



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



# NSW RFS ANNUAL REPORT

2014/15

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## **SUMMARY REVIEW OF OPERATIONS**

## Fire season overview

The 2014/15 fire season commenced with indicators pointing to an above average bush fire potential for the eastern half of NSW, and a normal potential for the western half of the state.

Earlier predictions of a strengthening El Nino with the potential for a challenging bush fire season saw activity early in the 2014/15 season. Overall, however, NSW experienced relatively benign bush fire conditions and a quieter bush fire season than anticipated.

The beginning of the season saw significant activity in the north and western parts of NSW as well as the Blue Mountains, near Sydney.

Over the fire season NSW experienced more than 7,837 bush, grass and scrub fires, which burnt 183,677 hectares across NSW. Due to ongoing dry conditions 13 districts extended their Bush Fire Danger Period through until the end of April.

Notwithstanding the conditions within NSW, the services of NSW RFS were in demand due to significant bush fire activity which saw the deployment of personnel to Victoria, South Australia, and for the first time, to Western Australia. Crews were also deployed to Elcho Island in the Northern Territory to assist after Cyclone Lam destroyed parts of that area.

### Aviation

The reduced requirements for aerial assistance during 2014/15 reflected the relatively benign bush fire season.

During this time the NSW RFS purchased an additional medium utility helicopter, a BK117B2, to support firefighters on the ground. A total of three helicopters, two medium and one light, are now available year-round to conduct aerial firefighting and fuel management activities. During 2014/15 the State Air Desk made 1,095 dispatches to fire and emergency operations across the state, and enacted 28 contracts for rotary and fixed wing aircraft. Contracted aircraft continued to be sourced through the procurement processes of the National Aerial Firefighting Centre.

The owned and contracted aircraft were supported by over 100 tactical aircraft on the 'Call When Needed Approved Operator List'.

During the fire season of October-March the State

Air Desk facilitated the re-deployment of aircraft to assist interstate fire operations in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

All aviation operations were supported by trained aviation specialists, with the strong aviation training program generally held across the state during the winter months.

## OPERATIONS ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

|                             |         |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| Total bush and grass fires  | 7,837   |
| Area burnt                  | 183,677 |
| Total fire ban declarations | 19      |
| Section 44 declarations     | 5       |
| Personnel deployments       | 52,240  |
| Aircraft taskings           | 1,095   |
| Firefighter injuries        | 138     |
| Human lives lost            | 1       |



### Preparing for the fire season

The prevention of bush and grass fires remained the major focus for the NSW RFS during 2014/15. There was also considerable effort in the identification and reduction of hazards through the Bush Fire Management Committees and preparation and strategic placement of resources for the fire season during the reporting period.

#### Hazard reduction

Substantial works by all land managers to reduce bush fire hazards were completed in 2014/15 despite adverse weather conditions. Of the 9,604 proposed hazard reduction activities, 76.6 percent were completed.

Nearly 53 percent of annual hectares treated historically are treated between March and May each year. Autumn 2015 saw NSW experience significant rainfall events in the east, resulting in major flooding in some areas. This had a substantial impact on the ability to perform hazard reduction activities. This reduced the treatment window in the months when most treatment occurs, leading to a reduction in area treated, with a consequent reduction on properties protected by these works.

Despite the adverse weather conditions a total of 152,157 hectares were treated by hazard reduction activities, providing protection to 116,977 properties.

A full report on hazard reduction activities can be found in Appendix 1.1.

In support of volunteer brigades, mitigation crews undertook 1,063 services as part of the Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents (AIDER) Program and completed 12,362 kilometres of vegetation management as part of mitigation requests.

#### State Operations

During 2014/15 State Operations completed a refit of the Operational Communications Centre to facilitate the expansion of the Centralised Dispatch Trial from two to four rural fire districts. This refit included significant upgrades to the communications and data capabilities within the Centre along with an increase in the capacity and

**Despite adverse weather conditions across Autumn, a total of 152,157 hectares was treated by hazard reduction activities. This protected nearly 117,000 properties.**

quality of the systems used by operators to deliver services.

A trial of the Fire & Rescue NSW (FRNSW) ESCAD system was implemented during the reporting period. The aim of the trial is to determine how a Computer Aided Dispatch system may be structured to suit NSW RFS business practices and the needs of members.

State Operations continued to work with the Information, Communications and Technology section to enhance the ICON (incident reporting) system and develop future capability requirements. This included commencing a trial of mobile intelligence tools to allow field operators to provide live incident data to Fire Control Centres and State Operations.

The reporting period also saw the integration of the post-incident reporting function into the ICON system to ensure that ICON continues to expand as the single point of truth for incident information. While further refinement continues, this Brigade Incident Reporting System (BIRS) means only one area needs to be referenced for incident details. In addition, this new system will facilitate further flexibility for members reporting on incidents, including a mobile friendly application.

Other significant operations undertaken by State Operations with the support of other units included:

- Coordination of five section 44 declarations during the bush fire season, and
- Deployments of personnel to Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia to assist with incidents in those locations.

## Public information

The NSW RFS website is the key communication channel for bush fire warnings and information in NSW, carrying alerts and warnings on behalf of all agencies including NSW RFS, FRNSW, Forests NSW and National Parks & Wildlife Service.

During the reporting period, the NSW RFS website was significantly enhanced and upgraded to ensure an increased level of capacity and redundancy, especially during major incidents.

The website was redesigned from the ground up, including a complete overhaul of the hosting environment, content management system and a review of all content.

The new website went live in July 2014. Across the financial year, the website had more than 3.7 million visits, with 7.6 million pageviews.

14 November 2014 was the busiest day on the NSW RFS website, as fires burned at Warrimoo in the Blue Mountains. On this day, there were nearly 500,000 pageviews of content, including major fire updates.

As the use of technology changes, so does the way people access the website, with one in three users now accessing the site through either a mobile phone or tablet. To reflect this changing dynamic, the website is fully accessible on all devices.

Social media also increased in prominence across the reporting period, with the Service's Facebook page reaching more than 46 million people, and content from the NSW RFS page was displayed 152 million times. The Service's Facebook page continues to be one of the most popular social media channels of all NSW Government agencies.

The Service's media training program continued to grow across the reporting period, with three weeks of training conducted state-wide. The program trains journalists and other media personnel in fireground safety and survival, and provides information which allows them to report on bush fires from an informed position.

## Increasing community action

The Service continued its successful Prepare Act Survive public awareness campaign in the reporting period. The 2014/15 'Planning to make a plan is not a plan' campaign was the final year of a three year campaign which commenced in 2012.

Across the lifetime of the campaign, the proportion of people with some form of plan for what to do during a bush fire increased from 36 percent to 47 percent.

Development commenced on a new three year advertising and awareness campaign in early 2015. This included a comprehensive review of research

conducted after the 2013 NSW bush fires. The new campaign commenced prior to the 2015/16 bush fire season.

To increase the Service's capacity and capability to engage with the community, a series of regional forums were held in all four regions to allow members to share ideas on community engagement, and to provide updates on Service-wide activities.

## Improving operational capacity

The NSW RFS continued to invest and implement operational capability initiatives in line with risk assessments.

## Response and Coordination

During the reporting period, the NSW RFS completed a comprehensive review of driver and vehicle safety with outcomes expected to be implemented in 2015/16. A review was also initiated to evaluate marine firefighting operations, including consideration of training requirements and standard vessel designs.

The NSW RFS supports the Ambulance Service of NSW by operating a number of Community Fire Responder (CFR) units across the state. An officer from the NSW RFS continues to work with the NSW Police Force Counter Terrorism section to ensure preparedness and maintain information sharing arrangements.

Memoranda of Understanding and other agreements continue to be forged and reviewed by the NSW RFS with partner agencies which include the NSW Volunteer Rescue Association and Marine Rescue NSW.

## Fire Behaviour Analysis

The Fire Behaviour Analysis Team expanded to eight personnel prior to the commencement of the 2014/15 bush fire season, although in comparison to the 2013/2014 fire season, this year was relatively quiet operationally with more than 70 fire behaviour predictions prepared. The majority of these were prepared early or late in the season.

The unit provided a number of products and services to the organisation including:

- Fire behaviour and smoke plume predictions
- Routine weather briefings and monthly fire weather reports
- Grassland curing and fuel load grids updated at least weekly, and the

## SUMMARY REVIEW OF OPERATIONS

### ➤ Deployment of Portable Automatic Weather Stations.

Major projects completed by the section during the year included significant enhancements to the Fire Weather Portal and evaluation of the NSW RFS Prescribed Burn Forecast Tool and Smoke Plume Model. The unit facilitated grassland fire behaviour experiments in Tamworth in collaboration with the CSIRO and the Victorian Country Fire Authority. Four NSW RFS fire behaviour analysts have been assessed as competent against the National Module this year. The unit has also assisted with the production of new training courses and the delivery of existing courses where fire behaviour is a key component. Prescribed Burning is becoming a new focus for the unit via support for the weekly weather briefings and the Prescribed Burn Forecast Tool.

A number of new projects have commenced including a lead role in the project to develop a new National Fire Danger Rating System and enhancements to Grassland Fuel State assessment and Predicted Forest and Woodland Fuel Load processes.

### Arson prevention

The 2014/15 fire season saw some success in the area of arson prevention due to the combined efforts of NSW RFS fire investigators and the NSW Police Force, with several persons apprehended for arson-related offences during the reporting period.

Improved information sharing between agencies has been made possible by the Arson Trend Analysis System (ATAS) which was introduced in 2012 as well as analysis undertaken by the NSW RFS Arson Intelligence Office.

During 2014/15 fines for arson-related offences were increased under the *Rural Fires Act 1997* and government agencies were given greater powers to issue fines in their local areas for careless ignitions by landholders. New legislation also allows for infringement notices to be issued for those who discard lit cigarettes and reporting mechanisms have been implemented to allow members of the public to report such incidents.

### Operational Doctrine and Standards

The section's primary function is to develop operational doctrine that forms the basis of subsequent procedures and training material. During the year consultation draft doctrine and procedures were developed for Operational Exercising. Staff also participated in the development of the fourth edition of the AIIMS Manual (Australasian Inter-agency Incident Management System) at a national level, and made

several updates to the NSW RFS Firefighter's Pocket Book mobile app. In addition, a hard copy version of that app was also under development.

The section was expanded during the reporting year to develop and provide training for district and operational officers (OpOs). This involved delivering a range of (two week) induction courses for new OpOs and for those moving up through the OpO levels, plus a suite of initial training courses relevant for each level. Five induction courses and 12 initial training courses were developed and run during the year.

The annual State Operations Exercise was designed by the section and held in August, supported by ten State Operations courses. From 2015/16 the section will also be taking over delivery of incident management training and assessment, and nine courses were under development for that program.

The section continued to support the Incident Controller Major Incident (ICMI) program for senior incident managers, notably in the design, refinement and conduct of a series of sophisticated assessment events for participants.

**The number of Remote Area Firefighters has increased to nearly 300. Three additional units were established in Chifley, Gosford and the Southern Highlands.**

### Operational, Mitigation and Support Services

#### State Mitigation Support Services

Throughout 2014/15 mitigation crews located across the state continued to provide essential hazard reduction preparation works in support of volunteer brigades. Mitigation crews undertook 1,063 services as part of the Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly

Residents (AIDER) Program and completed 12,362 kilometres of vegetation management as part of mitigation requests.

SMSS was involved in a four month operation which, in the wake of Cyclones Lam and Nathan, provided emergency accommodation for the remote indigenous community of Galiwin'ku located on Elcho Island, approximately 300km north west of Darwin.

SMSS also provided equipment and personnel to support the NSW Police Force operation during the Martin Place Siege.

### **Remote Area Firefighting and Specialised Operations**

The remote area capability of the NSW RFS continued to expand this year with the addition of three new Remote Area Units in Chifley, Gosford and Southern Highlands, further increasing the operational numbers of Remote Area Firefighters to 296 in 22 rural fire districts. To further increase the safety of remote area operations a working group was formed to establish a remote area vertical access training package to enable Remote Area Firefighters to operate safely when working around cliffs and steep terrain.

Rapid Aerial Response Teams (RART) responded to 33 fire calls utilising three aircraft and increased its ability to better protect firefighters by providing training to 24 Remote Area Firefighters as Down the Wire Technicians. This now gives the program the ability to extricate firefighters by winch who may become isolated by fire.

In June 2015, 35 of the NSW RFS Remote Area Firefighters took part in the annual State Rescue Board Search and Rescue Exercise (SAREX). This year the Service took a key role in the organising and planning of the event. The SAREX was located in the Bendethra Valley on the Far South Coast of NSW with the NSW Police Force, NSW State Emergency Service, NSW Volunteer Rescue Association, Ambulance Service of NSW, Wilderness Bushwalkers Rescue Squad and WICEN. In total, 150 people took part in the event over three days, with all search teams staying overnight in the field. The exercise saw participants searching for a downed plane in the area, that prior to the exercise had been sling loaded in to position by NSW RFS helicopter HT201.

The Heavy Plant Program continued with the Heavy Plant Register having more than 400 contractors with over 3,000 items of plant pre-registered with the Service. The rollout of Plant Operations Manager and Heavy Plant Supervisor training packages has allowed for greater control and operational use of plant during incidents.

## **Community Resilience**

### **Community Protection Plans**

During the 2014/15 reporting year 32 Community Protection Plans (CPPs) were completed for communities at risk of bush fire across NSW. A further 47 are in progress. This brings the total of CPPs completed for NSW communities since the commencement of the initiative to 78.

### **The Bush Fire Resilient Schools Program**

In 2014/15 the NSW RFS commenced a trial in four rural fire districts of the Bush Fire Resilient Schools Program. The aim of the program is to work with education providers to enhance the resilience of bush fire prone schools in NSW through planning and preparedness. The program enhances a Principal's existing leadership by providing the tools required to understand the local bush fire risk. The program and its tools will also support the school to prepare its own effective bush fire emergency planning. The trial is scheduled to conclude mid-way through 2015/16, providing an opportunity to evaluate the program and consider the next steps.

**Neighbourhood Safer Places  
are a place of last resort during  
a bush fire. There are now  
983 locations identified  
across 129 local  
government  
areas.**

### **Neighbourhood Safer Places**

Throughout 2014/15 the NSW RFS increased the number of Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSPs) within NSW to 983 sites in 129 Local Government Areas, surpassing the targets of the NSW 2021 Goal 28.2.3. In addition, the NSW RFS conducted inspections of all sites within NSW and facilitated works to improve the resilience of a number of NSP sites across NSW. See Appendix 1.2.



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### Hotspots Program

The Hotspots Program, run in conjunction with the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) provides landholders with the knowledge and skills to actively participate in fire management for risk and biodiversity. The focus during the reporting year was on areas of high risk and biodiversity, delivering 13 workshops to 201 landholders and producing 123 fire management plans covering 22,258 hectares.

### Firesticks Program

The NSW RFS supports the NCC in the delivery of the Firesticks Project. This project aims to use fire to enhance ecosystem resilience within culturally connected landscapes, integrating contemporary and Aboriginal fire practices to create mosaics across the landscape, reduce wildfire risk and bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities together to achieve better results for land management.

During 2014/15 one such example of the strong partnership between the NSW RFS and Local Aboriginal communities was the Firesticks workshop where 30 Indigenous rangers undertook bush fire training and NSW RFS staff received training in cultural awareness.

### Customer Service Centres

The NSW RFS Customer Service Centres (CSCs) are located in Batemans Bay, Coffs Harbour and Glendenning, and in conjunction with local district staff, are responsible for the delivery of numerous programs and services. These include development assessment applications referred under S100B of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* and S79BA of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, identification and annual inspection for Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSPs), the implementation of CPPs, completion of environmental assessments and delivery of the Hotspots program, in partnership with the NCC.

During 2014/15 the CSCs did not meet targets for development assessment referrals, largely due to a significant increase in the number of referrals received. During the same period the CSCs contributed resources to enable the increase the total number of NSPs to 983, completed 32 CPPs, attracted 201 landholders to Hotspots workshops and completed all Reviews of Environmental Factors within agreed timeframes, exceeding the targets for all four of these programs.

### Improvements in infrastructure

#### Building Management

In conjunction with Government Property NSW NSW RFS has established a preventative maintenance program for all NSW RFS leased facilities, as well as the renewal of multiple contracts to ensure the smooth running of the facilities. The NSW RFS has implemented some improvements and enhancements to facilities which include the NSW RFS Headquarters meeting rooms' audio-visual capability and video conferencing equipment to enable superior communications with regional and remote locations. In the reporting period, the Operations Communications Centre was renovated to house the centralised dispatch system hardware and software. The reliability of the State Operations and State Air Desk video walls was improved by integrating the power supply into the building UPS system, which was upgraded in the last reporting period.

#### Building Projects

In the reporting period Fire Control Centre (FCC) and Brigade Station plans and specifications were aligned to new Australian architectural standards, Natspec. A review of the Standard Design Fire Control Centres was conducted including consultation with members from relevant districts and builders. The review produced some very effective ways to reduce costs and improve functionality in the Standard Design specifications. An method for continuous improvement and review of the Standard Design Fire Control Centres was put in place.

Significant work went into fixed FCC Infrastructure with the completion of the Hunter Valley (Singleton/Muswellbrook) FCC located in Bulga along with the commencement of planning for the Castlereagh, Liverpool Range, Tamworth, Chifley Lithgow and South West Slopes FCCs.

Across the reporting there were 44 new NSW RFS Stations constructed with a further five which receive extensions or enhancements.

#### Research and Development

In the reporting period a Personal Protective Clothing Working Group developed a new-style Wild Land Garment which will be trialled throughout the 2015/16 fire season. Extensive consultation with NSW RFS members included more than 280 responses.

The completion of the disposal of Class B foam containing perfluorooctane sulfonates (PFOS) saw

approximately 35,000 litres of environmentally harmful foam from across the state being disposed through high temperature incineration.

## Radio Communications

The upgrade of the Private Mobile Radio (PMR) and Paging networks continued this year and is due for completion in the next reporting period. This major project represents a total investment of some \$50 million into radio and paging systems, network and architecture. The addition of this digital radio architecture is vital in ensuring volunteer firefighters have the latest and most reliable communication capabilities.

NSW RFS communications systems use over 650 towers that support the P25 digital Private Mobile Radio (PMR), GRN Radio and Paging networks comprising of nearly 35,000 pagers and radios. These networks are used to minimise the impact of bush fires and emergency incidents on people, the environment and the economy. As at 30 June 2015 the radio replacement and system upgrades were 83 percent completed.

The paging network upgrades were completed in December 2014 and 64 towers and 75 huts have been replaced, built or strengthened to meet the new P25 digital PMR network.

Phase 1 of the hardware and software upgrades to deliver the centralised dispatch system was also completed, this has enabled Mid North Coast, Warringah/Pittwater, Orana and Shoalhaven to come on line and provide the basis for further future expansion. This included upgrading communications hardware, additional operator dispatch consoles, radio/audio management units and establishing connectivity to the NSW GRN core.

## Procurement

As part of the NSW Government Agency Accreditation Scheme for Goods and Services Procurement, the NSW RFS achieved accreditation to obtain goods and services not available under whole-of-government contracts up to a maximum contract value of \$20 million. In undertaking this accreditation process the NSW RFS actively sought to further improve its procurement by embedding the procurement policy and procedures across NSW RFS teams across NSW, involving significant training both at Headquarters and across each region.

The intention was to talk to each and every NSW RFS team member involved in any purchasing or procurement. Category planning is growing as a discipline, with at least 10 categories identified and working groups formed. Proposed procurement over \$30,000 is now tracked and reviewed before

**The AIDER program assists infirm, disabled and elderly residents. 1,063 AIDER services were carried out, assisting some of the state's most at-risk people.**

being issued to the market, the contract register is being audited to identify opportunities and gaps, and a number of improvement initiatives have been completed (including the simplification of many

of the templates and documentation). Business partners are providing positive feedback about the availability to procurement personnel and the quality of advice and service received.

## SAP

The SAP Enterprise Asset Management project (EAM) went live across the state this reporting period. Commencing with four pilot districts on 1 December 2014 then Regions East and North on 30 March 2015 and Regions South and West on the 1 June 2015. SAP EAM is the single source of data for all vehicles, equipment and real estate and includes standard maintenance regimes for all fleet and equipment across the state of NSW. This was a multi-agency project with Fire & Rescue NSW and the NSW State Emergency Service.

## Fleet

The Service's engineers worked to develop two new prototype firefighting appliances, including a Category One single cab carrying 4,500 litres of water with a remote-controlled front-mounted monitor. This prototype also has improvements in manual handling, suction hose storage and rake hoe storage. A new Category 10 Urban Firefighting appliance has also been built as a prototype and will be made available over the next 12 months to various districts to validate the build concept.

Lighting and livery upgrades across the whole

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firefighting fleet were tested and installed delivering an improved level of visibility and functionality, now becoming the standard for all service tankers.

A retrospective review of 'in service' fleet was taken in regard to pump operating noise, with noise output assessments undertaken on over 120. The results of the review have been incorporated into noise mitigation strategies in all new builds.

A review of the Service's Marine Operations was collaboratively undertaken with Operations during the year as was the construction of a new RFS standard utility light vessel. This new standard is designed to move people and equipment and is also fitted with a firefighting pump, delivering on operational requirements, similar to a light to medium tanker. Stability and seaworthy tests were undertaken, confirming suitability for both day and night operations before the vessel entered service in Shoalhaven.

The provision of firefighting pumps for all purposes was again tendered to market. Assessments included pump capability tests, pump and engine evaluation and noise mitigation opportunities. A contract has been resolved for the next five years.

### ICT

The NSW RFS successfully moved its computing environment into two NSW government data centres; one in Unanderra and Silverwater. This involved moving the entire computing and network infrastructure from the secondary data centre in AC3 (Eveleigh, Sydney, NSW) to the government data centre in Unanderra (near Wollongong, NSW). The data centre at Headquarters remains active. The new data centres will significantly improve the way ICT operations are run through these state-of-the-art facilities with significant redundancy, improved reliability, reduced power consumption, and a smaller carbon footprint.

During this period, the NSW RFS also completed a full Disaster Recovery test and later returned all systems to the now normal state of High Availability and redundancy.

Phase 1 of the Emergency Management Operations System (EMOS) was developed and deployed to support the Emergency Operations Centres in NSW. This project was jointly funded by the then Ministry of Police and Emergency Services (MPES) and NSW RFS. EMOS has been created as a module in the ICON suite and is the first module from that suite to move into the Cloud, thus delivering high availability and can easily expand to support high numbers of users, when required.

The system provides a single, on-line information management system for use in Emergency Operations Centres (EOC). EMOS significantly

enhances the preparation for, response to, and recovery from emergencies anywhere in the state of NSW. This improved situational awareness directly benefits agencies participating within the EOC.

### Our members

The NSW RFS has 74,516 members across NSW, 22 percent of those are female. The salaried staff totals 849 with 34 percent of those being female.

### Youth Participation Manual and Workshops

Children and young people have always played an important part in the NSW RFS, taking on roles across the organisation and developing their skills for the future. In September 2014 the Commissioner launched the Youth Participation Manual, the newest resource to help all members play their part in keeping children safe.

This Manual reflects the Service's commitment to youth participation. It is intended as a practical resource, supporting the Service's ability to provide a safe environment for the children and young people.

To support the Youth Participation Manual a series of workshops was conducted for districts interested in improving their skills and knowledge to engage young people more effectively. To date 12 workshops have been held, primarily in Region North.

### Site Management Plans

The Site Management Plans (SMPs) project was designed to enable consistency within the NSW RFS in the application of health and safety across the state. SMPs have been designed to collect and maintain necessary information about hazards, risks and controls at NSW RFS fixed facilities. Individual SMPs identify site hazards and control measures, provide adequate emergency response details to the site and create and monitor corrective actions. The project was designed to enable consistency within the NSW RFS in the application of health and safety across the state.

The process behind a state-wide roll out of this scale was to create a staged approach:

- (a) one-on-one mentoring at District Level to complete initial SMPs
- (b) District Managers coordinating the rollout of SMPs across their other fixed locations with support as required.

In March 2014 part (a) commenced with the target for implementation at 47 Fire Control Centres, 128 Brigade stations and seven other fixed facilities. That is one Fire Control Centre and two Brigade facilities in each district. This target was completed



**153 members, including staff and senior volunteers, attended the Leadership Forum in Dubbo.**

in November 2014 ahead of schedule.

The Health, Safety and Welfare Unit is working closely with Regional Services to complete the second stage by March 2017.

### **Leadership Forum & Young Members Forum**

The NSW RFS is committed to the ongoing development and support of its leaders. The NSW RFS hosted the 3rd Leadership and Young Members Forum in Dubbo from Tuesday 5 May to Saturday 9 May 2015.

#### **Leadership Forum**

The theme for this year's Forum was 'Leading for Success'. A keynote address was followed by sessions involving invited speakers from inside and outside the Service with Victoria Cross recipient Mark Donaldson as the guest speaker.

The Forum was attended by 153 members. Representation was well balanced across the state and the online evaluations highlighted a very positive response to the forum overall.

#### **Young Members Forum**

The Young Members Forum was conducted using the Change It Up program, designed and delivered by the Foundation for Young Australians. Change It Up sparks young people's ideas for change in their community - in this case participants considered how to better engage young people in the NSW RFS. The format is highly interactive with a focus on positive solutions, giving young people an opportunity to act on issues and ideas that are important to them and their community, build connections locally and more broadly across geographic areas.

## **Government Sector Employment Act 2013**

The NSW RFS has made significant progress in the implementation of the Government Sector Employment (GSE) Reform, which commenced on 24 February 2014 with a three year transition period. To strategically drive the transition, a GSE Reform working group was established with key subject matter experts from the Membership and Strategic Services and the SAP team. Progress with the implementation of the four key reform areas to date have included:

#### **➤ Senior Executive Reform**

The NSW RFS Executive structure, High Level Implementation Plan and a Communication Strategy was endorsed by the Secretary, Department of Justice on 23 July 2014 for implementation. Stage One of the implementation focused on the transition of the SES roles to the new structure which was completed by 10 November 2014. Stage Two focused on the transition of Senior Officer-equivalent roles (NSW RFS Level 14) to the new structure which was completed by 2 March 2015. The full Senior Executive Reform for the NSW RFS is now complete, well ahead of the 24 February 2017 timeframe.

#### **➤ Recruitment**

Since 24 February 2015, the NSW RFS has been fully compliant in its recruitment practices under the GSE Act. The changes to recruitment, including the engagement of temporary and ongoing employees, has been widely communicated to hiring managers and staff members. To support the new recruitment process policies, processes and templates have also been developed and implemented.

#### **➤ Capability Framework**

Significant progress has been made to the transition of role descriptions from the 2008 Capability Framework to the 2013 Capability Framework under the GSE Act. In the current phase, a systematic roll-out of role descriptions by functional areas in Headquarters is currently occurring. Discussions have also commenced to roll out revised role descriptions across Regions and districts. Fact Sheets, checklists and flow charts have been developed to assist in the communication of the rollout. The Capability Framework reform is on target to meet its timeframe of full implementation by August 2016.

#### **➤ Performance Management**

The NSW RFS has been working in conjunction with the other agencies in the Justice Cluster on the implementation of Success Factors, the performance management system selected for the

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Cluster. A scoping study is due to commence to establish license, implementation and integration costs for the NSW RFS. The NSW RFS is working towards a rollout of Success Factors by December 2016.

### Industrial Relations Policies and Practices

On 24 February 2014, NSW RFS employees employed under the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act (PSEM Act) 2002* were transitioned to the new *Government Sector Employment Act 2013 (GSE Act)*. This new legislative change is applicable to all NSW Government Sector employees.

The *GSE Act* aims to simplify employment structures in the Government Sector, build a modern and effective workforce, attract and retain talented people, and deliver the best service to the people of NSW.

The *GSE Act* is supported by the *GSE Regulations 2014* and the *GSE Rules 2014*. The *GSE Regulations* includes provisions retained from the *PSEM Regulations 2009*, provisions transferred from the *PSEM Act 2002*, and other matters included by the *GSE Act*. It includes general provisions relating to employment and conditions of employment, leave, allowances and workforce diversity.

The *GSE Rules 2014* deals with additional operational and procedural employment matters. The Rules address key areas such as: merit based employment, review of promotion decisions, workforce diversity, transfers and secondments, performance management, misconduct procedural requirement and additional senior executive provisions.

### Statement setting out WHS performance

Consolidation and improvements to the Service's Health and Safety Management System occurred during the period. Core to this has been the implementation and monitoring of strategies associated with:

- the development and implementation of health and safety related tasks responding to the internal OHS Audit Program 2011/12;
- the rollout of health and safety Site Management Plan (SMP) tools for use at all NSW RFS fixed site locations. SMPs have been introduced to all 47 NSW RFS districts and further deployment has occurred at Brigade Stations and other NSW RFS facilities. A program for implementation across

all NSW fixed facilities is being developed for the next two years;

- the implementation of a structured and documented investigation and recommendation review process for health and safety incidents to ensure that opportunities for improvement and incident prevention are integrated into NSW RFS business practices;
- identification and management of WHS risks and utilisation of risk registers. The SMP implementation project has enabled identification of new and emerging risks which are managed using a documented corrective action process;
- the generation of a chemical database for NSW RFS site based chemicals accessible to all NSW RFS members.

Actions have been undertaken in response to the NSW Auditor-General's Performance Audit 'Fitness of firefighters' Report April 2014. A draft five-year Health and Fitness Plan has been developed and is in a consultative phase prior to implementation across the Service.

Statistical information about Reported Injuries and Workers Compensation Claims is located at Appendix 3.6

### Equal Employment Opportunity

The NSW RFS Policy 3.3.1 Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and EEO Management Plan recognises the inherent value of having a workforce that reflects the diversity of the wider community of NSW. The Management Plan is the mechanism that supports the implementation of EEO practices. Some examples of the work undertaken by the NSW RFS in 2014/15 includes the:

- Implementation of the recruitment and assessment principles set out in the *Government Sector Employment Act (2013)* and *Government Sector Employment Rules (2014)*. These provisions strengthen the application of the merit selection processes and ensure all employment decisions are based on an assessment of capabilities, experience and knowledge of a person against the requirements of a role to ensure the best person and fit is selected.
- Continued support of the Workplace Advisory Committee (WAC). The WAC is a high level advisory committee that critically examines employee-related issues, proposals and any other high level matters that may arise in the workplace affecting employees. The membership of the WAC consists of the Executive Directors, six employee representatives including Region North, South, East, West, Headquarters and

Operational Mitigation and Support Services / Customer Support Centres and two PSA representatives

- Circulation of draft Service Standard 1.5.4 Respectful and Inclusive Workplace to the membership. This Service Standard reinforces the NSW RFS commitment to providing and maintaining a workplace where staff and volunteer members are treated with dignity, courtesy and respect at all times. Specifically this Service Standard addresses behaviour associated with bullying, discrimination, vilification and sexual harassment.

In 2015/16, the NSW RFS will:

- Finalise draft Service Standard 1.5.4 Respectful and Inclusive Workplace and develop an online training program to support it;
- Support women in leadership positions by sponsoring the attendance of female members at programs designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of women leaders;
- Update the Next Generation Workforce Strategic Plan for the period 2016-2021. The Plan will focus on the factors necessary to create a workforce that can meet the challenges of coming decades. The Plan will include actions to increase diversity among the membership;
- Continue to promote and support the principles of the Flexible Membership Model, which seeks to provide more options and greater flexibility within the volunteer membership.

## Multicultural Plan

The NSW RFS Multicultural Plan 2014-2017 builds on the achievements of the 2011 Plan and has assisted NSW RFS to continue to implement the principles of multiculturalism. The 2014-2017 Plan was developed in accordance with the Multicultural Policies and Services Program (MPSP) and reflects the MPSPs three activity areas and the seven outcomes which support those activity areas.

During the 2014/15 period, the NSW RFS:

- Established the Multicultural Plan Steering Committee as a mechanism to ensure continuous improvement and the monitoring and review the Plan. The key functions of the Steering Committee are to: monitor and review the Multicultural Plan; report on the actions within the Multicultural Plan; share information about additional programs or initiatives that are occurring throughout the NSW RFS and; provide input into the content of the Multicultural Plan at the time of its development;
- Promoted Harmony Day to all members of the NSW RFS and made the Multicultural Plan

available to members through MyRFS;

- Commenced work on updating the NSW RFS Next Generation Workforce Strategic Plan for the period 2016-2021. This strategic workforce plan will have a key focus on diversity;
- Continued to collect information about member's ethnic or migrant background on the volunteer membership application;
- Continued to be represented on Multicultural NSW Metropolitan Multicultural Coordinators forums;
- Integrated the actions within the Multicultural Plan into organisational business planning and reporting processes;
- Updated eight multilingual fire safety information fact sheets in ten languages;
- Continued to support vulnerable members of the community, including those from culturally diverse backgrounds, through a range of operational initiatives such as the AIDER Program, Neighbourhood Safer Places and Community Protection Plans.

In 2015/16 NSW RFS will continue to support ongoing actions within the NSW RFS Multicultural Plan and:

- Research and promote a list of suppliers who can deliver suitable cultural awareness training to NSW RFS members;
- Work with Multicultural NSW to ensure the Fires Near Me and the Bush Fire Survival Plan apps are promoted among multicultural communities; and
- Develop a communications plan to encourage volunteers to complete the equity and diversity profile in their membership record.

## Disability Plan

The NSW RFS Disability Plan is based on the NSW Government EmployABILITY Strategy. In addition to the Service's responsibility to support members with a disability, the NSW RFS is committed to providing increased community participation and protection against bush fires for persons with a disability.

In 2014/15 the NSW RFS:

- Continued to provide easy access and facilities for people with disabilities through standard designs for new premises across the state;
- Provided bush fire information to the community in a range of formats and channels useable by people with disabilities, including using Auslan interpreters during periods of major bush fire;
- Ongoing promotion of the NSW RFS Flexible Membership Model which promotes the full spectrum of roles available to volunteer members to encourage greater participation from people



## SUMMARY REVIEW OF OPERATIONS

(including people with disabilities) who in the past might not have contemplated membership; and

- Ongoing support of the AIDER (Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents) program. This program supports some of the most at-risk community members by helping them live more safely and confidently in their home in areas where bush fires may start.

In 2015/16 the NSW RFS will continue its focus on delivering and building on the initiatives outlined throughout the Disability Plan.

### Aboriginal Services

Throughout 2014/15 the NSW RFS continued to build on the initiatives contained within the Aboriginal Services Plan. Some examples include:

- A diversity component is now a permanent fixture in the Working with Young People Course. This program incorporates units from Certificate IV in Youth Work. At least one program is scheduled per year; nominations are invited from both staff and volunteer members;
- Operations Services continues to contribute to the 'Keeping Our Mob Safe' Strategy through the Bush fire Resilience for Aboriginal Communities (phase 2) Project. Through the delivery of the project outcomes, Aboriginal communities have an increased ability to mitigate against hazard and risk;
- Region South was successful in gaining a school based traineeship through the Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Program; and
- The New England Zone participated in the BackTrack program, which provided around 20 local at-risk Aboriginal youth the opportunity to take part in nationally accredited aviation and air-base operator training.

### Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research

During 2014/15 the NSW RFS strengthened its partnership with the national Bushfire and Natural Hazards Co-operative Research Centre (BNHCRC) by increasing the number of members involved in research projects. The NSW RFS currently has two Lead User Representatives and 27 end users involved with the BNHCRC.

The two lead user representatives concentrated on two research areas:

- (i) bush fire and natural hazard risks; and
- (ii) economics, policy and decision-making.

The 27 end users concentrated on three research areas:

- (i) bush fire and natural hazard risks;
- (ii) resilient people, infrastructure and institutions; and
- (iii) economics, policy and decision-making.

The NSW RFS hosted a BNHCRC Research Advisory Forum (RAF) on 8-9 April 2015 for 125 participants from across Australia including researchers and other emergency management stakeholders.

Details of the NSW RFS Research and Development contributions are set out in Appendix 3.10. More information on the BNHCRC can be found at [www.bnhcrc.com.au](http://www.bnhcrc.com.au)

### Financial Services

The NSW Budget allocation for the total expenses of the NSW RFS was \$332.9 million; an increase of \$1.8 million or 0.5 per cent.

The funding provided enabled the Service to:

- continue its commitment to bush fire prone communities through a combination of fire mitigation work crews, fire mitigation grants, hazard reduction allocations to Local Government and investment in Neighbourhood Safer Places;
- progress the program to upgrade the private mobile radio network and paging infrastructure to ensure volunteers have modern and reliable communication tools;
- enhance equipment and facilities for volunteer firefighters through the provision of tankers and other firefighting vehicles, new and upgraded Brigade Stations and Fire Control Centres and upgraded firefighting equipment including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE);
- improve community awareness through the Prepare Act Survive public awareness campaign; and
- respond to issues that arose while responding to the January 2013 fires, including improvements to the NSW RFS public website, strengthening of the Bush Fire Information Line and enhanced ICT infrastructure to support key systems during bush fire emergencies.