techniques will help ensure the community is better protected.

Commissioner Rob Rogers spoke about the benefits of the new partnership.

“Our aviation fleet has progressively grown in recent years to better respond and support firefighting and emergency operations across NSW, interstate and internationally.

“In support of ground crews, aviation assets are a vital tool to help stop or slow a fire’s run and protect lives and property, and we look forward to working with Coulson as our aerial capability continues to expand.”



# SPOTLIGHT ON WOMEN IN THE RFS

“

Don't let anyone, including yourself, tell you that you can't do it.

Katherine Merrick



Katherine Merrick standing on the wharf on Dangar Island.



## KATHERINE MERRICK

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Captain, Dangar Island Brigade,  
Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai

**How long have you been a member?**

I have been a member for 18 years.

**What made you want to join?**

I had no idea that it was possible to join the RFS. The thought had not occurred to me. Then one day, when we were still quite new to the area and didn't know that many people, I was out walking and got talking to some neighbours who said, "you should join", and the rest is history.

**Skills**

Boat Skipper, Crew Leader, First Aid Officer and hoping to learn chainsaw soon.

**I'd like to say...**

Living on an island you need to be resourceful and an active part of the community, relying on each other in a remote and sometimes challenging environment.

That hands-on attitude is reflected by our members, with almost half of our volunteers being women. We are a team of practical, reliable people with different skills that we bring together.

Protecting boats and houses is a big part of the lives of everyone living on an island, so the RFS is an extension of that. Women have always had the opportunity to be encouraged and promoted within our Brigade and we hope that continues.

The best teams (in my view) are made up of a diversity of individuals. We each bring different skills.

**Lastly...**

Working as part of a team to support your community and keep it safe from fire and other risks is a fabulous feeling.

Don't let anyone, including yourself, tell you that you can't do it.



## GLENDA HOWELL

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Secretary, Weddin Headquarters Brigade,  
Mid Lachlan Valley

**How long have you been a member?**

I have been a member since 1997 and with Mid Lachlan Valley Support since 2020. Over the years I have held the roles of Training Officer, Deputy Captain, Secretary, Callout Officer, Catering, Community Engagement and everything in between. In the Mid Lachlan Valley Support Brigade, I've also worked as an IMT Officer (logistics) and as Communications Senior Deputy Captain.

**What made you want to join?**

We had a fulltime Fire Control Officer arrive in 1996 and my husband Lawrence told me that our new FCO needed help in the office and with communications, so I was drafted in!

**Skills**

Training, communications and logistics. I had been a temp Administration Officer on and off since 2005 for the RFS, and Learning and Development Officer at one stage.

**I'd like to say...**

Always ask for help or advice, when or if you need to. If opportunities arise for Section 44s or training, do it! Enhance those skills whenever you can.

**Lastly...**

Stand up for yourself, don't let others step all over you.

## SPOTLIGHT ON WOMEN IN THE RFS



### JESSICA DAWES

**Deputy Captain, Inverell Brigade,  
Northern Tablelands**

**How long have you been a member?**

I've been with the RFS for six years. I am Deputy Captain and a member of the all-female strike team.

**What made you want to join?**

After returning from overseas, I relocated to the village of Woombah on the Clarence Coast. There I connected with members of the local Brigade who encouraged me to join.

The experience was unforgettable and although I now live in Inverell on the Northern Tablelands, prioritising rejoining the RFS here was essential for both my career and social connections.

**Skills**

My leadership, resilience and decision-making skills have all been refined since joining.

I enjoy making a direct impact on the community, developing life-transferable skills in a supportive environment while our successes and achievements are celebrated.

Like anything in life, you only get out of it what you put in. Our limits are challenged, and for every doubter or knocker, there are many, many more supporters.

**Lastly...**

People talk about the 'RFS family', which we all in some way take for granted most of the time.

When life throws you that inevitable curve ball, which it has done for me quite recently when my brother was in a very serious accident, the support shown by my RFS family has been wonderful.

It's promising to know that good people will surround you, stand with you and help you get back on your feet to fight another day.



### JENNIFER LAWThER AFsM

**Group Captain, Shoalhaven**

**How long have you been a member?**

In 1989 I joined Callala Beach Brigade. The community consisted mainly of retired couples, so being a younger member of the village, I was accepted with open arms.

I have held Field Officer positions at the Brigade including Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain and Captain, as well as Deputy Group Captain and Group Captain in the Shoalhaven District.

**What made you want to join?**

My grandparents lived here for many years, they always said if I stayed in Callala Beach then I must join the local Brigade.

I knew the impact that the members made to the community was invaluable because of the assistance and camaraderie they gave to people in need.

**Skills**

I joined with lots of enthusiasm, energy, friendliness and a great ability to learn. Organisational skills and leadership goals are a must for those who want to advance within the Service.

Knowledge of cultural diversity within communities and the importance of



inclusiveness and how to manage integration is also a valuable skill.

Since joining, I have developed patience and become a leader who takes responsibility for outcomes, good or not so good. I work with members' individual skills, while showing them pathways to develop.

I've managed to stay on top of technology and navigate through an evolving emergency service organisation, a massive task, and learnt copious amounts of acronyms while pretending to know what they all mean!

#### **I'd like to say...**

Believe in yourself, be yourself and have faith in your own skills and ability.

Be clear in your own mind as to why you joined the RFS – one day you may need to reflect on those choices to keep you going in the more demanding times.

Be positive and be active and don't shy away from jobs or positions that you have the skills and ability to take on.

Don't be discredited by those who cannot see a way forward to achieving your goals.

Teamwork, communication and a good sense of humour will be the key to your enjoyment and success.



## **JENNY BAMMAN**

**Group Captain, Far South Coast**

### **How long have you been a member?**

I joined the Surf Beach Brigade in 1994 and have been an active member for 30 years.

### **What made you want to join?**

When the 1994 fires impacted the Eurobodalla area, they came close to my home and business. My husband was a member of Surf Beach Brigade and was involved in fighting the fires. I did not see him for days at a time and it became evident that there were not enough volunteers to cope with such emergencies.

I decided that was something I could do to give back to my community and help the existing members that were stretched to the limit. Even though my children were young at the time, my husband and I decided we could 'tag team' with calls and never went out on the same crew.

### **Skills**

I have been given many opportunities and learnt so much during my time in the RFS. Particularly in the areas of

leadership, communication, training and assessing, understanding fire behaviour, structural firefighting, dealing with a wide range of fire emergencies and acting in a Divisional Commander role during the 2019/20 Black Summer fires.

### **I'd like to say...**

Firefighting is not without its challenges, particularly for women in a male-dominated role, however the Service has bridged this gap very well and we are achieving a much more even ratio of male to female members in most brigades.

The rewards far outweigh the challenges, and the camaraderie is amazing. Being a member is like being part of a very large family, everybody looks out for each other.

We get to help our communities and that is a privilege.

### **Lastly...**

I feel honoured to be a member of the RFS and to have been given incredible opportunities. I also feel proud to have achieved what I have during the past 30 years.

## SPOTLIGHT ON WOMEN IN THE RFS

“

My father was a firefighter,  
so fire is in my blood...

Danielle Brice



### DANIELLE BRICE

Senior Deputy Captain,  
Eurobodalla Volunteer Operations Support Brigade,  
Far South Coast

#### How long have you been a member?

I've been with the RFS for 12 years. I have just stepped down as Captain of the Eurobodalla Volunteer Operations Support Brigade, a role I held for six years, to allow others to learn and lead a great team. I've also been a member of Tuross Head Brigade, where I was Deputy Captain for three years.

#### What made you want to join?

I joined the RFS after the tragic loss of both our sons. Chris was 17 when he passed away in 2008, and his brother Nicholas was 22 when he passed in 2011.

Nick volunteered with the Army Reserves, Surf Lifesaving Club, SES, St John Ambulance and was a member of Belrose, Berowra Waters and North Rocks brigades.

I felt I needed to carry on our boys' hopes, dreams and community service, while keeping busy and showing my appreciation to those who had looked after us in our time of need. My father, Ron, was a firefighter, so fire was in my blood. I also volunteer with SES and St John Ambulance.

#### Skills

I have qualified up to Crew Leader Supervision, Communications Centre Assistant and Aviation Radio Operator.

I'm working towards completing Air Base Manager, Breathing Apparatus Operator and Advanced Resuscitation Techniques courses in 2024.

Willing to have a go at anything!

#### I'd like to say...

You can gain qualifications and experience to take to other walks of life. There are countless opportunities to gain new skills and learn to problem solve.

We are treated as equals and valued members of a team. Give as much time as you can and be part of a big family.

#### Lastly...

There are some special women who I aspire to be like, who are wonderful role models and who have made a huge contribution to the Service – Chief Superintendent Kelwyn White, Airbase Coordinator Tamsyne Harlen, Group Officer Jenny Bamman, Captain Judee Bryant, Deputy Captain Judy Moore and former Captain Helen Riedl.

Above: Danielle Brice cleaning up beach debris in Tuross Head.



## KYLIE LEDGER

**Deputy Group Captain,  
Hunter Valley**

### How long have you been a member?

Officially since 2006, but I started helping around the station from 2003. In the past I've been Secretary, Equipment Officer, Training Officer, Treasurer, Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain and a Corporate Trainer teaching fire awareness and firefighting skills to commercial clients.

I've also worked as a volunteer District trainer, and with our Communications Brigade.

### What made you want to join?

My husband joined after the Canberra fires, and I came along to help. When the Brigade realised I had admin skills, they talked me into being Secretary. One day I was helping deliver catering and they suggested I do my Bush Firefighter course. I was hooked after that!

### Skills

I am curious and like to try different things – I am a driver, have been a CABA operator, I've done CFR and RCR, currently building skills in aerial intelligence and a passionate trainer for many years.

### I'd like to say...

Explore your limits, you might be surprised! Don't let anyone tell you what you can and cannot do. Treat your service as a personal challenge – the only person you are competing against is yourself and you might be surprised where you go. I had a few instances over the years of people telling me what I could and couldn't do – that only pushed me harder to prove them wrong.

### Lastly...

I couldn't have done this without the support of my husband and family, and key people in my RFS journey who believed in me. Being surrounded by people who want to lift you up is such an amazing feeling.



## JO HORNE

**Firefighter and Treasurer,  
Myall Vale Brigade, Naomi Gwydir**

### How long have you been a member?

I've been a member for 20 years. I'm Treasurer (can't give it away, no one else wants it!) and a general firefighter.

### What made you want to join?

I had been interested as a teenager living in the Blue Mountains, but the opportunity wasn't there so I never pursued it.

When my hubby joined Myall Vale in 2002, I decided to join to be the Treasurer and then did my BF.

### Skills

I did my Village Firefighter and Advanced Firefighter courses a long time ago. Although I'm not as active now due to health issues, you will usually find me helping with whatever needs doing, sometimes on the end of a hose, sometimes traffic control and a multitude of other jobs.

### I'd like to say...

It can be hard work a lot of the time but there's something for everyone, even if you don't want to be on the end of a hose.



## **STEPHANIE LOOI**

**Deputy Captain, Hornsby Brigade, Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai and Aviation Rescue Crew member**

**How long have you been a member?**

I have been with the RFS for 13 years.

**What made you want to join?**

I moved to Sydney and wanted to meet people in my local area. My parents instilled a strong sense of service into me from a young age, so I investigated what I could do.

At the end of the day, I decided I preferred yellow over orange, so ended up in the RFS.

### **Skills**

I would like to think I'm an advocate for women in the Service. I don't always get it right, but I'm trying.

I hope I've had some small part in making it better for those who come after me, whether through helping people to navigate the system, being a listening ear or advocating on a broader stage, through forums such as the Australasian Fire And Emergency Services

Authorities Council (AFAC) and WA Fire Alliance (WAFA).

I would like to be a mentor for newer members of the Service, particularly people looking to head down a Remote Area/Aviation Rescue path.

**I'd like to say...**

Everyone's experience is different, and brigade cultures that drive individual experiences with the Service differ wildly.

But my view has been that the RFS has given me experiences and opportunities that I never could have imagined.

Even though the path has not always been straightforward or easy, it's given me a group of people all over the state and country that I'm proud to call my friends.

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Above: Stephanie Looi with her daughter. Photo by Jen Osborne.



“

I don't think gender plays a role in what you can do...

Joh Paynter

## JOH PAYNTER

**Firefighter, Thurgoona Brigade,  
and Secretary/Field Support Officer, Southern Border**

**How long have you been a member?**

I joined the RFS in 2020. After completing my Bush Firefighter course, I was fortunate to work with a Strike Team Leader who has been involved in the RFS for about 40 years. They identified my skills were better suited with a pen than a hose and after trying the role, found something that I am good at and enjoy.

From there I moved into other areas such as Management Support Officer and Air Radio Operator. I can honestly say that I'm excited to see what else the Service can use my skills and talents for.

Last year I had the opportunity to fill some short-term roles at the Southwestern Area Command in various administration positions, which was a great insight into the 'other side' of the RFS.

**What made you want to join?**

I'd been involved in the VRA for quite some time however I wasn't attending call outs and felt I still had something to offer. Like many, I saw the increasing need for people to assist in times of significant campaigns and started ferrying crews to staging areas during the Green Valley

Talmalmo fire in 2019/20. Not being a member at the time, limited how much I could do... so I joined.

**Skills**

My day job as a security guard brings note taking, people management and even negotiating as standard practice. As a Field Support Officer, I slipped into the role easily.

**I'd like to say...**

I don't think gender plays a role in what you can do, you are only limited by your own expectations. The RFS has so many different roles and opportunities – find what excites and empowers you. My Brigade has some incredible women that will don the breathing apparatus and fight a fire, legends during a bush fire and others that excel at community engagement. Find what works for you and where you feel you can best contribute. For me, it wasn't on a hose. The RFS doesn't just mean fighting fires, someone needs to be behind the scenes to support the frontline and it's a team effort to make that happen.

**Lastly...**

I've learned new skills and had great experiences working with likeminded people. I've gained new friendships while contributing to the community and supporting others.



“

Take every opportunity  
that gets thrown at you...

Nell Duly

## NELL DULY

**Captain, Hanwood Brigade, MIA**

**How long have you been a member?**

I have been a member since 2020.

**What made you want to join?**

Like a lot of people, I saw the fires of 2019/20 play out on my television and was mortified by the scale of destruction, but also in awe of the people going to fight them.

My mother lives in the Blue Mountains and while she was never evacuated, it was an incredibly stressful period. When I visited Mum towards the tail end of those fires I noticed an RFS truck from the MIA District near her house. I then realised, if people from my home can come all this way to protect my loved ones, what am I doing to help protect my own town?

**Skills**

Crew Leader Supervision, Breathing Apparatus Operator and internal Trim Felled Trees qualification. I am also particularly proud to be an Arduous Firefighter given I'm on the shorter side.

All these qualifications have pushed me in some way, be it to get stronger, think quicker, or in the case of chainsaw

operation, put me somewhere way out of what I thought my comfort zone was.

**I'd like to say...**

Like many things in life, you will get out of the Service what you put in. Take every opportunity that gets thrown at you. I recently returned from the 2024 Canadian deployment, something I was really proud to take part in. The friendships and connections I have made are invaluable, I encourage everyone to work towards the qualifications so they can give it a go.

**Lastly...**

The diversity of the Service today is one of the things that makes it strong, and there is a role for everybody. If you don't think your skillset is in frontline firefighting, it takes a whole team of other RFS members to get us there.

We need members who can help with communications, catering, wellbeing, community engagement, aviation and operational support, just to name a few. If you want a way to truly give back to your community, there is no time like the present to join the RFS.

Photo by Danielle McKay.





# RFS AT THE ROYAL EASTER SHOW

The 2024 Royal Easter Show was held from 22 March to 2 April at Sydney Olympic Park, and as always was an excellent opportunity to meet with people from all walks of life. Photos by Maria Cardomatis.





# TAKING TO THE FIELD AT THE 22ND NORTHERN EXERCISE

The 22nd annual Northern Field Exercise was held at the Glen Innes Showgrounds from 15-17 March 2024. The two-day event saw more than 300 firefighters from NSW and Queensland participate in 11 real-life training scenarios including bush firefighting and motor vehicle accident response. Photos by Victoria Qusted.





## NORTHERN EXERCISE 2024 AWARD WINNERS

### BEST PERFORMING CREW (ALAN BRINKWORTH AWARD)

Coonamble HQ 1 (NWZ)

### BEST STRIKE TEAM LEADER (STL) (TONY JARRETT AWARD)

Stuart Grant (NTT)

### BEST STL RUNNER UP

Josh Wallbridge

### BEST CREW LEADER

Tania Peene

### BEST CREW LEADER RUNNER UP

Kaleb Cooper

### YOUNG CREW / PERSON ENCOURAGEMENT (BLAKE SKINNER AWARD)

Elizabeth Pugsley  
Gowrie Little Plain Brigade  
SW Region, QLD

### COMMITTEE ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD

Alex Sadler Purkiss

### CATERING ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD 1

Caroline Rasmussen

### CATERING ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD 2

Les Jenkins

### OUTSTANDING CREW MEMBER

Alicia Roach

### OUTSTANDING SUPPORT PERSON

Sarah Mika

### BEST PRESENTED TRUCKS

Coomera Valley 51  
Solitary 7  
Herbert Park 2  
Woombah 1  
Valla 1





# RFS MEMBERS MARCH IN MARDI GRAS PARADE

More than 70 RFS volunteers and staff made their way up Oxford Street in Sydney on 2 March 2024, as part of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade. 2024's theme, 'Our Future' was the inspiration for the futuristic truck design and original take on RFS workwear.





# AUSTRALIAN FIRE SERVICE MEDALS 2024

The Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) is awarded to a member of an Australian fire service for distinguished service. Congratulations to the eight RFS members who received an AFSM as part the 2024 King's Birthday Honours.

## **GROUP CAPTAIN (RETIRED) LORRAINE BRUCE**

### **Mid Coast District**

Group Captain (retired) Lorraine Bruce has served the Mid Coast District, formerly known as the Great Lakes District, for more than 40 years. For 20 of those years, she was a group officer. First elected in 2003, she was the first female group officer in the Great Lakes District.

Lorraine has served in multiple senior leadership roles in the area with distinction over that time. This included instructing and mentoring many dozens of brigades and group officers, as well as serving relentlessly, and with exemplary dedication, in the field herself.

She continues to respond to many emergency incidents across the District, supporting and leading the volunteer members in attendance. Lorraine has led numerous strike teams interstate, including into Victoria and the ACT, and to fires across NSW. She has maintained a leadership role in community engagement and public education through her service in the former Great Lakes Firewise Team and the former Great Lakes Community Education Brigade.

Lorraine continues to play a key role in the learning and development of volunteers in the Mid Coast District. She serves unceasingly as an instructor, assessor and mentor, and she has been a mentor and role model to many current volunteer leaders by enabling the advancement of female volunteers in the RFS.

## **GROUP CAPTAIN PETER WILEY JOHNSTONE**

### **Canobolas District**

Group Captain Peter Wiley Johnstone has been an RFS member for more than 50 years, spending much of that time as a Group Captain in the Canobolas District. He has played a key role in many major fire incidents in the area over his time in the RFS.

In 1990, Peter became the incident controller of a major bush and grass fire in the Cowra Shire. Under his management, it was controlled within two days and contained to just over 6,000 hectares.

Peter responded to the Shiel fire of 2013 as the incident controller. This running grass and scrub fire was extinguished without loss of structures, stock or life on the same afternoon, and was contained to approximately 434 hectares.

During the 2019/20 fire season, Peter called on members of the Walli community to protect the neighbouring districts of Chifley Lithgow and Cudgegong from the Gaspers Mountain fire. Brigade members fed stock on drought-ravaged properties and Peter arranged and participated in out-of-area 24-hour strike teams to protect these and other nearby communities.

Peter remains as Group Captain of the Canobolas District and continues to respond to many emergency incidents across the District, supporting and leading the volunteer members in attendance. He is a mentor to many and focuses his energy and stewardship on supporting the next generation of RFS volunteer leadership. He also provides District management with sound rural advice, as required.

## **GROUP CAPTAIN (RETIRED) CLIFFORD JOHN LAST**

### **Coffs Coast District**

Group Captain (retired) Clifford 'Cliff' Last joined the RFS in 1980 as a member of the Repton Brigade in the Bellingen Shire, where he maintained active service with the brigade until transferring to North Bellingen Brigade. In the North Bellingen Brigade, he held the positions of firefighter, permit officer and Captain. In 2005, Cliff was appointed to the position of Group Captain, which he held until April 2023.

Cliff is a member of the Coffs Coast District Training Team and has been highly active in training and assessing members across the team in many disciplines. He is a mentor to members learning their trade and his leadership is highly valued and respected. Cliff is also a member of the Coffs Coast Senior Leadership Team and actively contributes to future business planning for the team.

Cliff has been deployed many times with out-of-area strike teams in leadership roles and has continuously demonstrated excellent management skills in very difficult situations. His ability to remain calm under pressure was particularly valuable during the 2019/20 bush fire season, as he was deployed to numerous fires and oversaw strike teams in what was at times almost overwhelming conditions.

Cliff has provided over 40 years of service to the RFS and is a highly valued member and leader within the Coffs Coast District.



# AUSTRALIAN FIRE

## SENIOR DEPUTY CAPTAIN WALTER JOSEPH MURRAY

### Clarence Valley District

Senior Deputy Captain Walter 'Wal' Murray joined the Mt Ramornie Brigade in 1986. He has served as a Senior Deputy Captain since 2014 and previously held the positions of Deputy Captain and brigade equipment officer, and has been active over many years as a permit officer. Wal continues to be an active member of the Brigade, attending all manner of operational incidents, including out-of-area deployments.

During the 2019/20 fire season, Wal was one of the more prominent volunteers who dedicated a significant amount of time and energy assisting the firefighting effort. He was instrumental in identifying and implementing containment strategies at several major fires, including the Mount Kaloe, Washpool, Liberation Trail and Whiteman Creek fires. His commitment, intimate local knowledge, willingness to help and calm demeanour were great assets to the service when he was leading out-of-area strike teams during some of the worst fire conditions the Clarence Valley area has ever experienced.

Wal is a major part of the Mt Ramornie Brigade, showing unwavering commitment to the Brigade and his community. Wal's local knowledge and experience is exceptional, and he goes above and beyond to help others. He has provided excellent leadership over many years, displaying outstanding knowledge of the bush and firefighting. He has shown dedication and commitment to his training and is a well-respected mentor.

Wal is known as one of Clarence Valley's achievers, he is trustworthy and honest, with a remarkable work ethic and stamina.

## CAPTAIN CHARLES OTMAR SCHUSSER

### Shoalhaven District

Captain Charles 'Charlie' Schusser first joined the fire services through the Country Fire Authority in Victoria (CFA) in 1981, where he served for nine years with the Numurkah Brigade, responding to the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 and Kosciusko fires in 1985.

Charlie transferred to the Falls Creek Brigade in Shoalhaven in 1990 and served in the operational roles of Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain and Captain, a role he remains in to this day.

Charlie has been active in major bush fire campaigns including Barrengarry 1993/94, Black Christmas 2001/02, Sale 2003, Canberra 2003, Victoria 2006, Coonabarabran 2013, Deans Gap 2013 and Black Summer 2019/20, as well as airbase taskings out of Richmond, Grafton, Tumut, Ulladulla, Albatross, Yawal and Burrier.

As a training officer, Charlie is at the Falls Creek Station almost every Sunday. He is a role model, confidante and advisor for members. Other RFS members on the fireground benefit from his extensive experience and calm approach to unexpected situations.

Over the past four years, Charlie has organised events for Shoalhaven residents with special needs, rallying other brigade members to provide joy for these young people and their families. Over 40 years, Charlie has given outstanding dedication and service to the CFA, RFS and the Shoalhaven community.

## GROUP CAPTAIN RICHARD SCILLEY

### Namoi Gwydir District

Group Captain Richard Scilley joined the Tibbereena Brigade in the Namoi Gwydir District in 1975 at age 13 and remains an operational member.

Richard had the support of his fellow brigade members when they elected him Deputy Captain in 1991 and then Captain in 2004. An exceptional and respected leader, he was appointed Deputy Group Captain in 2007 and then Group Captain in 2011.

Richard, like many other senior RFS members, has participated in numerous events over the years. His work ethic is exceptional and his firefighting skill level and knowledge is indisputable. People listen to and follow his directions when he sets a strategy or command because they trust him.

Richard was the first to volunteer for, and the last to leave, the prolonged Pilliga Forest fires. He has also attended numerous serious motor vehicle accidents over the years. He protects his team members as much as possible from the horrific nature of some of the incidents and then monitors their wellbeing after the event. This inner strength and fortitude make him the person sought out when a call for assistance from police is received that requires special abilities.

He has also promoted the RFS as a regular door knocker in his uniform for the Red Shield Appeal and he rarely misses an ANZAC Day march.

# SERVICE MEDALS 2024

## CAPTAIN FIONA STALGIS

### Blue Mountains District

Captain Fiona Stalgis joined Winmalee Brigade in 1991 and has held numerous field and administration positions over her 33 years of service, including Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain and Captain. Additionally, Fiona was previously a member of the Blue Mountains Group Support Brigade (formerly the Blue Mountains Communications Brigade).

During the Black Summer bush fires of 2019/20, Fiona was appointed Deputy Group Captain, a position she maintained until 2021. During this time, she was involved both operationally and non-operationally with multiple brigades, particularly the west group of brigades within the District, providing leadership, guidance and support.

Fiona holds a wide range of qualifications, passing on this knowledge and skills to others. She trains new and existing members and provides ongoing mentoring. She has supported and promoted continual training, including Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus training and structural training within the Brigade, with Winmalee Brigade being the first Village 2 brigade in the Blue Mountains.

Fiona continues to be involved with community engagement, including the education and training of community members to better prepare themselves for living with bush fires. She constantly demonstrates the values of the RFS through her dedication, professionalism, leadership and selfless commitment to her Brigade and community.

## FIREFIGHTER SUZANNE BERYL TALBERT

### The Hills District

Suzanne 'Sue' Talbert began her journey as a firefighter in the Kenthurst Brigade in 1979 and continues to this day. From the very start, Sue demonstrated a passion for service and an unwavering commitment. She later became a dual member with The Hills District Communication Brigade, where she served as a Deputy Captain from 2008 to 2024.

Sue's outstanding dedication extends beyond firefighting. In 1994, she was a founding member of the RFS Critical Incident Support Services (CISS) team. The CISS provides crucial emotional support to fellow volunteers and staff across the state. Sue works unconventional hours, traveling throughout NSW often onto firegrounds to prioritise the wellbeing of the RFS family. Over the past 30 years as a member of CISS, Sue has arguably made her greatest impact on

the RFS by supporting and protecting its members.

Sue has been deployed to large scale out-of-area incidents, undertaking essential work as a communications operator, aviation radio operator and scribe for group officers in locations including Tarcutta, the Blue Mountains and Narrabri. She believes passionately in the importance of an engaged community and tirelessly coordinates the Kenthurst Brigade's annual 'Get Ready Weekend' activities and 'Firewise for Kids' programs.

Sue's exceptional leadership, selfless dedication and tireless service over 45 years have enriched the lives of countless individuals and strengthened the RFS family. From firefighting to communications, community engagement and critical incident support, Sue has consistently gone above and beyond, making a profound impact on the RFS and community members across the entire state of NSW.



# RFS MEMBERS HONOURED AT AFAC MEMORIAL

In May 2024 a memorial service was held at the National Emergency Services Memorial in Canberra to honour the courage and sacrifice of those emergency services personnel who died in the line of duty.





On 2 May 2024, the RFS joined other emergency services to present an AFAC Memorial Medallion to the families of those who have fallen. The names of 17 emergency service personnel, including four RFS members, were added to the National Emergency Services Memorial after they made the ultimate sacrifice while protecting others.

RFS Commissioner Rob Rogers paid his respects on the day.

“Today we remember and thank the men and women who have died in the line of duty, while protecting communities across NSW and further afield,” he said. “This year, in addition to the many RFS members whose names are engraved on the memorial, the families of four firefighters who died in the past year were presented with AFAC Memorial Medallions. We pay our deepest respects to those men who have fallen.”

Tragically, the RFS lost four members in late 2023:

Senior Deputy Captain John Holmes of Mallanganee Brigade passed away last October following a medical episode while battling the Bean Creek fire in the Kyogle area.

Captain Leo Fransen of Diamond Beach Brigade died after he was struck by a tree while working on the Hudson fire outside of Walgett in November.

Group Captain Dale Bowles of the Mid Murray District passed away after suffering a medical episode while responding to a car fire in the Moama area in December.

Fire and Rescue NSW Firefighter and RFS member Michael Kidd died while battling a house fire in his capacity with Fire and Rescue NSW at Grose Vale in Sydney’s northwest.



“This is a fitting tribute to them and all who have tragically left us while carrying out the selfless act of defending others,” said Commissioner Rogers. “Our thoughts continue to be with their families, loved ones, friends and fellow brigade members.”

The National Memorial is situated on the banks of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra. Its Memorial Wall was opened in 2018 and displays the names of more than 500 emergency services personnel who lost their lives in the line of duty.

Photos by Emilie Koek.



# St. Florian's Day

## Bravery and Service Awards 2023

The fourth of May is the Feast Day of St Florian, Patron Saint of Firefighters, and International Firefighters' Day. On this day each year, the RFS holds an internal awards ceremony to recognise the bravery and outstanding service of members. In 2024, Commissioner Rob Rogers AFSM was joined by Minister for Emergency Services, the Hon Jihad Dib MP, at the RFS State Training Academy in Dubbo to honour our RFS volunteers, salaried members and teams for their bravery and service.

### Commendation for Bravery

**Firefighter Shane Attwood,**  
Mid Coast, Area Hunter

**Captain Damian Chester,**  
Mid Coast, Area Hunter

**Firefighter Rachel Fox,**  
Mid Coast, Area Hunter

**Group Captain John McDonald,**  
Castlereagh, Area North Western

**Firefighter Mackenzie Scott,**  
Chifley Lithgow, Area Western

**Captain Mark Waters,**  
Mid Coast, Area Hunter

### Unit Citation for Bravery

**Crew 91 Alberta Canada,**  
International Deployment,  
Field Operations

### Commendation for Service

**Group Captain Bruce Blackburn,**  
Mid Coast, Area Hunter

**Mrs Wendy Buckett,**  
Procurement, Technology, Finance and Legal

**Superintendent Keith Mackay,**  
Operations Support, Field Operations

**Assistant Commissioner Stuart Midgley AFSM,**  
Operations Support, Field Operations

**Captain Neville O'Malley,**  
Northern Rivers, Area North Eastern

**Deputy Captain Stephen Tonitto,**  
Mid Coast, Area Hunter

**Superintendent Steve Walker,**  
Lower Western, Area South Western

**Superintendent Tony Whitehorn,**  
Mid Murray, Area South Western

### Unit Citation for Service

**2019/20 Section 44 Incident Controllers,**  
Statewide

**Bathurst, Raglan and Eglinton Brigades  
and Chifley Lithgow District staff,**  
Area Western

**CAD Project Team,**  
Field Operations;  
Technology, Finance and Legal

**Central Coast and Lower Hunter Crews:**  
Cameron Park, Killingworth, Mulbring and East Maitland  
Brigades, Central Coast Communications and Central  
Coast District Office, Area Hunter

**District rollout of Microsoft 365,**  
Central Coast, Area Hunter

**Emergency Logistics Solution Project,**  
Technology, Finance Legal; Preparedness and Capability;  
Field Operations

**Liverpool Range Group 4**  
Brigades and District Staff, Area North Western

**Logistics Team,**  
Logistics and Equipment, Preparedness and Capability

**Mid Coast Strike Team Alpha,**  
Mid Coast, Area Hunter

**Moama Brigade 1 Bravo,**  
Mid Murray Area South Western

**Mudgee Heritage Group,**  
Cudgegong, Area Western

**RFS Coronial Team,**  
Technology Finance and Legal; Field Operations;  
Preparedness and Capability

**Tarlo Catering Unit,**  
Southern Tablelands, Area South Eastern

**The Hills District Chainsaw Team,**  
Area Greater Sydney

**Womboota Brigade,**  
Mid Murray Zone, Area South Western



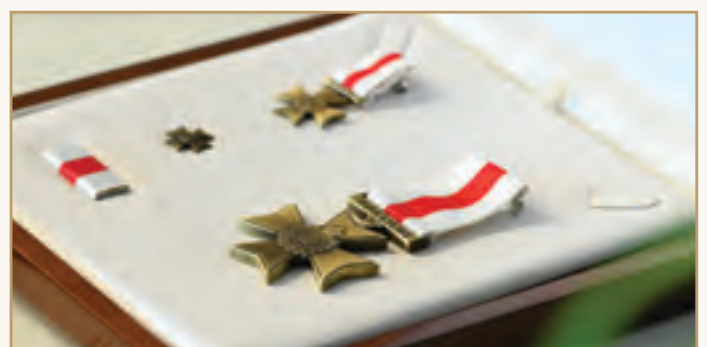
Above: Commissioner Rob Rogers poses with award recipients from the 2024 St Florians Day Bravery and Service Awards. Photo by Adam Hollingworth.

### Certificate of Commendation (Individual)

- Captain Gavin Adams,  
Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai, Area Greater Sydney
- Crew Leader Kristie Baxter,  
Communications and Engagement, People and Strategy
- Captain David Betts,  
Far West, Area Western
- Group Captain David Caswell,  
Far West, Area Western
- Ceremonial Sergeant Major Jason Donkin,  
State Ceremonial Unit, Office of the Commissioner
- Firefighter Robert Hardie,  
Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai, Area Greater Sydney
- Captain Ashley Hodgetts,  
Cudgegong, Area Western
- Firefighter Catherine James,  
Communications and Engagement,  
People and Strategy
- Operational Officer Gerard James,  
Mid Murray, Area South Western
- Operational Officer Dave Ormsby,  
Lower North Coast, Area North Eastern
- Operational Officer Trent Wagstaff,  
Mid Coast, Area Hunter
- Ms Eliza Ham
- Mr Warwick Ham
- Ms Julie Langlands

### Certificate of Commendation (Unit)

- Area Command North Western and nominated Districts,  
Liverpool Range, Castlereagh,  
Tamworth and Area North Western
- Bean Creek Fire  
Mallanganee, Bonalbo, Old Bonalbo and Woodenbong  
Brigades, Northern Rivers, Area North Eastern
- Brewarrina and Twin Rivers Brigades  
Far West, Area Western
- Chifley Lithgow District  
Brigades and Staff, Area Western
- Mid Murray District  
Brigades and Staff, Area South Western
- ‘Operation Sunshine’  
Llandilo Brigade, Cumberland/Macarthur,  
Area Greater Sydney
- South West Slopes Zone  
Brigades and Staff, Area Western
- Tuncurry Brigade,  
Mid Coast, Area Hunter



A photograph of Richard Elliot, an older man with a white beard and glasses, speaking at a wooden podium. He is wearing a light-colored, patterned button-down shirt. A microphone is positioned in front of him. The background shows a wood-paneled wall and several framed certificates or awards hanging on the wall to the right.

# RFS MEMBER RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS 2024 AUSTRALIA DAY AWARD

On 29 January 2024, long standing RFS member Richard Elliot of Majors Creek Brigade was announced as Braidwood's Citizen of the Year in the annual Australia Day awards.

Born in New Zealand and then moving to Canberra, Richard grew up a keen bushwalker. When he and his partner Sandra purchased a bush block in Majors Creek, a small town in the Southern Tablelands, in the late 1990s, he decided to join the local Farrington Brigade.

Climbing the ranks in less than 10 years from firefighter to Deputy Captain, Senior Deputy Captain then Captain, it was clear Richard was a natural leader.

Not only was he an enthusiastic role model to his team, but during his time as Captain of Farrington and then subsequently Majors Creek Brigades, he encouraged many new volunteers to join.

"Richard set out to increase numbers, and our team has grown from five available active and a few support members over the Black Summer fires to around 20



Above: Richard Elliot receives his award from John Madrell, former Braidwood Captain, alongside the Mayor of Queanbeyan, Kenrick Winchester. Photos courtesy of RFS members.

active members and six support members," says Jim Fowler, Senior Deputy Captain at Majors Creek.

"We now have volunteers who help clean trucks, ensure there is water available, pack eskies, prepare the first aid kits, provide snacks on the trucks and generally support the active members by procuring things they need."

Despite undergoing a triple bypass in February 2019, Richard was on the frontlines of the 2019/20 bush fire season for three months. His dedication to the community is evident as he holds roles in a number of community groups. Richard also volunteers as a driver for patients who need to get to specialist appointments in Canberra or Goulburn.

"Any community group he is involved with gets one hundred percent of his energy," says Jim. "Richard never says no to anybody's request for assistance. During his recovery from heart bypass surgery, the brigade members had to just about tie him down."

Awarded life membership of Majors Creek Brigade for his dedication over the years, Richard worked hard to get a new station for the Brigade and has been a driving force in training for the District and the Brigade.

As he moves closer to his retirement as Captain, Richard has even devised a succession plan for the brigade.

"He leaves no stone unturned," says Jim. "There's no doubt we will have the smoothest transition possible, being in the capable hands of our very own Citizen of the Year."



# FORMER CAPTAIN CELEBRATED FOR SEVENTY YEARS OF SERVICE

In June 2024, RFS Lake George District recognised dedicated members at a special ceremony in Bungendore. John Maddrell, former Captain of Braidwood Brigade, was awarded the Long Service Medal for his dedication and 70 years of service.

In June 2024, RFS Lake George District recognised dedicated members at a special ceremony in Bungendore. John Maddrell, former Captain of Braidwood Brigade, was awarded the Long Service Medal for his dedication and 70 years of service.

John Maddrell joined Braidwood Brigade, then known as 'F Brigade', in 1949 as an 18-year-old. Now 93, he can still recount his first fire in perfect detail. Burning under hot westerly winds, the grass fire in southern Braidwood was an intimidating introduction to firefighting.

"There was a whirlwind and all hell broke loose," says John. "My brother yelled out to run, but I couldn't hear from inside the truck."

Facing a fire overrun on his own, John remained calm and managed to save not only himself but the truck as well.

"You've got to control yourself and never panic," he says. "If you panic, you can't think."

In the years since then, John has committed a huge portion of his life to his community and the RFS. With radios installed in his house and tractor, not even tending to his property and cattle would stand in the way of a fire call.

In addition to his 20-year captaincy, John has performed roles including District Deputy Coordinator, honorary

Fire Control Officer for the Tallaganda Shire and Brigade President. Now a Life Member, he is still involved with Braidwood Brigade today.

Among the laundry list of John's contributions is the transition of the numbered 13 brigades of the Tallaganda District to the brigade names as we know them today, the installation of VHF radios and the design and construction of the Shire's first Fire Control Centre.

His lasting impact on the entire Lake George District cannot be overstated.

Looking back at his experiences with the Service, John considers it time well spent.

"I enjoyed the whole damn lot," he says. "I think it's a wonderful organisation and to be a part of it is most important. I've had a lot of fun and loved it right from the beginning, from that very first incident in '49."

Danny King, Deputy Group Captain, Lake George District worked alongside John during the years, "As a highly respected leader during his time as Fire Control Officer, John can tell a good yarn about past events and experiences. He really is a true living legend."

The Brigade, respected members of the RFS and locals, gathered to honour his unwavering dedication in a celebration that marked a special milestone for the Braidwood community.

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**Main:** John Maddrell (centre), receives his Long Service Medal with Paul Simakoff-Ellims (left) and Hon. Steven Whan, Member for Monaro (right). Photos courtesy of RFS members.

## “Brompton Rat” Successfully Modified

Since its introduction and subsequent testing as a bush fire prevention implement in Western New South Wales in late 1975, the Brompton Rat has proved a boon to fire break clearing and construction.

At the completion of recent exhaustive tests and under varying conditions, Bush Fires Branch officers in conjunction with Department of Agriculture engineering staff recommended certain modifications designed to improve the performance of the rat and safety of operation in the field.

The modifications were carried out by Mr Darryl Blinman of the Department of Agriculture Engineering Centre.

### Brompton Rat

Briefly the “rat” ploughs a vee shaped groove whilst a burner is used to burn grass material on one side of the groove. The “rat” is attached to and towed by a tractor. It is a cheap and versatile machine that can be used for both firefighting and fire prevention.

### Different models

With the early model “rat” it was necessary to dig the nose in 0.25 metres in order to plough a strip 0.6 metres wide. This left a deep gully

*The modified “rat”.*



# BUSH FIRE BULLETIN on



The 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. The collection brings to life the important work our members have undertaken over the years.



## How to search for Bush Fire Bulletin on Trove

On the Library page of the RFS website, you will find links to browse the various collections of the Bush Fire Bulletin. You can search place names, brigade names, dates and fire-related topics such as 'fire trails' or 'large air tanker'.

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# BUSH FIRE BULLETIN

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Photo by Mike Elvidge.



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