

# BUSH FIREbulletin

//// THE JOURNAL OF THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

## Shoulder to Shoulder

VICTORIA OUR LARGEST EVER INTERSTATE DEPLOYMENT



**ADDITIONAL STORIES:**

FIRES THREATEN PROPERTIES IN SYDNEY  
MORTON NATIONAL PARK FIRE  
HAZARD REDUCTION THIS SEASON

VOLUNTEER MEMORIAL SERVICE  
STATE CHAMPS: THE WINNERS  
REGION WEST EXERCISE



# CONTENTS



The recent fires in Victoria have been a devastating tragedy. They remind us that we all connected, that we are all neighbours. In that great spirit which all Australians share, we here in NSW, have given all the help we could to our friends and neighbours.

The Rural Fire Service in particular has been at the forefront of giving that whole-hearted assistance.

Thousands of Rural Fire Service members have been deployed to Victoria in recent weeks, doing whatever needed to be done. I want to take this opportunity to thank them, and everyone who made themselves available to go. The people of NSW are proud of your commitment and the people of Victoria are very grateful for your support.

Nathan Rees  
NSW Premier



As a Member representing a rural electorate, I have seen first hand the great work that RFS volunteers do for our community. That's why I was delighted to be given the opportunity to work with the RFS as Minister for Emergency Services.

In the short time I have been Minister I have been very impressed with the dedication and professionalism of RFS

volunteers and staff right across the State.

In the last few weeks I have been privileged to meet many of those being sent to help our neighbours in Victoria. Your willingness to put aside your personal life to assist in the wake of the terrible tragedy of early February, shows your true strength, and the strength of the RFS.

Steve Whan  
Minister for Emergency Services

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## 01 FOREWORD

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## 02 IN FOCUS

## 04 INCIDENTS

- 04 The Victorian Firestorm
- 12 Heatwaves and fires threaten Sydney homes
- 16-17 Morton National Park fire
- 18 Peats Ridge fire: A good save
- 20-21 Aviation this Summer
- 22 Hazard reduction this season

---

## 24 GENERAL NEWS

- 24-27 State Championships

---

## 29 OPERATIONS LIFTOUT: SAFE WORKING ON ROOFS

---

## 33 GENERAL NEWS cont'd

- 33 New Long Service Medal
- 34 Their names etched in granite

- 35 A personal view of the Volunteer Memorial Service

- 36 Region West exercise 2008

- 38 The finest of the RFS

- 39 Congratulations to the Australia Day AFSM recipients

- 41 CSIRO unveils bushfire wind tunnel

- 41 Bush fire risk tool wins awards

- 42-43 RFS Open Day 2008

---

## 48 SPOTLIGHT ON VOLUNTEERS

- 48 Rough, rugged and ready for 4WD training

- 50 Brigade in profile: Lake Conjola

- 52 In Focus: Volunteers

- 54 A fiery end for Home and Away

- 56 Renewing Gum Flat

---

## 57 MyRFS

- 57 Two out of three brigades use MyRFS

---

## 59 Values Photo Competition

# FOREWORD



**S**aturday 7 February 2009 is a day that will be remembered as one of the darkest and most tragic days in Australia's history, when bush fires devastated communities across Victoria. In the following days, the scale of the tragedy became clearer, with more than 200 people killed and more than 2000 homes destroyed.

The conditions experienced across Victoria on that day were amongst the worst fire conditions ever recorded in this country. Yet the national response to the tragedy, such as the more than \$100 million dollars raised through donations, is something the country should be proud of.

We should also be proud of the important role of volunteers in the firefighting effort and recovery. This has been the largest interstate deployment in the history of the RFS. More than 3100 individuals have been involved and with many personnel returning several times to Victoria, the total number deployed was 4161 (correct as of March 2009). Our crews have been working alongside crews from Victoria and our partners at NSW Fire Brigades, National Parks, Forests NSW, NSW Police and the Ambulance Service. It's highlighted the strength we have in the coordinated firefighting arrangements in NSW.

With a tragedy such as this, it is important that comprehensive investigations and inquiries take place and the RFS will take information from these to learn from the events in Victoria.

The response to the Victorian tragedy reflects the core values of the NSW Rural Fire Service. The RFS is one of the most diverse organisations in the country, made up of more than 70,000 members from all areas of the State. Our diversity and camaraderie are things that should be recognised and celebrated and they are key elements in the new RFS Organisational Values.

Our values have certainly been on display in recent months. I would like to thank you for your hard work this season, whether in your community or away from home. Thanks must also go to your families, friends and employers because their support is equally as important.

Finally, weather opportunities will soon allow us to resume our hazard reduction activities and we all have a role to play in this important area of work. As I have said before, I would encourage all volunteers to familiarise themselves with their local Bush Fire Management Committee, especially their senior volunteer representatives operating on their behalf at the local level, identifying and prioritising annual works programmes. There should be no impediment to effective hazard reduction activities and if any member can identify impediments, I want to know.

You can email me at [commissioners.office@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:commissioners.office@rfs.nsw.gov.au).

Thank you for your continuing hard work and support this season and I wish you all well. I hope you enjoy this issue of the Bulletin, in particular the reflection on the Victorian fires and our assistance.

Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM  
Commissioner

## IN THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE WE VALUE

community and environment

support, friendship and camaraderie

knowledge and learning

integrity and trust

one team, many players and one purpose

adaptability and resourcefulness

mutual respect

# in focus

The Hardcastle family in Conargo, near Deniliquin was cooking Christmas lunch in a combustion stove in the shed when it caught alight, completely destroying the building and its contents. Jeff Rose (right) recovered the turkey from the combustion stove after the Conargo Brigade put out the fire.

"The turkey survived the fire, and we still ate it," Mrs Hardcastle said. "It was cooked beautifully. One person made the joke that the leg could have used a little more time."



## Christmas Dinner Disaster

*"The turkey survived the fire, and we still ate it."*



Bronwyn Jones is the first director of the newly established Membership Services Directorate.

*"I have been welcomed so warmly by all levels of the organisation"*

## Welcome to the RFS, Ms Jones

She is responsible for Volunteer Relations, Learning and Development Systems, OH&S and Workers Compensation as well as Workforce Planning and Development.

"I am very much looking forward to bedding down the new directorate, working with all of you and with the management team," she told a staff meeting in November 2008.

With a father in the construction industry, Bronwyn spent her childhood in regional NSW. She comes to the RFS with a wealth of experience in human resource management and 33 years in the public sector. "I started in the public sector as a school leaver. I was 5 years old at the time," she quipped.

It was the opportunity to work more closely with the community and with volunteers that attracted Ms Jones to the RFS. "The RFS is an organisation that I admire and I look forward to meeting more and more volunteers as I travel throughout the State this year."



## The Coffee4Kids Ball

**For the first time, the Coffee4Kids Foundation will be hosting the RFS Coffee4Kids Charity Ball.**



The event will take place in Sydney Friday 8 May 2009 with all profits going to the Foundation to support sick children through our principal charity, 'The Children's Hospital at Westmead', as well as the 'Coffee4Kids Victorian Children's Bush Fire Appeal Fund' which has been recently established in response to the current crisis in Victoria.

"Coffee4Kids is an inspiration to many in the RFS and gives us all the opportunity to contribute back to the community," said Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, who is also Goodwill Ambassador of the Coffee4Kids Foundation. "The Ball is a celebration of what is possible by banding together. The Team are overwhelmed with the generous offers of help from members of the Service making the lead up to the Charity Ball much easier."

**Every RFS member is invited to the inaugural Ball. Tickets are only \$85 so why not book a table for your brigade or a group of your friends! For ticket sales, information and details, contact the C4K Team at [C4K@coffee4kids.org.au](mailto:C4K@coffee4kids.org.au) or call (02) 8741 5555 and ask to speak to a C4K Advisory Committee Member. To register your interest in the Foundation, please visit [www.coffee4kids.org.au](http://www.coffee4kids.org.au).**

## New Minister for RFS

### The RFS welcomes The Honourable Steve Whan as our new Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr Whan was sworn in to the NSW Cabinet late January 2009. Premier Nathan Rees praised Mr Whan and welcomed him to the NSW ministerial team.

"Steve Whan has proven himself as a smart and talented local member," the Premier said, "He has worked extremely hard and is a strong voice for the needs of rural NSW. His experience and knowledge of issues affecting the bush will be invaluable."

Steve Whan has been Member for Monaro since 2003. He and his wife, Cherie, live in Queanbeyan with their two children and are both active in local school, sporting and community groups.



**The new Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan (far right), with Bungendore Brigade volunteers and Federal MP, Mike Kelly.**

## It was the day that 'hell visited on the good people of Victoria'.

Our fellow Australians have witnessed the most ferocious firestorm ever seen. It has changed the Australian landscape forever and it has permanently changed the way we think about bush fires.

The intensity and size of the fires was simply unprecedented. The number of people who died in the fires is shocking. So too, the number of people displaced, injured and traumatised by the fires.

In the days following Black Saturday, February 7, 2009, as fire fighters flooded into Victoria, the death toll continued to rise. The threat of fire persisted while the terrible task of victim identification took place. Stories were told of lucky escapes as well as deadly confusion. Memorial services and funerals were held. Meanwhile the hard work of fire fighting and containment continued.

The RFS response to Black Saturday was immediate, efficient and prolonged. One month after Black Saturday, the RFS brought the majority of its operational deployment to a close.

In this issue we trace the day by day events through the words of Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. In the next issue of the Bush Fire Bulletin we will feature personal stories and a behind-the-scenes look at the RFS involvement in the Victorian deployment.



Here we trace the unfolding tragedy through the words of our Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons.

# THE VICTORIAN FIRESTORM

**During the first days after the firestorm Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons sent out regular emails to staff throughout the State.**

## Monday February 9

Morning All,

Yesterday we woke to media reports confirming 14 people dead in the Victorian fires and as I write this email less than 24 hours later the toll has climbed to 108, homes destroyed exceed 750 and whole communities have been decimated. This tragedy is being confirmed as Australia's worst ever bush fire disaster.

With reports of so many people still unaccounted for, the toll is unfortunately expected to rise.

The reports and video footage is most confronting and I'm

sure this disaster will touch you all in some way. For me, the significant death toll really brings home the fragility of life. Last night, even though my kids had gone to bed, I made a point of giving them and my wife a kiss and cuddle and telling them how much I loved them. Sadly, so many people in Victoria have lost such an opportunity and will be suffering enormously.

Our thoughts and prayers are with fellow Australians and fellow fire fighters during this tragic time.

We have just under 300 people from NSW assisting in Victoria, comprising 70 units (45 RFS,

10 NSWFB and 15 Combined NPWS SF) of fire fighters, public information officers and interstate liaison. We will be rotating these crews until at least the end of this week.

We are planning for additional requests in either specialist or general fire fighting roles. I would encourage any members that may be available for a deployment of at least 72 hours to register such interest with their respective Fire Control Centre.

My sincere appreciation to all for your continuing efforts.

Regards  
Shane



A CFA truck battling the blaze at the Bunyip State Forest, Saturday 7 February. Photo by Andrew Brownbill

Victorian Premier John Brumby, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Victorian Police Commissioner Christine Nixon, delivering the news of the tragedy to the nation. Photo by William West



An exhausted CFA firefighter on Saturday 7 February. Photo by William West

### Wednesday February 11

Afternoon All

As this terrible tragedy continues to unfold in Victoria, the gravity of the situation becomes increasingly difficult to comprehend. With the death toll now at 181 and reports that the number is likely to exceed 300, this is unequivocally Australia's worst natural disaster.

My sincere appreciation goes out to the thousands of members that have registered interest and availability in assisting their colleagues in Victoria.

Yesterday afternoon and evening I had the opportunity of speaking with our taskforce leaders currently deployed across a number of firegrounds in Victoria. They have all described their deployment as being challenging and busy with roles including property protection, backburning, mop-up etc. As you would expect, the environment in some areas is most confronting with

much of what is seen in the media, and certainly all that is not, proving challenging for even our most seasoned of members.

As a fellow firefighter, and who has offered himself on standby over the years, I sympathise with the feelings of frustration and anxiety about not being deployed at this stage. I simply ask all members, notwithstanding the natural emotional engagement of wanting to assist, to be patient and understanding of the practicalities associated with resource requirements and associated deployments.

Rest assured, knowledge of your availability and willingness to assist, is in itself, of significant assistance to our colleagues in Victoria.

Once again, thank you all for your attention and assistance in this terrible tragedy in Victoria.

Regards  
Shane

### EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

*"It was probably blowing at close to 100kph. Unbelievable. It came over the mountains like a thunderstorm. It was unbelievable. Roll of thunder. I have never seen anything like it. There wasn't so much fireballs in the air, it was more just roaring through the treetops. Unbelievable. Something I've never seen before. There were a few large flames over the horizon, but really this just turned day into night and just roared."*

Whittlesea Brigade Captain, Ken Williamson



Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons holding a briefing in RFS headquarters in Sydney. Photo by Matt Inwood.

**Friday February 13**

Evening All

The magnitude of devastation unfolding in Victoria continues to affect us all. Many of you have indicated a desire to do something more than the fire fighting/operational assistance currently underway and suggested giving a helping hand to those affected by these fires, especially to children.

To do this the Service's sponsored charity, Coffee4Kids is running a special Bushfire appeal for the Victorian children in need called "The Coffee4Kids Victorian Children's Bush Fire Appeal Fund."

To start the appeal the Rural Fire Service Association has very generously donated \$10,000 and if you want to make a contribution as well, just go to either [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au) or [www.coffee4kids.org.au](http://www.coffee4kids.org.au) or MyRFS and click on the Donate button and follow the instructions or alternatively simply send a cheque / money order to The Coffee4Kids Foundation, 15 Carter Street, Homebush Bay 2127.

Regards  
Shane

**Sunday February 15**

Afternoon All

You will probably hear and read reports today of NSW RFS fire fighters being injured overnight in the fires in Victoria. I can advise that there have been three significant injuries reported.

The first accident was associated with two of our volunteers, Bruce White and Ken Knight from Eunony Brigade (they were happy to have themselves identified) in the Riverina Zone, Region South being struck by a burnt out fallen tree whilst mopping up on the fire ground. They were both treated by ambulance and transported to hospital.

The second accident was associated with one of our volunteers in the Clarence Valley Zone, Region North tripping over at a staging area and bumping his head. He was treated by ambulance and taken to hospital for checks and observation. He has been released back into the field.

Today I had the opportunity of welcoming back a further contingent of 85 RFS and five ambulance personnel at Mascot. Further RFS personnel will be arriving home today at various regional locations such as Coffs



Premier Nathan Rees and Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan, wishing volunteers well as they head off to Victoria. Photo by Anthony Clark



Photo by Troy Cashen





*"It was the impact on the people that affected me. They have lost so much."*

RFS fire fighter

*"This is not the first major fire I have seen. I have seen major incidents over the last 25 years, but on that first Sunday night I went home and wept like a baby."*

RFS fire fighter

*"The photos and the TV footage don't do justice to the scale and the enormity of the impact on the land and on the people. You just had to be there to understand it."*

RFS fire fighter

Hundreds of chartered flights per week have transported RFS volunteers and staff to Victoria. Photo by Ben Shepherd

Our thoughts and prayers are with the family, friends and colleagues of the firefighter. The RFS is providing support and assistance to our colleagues in the ACT during this difficult time.

Reports have also confirmed another injury to one of our members. Whilst unrelated to the tragedy above, our volunteer (who wishes to remain unidentified at this stage) was taken to hospital yesterday for observation.

These recent accidents are a stark reminder of the dangers associated with trees whilst operating on fire grounds in a forest environment, particularly during the patrol and mop up phases. I would remind all members to be mindful of safety across all firegrounds and operations.

Regards  
Shane

**Thursday February 26**

Evening All

We continue to be very busy with our significant and ongoing commitment of support to our colleagues in Victoria. The contribution from members from all across the State and at all levels has just been simply

Harbour, Parkes, West Wyalong, Hay and Cootamundra. For the second time now that I've witnessed, the entire terminal of people spontaneously get up out of their chairs and give a standing ovation to our members as they walked from the arrival gate through to baggage collection. This was something very moving.

What is abundantly clear in speaking with crews arriving today... is that many of our members are affected by their experience. The feelings and emotions expressed include all manner of areas such as grief, sadness, helplessness, pride, fatigue, exhaustion,

frustration etc. as they try to comprehend the enormity of the devastation associated with this unprecedented disaster. Most members have said to me that they simply want to get home and be with those who count most – their family, friends and loved ones.

I would ask that all members be mindful of the physical and emotional challenges being faced by deployments to Victoria. Whether you are actually deployed or one of your colleagues is deployed, take the time to have a chat, cup of coffee/tea (or beer if that's the preference) and share in keeping an eye on one another.

Once again, thank you for your continued assistance during this terrible time.

Regards  
Shane

**Thursday February 18**

Morning All

Media reports last night and today are confirming the tragic loss of an ACT fire fighter whilst fighting fires in Victoria. It is understood the fatality occurred as a result of a tree falling and striking the firefighter whilst he was working off the back of the appliance.



"I had never seen anything like this. I just couldn't believe it everywhere you looked it was black. You'd look at a mountain and all you could see were sticks."

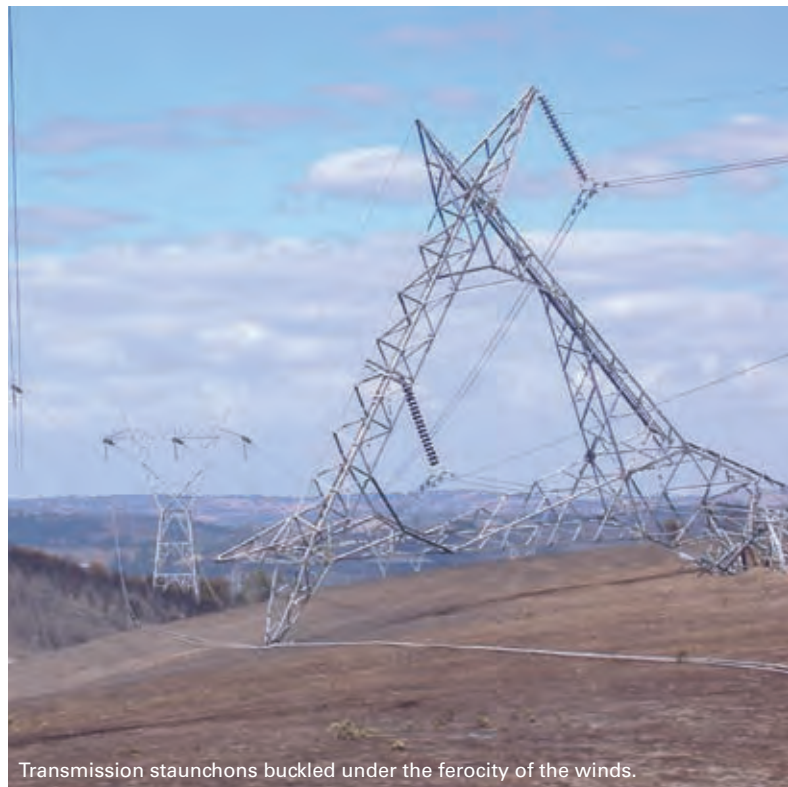
RFS fire fighter

Whole valleys blackened through central Victoria.

outstanding. The current deployment in Victoria comprises some 740 personnel (538 RFS, 57 FB, 77 NPWS, 42 SF, 26 AS) and 177 vehicles (102 RFS, 16 FB, 24 NPWS, 19 SF, 16 AS) performing roles in areas such as fire fighting, IMT, Chaplaincy, Liaison, Accident Investigation & Building Impact Analysis. In meeting our RFS component of this commitment thus far, some 2776 members from 818 different brigades have been deployed south of the border – a significant representation from brigades in all Regions (235 East, 241 North, 198 South, 144 West).

Over the last week I've had the opportunity of meeting many members at either the airports, in the field, or indeed throughout the HQ State Operations Centre or local Fire Control Centres.

The State Operations Centre, comprising teams from all the contributing agencies has been a hive of activity and a wonderful representation of effective and efficient coordinated fire fighting. Notwithstanding the inherent logistical and information management challenges associated with maintaining and adjusting such a significant deployment, the atmosphere of calm and dedication to the task at hand from all agencies and team members is simply impressive. It has also been an opportunity to engage so many members from right across the State to assist in State Operations and based on discussions with many, we are all benefiting from the experience and interaction. I am mindful of this commitment also occurring in Control Centres right



Transmission stanchions buckled under the ferocity of the winds.



Members of Heathcote HQ Brigade



A fire fighter from Heathcote HQ Brigade working on the Big River back burn in late February. Photo by Chris Maw

across the State and was able to witness such when visiting our Albury facility last Thursday and our Riverina facility yesterday.

Your Executive, Chaplains Ron and Carol and myself, (along with many others) are continuing to benefit from the interaction at Sydney airports whilst meeting, thanking and sharing time with those travelling to or coming back from Victoria. I am also most appreciative of Regional and D/T/Z officers doing same at our regional airports or bus terminals and with those I have spoken I know you have also benefited from such interaction.

In recent days there has been some frustrations expressed by returning members. It is incumbent on us all to be understanding and appreciative of the challenges on the plate of our interstate colleagues who are deploying so many resources across different and changing fire grounds under changing weather conditions. We have also been

discussing deployment details with our colleagues interstate to ensure they remain as effective and efficient as possible.

Last Thursday, I was joined by A/Manager Media Services Ben Shepherd, Senior Chaplain Ron Anderson and Assistant Commissioner Rob Rogers in a visit to Victoria to catch up with our teams in the field and visit some of the affected areas in order to gain some appreciation of what our members were relaying in relation to their deployments. The visit had a most profound affect on us all.

Our Chaplain asked me the toughest question I've had in a while: "How would you describe what you've seen if you are asked?" I paused. After a moment, I relayed what one of our early Strike Team Leaders said to me on the phone late one night. He said: "Boss, it's really tough down here. We are witnessing all that you see and hear in the media and imagine things to be, but it's more disturbing. We are also seeing all that couldn't be seen in the media and what you never wanted to imagine."

So I asked Ron the same question. Ron said: "It's a hundred times worse than I've seen or imagined." I have put this question to other members of the Executive and I am firmly of the view that this questioning will assist us in learning from what has happened.

My wife Lisa and I went to Melbourne on Sunday where we had the privilege of being present in the Rod Laver Arena for the Community Memorial Service. We found the experience extremely moving and felt it was an exceptional tribute and demonstration of



On Thursday 19 February Commissioner visited RFS teams in Victoria. This meeting occurred in Alexandra. Photo by Ben Shepherd

## EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

**Radio interview on ABC Radio 774 with CFA firefighter Peter Mitchell on Saturday 9 February around 3pm:**

**ABC:** What is happening in Kinglake?

**PM:** The whole of Kinglake is ablaze mate.

**ABC:** What can you see now?

**PM:** Flame everywhere. Trees exploding. Gas tanks exploding. Buildings on fire. It really is very very serious.

**ABC:** Which buildings can you see?

**PM:** I am sheltering at the moment .. I can't quite see the main stretch of town. But there is a lot of flame coming up from there. So I presume, you know, most of the town is going up. There will be multiple houses gone, including mine, I would imagine, Yeah. It's worst case scenario....."

*Used with permission from the ABC*

unity, support and dedication to those that are suffering so much from this tragedy. All the speakers, irrespective of their background, politics or faith spoke with respect, dignity and sympathy in offering messages of hope and support.

For me there were many special moments in the ceremony the highlight was a rendition of 'I am Australian', with verse modified for the victims. I don't think there was a dry eye in the place.

This terrible disaster has delivered the worst losses in history yet we must be mindful of reports that many remain unaccounted for, fire fighting operations continue and many areas are still off limits to people.

On Tuesday this week I joined many hundreds, if not thousands, of people to farewell our ACT Fire Brigade colleague, fire fighter David Balfour who lost his life last week after being struck by a tree during fire fighting operations in Victoria. The place was packed and overflowing and there was a sea of uniforms and patches as far as the eye could see, representing fire and emergency service agencies from right across the country. The service was beautifully done and our thoughts and prayers are with David's family.



Photo by Nick Moir

This afternoon, the serious injury of a fire fighter from the South Australian CFS has been confirmed. Ian Kleining, a 39 year old fire fighter and father of two boys aged 9 and 11, was struck by a large tree limb whilst operating on the fire ground in Victoria. Ian is in Royal Melbourne Hospital where he remains in an induced coma and both his wife and father remain by his bedside. Our thoughts and prayers for a full recovery are with Ian, his family, friends and colleagues.

Yesterday I was in Wagga Wagga and Urana. Despite some welcome rainfall across much of NSW, the southern border and south eastern parts remain very dry and fire prone. The season is clearly far from over in these areas. Our fire fighting support is certainly not over in Victoria particularly given the continuing

fire activity and forecast weather over coming days.

My sincere appreciation goes out to all members of the RFS. Not just those that are being deployed to, or involved in the organising of crews or resources to Victoria but I am also most appreciative of those that are ensuring the continuity of RFS business at all levels, from fire coverage through to office administration and everything in between. It is with a deal of pride that I witness the professional performance and unity of purpose from all in the RFS during this challenging time.

Thank you.

Regards,  
Shane

Members of the Heathcote HQ Brigade from Sutherland district at the Big River fires. Photo by Chris Maw



Jamie Levin from Medowie Brigade gets to work blacking out a fallen tree in the forest outside Narbethong. Photo by Darryl Luck

The operational deployment to Victoria was the largest and most sustained interstate operation ever undertaken by the RFS. Of the huge support offered to our neighbours by the State of NSW, the RFS made up 75 percent\* of the personnel sent.

Through the Interstate Liaison Unit, the RFS took up the mantle of the coordination of the entire NSW firefighting deployment including NSW Fire Brigades, National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests and NSW Ambulance.

This massive organisational and logistical effort touched every aspect of the Service. Willing volunteers came from every region in the State, nearly every D/T/Z (98%) and forty three percent of all brigades.

Thousands of RFS members signed up to help and 3177 individuals were deployed over four weeks. Some personnel returned to Victoria for up to four tours of duty bringing the number of people deployed to Victoria up to 4161.

The 660 RFS deployments were involved in the following areas:

- Fire fighting
- Major Incident Coordination
- Interstate Liaison Unit
- Incident Management Teams
- Critical Incident Stress teams and Chaplaincy
- Fire Investigation
- Media
- Building Impact Analysis Teams
- Accident Investigation Teams
- GIS
- Aviation Support
- Mechanical maintenance and repairs

The scale of the transport operation alone was staggering. On an average day, the RFS had 25 aircraft in the air, moving between 160 to 624 people around NSW and on to Victoria.

Every time a crew left or arrived from the Sydney airports and bus terminals, a member of the RFS Executive team was there to wish them well or thank them for their efforts. Very often it was the Commissioner himself.

And every time a RFS crew touched down in Melbourne a crew of Interstate Liaison Unit volunteers were there to greet them and direct them to transportation and accommodation.

Throughout the deployment supplies issued included: 130 pallets of foam, 50 pallets of bottled water and 16,000 RFS ration packs.

The RFS has also sent staff for the CRC Bushfire Research Task Force. The knowledge gathered by the Task Force will be shared across Australia and internationally and will assist with the Royal Commission and other investigations.

In early March, the Bureau of Meteorology issued frightening weather predictions of winds gusting to 200kph and temperatures in the mid-40s. The predictions sent a chill through fire agencies and government, igniting an escalated effort. It was at this time that the RFS deployment peaked. On 2 March, the RFS had 188 vehicles on the ground and 1,033 people were at work offering a massive 12,396 person hours over the 24 hours.

Fortunately rain and cooler weather conditions brought the fire emergency to an end. Apart from specialists operations, the RFS wound up its firefighting deployment on Friday 6 March, 2009.

\* All figures correct as 6 March 2009.

# INCIDENTS

## HEATWAVES AND FIRES THREATEN SYDNEY PROPERTIES

**M**id-January saw high temperatures and strong winds across Greater Sydney and NSW with up to 40 bushfires blazing across the State including two that threatened property in Sydney.

The height of the concern for Sydney properties occurred on Thursday January 15 with fire coming dangerously close to 15 homes in Londonderry in Sydney's north-west. In the north of the city a further 15 factories in Mt Ku-ring-gai were evacuated. The two incidents involved around 300 firefighters working in very high temperatures, strong winds and a late southerly change.

### Londonderry

The fire in Londonderry is thought to have been started in a local resident's shed. It spread quickly, driven by strong, hot and gusty north west winds and caught many residents by surprise. Firefighters on the scene, however, praised the homeowners' efforts in protecting their properties.

RFS Chief Superintendent Bruce McDonald described the fires as "very ferocious" with temperatures soaring to 43 degrees and flames reaching thirty metres in height.

Local resources were supplemented by strike teams from the Blue Mountains and Sutherland as the fire activity increased. Two firefighters suffering from heat and two residents suffering shock were transported to hospital.

Several water-bombing helicopters, including the Ericson Air Crane, supported the 150 firefighters who fought the blaze. The new surveillance aircraft, Airview, Firebird 255, was dispatched to enable images of the fire to be transmitted to the local Fire Control Centre.

The blaze destroyed cars, sheds and machinery, and apart from coming close to many houses, also burned 80ha of bushland.



Photo by Adam Hollingworth



Photo by Adam Hollingworth



**FLAMES AT THE  
FIRE FRONT  
REACHED  
THIRTY METRES**

Photo by Adam Hollingworth

RFS crews remained at the scene throughout the night doing fire protection between the fire and the properties.

Mopping up continued throughout the next day and the S44 Bushfire Emergency was revoked the following day.

Fire crews continued to monitor hot spots in the area until late Saturday night.

## Mt Ku-ring-gai

On the same day in the same hot windy conditions, about 150 firefighters from the RFS, NSW Fire Brigades and NSW National Parks worked to contain a fire in Mt Ku-ring-gai threatening several factories.

Firefighters attacked the flanks of the fire on foot while five helicopters, including an Air Crane, water-bombed the fire front. The new 'Eye in the Sky' Firebird 255 helicopter was used to monitor the fire front from above.

Inspector Ben Shepherd said the flames at the Mt Ku-ring-gai fire came within metres of the back of the industrial units, with occupants choosing to leave because of the thick heavy smoke.

Concrete platforms behind the industrial units provided some relief for firefighters, offering a barrier for fire crews to battle the blaze.

There were grave fears for Berowra residents in the late afternoon because the southerly was expected to push the fire back down the gully and towards Berowra homes. Motorists on the F3 were warned to take special care as smoke billowed across the freeway.

Late on January 15 fire crews were preparing for a long night ahead due to the unpredictability brought about by the southerly change.

Lightning strikes were being investigated as the possible cause of the Mt Ku-ring-gai fire.



The fire in Mt Kuringgai threatened several factories. Photo by Ben Shepherd



Flames came within metres of property. Photo by Ben Shepherd

## Are you interested in a Certificate III qualification in Rangeland Conservation?



Training can include:

- Undertaking a site assessment
- Operating earthworks machinery
- Constructing access tracks
- Implementing erosion and sediment control measures
- Monitoring sustainable land practices

Practical and theory training is available in these and other units from the Rangeland Conservation Certificate III Course. Flexible attendance options are available to suit your needs, including weekend training.

Phone: Lindsay Griffith (02) 6393 2687 or Cathy Stapleton (02) 6393 2670

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The Premier Nathan Rees and Minister Tony Kelly took time to thank volunteers in Londonderry the following day.



The Commissioner thanking firefighters at Londonderry. Photo by Ben Shepherd

## Statewide

Twenty other major fires were burning in Gosford, Kurrajong, Oberon, Singleton, Wingecarribee and Wollondilly on that day.

In the Morton National Park, about nine kilometres east of Wingello, firefighters there were also challenged by the winds and hot temperatures, struggling to keep containment lines on the eastern side of the fire. Waterbombing was employed to slow the progress of the fire.

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said 500 firefighters were working throughout the State and warned that hotter, drier conditions were expected the following week.

## The next day

The southerly change did bring welcome relief. Rain fell overnight and temperatures dropped significantly, although firefighters continued to monitor, mop up and black out the Mt Ku-ring-gai and Londonderry fires.

The Premier Nathan Rees, the then Minister for Emergency Services, Tony Kelly and Commissioner Fitzsimmons took the opportunity to visit the site of the Londonderry fire to thank fire fighters and visit those residents affected.

The Premier said RFS volunteers had saved several homes from the fire.

"Firefighters and residents deserve full credit for saving so many properties in the face of hot, dry and gusty conditions," he said.

Commissioner Fitzsimmons said the RFS was monitoring fires throughout the State.

"We've already seen a number of fresh ignitions and we're dealing with those, and we'll be doing a lot reconnaissance today to look for new fires as a result of that lightning," he said.



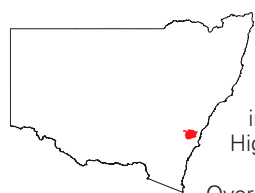
Mopping up in Londonderry. Photo by Ben Shepherd



The day after fires threatened homes in Londonderry, the RFS continued to mop up. Photo by Adam Hollingworth

## MORTON NATIONAL PARK FIRE

### AERIAL FIRE FIGHTERS LEAD THE ATTACK



In early January a fire took hold in the Morton National Park in the Southern Highlands.

Over the following two weeks 1333ha were burned and 400 RFS firefighters and nearly 100 aviation personnel were involved in the effort.

Aerial firefighting was deployed extensively and the new Airview helicopter, Firebird 255, allowing incident controllers to monitor the fire through live video footage and infrared vision.

The fire, near Bundanoon, south of Sydney, was started by a lightning strike on Sunday 4 January and within a few days 600ha of Morton National Park had been burned. On Tuesday January 6 the fire was declared a S44 bush fire emergency. Ground crews were reinforced by 15 aerial water-bombers in an attempt to control the blaze.

The fire burned in largely inaccessible country, challenging the local Incident Management Team (IMT).

"The predicted fire weather and the lack of fire trail access means we have had to think outside the square," said Incident Controller Superintendent Ashley Frank.

"Infrared cameras are being used on the ground and from the air to map the fire and identify hot spots, which will be attacked by ground crews and aircraft. Retardant is currently being delivered by helicopters using a Dip Tank located close to the fire. Ground crews are consolidating natural containment lines at Bundanoon Creek, Johnsons Creek and Tallowa Gorge."

"A large contingent of Remote Area Firefighting Teams (RAFT) are being deployed, supported by water-bombing aircraft."

By mid-January the fire had burned 1200ha of the Morton National Park and firefighters were continuing to locate and extinguish hot spots. RAFT teams were consolidating containment lines around the fires and other crews were blacking out the perimeter using heavy plant equipment.

The fire was declared contained late on 18 January and the S44 Bush Fire Emergency was revoked. RAFT teams continued to work on and monitor hot spots for several days.

**TOP:** Firebird 255 flies above the water-bombing aircraft working on the fire, however the zoom capability of the cameras allows for detailed and high resolution images of the fireground. Photo by Grant Roberson.



Smoke hanging in the steep hills of the Morton National Park. Photo by Rolf Poole.



Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons visited the Incident Management Team. Photo by Anthony Clark.



**A local of the area and journalist, Melissa Sweet gave us a personal account of the Morton National Park fire. This article initially appeared on crikey.com.**

## WELCOME TO THE FIRE SEASON

**T**hursday, 8 January 2009: We first saw the dark clouds billowing from the wilderness to our north late Monday afternoon. Incredible. Just a few days earlier, it had been damp and unseasonably cool, and we were congratulating ourselves on the prospect of a pleasant Summer without the usual worries about fire.

We checked the fire plan on our fridge to kick-start us into action. You forget how long it takes to prepare – packing away the outdoor furniture and everything else that suddenly looks like potential fuel, finding all the buckets and anything else that might hold water, checking that the water pump is working, loading the tank onto the trailer, digging out the first aid kit, the long-sleeved cotton shirts and other protective gear.

We can't find both pairs of goggles. I think of the farmer we met after fire tore through his place near Juneee on New Year's Day, 2006. When he took off his goggles briefly in the fire truck cabin, hot ash and dust blasted his eyes, leaving him without enough sight to help his wife and sons defend their home.

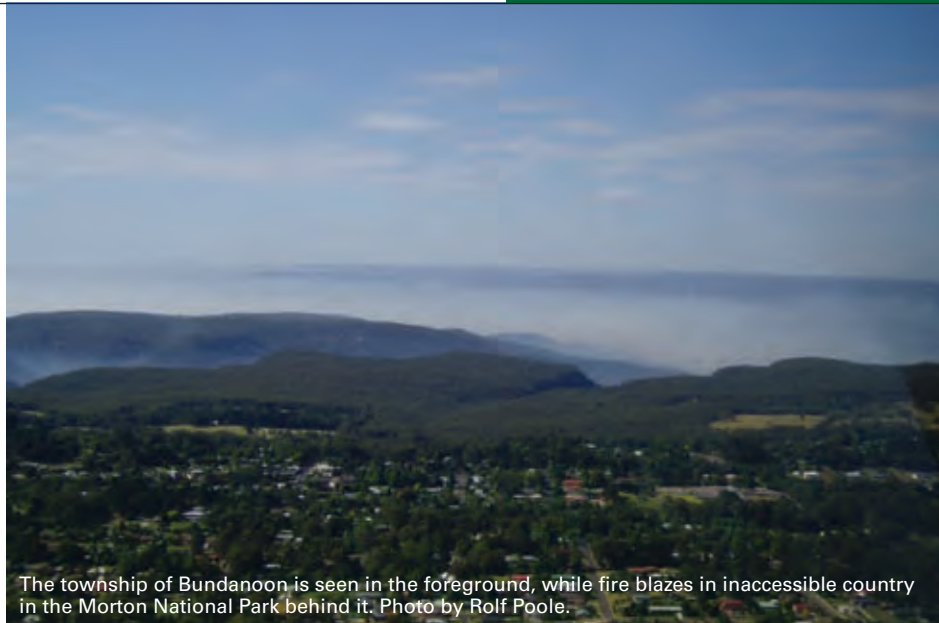
I also remember another farmer, who told us how it's the little things you might not think of that can cause problems with fires spotting after the main blaze passes. The cobwebs trailing under our veranda will have to go. Yet again, I curse myself for planting a luxuriant hedge of rosemary so close to our veranda. It has grown so beautifully, I have not had the heart to yank it out, not even when I learnt how well its oils feed a fire.

At first, the reports from the Rural Fire Service were reassuring. But hot westerlies soon transformed the picture. From our home atop a hill, with sweeping views over Morton National Park, we have watched great plumes of smoke spread right across the horizon.

The update from the NSW Rural Fire Service last night said that more than 130 firefighters and support personnel, backed by 18 aircraft, have been working on the blaze, which has burnt more than 700 ha of bush. We have watched the choppers, looking like dragonflies from our distance, dipping bravely in and out of the smoke.

We have been grateful that the winds have kept blowing the fire and the smoke east, but guiltily grateful because we know this means they are blowing towards someone else. We are reminded to be careful what you wish for when the fieries came by late yesterday afternoon to tell us the fire has spotted to our south. We rethink our wishes for a strong southerly.

Our elderly neighbour, Win, who has survived bigger blazes than this and is



The township of Bundanoon is seen in the foreground, while fire blazes in inaccessible country in the Morton National Park behind it. Photo by Rolf Poole.

our font of knowledge about many things, comes by, and tells us that the only hope for putting out the fire is if the promised southerly change eventuates and brings some solid rain.

Our last brush with bushfire was seven years ago when living in the Royal National Park south of Sydney. A neighbour woke us at 0130hrs on Boxing Day to tell us to pack the car because fire was on the way. Photo albums went into suitcases.

This time, there are no plans for evacuation. We now live in a more remote place, where the only real option is to bunker down. Now, saving the photo albums is about the last thing on my mind. Instead, I am worried about the pig – if the fire approaches, will we be able persuade Petal into the old pise house to shelter?

I am really not in the mood for jokes about roast pork, and am profoundly grateful when the fire (with the appropriate surname of Wise) takes my pig concerns seriously. I gush gratefully at him. Not just on Petal's behalf, but also for my own cowardice. I cannot even begin to imagine why or how people volunteer to go fighting fires and risking their lives on behalf of strangers. Of such mettle I am not made.

At times like this, you rely on the kindness of neighbours and strangers – and the attentions of the media. I was irrationally angry when a radio report described the fire as being on "the south coast". A small geographical glitch perhaps, but it means more than that to us on the Southern Highlands. It is strangely cheering to finally see our fire hit the national television news. Now people will know.

Sometime after 2100hrs last night, we sat on the grass outside and watched the mesmerising orange glow spanning our horizon. The fire is still several kilometres away, but has been edging closer, and the fieries have begun bulldozing a fire trail at the end of our road.



The fire was fought mainly using water-bombing aircraft. Photo by Anthony Clark.

The worst thing about the watching and waiting is the emotional yo-yoing. One moment, the winds settle, the smoke is less threatening and we are encouraged. Half an hour later, there are new and even more vigorous mushrooming clouds, and the fire is climbing another ridge towards us.

We have only had a small inkling of the force burning before us, but even that has left us emotionally and physically exhausted. Heaven only knows what it's like for those who've been so much closer to the fury.

This morning we woke to see cool mist where yesterday was smoke. The promised change has arrived. But the buckets won't be emptied just yet. We know how quickly a change comes.

## PEATS RIDGE FIRE: A GOOD SAVE

By Rolf Poole, Community Safety Officer,  
Gosford District

**W**ith a Total Fire Ban in force for much of the State including Greater Sydney and Hunter, the Gosford District was on a heightened level of alert on the weekend of 7 and 8 February.

The advice indicated that a week of hot, dry and windy conditions would culminate in a southerly change on Sunday. Captains were briefed of the synoptic situation and crew availability was checked.

At approx 1415hrs on Saturday, the first report of bush alight came in. Due to the hot conditions a number of brigades and a Group Officer were responded to Kangoo Rd Somersby. The fire was quickly contained. Before the fire had been completely extinguished Firecom received a Triple Zero (000) call at 1445hrs to numerous fires on Peats Ridge Road, some 15kms away. The first arriving units confirmed large columns of smoke from several fires going well and further units would be required as it was likely to turn into a significant incident.

The fires quickly grew into two main fronts and were burning in a south westerly direction driven by north-east winds off the coast. In the line of the two main fire fronts and under threat was the cluster of agricultural and residential properties, a primary school, service station and a number of shops.

Additional local brigades quickly responded and aviation support was requested through the State Air Desk. Units also responded from surrounding Districts including Hornsby, Warringah-Pittwater and Wyong as further situation reports came in and gave a clearer picture of the escalating incident. At 1540hrs an emergency was declared for Gosford Local Government Area under Section 44 the *Rural Fire Act 1997*.

By late afternoon thick smoke began to blanket Peats Ridge community and gave an indication of the fire's potential path. As crews pulled into individual properties along Nardoo Rd, numerous spot fires were running through grassy paddocks towards sheds, homes and extensive agricultural assets. Finding it difficult to determine where the fronts were heading, unable to see through the thick smoke, the Operations Officer and Group Officers were guided in by aerial observers.

The Airview Firebird 255 had been deployed by the State Air Desk and had its infra red and high definition cameras at work, beaming the images back to the Incident Management Team in the Emergency Operation Centre at Kariong.

The fire continued to burn uncontrolled into the evening and continued to threaten properties. Spot fires, hundreds of metres in diameter, were only stopped by the quick



actions and hard work of fire fighters on the ground.

By early morning Sunday 8 February, the fire had burned approximately 300ha of bush land predominantly on private property. During the remainder of the day, 50 appliances and 200 personnel from RFS, NPWS and NSWFB worked on securing the northern, western and eastern edges of the fire, supported by dozers, five helicopters and three fixed wing bombers.

Under hot and trying conditions approval was given for ground crews to commence back burning operations mid-afternoon in advance of the much anticipated southerly change. Whilst there were several anxious hours the objective was achieved and the southerly, which arrived late Sunday night, had little effect on the fire.

By Monday morning light drizzle was being experienced on the fire ground, however the southern edge of the fire remained uncontained near the creek. Ground crews continued to work to construct hand tool lines where the dozers and fire retardant could not reach.

On 12 February the Section 44 Bush Fire Emergency was revoked. The total area burnt exceeded 280ha and whilst there was damage to agricultural equipment no significant property loss was recorded and there were only minor injuries to fire fighters. All in all "a good save".

**TOP:** Copacabana crew at the Peats Ridge Staging Area.

**LEFT:** Fire fronts heading toward agricultural assets.

**RIGHT:** Gosford Group 9 briefs crews.



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Gosford SES purchased the Light Tower and have been impressed by its versatility and functionality. We have used it during training and have found it to be excellent during roof operations and outdoor night events.

The light is a softer light, unlike the harsh flood lights and this enables our operators to retain their night vision. The fluorescent type light emitting from above the work site greatly reduces the shadow that normally accompanies flood lights. The light produces minimal heat and packs up very quickly. It is easily carried by one person (we purchased the unit without the Generator) Our members believe that this light will be very useful during any job that requires light from above, especially roof jobs and tree jobs.

### Rolf Garda

Gosford SES Controller

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## AVIATION THIS SUMMER

### OUR LATEST AVIATION WEAPON

This Summer the RFS added to its aerial firefighting arsenal with the widespread use of the high-tech 'Eye in the Sky' helicopter.

The Airview Aviation helicopter broadcasts live images of the fire front – both daylight visual imagery and infrared data - to the Incident Controllers. It's one of only four in the world.

The Airview helicopter, known as Firebird 255, was used extensively throughout the fire season including the fires in Morton National Park, Londonderry, Hornsby/ Kuring-gai, East Killara, Penrith, Lithgow and Peats Ridge and fires in the south of the State.

The aircraft is an outstanding intelligence gathering resource and is able to provide real time information back to incident controllers and State Operations during major fires via a microwave link. It includes a high definition, digital daylight camera as well as a forward looking infrared (FLIR) capability.

The FLIR capability allows incident controllers to "see through the smoke" to directly observe hot spots and fire activity.

The new technology was unveiled for the public in January by the former Minister for Emergency Services, Tony Kelly, the Federal Minister for Home Affairs, Bob Debus and the Commissioner.

Bob Debus, said the state of the art technology was derived from the US military's predator UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) and was the most advanced technology of its type in the country.

"This will greatly transform the future of firefighting," Mr Debus said. He admitted that other States in Australia were watching NSW and are likely to take up the new technology soon.

At the January launch of the helicopter, a live broadcast from the Morton National Park fire was shown to waiting media who saw first hand the daylight camera in operation, as well the infrared images which reveal hot spots which cannot be seen by the naked eye. Commissioner Fitzsimmons said the 'Eye in the Sky' had already shown its value throughout the 2008-2009 fire season.

"The aircraft has quickly proven to be a useful acquisition for the Service by providing live information to incident controllers during the recent large fires in the Wingecarribee, Hornsby, Penrith, Lithgow and Gosford Districts as well as providing aerial surveillance across the Sydney Basin," he said.

"It joins a fleet of aircraft, which are ready to be deployed to assist the hard work of our firefighters on the ground."

The aircraft is on contract from an Australian



Firebird 255 in operation at the Wingecarribee fire in December 2008 sending back live images and FLIR data.



The gimble mounted cameras (left) and the two aerials (centre of the aircraft and also on the skid directly below the gimble in this image) that send images and data via microwave link to fire control centres and Headquarters at Homebush Bay.

organisation Airview Aviation, under parent company United Aero Helicopters, the aircraft was on dedicated contract to the RFS over the Summer.

The Airview helicopter has been made available through permanent arrangements by the National Aerial Firefighting Centre.

The helicopter generally operates at a height of 3000 to 5000ft (900-1500m) and

within an immediate radius of 150km of any incident.

The "live" broadcast option to send video images and data, such as GPS, can be achieved by way of setting up portable antenna receivers at locations, such as fire control centres and State Operations, to capture the signal transmitted from the helicopter.



## SUPPORT FROM ABOVE

Once again, fire fighters had assistance from above this bush fire season, with the use of two Erickson Air Cranes based in NSW.

The former Emergency Services Minister, Tony Kelly joined Commonwealth Attorney General Robert McClelland and Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons to welcome the first Air Crane, known as 'Malcolm', to Sydney in November.

The second of the NSW Air Cranes arrived in Sydney in December. The two specialist helicopters are based at Bankstown Airport and are available for deployment across the State or interstate when needed.

"Aircraft such as these Air Cranes are another valuable tool available to our firefighters, to help protect life and property," Mr Kelly said.

"Carrying up to 9,000 litres of water, the Air Cranes are especially useful along the urban bushland interface in populated areas like Greater Sydney.

"In previous fire seasons, these aircraft have been a comforting sight for people living in and around the bush.

"They can drop a large amount of water in a short time, reducing the intensity of fires and making it easier for firefighters to control the flames."



Mr McClelland said the Commonwealth had increased the capacity for aerial firefighting across the country by contributing \$10.2 million this year to assist the States and Territories to prepare for the bush fire season.

"Bushfires are an annual reality during Australian Summers," he said.

"Everyone has a responsibility to take care to prevent fires. And the public is entitled to expect all levels of government to work closely together so that the resources are there to fight bush fires quickly and successfully."

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said the two Air Cranes joined a fleet of about 100 aircraft available in NSW as part of the firefighting effort.



The Air Crane leaving Greece on its way to Australia. For safe transportation the massive helicopter is shrink-wrapped.

"These include aircraft specialising in fire detection, reconnaissance, transport and water bombing," he said.

"The RFS also uses Remote Area Firefighting Teams (RAFT), whose members can be winched into isolated areas to fight fires that might be otherwise inaccessible.

"While aircraft provide valuable assistance in fire suppression, it's their integration with the hard work of firefighters on the ground, along with a well-prepared community, that makes the difference."

The two Sydney-based Air Cranes are part of a consignment of five high capacity aircraft available across Australia through arrangements made by the National Aerial Firefighting Centre, which is co-funded by the Federal and State governments to provide both rotary and fixed-wing air support across Australia.

## HAZARD REDUCTION THIS SEASON

By Inspector Rolf Poole, Community Safety Officer, Gosford District

**B**eing flexible and being ready were the keys to the hazard reduction (HR) operations throughout the State this season.

Most Districts on the East Coast have been strongly influenced by the La Nina weather event over recent years meaning higher than average rainfall. The hazard reduction burning program had suffered as a consequence of the moist conditions, however, fire management agencies have pulled together to increase their efforts.

In the Gosford District there is a significant amount of urban bushland interface in the area, and as part of the Fuel Management Plan for 2008-09, we commenced hazard reduction burning operations in late July.

The scheduled burns were divided amongst the relevant agencies from the Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC). For this year's program the RFS was responsible for overseeing the completion of 18 burns.

Utilising the new Prescribed Burn Plan SOPs, both staff and volunteers worked continuously through Winter, Spring and into Summer to ensure the burning program progressed.

While the wet conditions persisted and hampered some activities, it also presented plenty of opportunities to continue burning into the Bush Fire Danger Period. This has not always been possible in the past due to excessively dry conditions. This only highlighted the very nature of prescribed burning and the need to be flexible with the program. The planning, environmental assessments, funding, site preparation and resources all needed to be ready in case a weather opportunity presented itself. In fact, most of the burns that were conducted were arranged in less than three days once a weather opportunity was recognised.

With the assistance of the RFS Mitigation Teams many of the HR sites were prepared more quickly than expected. The Mitigation Teams were established to assist RFS volunteers in preparing sites and they proved invaluable for Gosford District.

### Brigade Mitigation Support Work Crews

This was the first year that the RFS employed seasonal mitigation crews to assist in the preparation for hazard reductions. In 2007, the NSW Government allocated an additional \$36 million to be spent on mitigation programs over four years and part of this money was used to pilot a Brigade Mitigation Support Program in Hornsby and the Blue Mountains.

Work crews began in January 2008 and in the first six months they cleared over 110

kms of hand tool lines and prepared the ground for 153 hazard reductions.

Simon Davis, Mitigation Works Coordinator, said the effort put forward by the eleven men involved has been tremendous.

"The goal of the programme is to support volunteers by doing the hard physical labour. It means more weekends are available for volunteers to perform actual burns or other brigade activity."

"These work crews have got jobs done in a week that would have taken volunteers, who can only work part-time, six months."

Feedback from staff and volunteers has been overwhelmingly positive and the programme has been launched again in 2009.

### The Somersby HR: Classic example

By mid-December, with the site prepared by the Work Crews, the Dawson Street hazard reduction at Somersby was set to go. It was a classic example of a relatively complex, yet small burn where all the pieces needed to fit together. The burn was divided into two divisions due to the nature of the site, giving us the flexibility to do as much or as little of the burn as necessary.

***"In fact most of the burns that were conducted were arranged in less than three days once a weather opportunity was recognised."***

The burn was completed over three separate weekends because of the erratic nature of the weather. Conditions went from one extreme of being too dry to the other, being too wet, within a matter of 48 hours. Burning operations were also halted on one occasion due to a strong wind warning.

It was determined that 13 December would be the last opportunity to conduct safe burning before conditions became too dry and before the Christmas break. Twenty four hours before the scheduled burn, the site received 48mm of rain. Whilst this was a considerable amount of rain, the District's general philosophy is not to postpone burns until a site inspection is carried out and test burns are conducted. The Special Fire Weather Forecast indicated winds could possibly reach 35kph gusting to 70kph, posing another reason to postpone the operation.

Once on site the senior officers did a quick 'recon' to survey fuel moisture and conduct small test burns. It was determined on site that the fuel moisture would effectively lessen the impact of the predicted strong winds and the large number of resources that were allocated would be sufficient to go ahead as planned.

Fourteen crews worked well under trying conditions and kept the fire within the desired containment lines and according to the prescription. While there were



some hot spots this was to be expected and there were equal amounts of patchy areas that resulted in a good mosaic burn. Communications personnel provided a forward command post at the staging area, keeping a close eye on the fireground and surrounding weather. The Catering Unit deployed into the field and enabled crews to have sufficient breaks without the need to leave the fireground.

Media updates kept the community informed about the operation which helped reduce any unnecessary Triple Zero (000) calls from the urban areas affected by smoke. During the height of the burn local residents came to the staging area, one on horseback, to express their thanks to the volunteers for conducting the burn.

For the 2008-09 program, the Gosford BFMC agencies collectively have completed 16 prescribed hazard reduction burns, of which the RFS coordinated 11 burns. This





represents a significant protection to urban interface communities of close to 1000 homes.



**TOP CENTRE:** During the height of the Somersby burn local residents came to the staging area, one on horseback, to express their thanks to the volunteers for conducting the burn.

**TOP RIGHT:** The Somersby hazard reduction burn was conducted over three weekends.

**RIGHT:** The Catering Unit deployed into the field and enabled crews to have sufficient breaks without the need to leave the fireground.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Brigade Mitigation Support Program Work Crews began in January 2008 and in the first six months they cleared over 110 kms of hand tool lines and prepared the ground for 153 hazard reductions.



# GENERAL NEWS

GILBERT & ROACH  
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AUSTRALIA



2008  
NSWRFS  
State Championships

## STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS

By Russell Taylor, Chairman of 2008 State Championships Organising Committee  
Photos by Anthony Clark

A record number of teams and supporters descended on Tweed Heads for the 18th RFS State Championships, 12-14 September, 2008. And what a great championships they were.

The ground was more than big enough to hold the wide variety of events. Even better, it provided the opportunity for a water-based event for the first time.

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said including a water-based event showed how versatile our members are.

"We respond to bush fires, structure fires, search and rescues and motor vehicle accidents and these mock scenarios reflect the real-life experiences our crews deal with," he said.

Crews had to respond by fireboat to a mock fire on board a house boat and many of the competing teams had never experienced the particular requirements of fighting fires from a fire boat. It was judged amongst the top events and the team, from South Australia's CFS, were duly congratulated.

While the temperature was mild, windy conditions made for some interesting challenges, not least on the water.

The State Championships were held on the grounds of the Cudgen Leagues Club in Kingscliff, near Tweed Heads in a large marquee where Terry Best and his team of very able caterers provided meals right throughout the Championships.

Commissioner Fitzsimmons was pleased with the location.

"The location of Kingscliff has been ideal and I would like to thank the people of the area for being so accommodating," he said.

"I would also like to pass on my appreciation to the many RFS members from the local area who have helped make this event so successful."

The 2008 State Championships were also amongst the safest held. One of the unsung toilers is Dianne Anderson from Safety and Welfare. Her task is to ensure that everything is done to ensure the safety of competitors, supporters and spectators alike.

These championships can't be staged without a team of workers and organisers who tirelessly attend to a thousand and one details to ensure that they run smoothly. From judges, marshals and time keepers to logistics transport and the overall running of the event it takes many hands to make this light work. It could not be possible without the wonderful support of the Service's suppliers and partners; Gilbert & Roach, Chubb, ISUZU, RFS and GAAM - to name but a few.

Superintendent Mark Ryan was the Events Co-ordinator and IC of the Champs. From the resourcing of the events to tasking of crews and on to making sure that everything ran to time, he and his team were always on top of things. Sadly for us Mark is unable to carry on in this capacity but will still be there in 2010 in another role.

Dave Cook and his team of staff and volunteers were exceptional in the way they got behind the effort. Bob Wilcox received the Chairman's Award for the person who contributed most to the effective staging of the event.

Sadly through the tyranny of allowable space I can't name everyone who made these Championships great but you know who you are. I hope that my thanks as Chairman of the Organising Committee and the satisfaction of contributing to this terrific event is maybe enough thanks in itself.

To "Min", Frank and all the FNC volos, a heartfelt thanks and congratulations for a job well done. Orana Team will be hard pressed to top your efforts.



## Next State Championships in 2010

That's right! The Orana Team has won the privilege of hosting the 2010 RFS State Championships in Dubbo.

Inspector Peter McKechnie will be taking on the role of IC for the 2010 Championships and will be looking for the level of assistance and cooperation that has characterised the event to date. Anyone wishing to help should drop him a line stating what it is you'd like to do and how you believe that you can do it.

The venue for the Championships will be the Dubbo Showground and the likely dates at this stage are 17-19 September 2010.

From these meagre details you might guess that planning for the Championships is already underway. This major event does take time and careful consideration. The Organising Committee has already embarked on setting in train the framework and overall management of the 2010 Championships. It promises to be bigger and better than ever. We hope to see you there!

Continued page 26-7



THE FIRST EVER  
WATER-BASED  
EVENT WAS  
A STAND OUT

## WINNERS' CIRCLE

The State Championships saw more than 200 of the country's best firefighters from NSW, Queensland, South Australia and the ACT competing in a variety of skills-based events.

After the two days of fast-paced and exciting competition, the Far North Coast team and St Paul's Cadets emerged as the champions.

### STATE CHAMPIONS: FAR NORTH COAST

It was the first time in 20 years that the team from the Far North Coast has won the title of RFS State Champions. The Tweed last took out the title in the inaugural State Championship in 1988.

"I would like to congratulate the Far North Coast Team on their impressive performance over the weekend," said Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons.

"Their skills, and perhaps a little home ground advantage, have made them deserving State Champions.

"They have been put through their paces in events including defensive structural firefighting, tanker driving, navigation, equipment use, teamwork and emergency response.

"They, like all of the 19 senior teams, have demonstrated how professional and highly skilled our volunteers are."

In taking out the title, the team won the Structure Fire and Pump and Tanker events and took out places in the Equipment Failure, Light Tanker and House Boat Fire events.

Robert "Buster" Eglinton also won the Crew Leader of the Event award. This award is a first for the Far North Coast. He said the team was very proud of their efforts and "can't wait to defend their title in two years time in Dubbo!"

Far North Coast Team Manager Superintendent David Cook said that winning the title was recognition for the hard work the volunteers have put into training for the event.

"These guys volunteer their time to fight fires for their community and train very hard," he said, "They are clearly very good at their job."

### The winners team comprised:

**Robert Eglinton** - (Crew Leader)  
Cudgen Brigade

**Lance Hopson** - Main Arm Brigade

**Gregg Miller** - Byron Bay Brigade

**Damien Freeman** - Murwillumbah Brigade

**Johnny Taylor** - Murwillumbah Brigade

**John Milford** - Wilsons Creek Brigade

**Coach: Steve Phelps** - Main Arm Brigade.



Members of the State Championship team, Far North Coast Team, being congratulated by the Commissioner.

## STATE CHAMPIONS CADETS: ST PAULS

It was the second consecutive win for the St Paul's Grammar School's cadet rural fire brigade.

"St Paul's and the other 12 cadet teams have also performed well and it's encouraging to see the younger members learning and honing their skills," said Commissioner Fitzsimmons.

Cadet Coordinator at St Paul's, Anthony Head said the brigade has a long history of success in fire fighting championships.

"These Championships were the culmination of six months of training and competition for the team at zone and regional level," he said, "The team has worked very well together and they should be proud of their very well deserved results."

"St Paul's went into the championships as the reigning NSW and Australian Champions, so expectations were high!"

The team's crew leader, Bill Andrews, also won the Cadet Crew Leader Award for his excellent leadership of the team and his ability to make rapid decisions in tasking priorities during the event scenarios.

Along with the outstanding results in all eight events, St Paul's was declared the overall champion cadet brigade in NSW. It's an honour the brigade had previously achieved in 2003 and 2006. St Paul's is the only cadet brigade in NSW to have won the State Championships more than once.

Other local teams competing were Orchard Hills, who were placed second overall and Llandilo and Oakville, who both achieved placings in two events.

"Orchard Hills provided some formidable competition for our team and the final results were extremely close," Anthony Head said, "The cadets from Orchard Hills should be very proud of their results as they are the best brigade-based fire cadet group in both NSW and Australia."

St Paul's Grammar School has the largest cadet rural fire brigade in NSW and has its own fire station and fire tanker at the school.

### The winners team comprised:

**Crew Leader: Bill Andrews**

**Tyrone Pollard**

**Rhys Goldfinch**

**Nicholas Mitchell**

**Michael Gemin**

**Noah Minor**

**Jonathan Wong**

**Alex Casalini**

**Nicholas McDonnell**

**Nathan Brasier**



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# SAFE WORKING ON ROOFS

By Alan Brinkworth, Dan Meijer and Gordon Hill

For many years RFS Brigades have fought structure fires and assisted other agencies during major storm incidents without the benefit of any structured training in working safely on roofs.

That all changed in January 2008 when the RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons requested that a Project Team be set up to examine the need for Safe Working on Roofs training in the RFS.

The Project team was to develop SOP/SOGs for Safe Working on Roofs (SWR), identify suitable equipment to allow brigades to work on roofs and to develop a training package for brigade use.

## Who was on the team?

This Project Team initially consisted of Chief Superintendent Gordon Hill, Region West Operations Manager and Dan Meijer, Learning and Development (L&D) Project Officer at RFS Headquarters. Inspector Mick Holton, Learning and Development Officer at Monaro subsequently joined the project team.

All three project team members have a sound background in working safely on roofs with other emergency service agencies.

Work for the Project Team commenced quickly by establishing contact with the NSW Fire Brigades and NSW SES and identifying suitable equipment that was effective but easy to use when working on roofs.

From these meetings the project team put together two SWR equipment kits which were evaluated by a number of L&D Officers at the Mogo Training Centre.

Some valuable feedback was obtained from this equipment kit evaluation and a final RFS SWR Equipment Kit was developed which closely mirrored that already in use with the NSW Fire Brigades.

The Project Team was also busy meeting with representatives of the NSW Fire Brigades and NSW SES to discuss possible training options and to set up a small interagency committee to map common competencies across agencies with regard to working safely on roofs.

Dan Meijer, assisted by Mick Holton also commenced work on developing a Learning and Assessment Strategy, Code of Practice and a Learner's Workbook for the SWR training programme. These were completed in time for the Trainer Workshop in July which saw 16 trainers from across the State successfully complete the SWR Course.

## VETAB Accreditation on the way

The SWR Course has been aligned with the National Unit of Competency *BCPRF2001A Work Safely on Roofs* and this unit has been added to the RFS's scope of registration.

## The Safe Working on Roofs course

The first scheduled SWR Course was conducted in the Illawarra in September 2008. Further SWR courses have now been conducted in a number of districts and are being planned in the Sydney, Central Coast and Illawarra areas over the next several months and all Districts are encouraged to consider the need for this training as part of their local Training Plan.

The pre-requisite for Safe Working on Roofs Course is Village Firefighter (VF), as VF contains the underpinning knowledge on urban hazards, ropes, knots, buildings and ladders.

Once trained in the SWR package, brigades will be able to work safely on roofs to facilitate salvage and recovery operations following structure fires and will be able to assist other agencies following major storm incidents.

## The Roof Safety System (RSS)

The RSS kit consists of a main line, anchored at each end with slings and safety/"tag" lines, both of 11mm kernmantel rope. Operators wear a full body harness and attach to the safety line using a Rocker rope grab device. If the operator falls, the Rocker grabs the rope and the fall is arrested.

The RSS kit is life support equipment and must be treated with care and must be regularly checked. It's not unlike a CABA set – if you notice anything unusual, or if you break a part of it yourself, speak up!

## Why have we selected these items of equipment?

There have been many questions about the kit from members with extensive roping experience.

While there are several ways of rigging a system with many different pieces of equipment, the RSS is to be used and constructed exactly as per the SWR Workbook. This is to ensure safe and consistent work between crews. The RSS has been rated for safe use when deployed as specified.

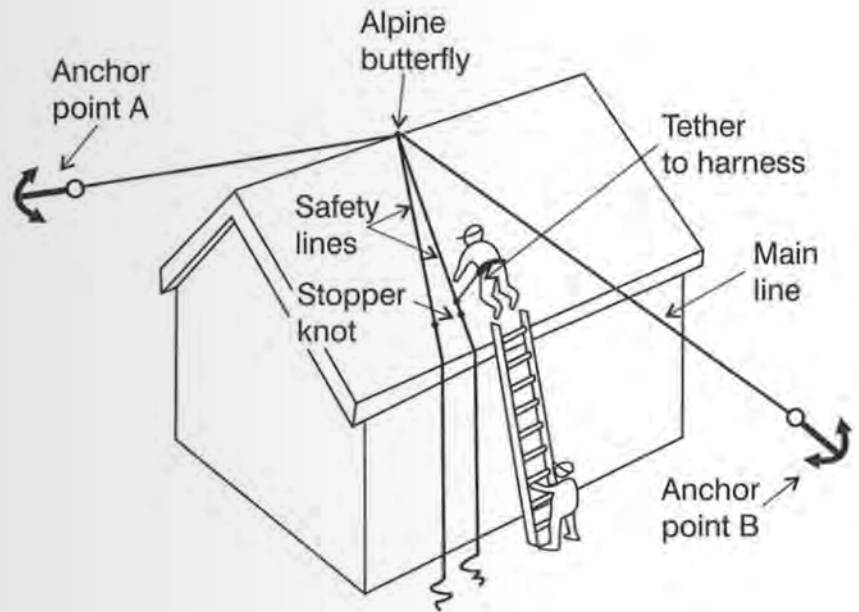
– Continued on page 32



# SAFE WORKING

## 1. The Roof Safety System

- 1. The Roof Safety System**, which operates by arresting any fall that may occur, is a simple design which can be applied to many different scenarios.
- 2. The Rocker** is a rope-grab device which locks off when force is applied. This allows you to move freely along the safety line, but if you fall (eg to your knees) you will be held.
- 3. Anchor points** use a locked-off Harpoon descender. If an operator is 'hung up' off a roof, the entire system can be slowly lowered to the ground by one person using the Harpoon.
- 4. RFS crews now have the equipment and training** to work safely on roofs, for making buildings safe following structural fires or storms.
- 5. The Roof Safety System and SWR SOPs** are aligned to those used by other agencies, to enable combined strike teams to work together.



## 2. The Rocker



## 2. Anchor Points





# WORKING ON ROOFS



## 4. Equipment & Training



## 5. The Roof Safety System & SWR SOPs



Pull out this section to display in your station or Fire Control Centre



Using different knots or your own personal gear dilutes the certainty of safe operation and is not permitted.

The other advantage of the RSS design is that equipment supply issues can capitalise on existing arrangements with other agencies. The RSS contains many component parts of the NSWFB's standard cordage pack for rescue.

### Using the RSS at incidents

The overriding priority of all operations is firefighter safety. Crews must conduct a risk assessment of every job to determine whether there is any need to get onto the roof at all. For example tarps can be hauled over from the ground using throwing lines, or you can work from ladders.

If there is a need to get on the roof, check that it can be done safely. No incident is 100 percent risk-free, but crews will balance any identified risk with the urgency of the task at hand. If in doubt, do not complete the job and request assistance. If you get on a roof you must use the RSS at all times.

The following points should be noted:

- 11mm rope meets the standards for life support and is cheaper and lighter than 13mm rope
- Harpoons have been used at each anchor, rather than Whaletails or AutoStops, as they're easier to learn, use and replace, while easily serving their purpose
- Full body harnesses, not sit harnesses, are used in accordance with Workcover's Code of Practice for safe working on roofs
- Bush fire PPE is required, but jackets may be doffed in warm weather. The bush fire helmet meets the requirements of the Code of Practice for headwear and must be worn
- No emergency service issues "volleys" or similar footwear for roof work. Bush fire

boots are sufficient. If there is doubt about your ability to safely do the job in boots, don't do the job – call for assistance

- Rockers are a more dynamic device than ascenders, and are easier to use than prussic loops/knots. Ascenders bite into the rope with teeth; when this is combined with force, the rope is often stripped and rendered unserviceable. This doesn't happen with Rockers.
- If asbestos is suspected to be present, do not commence work, and request Hazmat attendance.

There are several different ways of rigging anchor points. The SWR course does not prescribe what is or is not a suitable anchor point. This decision needs to be made by the crew based on individual conditions.

Anchor slings can be rigged in several ways. Again, this is the crew's decision. The slings have a tag with diagrams of the effect on Safe Working Load of using different rigging techniques.

All anchors will use slings, with a carabiner connected to a harpoon. The main line will always be attached to the harpoon and locked off.

Care must be taken to rig the main line as close as possible to the centre of the roof, to avoid "pendulum" effect.

### Walking on Roofs

Care must be taken to assess the stability of roof supports before climbing onto a roof. In some cases, salvage operations can originate from within the ceiling cavity rather than by climbing onto the roof.

Ensure that you walk on the lower part of tiles where they overlap on battens. On corrugated materials (aluminium, colorbond, etc) follow the lines of screws which indicate the support areas.



Keep your safety line relatively taut. In the event of a fall, slack will need to be taken up before the system will arrest your fall.

SWR courses are now being run in all Regions.

**For any questions on the SWR Course, contact your local L&D Officer, or Dan Meijer at RFS HQ Learning & Development Systems on [dan.meijer@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:dan.meijer@rfs.nsw.gov.au).**

## NEW LONG SERVICE MEDAL

A Long Service Medal has been introduced for all those serving 10 years of service with the Rural Fire Service.

The introduction of a Long Service Medal for the Rural Fire Service allows the organisation to be consistent with other emergency services such as the NSW Police Force, NSW Fire Brigades, Ambulance Service and State Emergency Service.

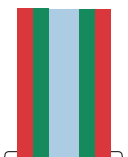
The Medal will replace the existing Long Service Badges (15, 25, 35 and 50 years) and will be worn on the right hand side of the uniform.

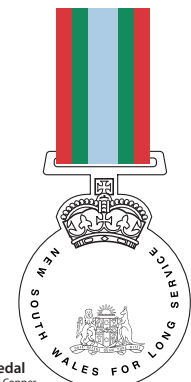
Arrangements for the production of the Medal are currently in progress. The Medal will be made of copper in a colour of Oxy-Silver with Impeller Rosettes and Clasps with a Watermarked Ribbon. The colours of the Medal will be taken from the Badge of the Rural Fire Service.

The Medal will be available for issue to all members of the Service, both volunteer and salaried staff. The Medal and Ribbon Bar Impeller Rosette will be issued for 10 years of satisfactory service. A Ribbon Bar Impeller Rosette and Badged Clasp will be issued for each subsequent period of 10 years of satisfactory service.


**NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE - Long Service Medal**

**Watermarked Ribbon**  
30mm x 50mm  
PMS Red 185  
PMS Green 347  
PMS Blue 277

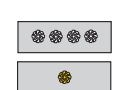





Medal  
Make: Copper  
Colour: Oxy-Silver




50 years  
40 years  
30 years  
20 years




10 years



20 years



30 years



40 years

**Rosettes Impeller - Oxy Silver (10-40 years)**

**Rosettes Impeller - Gold (50 years)**

**Clasps: 30x5mm - Oxy Silver (20-40 years)**

**Clasps: 30x5mm - Gold (50 years)**

The new Long Service Medal will not be retrospective, however, provision has been made to also recognise the past service of currently serving members. The new Medal, and clasp/s if appropriate, will be issued at the member's next available entitlement.

The proposed Order of Precedence for this Medal for Service members would be the Rural Fire Service Medal and with

the remaining order following the order of "emergency services organisation" as set out in the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act*.

The date for the cessation of the current Long Service Badges and the introduction of the Medal is St Florian's Day 2009 which is 4 May.

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Former Minister for Emergency Services, Tony Kelly addressing the congregation at the Volunteer Memorial Service

## THEIR NAMES ETCHED IN GRANITE

Photos by Adam Hollingworth

The names of three emergency services volunteers, including two members of the RFS, who lost their lives while giving their time to help the community, were added to the NSW Emergency Services Volunteers Memorial in October 2008.

The then Minister for Emergency Services, Tony Kelly, led the annual memorial service at the Volunteers Memorial at Mrs Macquarie's Chair beside Sydney Harbour.

Mr Kelly said the commemorative service paid tribute to the State's tens of thousands of emergency services volunteers from the NSW Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service, Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association, Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol and Volunteer Rescue Association.

"Today is a particularly sad occasion as we etch the names of one SES volunteer and two RFS volunteer firefighters onto the Memorial's Roll of Honour," Mr Kelly said.

"But it is also a day for all of us to pay tribute to the 84 volunteers who have given their life in service to their local communities and to the thousands of others who continue to dedicate their time to providing a helping hand in times of need.

"Emergency service volunteers are that special breed of people who step in to dangerous and uncertain environments to protect the community.

"Our emergency services volunteers are well-trained, well-equipped and very professional. Unfortunately, despite all of this there are tragedies which result in the loss of a life."

***"Emergency service volunteers are that special breed of people who step in to dangerous and uncertain environments to protect the community."***

The three men whose names have been added to the granite Memorial are:

- Mr Patrick Gehrig, a member of the Wallarobba Rural Fire Brigade, who died in 2000
- Mr John (Jack) McLean, a member of the Braeside Rural Fire Brigade, who died in 1964
- Mr Albert Lilley, a member of the Wauchope SES Unit, who died in 2007

### Mr Patrick Gehrig, Wallarobba Rural Fire Brigade

Patrick Gehrig had been a member of the Wallarobba RFS Brigade in the Hunter Valley for more than 30 years when he died during a firefighting operation on his family property in the Welshman's Creek area on 17 September, 2000.

"Mr Gehrig, a 47-year-old school teacher, had attended the fire, which had been burning in difficult terrain, with the brigade. During the course of the operation, he was taken ill and returned to the truck, where he collapsed and died a short time later," Mr Kelly said.

"The members of the Wallarobba Brigade - which includes a number of the Gehrig family - dedicated their new Category Seven tanker to Pat's memory in 2003. His loss is now officially recognised here on this record of granite."

### Mr John (Jack) McLean, Braeside Rural Fire Brigade

Mr Kelly said John (Jack) McLean was killed at the age of 65 on his way to fight a fierce 3000-acre fire on 17 December, 1964.

"Mr McLean, who was a grazier, was travelling to the scene of the fire at Colly Creek between Braefield and Willow Tree, when he was crushed by a full tank of water after the trailer on which it was being carried overturned," Mr Kelly said.

"He was rushed to Quirindi District Hospital and admitted in a serious condition but sadly lost his life later that night while being transferred to Tamworth Base Hospital.

"Jack's granddaughter Leanne Henry who, at three, was far too young to lose her grandfather, alerted us to his omission from the Volunteers Memorial and I thank her for bringing her grandfather's sacrifice to our attention so he can be paid the tribute he deserves."

### Mr Albert Lilley, Wauchope SES Unit

Mr Kelly said that on 4 December 2007, 71-year-old Albert Lilley had been taking part in an operation at the local racetrack to



Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and former Minister for Emergency Services, Tony Kelly, join representatives of all NSW emergency services to honour volunteers who have lost their lives.



The family of Jack McLean, from the Braeside Rural Fire Brigade, Jack's daughter Jill Hoswell, and her husband Ray Hoswell and granddaughter Leanne Henry.

remove a tree that had been damaged in a recent storm.

"After carrying out his task he decided to take a short break, but he became ill and collapsed. His fellow volunteers carried out CPR and an ambulance rushed Mr Lilley to hospital where he passed away shortly afterwards," Mr Kelly said.

"An engineer, Mr Lilley joined the SES after his retirement and quickly became a valued mentor, coach and core member of the unit."

The Volunteers Memorial was unveiled by the NSW Governor, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC in 2001 to acknowledge the contribution of the state's emergency services volunteers, particularly those who have lost their lives serving the community.

## A PERSONAL VIEW OF THE VOLUNTEER MEMORIAL SERVICE

I attended the Volunteer Memorial Service for the first time this year, with my young family, for the sole purpose of paying respects to fellow volunteers.

I don't personally know the people listed on the plaque, or their families and I haven't had a close connection to them in any way. Yet I felt it was important to go with my family, at least once, to the Memorial Service.

I attended in civilian clothing and at first I was unsure of what to expect. I soon found myself filled with emotion and pride.

I have to say that I was deeply touched by the service itself and the permanent memorial to volunteers who have given their lives.

Seeing the friends and families who were there to pay their respects and to remember loved ones, brought a lump to my throat.

The representation of all Volunteer Emergency Services, highlighted that our Service is not alone in losing comrades.

I felt pride that I am part of a volunteer organisation that has become so much stronger thanks to those who have been before me.

I now have a greater respect for our history and will ensure my children have such respect.

At next year's service, and into the future, I will wear my colours with pride and be there to remember.

*Name withheld*

# REGION WEST EXERCISE 2008

By Andrew Dillon, Learning and Development Manager, Region West

A record number of brigades, volunteers and other agencies descended upon Burrendong Dam for the Fifth Region West Exercise in September 2008.

Over 35 brigades, 320 volunteers and other agencies - NSWFB, Country Energy, St Johns Ambulance and Correctional Services - descended upon the well loved venue to hone their skills and reunite with old friends ahead of the fire season. Word had obviously spread of the benefits of the regional exercise. It was great to see so many new faces.

The RFS kindly sponsored the event and provided encouragement in the form of several prizes in various categories.

## Crew Leaders assessed

Last year Region West conducted a successful pilot allowing volunteers to be assessed for crew leader qualifications while undertaking activities at the exercise.

The scenarios were designed so that all aspects of the practical crew leader course could be covered and assessed. Instructors and assessors were sourced and assigned to specific scenarios so that volunteers could be assessed as they passed through. In total 26 individual assessments were conducted.

Live fire was utilised at the Crew Leader Wildfire assessment scenario enabling assessors to gauge the leadership skills of candidates in a real grass fire environment.

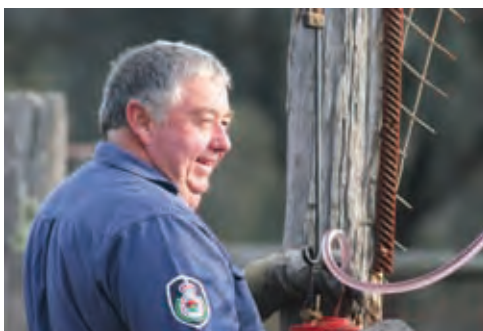
For the first time Region West also included a Hazard Reduction burning component. Designed to show the volunteers the correct procedures and patterns of burning and demonstrating what they look like, with many crews given the opportunity to practice and implement these.

## Commissioner joins forums

Other highlights included a Group Officer Forum with 47 participants, an open Volunteer Forum and a Field Commander's Workshop. RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons was involved in both the Group Officer Forum and the Open Volunteer Forum.

When it was all said and done it was another very successful regional exercise and the last for 2008.

The Region West staff are now looking forward to 2009. They plan to reach the milestone of 400 participants at the exercise. The focus for 2009 will be on the integration of Community Safety and Fire Investigation skills.







## THE FINEST OF THE RFS

Photos by Adam Hollingworth

**S**even members of the RFS were recognised with the prestigious Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) at the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

The recipients received their awards from the NSW Governor, Marie Bashir at a ceremony at Government House in late September 2008.

"These seven members have more than 250 years of experience between them," RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said, "Some have been assisting the community through roles with the RFS for more than 50 years and their dedication deserves to be recognised."

"These members have given up countless hours over the years and while they don't do it for awards or accolades, the community says 'thank you' for your remarkable contribution."

Those to receive the AFSM include:

**Superintendent George Alexander**, who joined the RFS in 1973. In 1998 he was appointed as the Fire Control Officer for Albury, Culcairn and Hume Councils and, in 2003, was appointed as the Fire Control Officer for Holbrook Shire. Since then, he has helped establish the Southern Border Team and is a frequent incident controller at major incidents.

**Group Captain Mark Swayn** followed his father into the West Pennant Hills (Cherrybrook) Brigade, 42 years ago. Since then, he has risen to positions of Group Captain and Manager of RFS Corporate Planning and Performance. He was also one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Rural Fire Service Association.

**Firefighter Edward Davies** joined the Wilcannia and District Brigade in 1970. He has served as a member of the NSW Bushfire Council and acts as a mentor for younger members in remote areas of the State, often travelling long distances to assist with training.

**Senior Deputy Captain Ronald Jollow** was a founding member of the Wendoree Park Brigade in 1967. He has served as a Brigade Captain for 29 years and since 2006, as a Senior Deputy Captain.

**Group Officer Dennis Saunders** has provided 35 years of service to the RFS, including leading strike teams throughout the New England area and as a trainer. He is a self-employed grazer who has never declined a callout.

**Group Captain William Dunn** joined the RFS in 1950, with the Talmalmo Brigade. For a decade he served as a Deputy Captain, as Senior Deputy Captain for 20 years and as Captain for three years. He has been Incident Controller at many large fires throughout the Southern Highlands.

**Chief Superintendent Steve Yorke** began his service with the RFS in the Evans Shire Headquarters Brigade. Since 1991, he has been with the Scotland Island Brigade and in 1999, began work as a paid officer of the RFS, playing a vital role during the Sydney 2000 Olympics as the RFS Liaison Officer at the Police Security Command Centre. He has helped set up the Coffee4Kids Foundation, served as president of the Rural Fire Service Association and currently holds the position of Manager Region East.

"Over the years, these members have shown remarkable commitment to their local communities, building their expertise and leading others," the Commissioner said.

"The Australian Fire Service Medal is the highest honour that can be awarded to a member of the RFS," he said, "These members and the communities they come from should be rightly proud of their achievements and commitment."

2008 was the 20th anniversary of the introduction of the AFSM. It is awarded for distinguished service on the part of an individual member of the NSW Rural Fire Service. Distinguished service is demonstrated by leadership, dedication, commitment, achievement and promotion of the RFS.

**TOP:** These AFSM recipients received their awards from the Commissioner at a ceremony at Government House in late September 2008. (Left to right): Edward Davies, William Dunn, Ron Jollow, Steve Yorke, Commissioner Fitzsimmons, George Alexander, Mark Swayn, Dennis Saunders.



## CONGRATULATIONS TO THE AUSTRALIA DAY AFSM RECIPIENTS

Australia Day in 2009 saw the acknowledgement of a further seven Rural Fire Service firefighters who have offered distinguished service.

- Firefighter Dennis Joiner (Mona Vale)
- Superintendent Bryan Daly (Waterview Heights)
- Group Captain Alfred (John) Sendall (Goulburn)
- Group Captain James Drane (Thirlmere)
- Group Captain Christopher Smith (Merimbula)
- Superintendent Frederick Apthorpe (Merbein VIC)
- Superintendent Joseph (Joe) Knox (Wagga Wagga)

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons has congratulated those volunteers and staff, who were named in the Australia Day Honours List.

"Day in, day out, they're ready to assist when called upon and they thoroughly deserve recognition for their hard work and dedication," he said.

"Firefighter Dennis Joiner has been a member of the RFS for 47 years, in which time he has greatly assisted not only the community but also other members, through his hard work in the areas of training, hazard reduction and mentoring.

"Superintendent Daly has given more than 25 years of diligent service, through positions such as Fire Control Officer and his current role of Regional Operations Manager.

"Group Captain John Sendall joined the Service in 1963 and ever since, has been actively involved as a firefighter, Group Officer, Incident Controller and administrator.

"Group Captain James Drane has held the roles of Secretary, Vice President, President, Training Officer and Deputy Captain of the Theresa Park Brigade since he joined in 1984 and has assisted not only in his own areas, but other regions across the State.

"Group Officer Christopher Smith has been a member of the RFS since 1969 when he joined the Merimbula Brigade. Within a year, he became a Deputy Captain and held the position of Captain for 33 years.

"Superintendent Frederick Apthorpe has fulfilled roles such as Group Captain and Fire Control Officer during his 35 years of Service, in which time he has demonstrated a commitment to his community.



John Sendall



Bryan Daly



Frederick Apthorpe



Jim Drane



Dennis Joiner



Christopher Smith

"Superintendent Joe Knox joined the RFS as a volunteer in 1979 and since then has progressed to the role of Superintendent of the Riverina Zone which covers the Wagga Wagga, Coolamon, Junee, Lockhart and Urana local government areas.

"I congratulate all seven of these dedicated members and staff on their awards.

"I would also like to thank the partners and families of those receiving the awards because their ongoing support is vital," said Commissioner Fitzsimmons.



Joe Knox

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## CSIRO UNVEILS BUSH FIRE WIND TUNNEL

**C**SIRO has built a bush fire wind tunnel to research how bush fires spread and to improve the safety and firefighting capabilities of Australian communities.

Launched in November by the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr, the CSIRO Pyrotron is an important new facility for understanding the behaviour of bush fires.

Located at Yarralumla in Canberra, the Pyrotron is a 25-metre-long aluminium wind tunnel with a five-metre-long fuel bed and a viewing section lined with toughened glass.

The type of bush fire fuel burned, such as leaves, twigs and bark, and the wind speed will be varied while the temperature and humidity will be that of the day.

Assistant Commissioner Mark Croweller says the Pyrotron is going to help us learn more about bush fires.

"What it allows us to do is literally to get right up and close to the fuel that is burning in a forest fire," he said.

"All of the experimentation we've done over many years, we've had to stand well back to observe the fire from some distance. "This allows us to approach the fuels within



about 300, 400 millimetres and actively observe what the fire is doing."

Assistant Commissioner Croweller says the experiments will build on existing bush fire behaviour research.

"Fighting fire is as much an art as it is a science, so the art of firefighting and the techniques firefighters use will be greatly enhanced by the knowledge that apparatuses such as this produce."

CSIRO bush fire researcher Andrew Sullivan says the Pyrotron will enable researchers to build a better understanding of the mechanics of bush fire spread, which is important for understanding bush fire behaviour under changed future climate conditions.

**ABOVE:** Federal Science Minister Kim Carr and Assistant Commissioner Mark Croweller check out the Pyrotron tunnel in Canberra.

## BUSH FIRE RISK TOOL WINS AWARDS

**A**t the NSW Public Sector Awards in November 2008, NSW Premier Nathan Rees presented the RFS with a Bronze award for the production of the tool and state wide use of the new bush fire risk management plans.

The Premier's Public Sector Awards formally recognise and reward initiatives which have produced measurable outcomes with proven results and benefits to NSW community.

The Bush Fire Risk Register tool also recently received a highly commended award from the NSW awards for Excellence in Surveying and Spatial Information, hosted by the NSW Institution of Surveyors.

The Bush Fire Risk Register is a new process and computer application and has changed the way all fire agencies identify and treat risk in NSW. The planning tool is being used to assist Bush Fire Management Committees in preparing Bush Fire Risk Management Plans.

Manager for Community Planning, Dr Simon Heemstra and Planning Officer, Pat Westwood, accepted the award under the 'Delivering Locally' category on behalf of the many people that were involved in the project. "This award reflects the dedication and



Dr Simon Heemstra and Pat Westwood accepted the award from the Premier Nathan Rees.

hard work from head office, district and regional staff in producing a simple and useful tool," Dr Heemstra said.

The RFS is also achieving national recognition for the tool.

"Most States in Australia have contacted us and asked that we assist them with using

the tool," Dr Heemstra said, "We are very happy that we can contribute to community safety in other States."

"It has taken three years to develop Bush Fire Risk Register and it is now in its final stages of implementation. Staff from all agencies have commented on how practical the tool is."

## RFS OPEN DAY 2008

### ENTHUSIASM AND PROFESSIONALISM

By Shane Culbert, Open Day 2008 Coordinator

The enthusiasm of brigade members and their ability to engage members of their local community for the fifth annual RFS Open Day was outstanding. District offices have received numerous positive comments from the public regarding the professionalism of brigade members.

Saturday 20 September 2008 saw more than 420 brigades throughout NSW engage approximately 20,000 people for RFS Open Day. This was the fifth event since its inception in 2004 and the trend shows that more brigades are participating each year.

A survey was conducted after RFS Open Day to evaluate the success of the event and how it can be improved in 2009. Two hundred and fourteen completed surveys were submitted and the results are summarised in the chart top right.

### Location

The large majority of brigades opened their station doors to the community in 2008 rather than conduct the event at an alternate venue. Twenty six percent of brigades felt they would receive more interest from local residents if they set up a display in a more convenient location like shopping centres, parks, schools or incorporated RFS Open Day into other community events.

### Promoting Open Day

Brigades explained the innovative ways they found to communicate the event to local residents including:

- Personal letters to new and current residents
- Letterbox drops via Australia Post unaddressed mail system
- Placing event details on LGA Electronic Bulletin Board
- Invitations to residents to attend a fire safety presentation
- PA announcements at local community events
- Flyers delivered to local school students and teachers

Volunteers still perceive posters and banners to be the most effective means of promoting the event.

### What would you do with \$500?

We posed a scenario-based question to those who participated in the survey. If you were given \$500 to coordinate RFS Open Day what would you spend it on? Advertising and promotions were the stand-out recommendations. Other ideas included props for demonstrations, catering, signage, community BBQ and prizes for raffles.



### Open Day Activities

BRIGADES CONDUCTED A RANGE OF ORIGINAL EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES ON RFS OPEN DAY, SOME OF WHICH INCLUDED:

BRIGADES CONDUCTED A RANGE OF ORIGINAL EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES ON RFS OPEN DAY, SOME OF WHICH INCLUDED:	
<b>Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colouring-in competition</li> <li>• Firefighters tug-of-war</li> <li>• Jumping castle/face painting for kids</li> <li>• Incorporating RFS Open Day with other local events</li> <li>• Kids using charged hoses with and without foam</li> <li>• Bicycle ride around fire trails</li> <li>• Knapsack target practise game for kids</li> </ul>
<b>Demonstrations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kitchen fire safety</li> <li>• How to use fire extinguishers and fire blankets</li> <li>• Smoke house with evacuation commentary</li> <li>• LPG fire and five man fog attack procedure</li> <li>• Fire over-run drills</li> <li>• Roll and bowl hoses</li> <li>• Simulated motor vehicle accident</li> <li>• Pumping and water delivery</li> </ul>
<b>Displays</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smoke alarms</li> <li>• BBQ and camping fire safety</li> <li>• Safety videos for children and adults</li> <li>• Community Education trailer</li> <li>• Photos of training, incidents and members</li> <li>• One on one conversations relating to display</li> <li>• Tours of tankers, station and other equipment</li> </ul>
<p>The most popular resources used to engage the community were balloons, pencil sets and banners.</p>	

### Improvements

Volunteers provided many suggestions to improve RFS Open Day in 2009. The community engagement team will now review each one to determine how the next state-wide community event can be coordinated effectively and professionally with the money available.

On behalf of the community engagement team I would like to sincerely thank all volunteers and district staff who were involved in making RFS Open Day 2008 the

largest and most successful yet. We will endeavour to work together for the 2009 event to successfully plan, coordinate and evaluate RFS Open Day.

To share your thoughts and ideas for resources, registration, advertising, signage, documentation, evaluation and the delivery of resources in 2009 please email [open.day@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:open.day@rfs.nsw.gov.au). Alternatively you can provide comments to the community engagement blog at [www.behindthefireline.com](http://www.behindthefireline.com).



## A HECTIC START TO THE FIRE SEASON

Story and photos by Jesse Rowan,  
Malua Bay Rural Fire Brigade

**T**he Malua Bay Rural Fire Brigade got more than it bargained for at the RFS Open Day in September. The brigade set up at Malua Bay Park with a sausage sizzle, fun activities for the children and a trailer load of brochures to help local residents prepare for the fire season.

Just after lunch the brigade was called to a fire two kilometres away, leaving one poor volunteer to man the sausage sizzle and the information trailer.

A landowner had started a hazard reduction on his property, but it had escaped his control. As winds intensified in the early afternoon, the fire spread into bushland and several spot fires sparked up in mulch heaps in a new housing development. Luckily the two crews from Malua Bay were able to put it out in about an hour.

Back at Malua Bay Park, the Open Day trailer was just packing up when another callout came through for Malua Bay crews to respond to a much more



serious fire at Broulee. Malua Brigade responded along with several other units from Batemans Bay, Surf Beach, Candlagan, Mogo and Moruya brigades.

The hard-working Rural Fire Service crews' combined efforts and managed to contain this fire by about 1800hr. Winds were creating havoc all over the district. While brigades were battling with the Broulee fire, another fire in windrows back at Malua Bay, which had been attended a week earlier, flared up again.

This took two valuable crews away from the Broulee fire.

Weary crew members had just hung out the hoses to dry when another callout came and a dedicated crew headed out to Lilli Pilli only to find it was a false alarm.

What an initiation it turned out for a couple of the brigade's new members who helped fight their first fires that day!

# myrfs

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Volunteer family day

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# LOCAL NEWS & INFORMATION

**MyRFS** is getting better all the time and this year it will seem a lot closer to home. From December last year your district has been able to communicate directly to you through **MyRFS**.

Updates, newsletters, stories, training calendars and photographs are all things that your district will now be able to send to you through the **MyRFS** website.

More reliable than regular mail, and more frequent - you will find more RFS related information than in any other single location. This fire season, **MyRFS** will provide comprehensive fire information - including community safety messages - through the Fire Updates section.

Time is precious and you're already giving so much of it to the Service. **MyRFS** provides a way for you to connect, check and update your information online - at a time when it's convenient to you.

Your personal training records, training schedules, maps and permit and hazard reduction information are all available online, drawn directly from centralised systems.

And for Group Captains, we are releasing a new and improved Group Captains reporting module to help manage teams.

Technology can be challenging at times, but you will find **MyRFS** easy to register and use, and there are always people on hand who can help you with the process. We have a 24 hour support line to answer your questions - **1300 269 737**.

If you can't get connected in your area, then perhaps you know someone who is. Find out who in your brigade has access to **MyRFS** so that you can stay in touch with what is happening in your area, and across the State.

Being online is a faster, smarter and more convenient way of staying in touch with your Service. If you haven't been online for a while, maybe it's time for a fresh look. **MyRFS** is all part of the way we are helping you do your job better.

Connect at home, at work, or at your local public library or community centre. **MyRFS** is your official volunteer website. If you're not signed up for **MyRFS**, now is the time to get connected.

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



# Illuminating the darkness

## **TORCH LIGHTING**

GAAM now offers an extensive range of Pelican Torch Lighting. These lighting options are durable in design, compact in size and illuminate with high density beams - ideal for cutting through thick smoke, fog and dust. Range includes;

- Personal and Duty Lights
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- Tactical Lights

*Pictured: 2000 SabreLite™*



## **AREA LIGHTING**

GAAM also offer Pelican Remote Area Lighting Systems (RALS), that are designed for illuminating poorly lit sites. The RALS provide a powerful and versatile alternative to wasteful gas powered generators and are ideal for fire and emergency rescue situations. The RALS are available in two models; a high power search and rescue spotlight and a handheld option - both of which project a clean, white beam that can penetrate through metres of darkness.

*Pictured: 9450B RALS*



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## Invitation

Sydney, while one of the world's most beautiful cities, is also in the heart one of the world's most wildland fire prone areas. That is why we are very pleased to invite you to join us at the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre on 18-20 June for the International Wildfire Management Conference - Australia 2009.

This Conference is jointly sponsored by the NSW Rural Fire Service, the Rural Fire Service Association in association with the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC).

This major Conference will bring together experts from around the world to look at many of the major issues facing wildland firefighters and agencies, as well as land managers and environmentalists.

The Conference will present three main streams:

- Technology and Research
- A Safer Community
- Challenges We Face

These streams will cover a range of topics, with key presentations by fire personnel, land managers, environmental experts, educators and government and community representatives that have extensive experience in combating wildland fires, and protecting communities from their impacts.

# INTERNATIONAL WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT conference AUSTRALIA 2009

Incorporating the **Australasian Education and Fire Awareness Conference**

**18 - 20 June 2009**

Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre Sydney, Australia

## facing our future

### Keynote Speaker – Professor Tim Flannery



The IWMC09 Organising Committee is very excited to be welcoming Professor Tim Flannery as a Keynote Speaker to the Conference. Don't miss out on witnessing one of Australia's leading thinkers and writers. An internationally acclaimed scientist, explorer and conservationist, he has published more than 130 peer-reviewed scientific papers. His books include the landmark works, *The Future Eaters* and *The Weather Makers*. Professor Tim Flannery appears by arrangement with Claxton Speakers International.

### Invited Speaker – Mr Roy Bishop OBE QFSM MIFire



Roy Bishop has over 30 year's operational service experience in the London Fire Brigade. He started his career as a firefighter in the London Borough of Greenwich in 1978 and has served predominantly in the south and east of the city. Following promotion to Assistant Commissioner 1994 he has held a number of senior roles including, Head of training and recruitment and management of the eastern sector of London. He was appointed as Deputy Commissioner in early 2001. As Roy is a specialist in community education he will be addressing the community awareness issues at the Conference. Roy's presentation will look at the vexing subject of measuring the effectiveness of any given community and education/awareness program an issue that is becoming increasingly important in an era of budget pressures.

### Conference Sponsors

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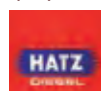
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### Registration

Registration for the Wildfire Conference is now open, to register your attendance at the Conference please visit the website at [www.wildfiremanagement09.com](http://www.wildfiremanagement09.com).

### IWMC09 Conference Managers

Managed by Tour Hosts Pty Ltd  
GPO Box 128, Sydney NSW 2001 Australia  
P: + 61 2 9265 0700  
F: + 61 2 9267 5443  
E: [wildfiremanagement09@tourhosts.com.au](mailto:wildfiremanagement09@tourhosts.com.au)

For further information please visit the Conference website at [www.wildfiremanagement09.com](http://www.wildfiremanagement09.com)



[www.wildfiremanagement09.com](http://www.wildfiremanagement09.com)

# SPOTLIGHT ON VOLUNTEERS

## ROUGH, RUGGED AND READY FOR 4WD TRAINING

Story by Inspectors Bill Britt and Robyn Martin  
Photographs by Inspector Bill Britt

**P**eople often think that far western NSW is a vast flat plain, devoid of hills and escarpments and therefore not suitable for four wheel driver training.

Volunteers from the Far West Team, however, recently put their driving skills to the test when they participated in a Rural Fire Driver course held at remote but beautiful Moona Vale Station, north east of Broken Hill.

The rugged course was designed to allow members the opportunity to drive and negotiate vehicles over any terrain likely to be encountered during fire and other emergency situations. The vehicles used ranged from the smaller Nissan/Hilux Group Vehicles and Landcruiser fire units to mid-range Mitsubishi Canters right up to the heavy Category 1 Isuzu Fire Tanker.

Members of Wilcannia HQ, Wilcannia, White Cliffs, Menindee and Cobar HQ Brigades attended the course and had a fantastic time. The facilitators travelled from Hay, Bourke and Ivanhoe to assist with mentoring, training and assessing the participants.

The two day course included manoeuvring over rough uneven ground, driving through sandy creek beds, traversing over and across steep terrain and training in recovering vehicles bogged in sandy conditions. Participants swapped vehicles, undertook various challenges and gained valuable experience and confidence in their abilities over the challenging 120km long course.

It wasn't hard work all the time though. There were numerous opportunities for taking in some absolutely spectacular scenery and for visiting a number of historical and cultural sights along the way. They camped in shearer's quarters at



Moona Vale and dined on roast suckling pig, cooked to perfection on a spit.

Congratulations must also go to all the participants who took time out of their busy lives to commit to advancing their skills and capabilities. All the participants were successful in attaining the Rural Fire Driver qualification and will be awarded their certificates of competency in due course.

The Far West Team are extremely grateful to Group Captain Rick Howard from Moona Vale Station for his assistance and support in organising the event and allowing us the opportunity to visit this amazing part of our state.

**TOP:** Participants enjoying the amazing scenery during a break and driver/vehicle change.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Ruins of the White Cliffs to Broken Hill Cobb and Co change station. The rugged course was designed to allow members the opportunity to drive and negotiate vehicles over any terrain that may be encountered during fire and other emergency situations.



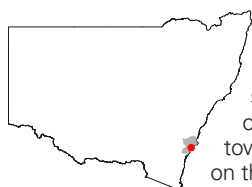


**NORTH EAST OF  
BROKEN HILL:  
ARE WE THERE YET?**

## BRIGADE IN PROFILE

**Name of Brigade:** Lake Conjola  
**Year brigade formed:** 1957  
**Current Captain:** Stan Firman  
**Current President:** Eric Harper  
**D/T/Z:** Shoalhaven

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



Lake Conjola is a small rural village that is situated some 14km north of the historic township of Milton on the south coast of NSW. The Lake Conjola

RFB was officially formed in November 1957, following a series of large bush fires that swept through the district. The first captain of the Lake Conjola RFB was Stan Milham and the initial membership totalled 15 active personnel. The Lake Conjola RFB has had six captains since its formation to the present day, the longest serving of whom was Albert Landow, who was the incumbent captain of the brigade for 18 years.

The first meetings of Lake Conjola Volunteer Fire Brigade were held at the local School of Arts. The first station for the brigade was a single bay fibro shed. An incurable white ant infestation meant the fibro was later replaced with our current, modern, two bay brick structure - white ant proof!

### What was the most recent milestone for the Brigade?

Lake Conjola celebrated its 50th anniversary in November 2007.

Highlights of the celebrations included the presentation of six individual plaques to past captains and families of past captains of the brigade, as well as cutting of a 50th anniversary cake by the Brigade Captain and Mayor of Shoalhaven City Council.

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

The fact that we have only had six captains since 1957 is pretty unique.

### What type of area do you cover? (e.g. farm/urban/bushland)

The Lake Conjola RFB covers an area that consists of farming land and village land and a large expanse of bushland. The brigade also covers Lake Conjola and an infamous section of the Princes Highway.

### What types of incidents does your brigade attend?

The brigade attends incidents involving bush alight, motor vehicle accidents, structural fires, and boat fires. We also assist the Ambulance Service and SES with rescues when requested. We attend hazard reduction burns as the need arises. Over the years our brigade members have



also made themselves available for RAFT and STARG deployments within NSW and interstate.

### What vehicles do you have?

The Lake Conjola RFB has had a total of four appliances in its history, the first of which was an old council truck that was converted into a Cat 8, followed by another Cat 8, a Cat 2 Hino and our present Cat 2 Isuzu tanker.

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

The Lake Conjola RFB conducts a flexible training programme that consists of a monthly maintenance component, a compulsory attendance component and a non-compulsory attendance component.

The members are given training in pumping scenarios, hydrant work, hose lays at incidents, structural fires, emergency drill, electrical safety, correct use of hand tools and extinguishers, first-aid, communications and mapping.

Individual members of the brigade have assumed an area of training and it is his or her responsibility to conduct a theoretical lesson for the other active members of that area of training as per the training programme, followed by a skills based practical lesson.

Our brigade's training programme is designed to cater for the needs of all our members, whose ages range from 15 years up to our most senior member, Deputy Captain Ernie Penfold, who still enjoys active status at the grand age of 86 years.

### What are some unique skills and features of your brigade?

Lake Conjola is a tiny community that triples in size over the Summer. This brings with it significant challenges as many tourists are unaware of the fire regulations in the area, so informal community education and fire safety plays a big part in what the brigade does.

### What community events does your brigade participate in?

The Lake Conjola RFB conducts Christmas seafood raffles, which the many holidaying folk in our village look forward to each year. In years gone by the brigade, under the captaincy of Albert Landow, together with his wife Margaret, held such events as bonfire nights, bingo, raft races, breakfast at the beach on Australia Day and carols-by-candlelight each Christmas Eve.

Written by Ian Stewart.

**TOP: Members of the Lake Conjola Brigade outside their Station during their 50th anniversary celebrations.**



Manager South, Jeff Lucas, during the unveiling of the 50th anniversary plaque.



Lake Conjola Cat 2 Tanker and Station



Our first Cat 8 tanker and meeting place



Our second Cat 8 tanker and crew



Our new station (Left) and the old one

# in focus:volunteers

In 2001, the rusting remains of Hornsby Heights' first bush firefighting vehicle - a 1942 Chevrolet Blitz nicknamed Puff and belonging to The Gorge Volunteer Bushfire Brigade - were found on a farm in Mudgee.



## Puff lives again!

*"Puff has been restored to it's original glory."*

Barely recognisable, members of the brigade brought it back to the Shire where a very small band of men, most of whom had former links to The Gorge and Hornsby Heights Rural Fire Brigade, set about the painstaking and tedious task of restoring it to its original glory.

Every Friday for the past seven years, they have lovingly worked on the task, which necessitated not only the actual hands-on work but also many hours spent sourcing parts and trips made

at their own expense all over Sydney and further afield. Recently, the task completed, it was passed with flying colours by a representative of the Historic Fire Engine Association and is now registered as a Historic Fire Engine.

The new Puff was never intended to be used as a firefighting vehicle but will be available within the Shire to promote the work of the Rural Fire Service.

Story by Annette Collins



## A postie with passion

Australia Post driver, Warren Knight, has been named a winner of the Australia Post Community Champion Award for his dedicated involvement with the Ridgeway Rural Fire Brigade for over 14 years. Warren says he volunteered for the Rural Fire Service primarily to assist the community in which he lives.

"The Rural Fire Service is like a family," he said, "I gain a sense of community spirit and camaraderie as well as being kept physically active by my volunteer work."

The Australia Post Community Champion program celebrates the contribution of Australia Post people who provide valuable voluntary support to the community. Winners receive \$1,000 to donate to their chosen charity or community organisation and a \$100 gift voucher for their own use.

Warren has decided to give his \$1000 donation to the Ridgeway Fire Brigade for new equipment.

## Tragedy in north coast fire

The NSW Rural Fire Service is deeply saddened by the loss of National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) officer Mr Bryce Laut, who died while fighting fires on the mid-north coast of NSW in late October.



Mr Laut was known to many RFS members through his employment with the RFS in the Narrabri and Grafton Regional Offices from 1995 to 1998 and through his long service as an RFS volunteer, particularly in the Mudgee area.

For the past ten years Mr Laut was one of the NPWS's most experienced and senior firefighters in northern NSW. He was a respected and well-liked colleague and friend to many in NPWS, the RFS and the community. Bryce was a long term member of the RFS with service in other bush fire brigades before moving to Mudgee and joining the Mudgee Bush Fire Brigade.

Mr Laut was employed as the Planning Officer for the RFS Castlereagh Region from 1995 to 1997, before taking up the role as Acting Deputy Regional Co-ordinator, then substantive Planning Officer for the RFS Northern Region for a period in 1997-98. He maintained his links with the Mudgee Brigade. Operations Officer at the Cudgegong Fire Control Centre, Paul Dewick said they were extremely honoured to have had Mr Laut as a part of their team for so many years.

"Bryce dedicated himself to anything he put his mind to and was one of the nicest blokes going round. He had a great love for the bush and would go out of his way to help anyone," he said.

Along with many other RFS members, Commissioner Fitzsimmons also attended the Memorial Service which was held Lake Innes Nature Reserve, near Port Macquarie in late October.

"Our thoughts, prayers and wishes are with Bryce's family and loved ones, crewmates and colleagues," he said.

*Thanks to Mudgee Guardian.*

Are you, or  
have you been,  
in the Army,  
Navy or Air  
Force?



If you have served overseas as member of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), we would like to know.

The Service is currently trying to find out how many members of the RFS are also members of the ADF - Army, Navy or RAAF - and are, or have, served overseas. Please contact Dick Tucker, Executive Officer for Committees, Awards and Protocols by email, letter or telephone call and advise which Service, for how long, your speciality (i.e. pilot, seaman, etc) and whereabouts you served

Dick Tucker, Locked Bag 17, Granville, NSW 2142  
Dick.Tucker@rfs.nsw.gov.au Phone: 8741 5473

This information will enable the RFS, at some appropriate time in the future, to acknowledge your sacrifice and service to our nation.



## On target for gold

Peter Jones, archer and Community Safety Officer in the Riverina Highlands, came home from the Police Games with three out of three medals, winning two gold medals and a silver.

"This was my first competition at this high level and to come home with three out of three medals is amazing," Peter said, "I only hoped to come home with a bronze but this has blown me away." The Australasian Police and Emergency Services Games held in Coffs Harbour in October 2008. The RFS had 15 representatives in the Police Games. Most were competing in the shooting and cycling events and Peter was the only archer.

Peter competed in the three archery disciplines and won gold in FITA (Olympic style), gold in IFAA (field targets) and silver in 3D (replica animals made from polyurethane). He missed out on gold for the 3D round by only three points!

For the RFS crews on hand at the Home and Away set it was time to 'hurry up and wait' so they sat back in the sun to take it all in. Photo by Nadine Morton.



## A FIERY END FOR HOME AND AWAY

By Nadine Morton, Davidson Rural Fire Brigade

Filming was grinding to a halt, anticipation was in the air and nearly all the faces were famous. The Warringah Pittwater District had been asked to assist with filming the end of season cliffhanger for Channel 7's Home and Away.

"Home and Away?" I hear you say. How often do you get the chance to put a fire out, be involved in pyrotechnics and sit in the sun mingling with the stars of tomorrow?

Now in its 20th year, Home and Away is well known for nurturing some of the great young talent that Australia has to offer. While those of us who live on the northern beaches also think it does a great job of promoting our fantastic little part of the world.

Around 30 volunteers from local brigades responded to the call from Channel 7 to attend the week-long shoot. Filming took place at a purpose-built set that would house the final moments of the 2008 year for this long running show.

The set for the next few days of filming was just near the now defunct Waratah Park (better known as Skippy Park) in Duffys Forest. It was kind of an eerie feeling as most of us hadn't been there since the 'bush kangaroo' days, many years before. All of us had fond memories of Rangers Stations, helipads and of course who could forget Sonny with that unique whistle that would bring Skippy bounding over! There is



RFS at the Home and Away finale: How often do you get the chance to put a fire out, be involved in pyrotechnics and sit in the sun mingling with the stars of tomorrow? Photo by Nadine Morton.

even talk that the Rangers Station is soon to be heritage listed.

We arrived on set for an 1130hr start. There was plenty of crew rushing around getting prepared for the day and many extras milling around hoping to chat to one of the actors.

For us it was time to 'hurry up and wait' so we sat back in the sun to take it all in. I have to say that even though I haven't been here since Skippy was around its still a great place. Sitting atop a slight hill with the sound of lyrebirds and kookaburras and a nostalgic thought that maybe, just maybe, Skippy may just jump on by!

But for now we have to be content with the planned burns, explosions and pyrotechnics that are part of the filming sequences on set. Our role for the next few days is to provide fire protection for the high risk scenes, simulated rescues on camera and also to assist as extras.

The production crew gained valuable guidance on RFS procedures by State Media Officer Inspector Ben Shepherd and Operations Support Officer Alex Chesser of the Warringah Pittwater Zone. They were on hand to ensure that what all of us RFS



volunteers were doing on camera (and off) was as realistic as possible.

Home and Away regularly seeks the assistance of the NSW RFS to support them in filming scenes that involve fire and pyrotechnics. "Attending an event like this allows the RFS to promote the work we do within the local community," Inspector Shepherd said.

Senior Deputy Captain Bernie O'Rourke of Duffys Forest Brigade was my Officer In Charge (OIC) for the day and when asked why he had given up four days of his own time for this event, including two days of work, his reply was easy: "doing this helps bring a greater awareness of the different ways the RFS assists the local community".

As night fell, the smoke seemed to creep in ghostlike rays of light out from the trees. The temperature dropped as the earlier Spring-time weather faded away into the past.

Suddenly a booming voice called out: "Action!" Actors, extras and all of the emergency services are in full flight playing out the disaster scene. Buildings started to burn and explosions shatter the silence.

Finally we're on! RFS members in either structural or bush fire PPE jump into action. Patients are being evacuated from burning buildings and it's all been done expertly by some of the Duffys Forest crew.

For me and the other non-CABA's, we did the background stuff - rushing back and forth with hoses, hoolie tools and whatever else looked good on camera.

Eventually between countless takes, camera angles, explosions, sirens and fire the final scenes were shot. Directors pat each other on the back and our 14-hour day has come to a close.

Jess Joel, long time member of Duffys Forest RFB was heard to say that even though she didn't know many of the actors that she: "had a great time and would definitely do this again".

As a member of Davidson RFB and also the newest RFS member on set this was definitely a great experience and the behind-the-scenes encounters were an eye opener. Even in the short time I've been a member I've been involved in numerous HRs, publicity ventures, social events and now this. I am already having trouble remembering what I did with all my time before I joined the RFS.

**TOP:** The car ignites at the school formal, Home and Away. Credit: Tarsha Hosking, Seven Network.

**CENTRE:** Miles (Josh Quong Tart) is dragged out of the burning building. Home and Away. Credit: Tarsha Hosking, Seven Network.

**BELOW:** Jai (Jordan Rodrigues) Miles (Josh Quong Tart) Annie (Charlotte Best) Irene (Lynne Mcgranger) and Geoff (Lincoln Lewis) after the school formal crash. Home and Away. Credit: Tarsha Hosking, Seven Network.



## RENEWING GUM FLAT

Only two years ago the Gum Flat Brigade was on the verge of closing, but when there was a chimney fire in the town the residents decided to pull together and rebuild their brigade.

Gum Flat/Staggy Creek residents called a meeting to discuss the future of their brigade. There were a number of options available and the community decided to rebuild the brigade with the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Previously the Gum Flat Rural Fire Brigade consisted of two Tanker Trailers and a handful of members.

Gum Flat Brigade now has 30 active members and recently attended a successful Village Firefighting workshop for 70 firefighters from the Northern Tablelands Team.

In their effort to revitalise the brigade the members have thrown themselves into training and re-accreditation. They have attended Nationally Accredited Training in Bush Firefighting, Advanced Firefighting, Chainsaw Operation and more recently, Village Firefighting.

Captain Greg Brabant acknowledges the effort put in by both old and new members.

"Although the training seemed a heavy burden to begin with, particularly for the older members, we have all learned new skills," he said. "The newer members now have an excellent base on which to build their practical fire skills."

In early, 2008 a Category 2 tanker was donated to Inverell by Coffs Harbour. The tanker, affectionately known as "The Pimple" became Gum Flats first dedicated firefighting appliance in many years. In August last year, a diesel JCS Izuzu became available for the brigade which replaced "The Pimple." This vehicle has better water carrying capacity, is four wheel drive, has crew protection and a separate crew area.

During September last year the Gum Flat has put their equipment and training into practice attending a number of incidents in their own area as well as assisting neighbouring brigades.

### Next steps

The next step in revitalising the brigade is to build a station. Money was allocated to Inverell Council in the 2008-09 budget. The new double bay colour bond shed will be first stage towards a Category 2 Station. The station will become a focal point for the area, housing the Brigade's tanker, providing a place for meetings, get togethers and the continuation of their training.

**ABOVE:** The five man fog attack at the Village Firefighting training. Got wet but had fun. Photo by Chris Wallbridge.

**CENTRE:** The Gum Flat community are in good hands. Left to right: Raymond White, Greg Brabant, Jo White, Norm Maberly-Smith, Nick Rhoades.

**BELOW:** At the Village Firefighting training. Photo by Angela Daly.



# MyRFS

## TWO OUT OF THREE BRIGADES USE MYRFS

By Matt Gould, Online Communications

**B**rigades as far flung as Bilambil, Telegraph Point, Silverton and even Lord Howe Island are choosing to use MyRFS as their preferred way to keep up to date with what's happening in their brigade, their district and across the State.

More than 66 percent of brigades across the State have one or more members registered for MyRFS. This means that these brigades are directly linked in to real time communication and data from the Service.

### Most isolated brigade picks up MYRFS

Region East brigades in particular, are seeing the benefits of MyRFS with 95 percent of brigades now registered to use the site, including the most isolated brigade in the State - Lord Howe Island!

Chief Superintendent Mick Beltran, who is responsible for the island's brigade said MyRFS has really taken off on the island. "The internet plays a significant role in the life, businesses and public administration of Lord Howe Island," he said.

"Members are registered on MyRFS and share the currency and flexibility of the site in common with their mainland RFS colleagues."

### Online popular with Executives

The Commissioner and the RFS Executive are driving the Services' adoption of online services. Assistant Commissioner Mark Crossweller said he was a supporter.

"Brigades should be congratulated on their willingness to embrace new technologies, such as MyRFS, to help them manage their brigade activities," he said.

Online Communications Manager, James Williams says the RFS is committed to making MyRFS even more useful and user friendly.

"For the last three years we have been incorporating volunteer feedback into MyRFS. Regular workshops and information sessions are run with volunteers around the State by members of the Online Communication team," he said.



Members of the Lord Howe Island Brigade who stay connected through MyRFS.

This approach is paying off with more and more brigades registering their members on MyRFS. Waterfall Brigade in the Sutherland is one such brigade – they have every single brigade member registered for MyRFS.

"Our target was 100 percent sign-up for MyRFS," Waterfall Captain Kelly Browne said.

"Our motivation was to ensure that everyone had access to the features that MyRFS has to offer," she said.

Waterfall Brigade is using MyRFS to reduce the workload on their administrative roles by asking members to update their address and contact details themselves through MyRFS.

"Our members manage their own personal details, see what incidents they've attended, access Service Standards and read up on news and incident information from across the State - as well as so many other things."

### Launch of the District News function

With the new District News functions, brigades can now look forward to more

direct communication from districts through MyRFS.

"We are definitely looking forward to getting news from our district through MyRFS," Captain Browne said, "it's certainly going to make my life easier as a Captain and, I hope, reduce the amount of paperwork sent through from district on a monthly basis."

### District and Regional managers come on board

District and regional managers are also seeing the benefits of the District News functionality.

"MyRFS registered members will be able to easily access important news and correspondence from their district, without the risk of it getting lost or not being passed on."

"The District News functionality will be an invaluable avenue of information for brigades and districts alike," said Region North Manager, John Parnaby.

District News functions are being progressively rolled out across the State.

# BUSH FIRE BULLETIN READER SURVEY

Overall, how appealing did you find this edition?

- Very appealing
- Fairly appealing
- Neutral
- Fairly unappealing
- Very unappealing

Comments: .....

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For each of the following, please indicate or comment on the features you were interested in reading in this issue (tick column applicable)

	Yes, I was interested	interested	I will use this section
<b>Incidents</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> .....	<input type="checkbox"/> .....	<input type="checkbox"/> .....
<b>General News</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> .....	<input type="checkbox"/> .....	<input type="checkbox"/> .....
<b>Training</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> .....	<input type="checkbox"/> .....	<input type="checkbox"/> .....
<b>Operations Liftout</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> .....	<input type="checkbox"/> .....	<input type="checkbox"/> .....
<b>Spotlight on Volunteers</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> .....	<input type="checkbox"/> .....	<input type="checkbox"/> .....

Please list the types of stories, or specific story ideas, you are interested in reading in the Bush Fire Bulletin

.....

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**Cut out and mail to:**  
**Bush Fire Bulletin**  
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 Reply Paid 67059 Granville NSW,  
 2142 (No stamp required)

**or email your details to:**  
 Bushfire.Bulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au

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## BUSH FIRE BULLETIN ADVERTISING RATES & SPECIFICATIONS

NOTE: ALL RATES ARE BASED ON PER ISSUE. Popular sizes shown here only.

To view or download the **FULL RATE CARD** go to: [http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/dsp\\_content.cfm?CAT\\_ID=510](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/dsp_content.cfm?CAT_ID=510)



	Measurements (Width x Height)	Casual Rate Per Issue	RHP First 12 pages	12 Month Contract rate	12 Month Contract RHP First 12 Pages
Spread	<input type="checkbox"/> 420 x 297mm	<input type="checkbox"/> \$2810	<input type="checkbox"/> \$3232	<input type="checkbox"/> \$2670	<input type="checkbox"/> \$3070
Full Page	<input type="checkbox"/> 210 x 297mm	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1405	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1616	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1335	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1535
1/2 Page	<input type="checkbox"/> 132 x 186mm	<input type="checkbox"/> \$984	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1132	<input type="checkbox"/> \$935	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1075
Inside Front Cover	<input type="checkbox"/> 210 x 297mm	<input type="checkbox"/> \$2038	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1936	NA
Inside Back Cover	<input type="checkbox"/> 210 x 297mm	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1967	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1869	NA
Outside Back Cover	<input type="checkbox"/> 210 x 297mm	<input type="checkbox"/> \$2178	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> \$2069	NA

# VALUES PHOTO COMPETITION

ENTRIES OPEN TO RFS MEMBERS AND THE PUBLIC

## YOU CAN WIN

### OVERALL WINNER PRIZE

- \$1,000 Photographic Equipment Gift Voucher

### 2ND OVERALL WINNER PRIZE

- \$500 Photographic Equipment Gift Voucher

### 3RD OVERALL WINNER PRIZE

- \$300 Photographic Equipment Gift Voucher

Winners and their story

"BEHIND THE PRIZE-WINNING PHOTO"  
will be profiled in the Bush Fire Bulletin.

## HOW TO ENTER

Send your digital image to:

Email: [valuesphotocomp@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:valuesphotocomp@rfs.nsw.gov.au)

Subject: Values Photo Competition

Entrants name and contact number

**PLEASE NOTE:** photos submitted must be digital of a high resolution and per email must not exceed 8mb.

CLOSING  
DATE  
END OF JULY 2009

## CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

- The competition is open to all members of the RFS and the general public.
- There is no age restriction.
- To be eligible, photos submitted must be digital of a high resolution and must not be over 8mb in total.
- Proof of consent may be required
- Photo must be fully released by the owner (in writing) for reproduction by the RFS
- Photos of children under the age of 16 years of age require a written consent from parent or guardian
- Winners will be selected at the discretion of the RFS and all decisions are final
- Winners will be announced on 31.8.09 at the NSW RFS Website: [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au) and [www.myrfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.myrfs.nsw.gov.au)

## Can you picture this?

*What does Friendship and Support look like?  
What images come to mind when we say  
someone is Resourceful, or full of Integrity?*

WE ARE CALLING FOR PHOTOS FROM  
MEMBERS THAT BEST REPRESENT THE  
7 RFS VALUES

- Mutual Respect
- Adaptability and Resourcefulness
- One Team, Many Players, One Purpose
- Integrity and Trust
- Support, Friendship, Camaraderie
- Community and Environment and
- Knowledge and Learning.

The photos will be used in ongoing marketing  
and education of the values.



# What is courage?

Courage is a fire fighter  
standing before the gates  
of hell, unflinching and  
unyielding and with eyes  
of steel, saying this:

*"Here I stand, I can do no other."*

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd  
at the National Day of  
Mourning February 22



CFA  
**FIRE**  
SECTOR  
COMMANDER



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



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Cover Photo Sunday 8 February 2009, near Dederang, Victoria: RFS firefighters from Illawong Brigade fought the blaze next to the Kiewa Valley Highway. Courtesy of The Border Mail. Previous page Saturday 7 February 2009, Labertouche, Victoria: A Country Fire Authority Sector Commander looks up at a giant fire raging in the Bunyip State Park near Labertouche. AFP Photo/William West. All other photos, unless otherwise stated, taken and owned by the NSW Rural Fire Service Corporate Communications.