



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

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# NSW RFS ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

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# Letter to the Minister

Dear Minister,

I have pleasure in submitting to you for presentation to Parliament the Annual Report of the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) for the year ended 30 June 2016.

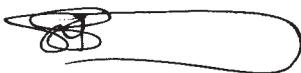
The NSW RFS was well-prepared for a busy fire season in 2015/16, with predictions for hot and dry conditions from the Bureau of Meteorology. In the end NSW experienced a quiet season than was predicted. It was in Western Australia, Victoria and Tasmania where our resources were able to assist. The Service deployed members to all three states. The Tasmanian deployment lasted more than six weeks and included the largest ever deployment of Remote Area Firefighters as well as equipment such as two helicopters and a Base camp to house 150.

The four-year program to upgrade radio systems across NSW was brought to a successful conclusion in this reporting period, providing NSW RFS members with the most reliable communications systems available.

The number of Remote Area Units was once again expanded including a further three districts and bringing the total of these specialised firefighters to 410. Plans are well underway for the construction of the new Remote Area Firefighting training centres across NSW which will be in operation in the coming reporting period.

This Annual Report has been prepared in accordance with the *Annual Reports (Departments) Act 1985*, the *Public Finance and Audit Act 1983*, the *Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2001*, the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013*, the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* and the *Public Disclosures Act 1994*.

Yours sincerely



**NSW RFS Commissioner**  
**Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM**



The Minister for Emergency Services, the Hon. David Elliott, MP speaking at the 2015 Emergency Services Volunteer Memorial Service at Mrs Macquarie's Chair. Photo by Adam Hollingworth

# NSW RFS Vision & Mission

To provide a world standard of excellence in the provision of a community-based fire and emergency service.

To protect the community and our environment we will minimise the impact of fire and other emergencies by providing the highest standards of training, community education, prevention and operational capability.

## Values

- mutual respect
- adaptability and resourcefulness
- one team, many players, one purpose
- integrity and trust
- support, friendship, camaraderie
- community and environment
- knowledge and learning

## Customers

- the people of NSW
- our members

## Stakeholders

- community
- our members
- planners and developers
- media
- Minister for Emergency Services
- Office of Emergency Management
- Department of Justice
- Members of Parliament - State and Federal
- Local Government NSW (LGNSW) and local councils
- other State and Territory Governments
- Rural Fire Service Association (RFSA)
- NSW RFS member representative groups
- Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC)
- Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre
- consultative committees (Community Engagement, Infrastructure Services, Membership Services, Operations and Regional Services)
- emergency service peak groups
- insurance industry
- tourism industry groups
- peak industry groups
- non-government organisations and service providers
- other government authorities
- employers of volunteers
- other associations (Farmers Association, Country Women's Association etc)

# Commissioner's Report

2015/16 was a relatively benign fire season for NSW and the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS). Predictions were for an El Niño weather event which would produce drier and hotter conditions and resultant dangerous fire weather. Fortunately, this did not come to pass in NSW.

Nevertheless NSW RFS members responded to 7,686 bush and grass fires, and a total of over 21,000 incidents across the year.

While the impact of bush fires in NSW was limited, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia all experienced large and destructive fires and NSW RFS members were generous in their offering of support.

NSW RFS members were deployed to Tasmania over a six-week period. This was the largest deployment of Remote Area Firefighting Teams (RAFT) by the Service, and saw the establishment of a new arduous firefighter capability for deployment. The Service coordinated resources from ten agencies and across three states on behalf of the Tasmanian Fire Service. In all 1,340 deployments were conducted. Much of the work was in remote areas, leading to the protection of large tracts of Tasmanian World Heritage Listed Areas.

The 2015/16 fire season saw a significant strengthening of operational capacity with the first year of a two-year trial of Large and Very Large Air Tankers (LATs and VLATs) in NSW. Faster airspeed and larger carrying capacity enable these aircraft to deliver more suppressant in a shorter time frame compared to aircraft currently in use in Australia. In this first year of the trial the aircraft were deployed to several fires across NSW. The Beecroft Peninsula fire in the Shoalhaven in November 2015 clearly demonstrated the positive impact these large aircraft can have. Five sorties by the LAT and VLAT released 130,000 litres of retardant onto the fireground and brought the Beecroft Peninsula fire to a halt, protecting the village of Currarong from any fire damage at all.

Following a request from the Australian Government in October 2015, the NSW RFS provided aerial firefighting assistance to Indonesia. The LAT, along with a highly trained crew and support personnel, were deployed to assist with the hundred of fires in that country which had caused major smoke issues across much of Asia.

A further enhancement saw the establishment of trail bike teams. These teams are designed for initial

attack and reconnaissance in remote areas or where access via fire truck is difficult. The Service has a capability of four trail bikes and sixteen volunteer firefighters with qualifications in remote area firefighting and experience with trail bikes. This trial will continue for the coming period.

The NSW RFS is committed to learning from all previous fire events and comprehensive incident reviews are always conducted. During the reporting year the NSW Government provided its formal response to inquiries into the 2013 Wambelong bush fire. There was both a Coronial Inquiry and a Parliamentary Inquiry into the bush fire which destroyed more than 50 homes near Coonabarabran.

These inquiries resulted in a total of 52 recommendations, 42 of which were supported in full or part. Some of the key recommendations included increased fire prediction capability, mid-week burning by mitigation crews and the development of a Strategic Fire Trail Network across NSW.

As a result of these recommendations, the NSW RFS is establishing four additional Fire Behaviour Analysts in regional areas. These analysts will provide smoke plume and fire modelling, to assist with containment efforts and community warnings. The Service is also building a weather balloon capability, used to assess weather conditions during fires, which may have an impact on fire behaviour.

Hazard reduction is an ongoing and important focus for the Service and a key part of the response in relation to increasing the amount of hazard reduction is an enhancement to the State Mitigation Crews program. The NSW RFS will engage an additional 10 mitigation crews to work with local volunteers to increase the amount of mid-week burning. The crews will assist with the preparation of control lines, and where volunteer availability may be low during the week, can assist with burning.

The NSW Government is in the process of introducing legislation to give the NSW RFS powers to create a standardised and integrated Fire Trail Network across NSW. The Bill to implement the legislation has been passed through parliament and once the Fire Trail Standards are in place, the NSW RFS will request that the legislation be assented. This is expected to occur before the end of 2016.

Using research conducted following the 2013 NSW bush fires, the Service this year developed a new public awareness campaign titled I Am

## INTRODUCTION

Fire. This coordinated television, radio, print and online campaign focuses on personalising the risk of fire, while giving people simple steps that can reduce their risk of fire. The campaign, which is supported by the MyFirePlan.com.au website, has since been recognised with a number of awards for effectiveness.

Providing NSW RFS members with world-class equipment is an ongoing effort and priority within the Service. The radio project upgrade has been a focus for the past four years and was brought to a successful conclusion in the reporting period. This project included the upgrade or replacement of radio towers and huts, as well transforming the radio transmission technology to a digital platform with Internet Protocol linking. The upgrade project represents a total investment of \$50 million over four years. This huge effort and investment ensures that NSW RFS members now have the most reliable, resilient and up-to-date communication networks available.

The Fire Control Centre and Brigade Station Build continued and this year 60 new brigade stations were opened and 40 were renovated. Designs, plans and tenders for a further six Fire Control Centres, various station upgrades and improvements, and four RAFT training centres are well progressed.

In the reporting period extensive work was conducted to research, review and trial new bush fire Personal Protective Clothing (PPC). Two new types of fire trucks were introduced into the fleet - a refreshed Category 1 tanker and a new Category 10 pumper. Within Marine Operations a new light vessel was introduced and plans for more standardised marine firefighting vessels are in the pipeline for launch in the coming reporting period.

Increasing the diversity within the NSW RFS membership has been a goal for some years. To this end, the Service has spent the past 12 months developing the Next Generation Workforce Plan. A series of facilitated workshops were held around the state, involving volunteers and staff from each region. During the workshops participants explored the factors they believe will drive the NSW RFS in the future and these were incorporated into the final plan. The Plan encompasses greater inclusion of those with disabilities, multicultural groups and indigenous members. In the coming twelve months gender diversity will be in focus.

In the reporting period the first female Assistant Commissioner was appointed. Assistant Commissioner Rebel Talbert is Director of

Operational and Mitigation Services and has been an active member of the Service at the brigade level since 2002 and as a staff member since 2003.

Land use changes in the Lidcombe area where the NSW RFS Headquarters is located were announced by NSW Government in 2015. The NSW Government has recommended the Service find a new location in the greater Sydney area to ensure access to facilities, utilities, communications and technological infrastructure, as well as to major transport networks. A process is currently underway to identify a location in the greater Sydney area.

The very real danger of firefighting was brought home this year when one of our members from the Hunter Valley, Paul Sanderson, died while on the fireground. 'Sando' was 48 and Deputy Captain of the North Rothbury Brigade. In November 2015 he collapsed while on firefighting duties. His fellow crew members fought courageously to save his life but sadly, Sando could not be revived. Sando left behind a wife, two adult children and a grandson.

Sando was remembered at a memorial service held in Canberra in April 2016 to remember members of the fire and emergency services community who have paid the ultimate sacrifice while helping others. He will also be included in the annual ceremony at the Volunteer Memorial Service, held at Mrs Macquarie's Chair in Sydney each October.

In conclusion, my thanks go to the members of the NSW RFS. As I travel the state to attend station openings and other events, I have the opportunity to meet with volunteers and staff across NSW. I have noticed again and again, that no matter what challenges they face, NSW RFS members demonstrate remarkable dedication, enthusiasm and commitment to serving their local communities. This is the foundation of the NSW RFS and is what makes it so successful.

I would also like to thank the Hon. David Elliott, MP, the Minister for Emergency Services, for his support of the Service and our members.

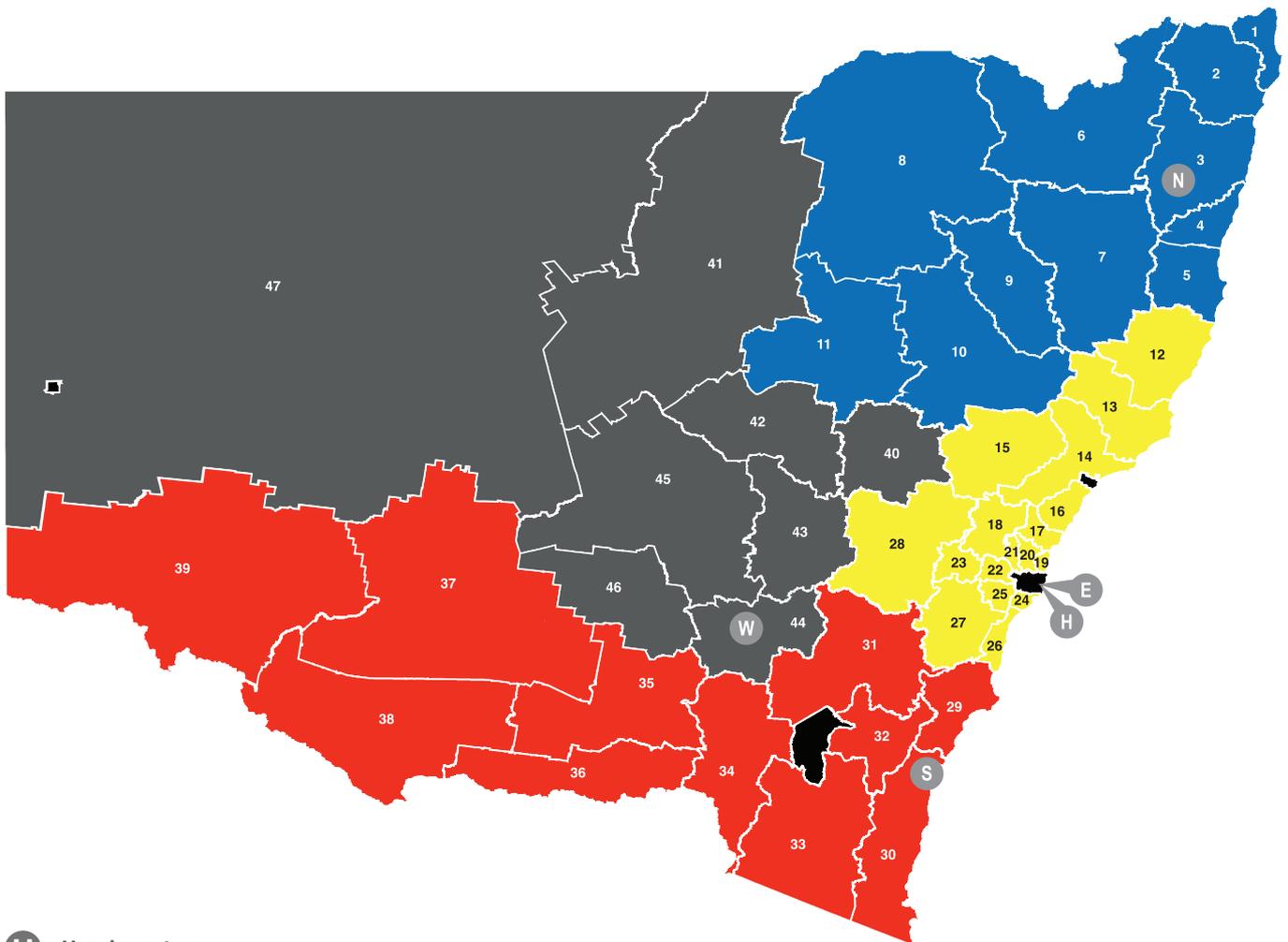


Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM  
NSW RFS Commissioner

# NSW RFS Regions and Districts

as at 30 June 2016

This map shows the NSW RFS Districts, Teams and Zones as at 30 June 2016. In May 2016, the NSW Government announced changes to local government arrangements across the state, including the formation of new councils in some areas. Noted here are changes to the names of some Councils which were brought in at that time, however, as at 30 June 2016, there were no changes to NSW RFS boundaries. A Working Group has been established to assess the key areas of impact and significant changes to NSW RFS operating systems.



**H Headquarters**  
15 Carter Street,  
Lidcombe

**N Region North**  
Level 4,  
State Office Block,  
Victoria Street,  
Grafton

**E Region East**  
42 Lamb Street,  
Glendenning

**S Region South**  
7-9 Kylie Crescent,  
Batemans Bay

**W Region West**  
3/21 Lovell Street,  
Young

Office hours at all locations: 0845hrs-1700hrs, Monday to Friday

REGION NORTH		REGION EAST		REGION SOUTH		REGION WEST	
1	<b>Far North Coast</b> Ballina, Byron, Tweed	12	<b>Mid Coast</b> Mid Coast, Hastings, Lord Howe Island	29	<b>Shoalhaven</b>	40	<b>Cudgegong</b> Mid Western Regional
2	<b>Northern Rivers</b> Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley	13	<b>Gloucester/ Great Lakes</b> Mid Coast	30	<b>Far South Coast</b> Bega Valley, Eurobodalla	41	<b>North West</b> Bogan, Coonamble, Walgett, Warren
3	<b>Clarence Valley</b>	14	<b>Lower Hunter</b> Cessnock, Dungog, Maitland, Port Stephens	31	<b>Southern Tablelands</b> Goulburn Mulwaree, Upper Lachlan, Yass Valley	42	<b>Orana</b> Western Plains
4	<b>Mid North Coast</b> Bellingen, Coffs Harbour	15	<b>Hunter Valley</b> Muswellbrook, Singleton	32	<b>Lake George</b> Palerang-Queanbeyan Regional	43	<b>Canobolas</b> Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Orange
5	<b>Lower North Coast</b> Kempsey, Nambucca	16	<b>The Lakes</b> Lake Macquarie, Central Coast	33	<b>Monaro</b> Snowy Monaro Regional	44	<b>South West Slopes</b> Hilltops, Gundagai
6	<b>Northern Tablelands</b> Glen Innes Severn, Inverell, Tenterfield	17	<b>Gosford</b> Central Coast	34	<b>Riverina Highlands</b> Snowy Valleys	45	<b>Mid Lachlan Valley</b> Forbes, Lachlan, Parkes, Weddin
7	<b>New England</b> Armidale Regional	18	<b>Hawkesbury</b>	35	<b>Riverina</b> Coolamon, Junee, Lockhart, Federation, Wagga Wagga	46	<b>Bland Temora</b> Bland, Temora
8	<b>Namoi/Gwydir</b> Gwydir, Moree Plains, Narrabri	19	<b>Warringah/ Pittwater</b> Northern Beaches	36	<b>Southern Border</b> Albury, Berrigan, Corowa, Greater Hume	47	<b>Far West</b> Bourke, Brewarrina, Central Darling, Cobar, Unincorporated NSW
9	<b>Tamworth</b>	20	<b>Hornsby/ Ku-ring-gai</b> Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai	37	<b>MIA</b> Griffith, Leeton, Hay, Murrumbidgee, Narrandera, Carrathool	<p><i>NOTE: Where a district is a team or zone, local government areas (LGAs) are listed.</i></p>	
10	<b>Liverpool Range</b> Gunnedah, Liverpool Plains, Upper Hunter	21	<b>The Hills</b>	38	<b>Mid Murray</b> Edward River, Murrumbidgee, Murray River		
11	<b>Castlereagh</b> Gilgandra, Warrumbungle	22	<b>Cumberland</b> Blacktown, Fairfield, Penrith	39	<b>Lower Western</b> Balranald, Wentworth		
		23	<b>Blue Mountains</b>				
		24	<b>Sutherland</b>				
		25	<b>Macarthur</b> Camden, Campbelltown, Liverpool				
		26	<b>Illawarra</b> Kiama, Shellharbour, Wollongong				
		27	<b>Southern Highlands</b> Wingecarribee, Wollondilly				
		28	<b>Chifley/ Lithgow</b> Bathurst Regional, Lithgow, Oberon				

# TOTAL VOLUNTEERS 73,162

REGION NORTH

**13,305**  
VOLUNTEERS

REGION SOUTH

**21,706**  
VOLUNTEERS

REGION EAST

**23,120**  
VOLUNTEERS

REGION WEST

**15,413**  
VOLUNTEERS

NOTE: Dual  
members in different  
Regions are counted  
in both Regions.

ABOVE: Blake Ross and Nadia Knox, Loftus Brigade. Photo by Sharon Quandt





## OVERVIEW OF NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE

Brigades	2,029
Rural Fire Districts	125
NSW RFS Districts	47
Regions	4
Headquarters*	1

\*The Planning and Environment Centres (formerly known as Customer Service Centres) and the Operational Mitigation Services bases are considered part of Headquarters

### Planning and Environment Centres

Batemans Bay, Coffs Harbour, Glendenning,	3
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### Operational and Mitigation Services Bases

Batemans Bay, Bega, Cooma, Glendenning, Mudgee, Tamworth, Taree, Wyong	8
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## NUMBER OF NEW BUILDS AND RENOVATIONS IN 2015/16

Builds	New	Renovation	Total
Fire Control Centres	0	1	1
Brigade stations	66	40	106

NOTE: Maintenance, renovation and construction of NSW RFS buildings are in progress at all times. This table indicates those projects which were completed in the reporting period. Further information about building projects can be found on page 34.

**TOTAL NSW RFS EXPENSES BUDGET**

**\$361.6M**

## INTRODUCTION

### TOTAL VEHICLES

Vehicles	North	East	South	West	Total
Tankers	822	1,119	915	927	3,783
Pumpers	7	14	43	1	65
Personnel Transport & Command Vehicles	198	424	511	163	1,296
Bulk Water Carriers	5	20	28	6	59
All general purpose trailers and miscellaneous vehicles	701	397	337	269	1,704
Communications vehicles and dedicated communication trailers	8	9	15	8	40
Catering vehicles and dedicated catering trailers	17	17	43	4	81
Marine Craft	0	3	27	0	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,758</b>	<b>2,003</b>	<b>1,919</b>	<b>1,378</b>	<b>7,058</b>

NOTE: Non-Service owned vehicles are not included in these figures. In 2015/16 the SAP Enterprise Management system was introduced to audit and manage all NSW RFS assets. This upgrade has seen the data in the yearly reports for vehicle numbers improve in precision and accuracy. General purpose trailers and tanker trailers have been combined in this year's report.

### NUMBER OF NEW AND REFURBISHED APPLIANCES ALLOCATED TO BRIGADES

Vehicles - Category	Style	New	Refurb	Total
Category 1 Tanker	Village	40	0	40
Category 1 Tanker	Multipurpose	10	0	10
Category 1 Tanker	Grasslands	6	0	6
Category 6 Tanker	Grasslands	6	0	6
Category 7 Tanker	Grasslands Dual Cab	17	0	17
Category 7 Tanker	Grasslands Single Cab	11	0	11
Category 9	First Response Unit	22	0	22
Category 10	Urban Pumper	5	0	5
Category 13	Bulk Water Carrier	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>				<b>172</b>

The major road between Sydney and Wollongong was shut in December 2015 by the Maddens Plain fire near Bulli Park.



## INTRODUCTION

### INCIDENTS

	North	East	South	West	Total
Bush and grass fires (attended by NSW RFS)	2,000	3,242	1,609	835	7,686
Structural fires	242	472	286	166	1,166
Motor Vehicle fires	365	985	288	170	1,808
Motor Vehicle accidents	906	2,305	916	435	4,562
Investigation	525	2,125	761	243	3,654
Refuse fires	80	284	101	83	548
Spillages	150	519	122	31	822
Assist other agencies	141	596	264	84	1,085
Flood	9	69	16	3	97
Other incidents	326	1,177	425	164	2,092
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,744</b>	<b>11,774</b>	<b>4,788</b>	<b>2,214</b>	<b>23,520</b>

Controlled burns/pile burns (Rural Fire Districts)

2,502

### INCIDENTS: FOUR YEAR VIEW

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Bush and grass fires	7,474	8,032	7,837*	7,686*
Structural fires	957	1,090	1,264	1,166
Motor Vehicle fires	1,638	1,535	1,633	1,808
Motor Vehicle accidents	3,881	3,909	4,236	4,562
Investigation	1,777	2,302	3,512	3,654
Controlled burns/pile burns (RFDs)	1,088	2,664	1,960**	2,502**
Refuse fires	608	634	652	548
Spillages	214	590	776	822
Assist other agencies	258	547	917	1,085
Flood	22	115	76	97
Other incidents	4,410	1,957	2,245	2,092
<b>Totals</b>	<b>23,436</b>	<b>23,375</b>	<b>23,148</b>	<b>23,520</b>

\*The figure of total bush and grass fires refers to the incidents in which the NSW RFS responded.

\*\*Since the 2014/15 reporting period, controlled burns/pile burns are not included in the total incidents figure.

LEFT: 2 August 2015, Coronation Parade, Wentworth Falls. Photo by Ben Shepherd