

## **COMMISSIONER'S COMMENDATION FOR BRAVERY (INDIVIDUAL)**

### **Senior Deputy Captain James Angus Burge - Stockinbingal Rural Fire Brigade, South West Slopes Zone, Region West**

Senior Deputy Captain James Burge is from the Stockinbingal Rural Brigade, where he has been a member for the last 12 years.

On 8 December 2012 at approximately 1600hrs, James Burge was driving and noticed a house alight at 57 Berthong Street, Cootamundra. James attempted to rescue a member of the public from the burning home, before other emergency services had arrived. During the attempted rescue, James suffered a serious laceration to his left lower leg.

On arrival James identified that a person was inside the burning house. James attempted to gain entry to the house through a door but was unsuccessful due to a locked security screen. James was able to gain entry by breaking a glass window along the side of the house with his left foot.

Upon entry to the house James suffered a serious laceration to his left calf, which severed ligaments to his left Achilles tendon, nerves and blood vessels. James was treated on scene by ambulance officers and was transported to Wagga Wagga Base Hospital where he underwent surgery and spent over a week recovering. James spent a further 12 weeks recovering at home following the incident and has since had two further surgeries on his left leg and foot in an attempt to regain the function of his lower leg in the long term. Unfortunately, due to the severity of the fire, the single occupant located in the house was unable to be rescued and subsequently died in the house.

The unselfish nature of James' rescue attempt coupled with the serious injury he incurred as a result of attempting to save a life is worthy of nomination for the NSW Rural Fire Service internal bravery award.

Senior Deputy Captain James Burge is a worthy recipient of the Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery.

## **COMMISSIONER'S COMMENDATION FOR SERVICE (INDIVIDUAL)**

### **Captain Harvey Alan Bailey - Dapto Rural Fire Brigade, Illawarra Zone, Region East**

Captain Harvey Bailey joined Dapto Rural Fire Brigade in September 1974 as a high school student and quickly became involved in all facets of brigade activity. Harvey was soon elected as Equipment Officer and then Senior Deputy Captain. In July 1979 he was elected Captain, a position he still holds today.

Harvey has undertaken a wide range of training in the NSW Rural Fire Service. He has been involved in training since the first formal training was introduced. His commitment to personal development sees him qualified as a Group Leader, BA Operator, Chainsaw Operator, Rural Fire Driver, Rural Fire Instructor and BA Instructor.

Harvey has been to a large variety of fires and other incidents both locally and across NSW including fires around Grafton, Coonabarabran, Burrinjuck Dam and Canberra as well as assisting with the clean up following several hail storms around Sydney and floods including the 1998 floods in Wollongong. He has fulfilled the role of Sector and Division Commander at many major fires.

Harvey has been the driving force behind many projects undertaken by the Dapto Brigade, in particular the various extensions and renovations to the Brigade Station. He was in the Brigade when

their “station” was an open shed on a farm, then the move in 1977 to the new Fire Station in Wongawilli. He was involved in building a carport on the back of the station in 1978. He also managed other projects such as the design, building or re building of several vehicles, including a District support vehicle, the design and fitting out of the District Aviation Support Trailer, and refurbishment of plant such as a bobcat used in various activities.

Harvey is dedicated to the NSW Rural Fire Service in general, not just the Dapto Brigade. He is continually looking for ways to improve things and ways to fund these improvements. It was Harvey’s vision for better training facilities in the early 1990s that led to the Dapto Brigade leasing land behind the Fire Station from BHP and establishing a Hot Fire Training Facility. It took several years to get it up and running but it has been used by Brigades from various NSW Rural Fire Service Districts as far away as Port Macquarie as well as several other Emergency Services. The facility has been pulled apart, rearranged and refurbished several times. Harvey continues to come up with ideas for modifications and improvements to the facility and while not all the ideas are his, if someone has an idea he thinks is a good one, he will try (and usually succeed) to make it happen. Overall, under Harvey’s stewardship and initiative, the Brigade now enjoys the benefits of a first-class four bay station, with the extensive training and support facilities, which benefit a broad range of NSW Rural Fire Service users from many areas.

### **Inspector Robyn Anne Favelle - Far West Team, Region West**

Inspector Robyn Favelle has, over recent years, identified communication difficulties involved in fire response activities in the remote area of Far Western NSW. She has committed herself to providing an improved level of service to the NSW Rural Fire Service brigades that protect these remote areas and has developed a close and effective relationship with and understanding of these brigades, their members and the extreme operational conditions under which they operate.

Inspector Favelle has taken responsibility for bush fire related operational management and communication across the entire north west corner of NSW and has actively embraced new and innovative technologies to do so. The introduction of Facebook and the possibilities that this technology provided was quickly recognised by remote brigade members, with the support of Inspector Favelle a number of closed brigade Facebook groups have been developed. These groups now provide timely, accurate and relevant fire and brigade related information directly to the local Rural Fire Service. This has allowed for an enormous increase in the District’s ability to support remote brigade activities and manage ongoing fire reporting and resourcing requirements.

Inspector Favelle has shown a deep commitment to the remote brigades and has developed strong relationships and a level of trust that has never existed in this area before, all of which have assisted the brigades and the Rural Fire Service organisation to provide a much more effective service to their communities. None of this came about easily and is still not well understood or valued by many in the organisation. It has taken many hours of travel and brigade liaison to achieve this outcome and a commitment well in excess of the requirements of her position.

With the success of the closed group process, and to allow other less technologically advanced members the opportunity to participate in the use of Facebook as an effective operational communication tool, Inspector Favelle has developed the Far West Operational Facebook page for the posting of any relevant information. This is available for use by all brigade members across the Far West Team and Inspector Favelle also developed the extremely popular Far West General Facebook page which is constantly updated with as much relevant and topical information as



possible. All of these developments have greatly improved Rural Fire Service communications across a vast area of remote NSW.

### **Senior Deputy Captain Diane Fellows - Bungawalbyn Rural Fire Brigade and Northern Rivers Support Brigade, Northern Rivers Zone, Region North**

Senior Deputy Captain Diane Fellows, became a member of the Bungawalbyn Brigade in the Richmond Valley District on 1 March 2000, just a month before her 56th birthday. She soon became very active in the Brigade, not only as an active firefighter, but also as Secretary and Treasurer. In due course, she completed her training and eventually qualified as Crew Leader. She was elected by the Bungawalbyn Brigade as Senior Deputy Captain in 2008 and continues to serve in that capacity. She also functions as the Brigade's Call-Out Officer and Community Engagement Representative. Diane Fellows became the Brigade's Permit Issuing Officer in 2007. She is especially active as a Community Engagement Representative teaching the children of primary schools in the Richmond Valley area since 2001. In this capacity, she has also served the public on the NSW Rural Fire Service "Primex" Exhibitions in Casino every June for the last 12 years.

When the Northern Rivers Support Brigade was formed in 2008, Diane Fellows became a dual member of the Northern Rivers Support Brigade and was elected Captain, a position she held until June 2013. Diane not only guided the Northern Rivers Support Brigade through the difficult formative years, but she also became Captain of the Catering Section. In this role, she has not only catered for all Northern Rivers Zone in-house training courses, but at different times, has also catered for other sectors of the Emergency Services, such as the NSW Police. Her catering for official Northern Rivers Zone functions, such as the official opening of the Northern Rivers Zone's Fire Control Centre Complex in 2012 and Award Ceremonies, has been faultless. She also assisted in catering for the Region North Exercises for the last six years, as well as the State Championships in 2008 and 2010.

Despite her own sometimes fragile health, Diane Fellows continues to serve the NSW Rural Fire Service in these capacities. She is a role model for all volunteers who serve in the NSW Rural Fire Service in our Zone and Region North.

### **Firefighter Bernard John Fisher - Blaxland Rural Fire Brigade, Blue Mountains District, Region East**

Firefighter Bernard (Bernie) John Fisher, after moving to the Blue Mountains in April 1965 became a member of Blaxland Volunteer Bushfire Fire Brigade, which at the time was the closest brigade to his home. Joining in an era of less formalised training, he attended his first fire a relatively short time later.

Bernie was voted into the position of Brigade Treasurer in June 1969, a position he holds some 45 years later and one that he continues to perform with distinction. He is the longest serving office holder of the Brigade in its 54 year history. Bernie has held the position of Deputy Captain for nine years, Brigade Driver, Assistant Equipment Officer for several years and Assistant Station Officer for seven years. He remains highly active within the Brigade.

During his 48 years of dedicated service to the community of the Blue Mountains, Bernie has attended numerous fires, storm damage events and other incidents and has always been prepared to share his vast experience with newer members and provide advice and support to his Brigade Field Officers.



He joined the Australian Red Cross for the benefit of the Brigade. By becoming a member of the Australian Red Cross and achieving an Instructors Qualification, Bernie has been able to assist numerous members of Blaxland Brigade as well as other brigades in obtaining First Aid competencies.

As Treasurer and a member of the Brigade Executive Committee for over four decades, Bernie has been instrumental in not only ensuring the Brigade's financial management has been of the highest order but he has been a mentor to the many members who have come into the Brigade Executive. The other members of the Brigade Executive have relied heavily on his skill and expertise and it is no surprise that other brigades in the District have sought his advice from time to time.

The past decades have seen enormous change in financial management practices and the responsibilities placed upon Treasurers. Bernie has been the driving force in ensuring that the Brigade has always met its obligations and ensured the Brigade's strong financial position. Be it in his role as Treasurer, or as an active firefighter, Bernie has always conducted himself with the highest professional and personal standards of integrity. The many hours of work that Bernie puts in behind the scenes to develop and manage the Brigade budget and fundraising program is done without any expectation of thanks or reward, he just gets on with the job to assist the Brigade he loves.

Without Bernie the Brigade and the wider NSW Rural Fire Service would be a much poorer organisation. Bernie is a foundation of the Brigade, a pillar of the NSW Rural Fire Service and an outstanding member of the greater community of the Blue Mountains.

### **Deputy Group Captain Christine Alice Hartley - Tuncester Rural Fire Brigade, Northern Rivers Zone, Region North**

Deputy Group Captain Christine Hartley, joined the Bentley Rural Fire Brigade in the Northern Rivers Zone in 1997, and was accepted as an active member on 3 May 1997. She quickly became an active member of the Bentley Brigade, accepting the duties of Training Officer, Deputy Captain and Permit Officer. She also became a member of Tuncester Brigade under dual membership, and was elected as Senior Deputy Captain and subsequently became the Captain of the Tuncester Brigade in June 2003, in which she also held the position of Secretary. She was also elected Deputy Group Captain in the Northern Rivers Zone in May 2011, a position she still holds today.

It is, however, in her participation in the Northern Rivers Training Team where Christine Hartley contributed most to the high standards maintained in the Northern Rivers Zone.

Christine Hartley's previous training and work as a nursing sister made her a valued contributor to First Aid Training. Her skills as a Driving Instructor are displayed during the Rural Fire Service Driving Courses. Christine Hartley has co-ordinated and instructed many of the courses held in the Northern Rivers Zone for more than 10 years. Her contribution to the Training Team has been invaluable in maintaining the high standards that are the norm in the Northern Rivers Zone.

Christine Hartley has also contributed to training in the community. She is still active in the Community Education Team and activities have included visiting local primary schools teaching the "Stop, Drop and Roll" lessons to the little ones. Her influence as an instructor and co-ordinator has ensured a continuing high standard of training in the Northern Rivers Zone. Her boundless energy and willingness to share her instructional skills to aspiring members is a shining example of volunteering.



## **Captain Neville Denzil Lawrence - Gresford Rural Fire Brigade, Lower Hunter Zone, Region East**

Captain Neville Lawrence joined the NSW Rural Fire Service as a member of the Gresford Brigade in December 1965 and has served continuously since then. He has held the roles of Brigade Treasurer from 1972 to 1993, Deputy Captain from 1970 to 1993 and then Senior Deputy Captain from 1993 to 1994. In 1994 he was elected as Captain of the Gresford Brigade, a position he still holds.

Neville was also a member of the Lower Hunter Zone (concept) Working Party from 2000 to 2001. Neville's contribution to the Service is heralded in Dungog Shire. His contribution to the Gresford Brigade is outstanding.

Whilst Neville's leadership and professional knowledge is clearly evident in his position as Brigade Captain, his initiative and resourcefulness are the traits that are meritorious and often unnoticed in the public eye. As Deputy Brigade Captain, Neville embarked on an ambitious project in 1985 to refurbish the existing Gresford Station to incorporate meeting facilities, amenities and the construction of a new two bay shed to accommodate firefighting vehicles. This enormous project was fully funded and financed by the Gresford Brigade and Neville was the driving force in all fundraising activities including Friday night raffles at the Gresford Bowling Club, operating the barbeque at the Annual Gresford Billy Cart Derby and catering at local functions. These fundraising ventures have extended over an 18 year period with the shed improvements being completed with an additional bay added to the two bay shed in 2002.

Under Neville's guidance, the Gresford Brigade volunteer their services to direct traffic control at the Gresford ANZAC Day March, supervising admission and parking at the Annual Gresford Rodeo who then make a donation to the Brigade. Neville is also the driving force organising fire support for the Annual Gresford Agricultural Show.

Neville is also a key member of the Community Engagement Team and involved with community workshops to assist with the preparation of Bush Fire Survival Plans, practical use of pumps, fire blankets, extinguishers and sprays. Neville also continues his association with many organisations.

In 2007 he was nominated as Dungog Shire Citizen of the Year for his meritorious contribution to the NSW Rural Fire Service, a Life Member and Committee member of the Gresford Agricultural Show Society, founding member of the Gresford/Vacy Soccer Club, and past Treasurer of Gresford Public School (three years) and contributor to countless working committees in the Gresford area.

Neville was presented with his National Medal in 1998, his second clasp (NM) in 2006 and received NSW Rural Fire Service Long Service Medal (3rd Clasp) in 2012. He was also made a Life Member of the Gresford Brigade in 2002.

## **Deputy Captain Christine (Chris) Ann McGrath - Bombay Rural Fire Brigade, Lake George Zone, Region South**

Deputy Captain Christine (Chris) McGrath has demonstrated leadership and professionalism in assisting in a range of activities within the Zone, ranging from administrative assistance to the Operations Officer, catering for courses, re-invigorating the Operation Support Group in Braidwood and most importantly organising and managing the Cadet Program involving students from the Braidwood Central School. Chris has worked tirelessly in support of these functions, and freely gives her time at sometimes extremely short notice to accommodate requests from Firecom.





One of Chris' passions is supporting youth in our community and she is doing this through the Cadet Program. This is a program that has been running for many years in Braidwood with Chris at the forefront of preparing, delivering and mentoring the students. She recognises the benefits of the program and what it delivers to our youth who are embarking on a new journey when they leave school and joining the wider community in the workforce.

The Operations Officer receives significant support from Chris in many areas. Significantly she has developed a system of maintaining vehicle service records and associated costs which provides information to management on the fleet maintenance program and adds value in allowing historical records to be maintained which feeds into the estimates cycle. This is only one area of support provided by Chris. She along with her husband Graeme, continually provide support with the movement of vehicles and stores and regularly maintain the store in Braidwood.

The development of the Braidwood Office has received significant support from Chris since the original construction phase. Now that the office has been developed, she has made sure that it is kept in an orderly fashion so that it is ready for operations at any time.

Another passion of Chris' is in the field of communications and support roles for scribes and radio operators for the Braidwood Office and Group Officers. She has devoted a vast amount of time in this area and has encouraged her team to undertake Communication Centre Assistants training and ensures that they receive regular training in these roles.

### **Captain/Deputy Group Captain Graeme McGrath - Bombay Rural Fire Brigade, Lake George Zone, Region South**

Captain/Deputy Group Captain Graeme McGrath has resumed the position as Captain of the Bombay Brigade and is also the Deputy Group Captain for the South Group in the Lake George Zone. These roles have been accepted as a result of incumbents leaving the positions. Recognising the need to have roles filled, Graeme has once again accepted the responsibility for them, to ensure functionality in the areas.

In his roles, Graeme has demonstrated exceptional commitment to the NSW Rural Fire Service and consequently to the community. In his role as Captain, he has been a staunch supporter of management in the Zone in order to provide a better level of service. He recognises the need to adhere to Standard Operating Procedures and supports the function of Firecom during operations. He is a very good operator in the field and is prepared at all times to mentor upcoming members. In his own Brigade he has recognised the need to encourage more young members of the community to commit to the NSW Rural Fire Service in order to protect the community in which they live. As a result of this, the Brigade has secured the service of at least 10 new members who have youth on their side. Graeme has been encouraging these members to undertake training in order to prepare them for firefighting roles. He further recognises the need for these younger members to undertake additional training so they can take on officer roles in the near future.

Aside from this, Graeme has supported the Cadet Program as he sees the need to provide the youth in Braidwood with a level of training as they leave school and move out into the community. He is aware of the need to instil commitment in the youth of the town and he sees the Cadets as an important way of achieving this goal. He assists in delivering this mentoring and transfer of skills to youth in the community.

The District regularly calls on Graeme to assist in a range of functions. He is ever ready to come to the aid of the Zone in any capacity needed, be it to assist with movement of vehicles, often using his



own truck to move bulky stores across the Zone, never seeking recompense for this extreme effort despite having a large farming operation to run.

He is also integral to ensuring that newcomers are given the opportunity to learn new skills and implement them. He takes scribes and radio operators when operating as a Group Officer enabling a good grounding for them and an opportunity to practice their skills at every available opportunity.

### **Deputy Captain Glenn O'Rourke - Wollombi Rural Fire Brigade, Lower Hunter Zone, Region East**

Deputy Captain Glenn O'Rourke has been the leading person in developing Community Engagement Strategies within the Wollombi Valley Community. As a part time resident,

Glenn has promoted a better prepared community which has led to a safer community when it comes to bush fires.

This has been achieved through the co-ordination and support of the four local brigades, and with Glenn's expertise and skill in developing an integrated risk based Firewise program of Bush Fire Safety Forums and Survival Planning Workshops. The program events are always well attended and received, with a primary focus on the understanding of local bush fire risk, preparation and the development of Bush Fire Survival Plans.

The model of engagement is based very much on local involvement and interaction between all parties. This successful model has seen Glenn present at the Rural Fire Services Community Engagement and Fire Awareness Conference, where senior personnel from the Country Fire Authority (CFA) were so impressed they travelled to Wollombi to see one of the workshops delivered and the Brigade's engagement model at work.

Following on from this, Glenn was invited as a guest presenter and keynote speaker at the CFA inaugural Community Engagement and Fire Awareness Conference in Melbourne. Glenn's presentation left the delegates discussing how best to apply this model in Victoria for a better prepared community in the face of bush fires. A quote from the Deputy Chief Officer, Steven Warrington: "this model is how the CFA will deliver Community Engagement in the future". In addition, the Wollombi Valley Firewise Team, lead by Glenn, has been presented with both NSW State and National 2012 Resilient Australia Awards.

Glenn has brought nothing but credit to himself, his fellow Brigade members from Group 8 and NSW Rural Fire Service as a whole.

## **COMMISSIONER'S CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION (INDIVIDUAL)**

### **Firefighter Julie Blackmore - Clunes Rural Fire Brigade, Northern Rivers Zone, Region North**

Firefighter Julie Blackmore joined the Clunes Rural Fire Brigade in 1995, she quickly demonstrated her administrative abilities and was elected to the position of Secretary/ Treasurer in 2000 and still continues in those positions to date. Julie has continued to manage the Brigade's administrative functions with a high degree of professionalism with the Brigade's management becoming a model for many other brigades within the Zone to aspire to.

Julie has been instrumental in assisting the Brigade to purchase additional equipment through her knowledge and success in securing external grants and developing a plan for community fund raising

events and brigade raffles. Recently, Julie was instrumental in developing a program for our local brigades to participate in the local “Our House” program where brigade members provide a BBQ to families and patients currently being treated for cancer and residing at the Our House facility in Lismore.

Julie is also a committed firefighter of the Brigade and has attained her Advanced Fire Fighter qualifications as well as many other specialist firefighting skills. Julie is a regular member attending firefighting and other incidents and is a key member in keeping the Brigade’s operational ability during the day when many other local members attend working commitments out of the local community.

Julie continually avails herself to attend many requests for assistance out of the local area including the recent assistance to Queensland with the Brisbane Flood clean up, the Black Saturday Bush Fires in Victoria and many other fire emergencies the Zone has sought and sent members to assist. Julie was also heavily involved in the 2000 Sydney Volunteer in Policing in support of the Sydney Olympic Games.

Julie is continually held in very high regard by her peers, officers and staff within Northern Rivers Zone for her continual selfless support to the NSW Rural Fire Service and broader community.

### **Dr Phillip (Phil) Alan Borchard (Posthumous), Shoalhaven, Region South**

Dr Phillip (Phil) Borchard worked with the hotspots team from October 2011 until March 2013. In the position of Environment Officer, Phil’s role was to deliver Hotspots workshops to landholders in the Southern Rivers area. Focusing on Phil’s home patch in Shoalhaven, Phil delivered five workshop series to almost 150 landholders.

Phil’s passion was for helping people understand how they can live harmoniously with their environment, particularly when it came to his area of expertise, and the topic of his PhD, which was wombats. Phil’s other interest was working with the NSW Rural Fire Service. This made Phil a natural candidate for part of the Hotspots team, which helps rural landholders in areas of high bush fire risk understand how they can manage their risk, whilst also improving biodiversity.

Phil ran a total of 10 workshops during his involvement in the Hotspots program. In evaluation after the programs, landholders have often commented on Phil’s friendly, obliging approach, and how after the workshops, they feel more confident to approach managing fire on their properties. Because of Phil’s work with Hotspots, significant ecological benefits are expected to flow on from the Hotspots program in Shoalhaven.

Phil often went far beyond what was expected of him in his role as Environment Officer. Phil would often make individual visits back to landholders between workshops to assist them in completing their plans, help them to apply for hazard reduction certificates, and give them the extra time and attention to make sure they could make the most out of being involved in the Hotspots program.

Phil’s experience and passion for monitoring fauna also saw the development of a pilot community monitoring component of the Hotspots program. Phil worked closely with a number of Hotspots landholders, and building on the skills developed during the two day program, gave them further insight and tools they could use to undertake ecological monitoring on their own properties. Using motion activated cameras (camera traps), Phil showed landholders the fauna species that are active on their lands. This often included multiple trips to landholder’s properties to set up and check on cameras, often in Phil’s own time, and countless hours of going through thousands of photos to decipher exactly what species landholders had on their properties.





Sadly through Phil's illness, he was not able to continue formal work on the Hotspots program, but this did not stop Phil from continuing to follow up with landholders off his own back. Phil's passion for the community and environment is an inspiration to all the Hotspots team. His nurturing approach to community engagement is sure to leave a legacy of improved fire management for landholders in Shoalhaven.

### **Inspector William (Bill) James Britt - Far West Team, Region West**

Inspector William (Bill) Britt has been a diligent member of the Far West Team staff for a number of years. During this time he has specialised providing Learning and Development opportunities for the volunteers of remote Far West NSW Rural Fire Brigades. During this period, Bill has developed an understanding of the difficulties facing these volunteer members and the disadvantages they face in obtaining updated training and other information due to their remote locations.

After being faced with the issue of distance, remote locations and difficulty in getting people together at central locations for training activities, it became obvious to Bill that the traditional face to face training ethos of the organisation was not viable in the Far West. It also became clear that the computer and internet usage rates across the area were very high, with most people undertaking much of their business activities over the Internet. With this in mind, Bill customised a complete E-Learning process which allows for the theory component of all mainstream NSW Rural Fire Service training packages to be delivered remotely and in the learner's own time and location. After many hours of preparation, approvals and testing, the E-Learning packages have now been fully developed and approved and are being embraced by many members of the remote brigades across the Far West Team.

This process has allowed new members to start obtaining skills as soon as they join their brigade, no longer do they need to wait until a course is available somewhere across the Districts. We are confident that this process will not only increase the knowledge base of our remote firefighters, but it will also encourage new members to take ownership of their new skills and not be dependent upon the availability of others. Due to the success of the

E-Learning packages, it is now much more about practical skills and assessment than face to face presentation.

### **Superintendent John William Cook - North West Zone, Region West**

Superintendent John Cook first joined the NSW Bush Fire Service in January 1968 as a volunteer Bush Fire Officer and as a volunteer firefighter. Then in January 2003 John was appointed as a staff member and has held many management positions within the NSW Rural Fire Service over the years, including District Support Officer, Regional Learning and Development Officer and District Manager at Sutherland.

John was asked out of retirement to take on the role of Acting Zone Manager for the North West Zone at Coonamble in December 2011, a role which he held until the appointment of a permanent officer in February 2013. During this time, John has dealt diligently with the challenges that have faced him, including the management of a very busy fire season whilst being two staff members down. John has also proven to the NSW Rural Fire Service, stakeholders and volunteers, that with the correct leadership, direction, management and encouragement, anything can be achieved.

In the 2012/13 fire season, the North West Zone and Bogan District had a total of 218 fire incidents, with one being a Section 44 declaration. John's leadership during this period has enabled him to



manage a majority of these incidents with the staff that he had. This also required the engagement of the local volunteers and councils. John's strong leadership, direction, knowledge and maturity has assisted in overcoming the many obstacles associated with the remote areas of NSW and this has delivered the expected services of the NSW Rural Fire Service to local communities, many of whom have expressed their appreciation in the improved service delivery under John's leadership. Since the commencement of the permanent manager, John has agreed to stay on in Coonamble for another five months and act as a mentor in this role.

### **Firefighter Laurie Edebohls - Nerrigundah Rural Fire Brigade, Far South Coast Team, Region South**

Firefighter Laurie Edebohls (Secretary Nerrigundah RFB), representing the Nerrigundah Rural Fire Brigade, was contacted to be involved in hosting a community meeting to commence a Community Protection Plan (CPP) and Hotspots program for the Nerrigundah village. Initially this was met with some resistance and disinterest from the broader membership of the Brigade. Laurie, seeing the potential in the CPP for greater community preparedness and pre-incident planning for the Brigade, took ownership of the project and forged ahead. Laurie's rapport with the community and support for the project gave the project credibility. At the time, the community was negative and cynical about new initiatives but Laurie was able to effectively communicate and promote the benefits and then work with the CPP team to steer the project in a direction acceptable to the community. When the initial meeting started to derail as some community members didn't think the entire community was being covered by the CPP, Laurie again intervened and redefined the community being covered by the plan to the entire Nerrigundah RFB area. Laurie has been the strong and essential link between the Rural Fire Service Far South Coast Team, Customer Service Centre planning staff, the Nerrigundah NSW Rural Fire Brigade and the community. He has gone out of his way to organise meetings, including venues, catering and Brigade support.

Laurie has been keeping the Brigade and broader community informed of the project through regular e-mails and updating the Brigade website. Laurie has provided an updated progress report to the community whenever necessary. Laurie has also been an integral player in the success of the Hotspots program (which was a treatment from the works plan in the CPP). Laurie has again updated the community, arranged meetings, venues and catering and thrown his support behind the program giving it recognition from within the community. Laurie has also advised of any contentious issues and assisted with the continued smooth running of the project. Laurie Edebohls has gone beyond the scope of his position as Secretary within the Nerrigundah Rural Fire Brigade to ensure the successful development and implementation of the Nerrigundah CPP and Hotspots projects. Laurie has been a valuable part of the planning team due to his ability to bring the community together in a cohesive manner. Laurie has become the driving force behind the Nerrigundah Brigade, he is the initial point of contact, handles all Brigade activities and has become the backbone of the Brigade. His commitment to the Brigade and wider community is far beyond the scope of his position.

### **Firefighter Gordon (Gordie) William Gam - Emu Creek Rural Fire Brigade, Mid Lachlan Valley Team, Region West**

Firefighter Gordon (Gordie) Gam is a member of both Weddin Headquarters and Emu Creek Rural Fire Brigades in the Weddin area of the Mid Lachlan Valley Team.

Both Gordie and his father Walter (Wally), go well beyond what is expected of volunteers by not only ensuring their own Brigade's response capability is always ready to go but they also provide valuable



assistance to our team by liaising with Weddin Shire Council and our staff to organise the pickup and delivery of tankers for servicing or mechanical breakdowns.

Gordie and Wally are community minded people who have been doing this service for many years and the Weddin Senior Management Team would like to acknowledge their effort.

### **Firefighter Walter (Wally) Gordon Gam - Emu Creek Rural Fire Brigade, Mid Lachlan Valley Team, Region West**

Firefighter Walter (Wally) Gam is a member of the Emu Creek Rural Fire Brigade in the Weddin area of the Mid Lachlan Valley Team and has been for nearly 30 years. Wally, who is 83 years old, is still a very active member and with his son Gordon (Gordie) liaise with our staff and Weddin Shire Council to arrange the pickup and delivery of tankers for annual servicing or mechanical breakdowns and have done so for many years. Both go beyond what is expected of volunteers. They ensure their Brigade is ready to respond at a moment's notice and are prepared to be on standby on bad fire weather days.

The Senior Management Team would like to acknowledge their efforts for their outstanding contribution to the NSW Rural Fire Service.

### **Deputy Captain Rodney James Halpin - Byron Bay Rural Fire Brigade, Far North Coast Team, Region North**

Deputy Captain Rodney James Halpin is being nominated for his heroic act on Sunday 25 November 2012. Rodney was sitting at home with his wife watching the cricket at about 1715hrs, he smelled plastic burning and discovered it was coming from the back porch of the next door neighbour's house. Rodney has been in the service for 20 years and has always kept two fire extinguishers in his car, so Rodney donned his uniform, grabbed his extinguisher while his wife rang triple zero emergency and threw a garden hose over the fence. The fire had entered the roof cavity and Rodney proceeded to extinguish the blaze prior to any fire units arriving on scene. Mrs Joirs, the mother of two young children was home alone and in the shower at the time of the blaze and unaware of the fire.

Rodney has 20 years service, with the NSW Rural Fire Service and his quick action was instrumental in saving his neighbour's possible life and home.

### **Captain William (Bill) Alfred Hovell - Larnook Rural Fire Brigade, Northern Rivers Zone, Region North**

Captain William (Bill) Hovell joined the Larnook Brigade in 1980. He took on the position of Treasurer from 1993 to 1999. He continued his involvement with Brigade management, holding positions of Brigade Training Officer, Brigade Callout Officer, Brigade Community Engagement Officer and Permit Officer. Bill continues to keep the Brigade and community engaged, holding training events with the Larnook School and involvement with the Billen Cliffs Village Fire Management Plan.

Bill was Senior Deputy Captain during the 1994 New Year State-wide Bush Fires. He was involved in subsequent campaigns 2001/2002, 2004 and so on. In 1999 Bill was elected Captain, filling the vacated position. In recognition of his efforts and commitment, Bill was awarded the National Medal.

In 2004, Bill joined the Lismore Training Team as an instructor and he continues to be involved as an instructor and assessor. His specialty is GPS training, not a formal NSW Rural Fire Service subject but one he excels in. He has developed a workshop and has trained several generations of local firefighters on how to use a Navigational GPS.



Bill continues as Captain of Larnook Rural Fire Service Brigade, putting a lot of effort into the job, in addition to maintaining the shed and firefighting equipment. He has developed the Brigade facilities, so they now have a well equipped and comfortable meeting and training room. He is always ready to respond as an officer, instructor or as a firefighter. Bill is highly regarded by his superiors, peers and students.

### **Captain Keith Purvis - Goorangoola Rural Fire Brigade, Hunter Valley Team, Region East**

Captain Keith Purvis has been Captain since 2003 and was instrumental in the Brigade receiving its first appliance, a Cat 9. He promoted Brigade activity and participation at incidents such that the Brigade was then given a Dual Cab Cat 7. In this time, Keith has attended almost all incidents within his Brigade area and numerous incidents within the District and taken crews on a number of "Out of Area" deployments.

The more outstanding feature of Keith's service stems from the fact that for the last two years he has suffered from a serious, debilitating and potentially life threatening illness requiring weekly chemotherapy. Despite this, he has remained consistently active as Captain, turning out to all the Brigade has been requested to attend. The most recent being the Razorback Fire, a fire that involved some very steep and difficult terrain, where he supported a Group Officer in commanding a number of brigades including two units from his Goorangoola Brigade from Wednesday 28 August 2013 through to Saturday 31 August 2013, despite receiving chemotherapy the day before.

Keith has displayed a commitment and dedication to the Service and community well beyond what could be reasonably expected of an individual.

## **COMMISSIONER'S COMMENDATION FOR SERVICE (UNIT)**

### **Lower Hunter Group 8 Community Engagement - Lower Hunter Zone, Region East**

Glenn O'Rourke (Wollombi Rural Fire Brigade)

Leanne Bell (Wollombi Rural Fire Brigade)

Anthony Hawkins (Wollombi Rural Fire Brigade)

Douglas Mackie (Laguna Rural Fire Brigade)

Camilla Dorsch (Laguna Rural Fire Brigade)

Kerry Lannoy (Bucketty Rural Fire Brigade)

Meredith Emmanuel (Bucketty Rural Fire Brigade)

Desmond Kaminsky (Millfield Rural Fire Brigade)

Alveen Kaminsky (Millfield Rural Fire Brigade)

Alan Johnston (Lower Hunter Zone)

Jordis Pointu (Lower Hunter Zone)

The Lower Hunter Group 8 Community Engagement Team comprises the brigades within the Wollombi Valley, including Wollombi, Laguna, Bucketty and Millfield working together to provide a safer environment for those living and visiting the area.



The model of engagement is based on local involvement and interaction between all parties. As a result, over the past nine years the Group 8 Team has engaged with their communities in various ways, as one way does not fit all. Some examples of this are Community Firewise Forums, Street Meetings and Bush Fire Survival Planning Workshops, including an innovative women's only workshop, which is uniquely delivered by an all women team of Group 8 volunteers.

The activities of the group are not confined to brigade stations but meeting with the public in their locations like a community workshop in the Buralong Valley. The group regularly runs an information booth at the Wollombi Market Days held each long weekend at Wollombi Saleyards. The group is a regular contributor to the local newspaper (Our Own News) promoting fire safe messages and articles.

This group has been the role model for other Groups/Districts/Zones within the State and also nationally with a number of senior personnel from interstate calling in to see how it is done. In addition, the Group 8 Team has been presented with both NSW State and National 2012 Resilient Australia Awards.

Through the collective support of local brigades, the community networks this group are building, fulfilling and exceeding the Risk Management Plan by making their community bush fire and fire aware, providing the tools and knowledge to the community to be better prepared to make an informed decision in times of emergencies.

## **COMMISSIONER'S CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION (UNIT)**

### **Castlereagh Zone - Region North**

Represented by Inspector Corey Philip, Inspector Darren Vatcher, Group Captain Robert (Bob) Fenwick, Group Captain John Unwin, Group Captain Graham Bunyan, Group Captain Peter Miller, Group Captain Anthony Waldron, Deputy Group Captain Michael Bowman, Deputy Group Captain John McDonald and Inspector Stuart Green.

On 13 January 2013, a sleeping monster in the Warrumbungle National Park roared into life, fanned by high winds, high temperatures and low humidity. The Wambelong Fire that had started the previous day was in the process of being contained by National Parks and NSW Rural Fire Service crews when it jumped containment lines in two places and spread at an alarming rate. The southern spot over travelled 8kms in two hours, whilst the northern spot over travelled 4.5kms in the same time. The crews working on the fire were trapped and sought safe refuge around the Visitor Information Centre. All available brigades within the Castlereagh Zone, as well as adjoining Districts, were mobilised to try and combat the growing threat. By now, the fire was travelling at a speed never before experienced, ridge hopping through the National Park and bearing down on Siding Spring Observatory, the Timor Valley and the town of Coonabarabran. Providing fire cover to 170 dwellings in Timor Valley was going to be a challenge compounded by the fact that the local Timor Brigade crews were trapped at the Visitor Information Centre.

All ground crews worked tirelessly at saving as many houses as possible in conjunction with the aerial support being provided by rotary and fixed wing bombers. Many crews were threatened with fire over-run however their training and experience ensured that they remained safe. By now the fire had run approximately 23kms to the east and was creating its own weather, with the convection column rising





over 10kms into the air. A southerly change then turned the fire north at an even greater velocity and again local crews stood fast as the fire bore down on them while they evacuated residents.

By 2000hrs on Sunday night, the fire had almost reached its full size of 42,000ha, only seven hours after jumping the containment lines. In those seven hours, 53 houses and 150 outbuildings had been destroyed. However, countless other dwellings, outbuildings and most importantly, resident's lives had been saved by the selfless and dedicated work of the Castlereagh NSW Rural Fire Service crews and other emergency services.

The outstanding professional front line response ensured not one life was lost nor any serious injuries sustained. The quick response to the Wambelong Fire was a team effort by the volunteers, both on the ground and back at Fire Control and staff.

### **Dapto Rural Fire Brigade - Illawarra Zone, Region East**

Captain Harvey Bailey, Marcus Bartle, Max Brennan, Deputy Captain Mark Collins, Gregory Dingwall, Catherine Draheim, Ken Fleming, Deputy Captain Jason Gallacher, Patrick Grady, David Hampton, Drew Hentschel, Sharon Jackson, Stuart Jackson, Thomas Jones, Deputy Captain Robert Kennedy, Peter Leinsle, Scott Matthews, Terry Matts, Senior Deputy Captain Joseph McDiarmid, Michael

Mostyn, Mitchell Nisbet, Bruce O'Dea, Mark Panozzo, John Parkinson, Ann Payne, Fred Priestley, Deputy Captain William Reid, Deputy Captain Stephen Roberts, Marcel Rolet, Jamie Shepherd-Granger, Nicolce Simonoski, Deputy Captain Andrew Toole, Glenn Vaughan and Paul White

The Dapto Rural Fire Brigade station was an open shed on a farm where the Brigade had been since its inception in the 1950s. The Brigade then moved to a new two bay Fire Station in Wongawilli in 1977 as a result of dedication and commitment of a number of Brigade members. The members of Dapto Rural Fire Brigade have committed many thousands of combined hours which has seen the Brigade station at Wongawilli develop from the original two bay facility through a number of evolutions including the addition of a carport which was enclosed in the early 1980s to the addition of a further two bays and a workshop in the late 1980s. A toilet and shower were also added in the late 1980s. All these works were designed and built by the Brigade membership and the majority of funding was sourced by Brigade members conducting fundraising activities.

In 1992, Brigade members commenced the design and construction of a Hot Fire Training Facility. This facility has also seen a number of evolutions resulting in the current facility being of a high standard and well used by many Brigades from the Illawarra Zone and from other Districts around NSW. Again, most of the funding utilised in the ongoing development of this facility has been sourced through Brigade members fundraising. More recently, with a need identified to improve amenities for Brigade members generally and visitors using the Hot Fire Training Facility, the members have further improved the Brigade station, utilising funds raised by the Brigade and funds from the Rural Fire Fighting Fund and Wollongong City Council.

The commitment and hard work of the Brigade members has resulted in a modern four bay station with male, female and disabled facilities, modern kitchen and training facilities and functional support areas such as a breathing apparatus maintenance area.

