



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

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# NSW RFS ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

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## **SUMMARY REVIEW OF OPERATIONS**

## Fire season overview

With early predictions of a long and difficult bush fire season due to a strong El Niño weather pattern and above normal fire potential across much of coastal NSW, we were fortunate to benefit from some good rainfall across the season.

Despite a relatively benign season, NSW RFS crews responded to more than 7,600 bush and grass fires, burning a total of almost 88,000 hectares.

### FIRE SEASON OVERVIEW

Total bush and grass fires	7,686
Area burnt	87,810ha
Total Fire Ban declarations	14
Section 44 declarations	3
Personnel deployments	57,513
Aircraft taskings	1,097
Human lives lost	1 firefighter fatality
Loss/damage	1 habitable structure 4 sheds/outbuildings

NSW RFS members from across all four regions attended over 23,000 incidents in the reporting period, ranging from forest fires to assisting State Emergency Service (SES) with storm damage and several significant interstate deployments.

The official Bush Fire Danger Period begins in October for most part of NSW. So it looked to be an early start to a difficult season when just two weeks after snow blanketed the Blue Mountains, the Hordern Rd Fire in Wentworth Falls started on 31 July. The fire quickly became dangerous fuelled by strong and gusty winds. Homes were threatened on 2 August, 2015 and a Section 44 was declared. The fire burnt through 600 hectares but a massive effort by fire services over seven days kept the damage to a minimum.

In late November and early December several threatening fires developed. The town of Currarong on the Beecroft Peninsula in Shoalhaven came under serious threat on 26 November 2015. The fire was brought to an effective stop 700 metres from houses in Currarong by the use of the Large and Very Large Air Tankers. In five sorties, dropping about 130,000 litres of retardant, the Air Tankers created a strong containment line and protected the township from any damage.

The Terraborra North fire was one of a number of fires that started on 10 December by lightning strikes across the Hawkesbury area. A Section 44 was declared on 11 December and resources were called from a number of surrounding districts. Due to the remote and rugged terrain night time RAFT operations were used for the first time. This fire also provided the opportunity to test the new two-person trail bikes teams and to continue the trial of the LAT and VLAT aircraft. The fire burnt more than 5,300 hectares and took 10 days to contain.

Severe thunderstorms in parts of Sydney, and floods in the Hunter Valley in January, saw NSW RFS members assisting NSW SES with the extensive water and flood damage caused.

The first half of 2016 was dominated by interstate deployments.

### Interstate and International deployments

The NSW RFS coordinated the resources on behalf of NSW in support of fires in Victoria (34 personnel), Tasmania (1,340 personnel) and Western Australia (132 personnel). These deployments involved incident management personnel, specialists and firefighters. The Tasmanian deployment was the most challenging, due to the logistical challenges of reaching the island and the sheer duration of the incident, which stretched to some 47 days of deployment.

During 2015/16 the Service was also involved with the other states in international deployments to Canada, involving 33 personnel, United States of America, involving 18 personnel and Indonesia where 10 people were deployed, along with aircraft including the Large Air Tanker.

### Aviation

The NSW Government allocated \$9.8 million in the 2015/16 State Budget for the trial of the Large and Very Large Air Tankers (LAT and VLAT) to fight bush fires. The trial commenced in September and continued until 31 January 2016. The LAT and VLAT were deployed from Richmond RAAF base to fires both within NSW and interstate.

Apart from these large Air Tankers there were 1,100 aircraft taskings over the reporting period involving both Contract and Call When Needed aircraft. The three NSW RFS aircraft continue to be upgraded with additional camera technology and night vision capability.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Maddens Plain Fire near Bulli Tops, December 2015. Photo by Mick Reynolds

### Preparing for the fire season

The prevention of bush and grass fires remained the major focus for the NSW RFS during 2015/16.

The official Bush Fire Danger Period commenced on 1 October 2015, but the NSW RFS had been preparing all its members for the fire season for several months.

In the reporting period, seven local government areas brought their official Bush Fire Danger Period forward to 1 August due to local climactic and fuel conditions.

In 2015/16 Preseason Briefings were developed utilising the 'Live Stream' online format. Presentations on the role of the various fire management agencies, season weather outlooks, Incident Management and Public Warnings, Emergency Management, Fire Investigation, Aviation and Logistics and Finance were all made available online. NSW RFS members and other fire management agencies were invited to view these briefings.

Also in August, the State Operations Exercise was held at State Operations Centre in Lidcombe. Involving all four regional offices, the Exercise saw a scenario played out where several large fires were burning at once. In this way, procedures and communication systems were tested.

The Fire Behaviour Analysis team, in conjunction with meteorologists, monitored forecast conditions along with fuel and soil dryness to remain alert to the possibility of deteriorating conditions.

#### Hazard reduction

The NSW Government has committed to targeting the protection of almost 600,000 homes over the next four years through hazard reduction works, and almost 750,000 hectares of hazard reduction activities across NSW firefighting and land management agencies. These works were supported in the 2015/16 Budget with \$35 million allocated to targeted hazard reduction works.

In the reporting period more than 116,100 properties were protected by hazard reduction activities with approximately 53 percent of hazard reduction burns being undertaken between March and May (typically when conditions are most suitable).

Of all these activities NSW RFS members undertook 1,687 activities comprising 34,282 hectares of hazard reduction work. Please see Appendix 1 for more details.

NSW RFS State Mitigation Support Services (SMSS) also provided assistance to volunteers

**\$35 million was allocated to continue targetted hazard reduction works throughout NSW.**

undertaking strategic bush fire mitigation works in order to accelerate the rate of hazard reduction across the state. Support for more mid-week burning through an increase in SMSS crews is being implemented to maximise opportunities for planned works to be completed. Currently 90 percent of hazard reduction works undertaken by NSW RFS volunteers take place on weekends.

#### Public information and preparedness

The reporting period saw the development and commencement of the Service's latest Prepare Act Survive public awareness campaign.

This campaign was developed using research conducted following the 2013 NSW bush fires which affected areas including the Blue Mountains, Southern Highlands, Coonabarabran, Port Stephens and Yass areas.

The campaign aimed to address the key findings of the research: that the majority of people do not personalise their risk of bush fire; many believe it is too hard or costly to prepare for bush fires; and that there is low appreciation of the benefits of preparing a property.

The campaign, titled 'I Am Fire', launched in September 2015 and included coordinated television, radio, print and online activity. It was closely aligned with the statewide Get Ready Weekend in September, which saw more than 400 brigades take part in community engagement activities across the state.

The campaign resulted in an increase in the proportion of people who correctly assessed their level of risk from 24 percent to 36 percent, and increased the number of people who had discussed their bush fire plan from 52 percent to 66 percent. Levels of preparation also increased from 38 percent to 50 percent.

All targets for the campaign were exceeded and in

2016, the campaign was recognised with a number of awards for advertising effectiveness. The three year campaign will continue each bush fire season until 2018.

The campaign was supported by a new website designed to simplify bush fire planning and preparation information.

The MyFirePlan website provides information about planning for bush fires, including a simplified risk assessment about the user's locality. The website

**The 'I Am Fire' campaign was recognised with a number of awards for advertising effectiveness.**

also includes extensive video content aimed at increasing community awareness about matters including bush fire danger ratings, alert levels and the steps to be undertaken to prepare a property.

### **NSW RFS Website**

The Service's main public website remains the authoritative source for bush fire emergency information. During the reporting period, the NSW RFS public website received close to 2.2 million users, with 7.1 million page views. The busiest period on the website was December 2015, during fires which affected the Williamtown area, north of Newcastle.

Throughout the year, the Corporate Communications group and Public Liaison Unit published 115 major fire updates on bush fire activity across the state.

Demand via social media also remained strong, with 46 million people reached through the NSW RFS Facebook page, with 123 million impressions of content. 13,680 calls were made to the NSW RFS Bush Fire Information Line.

### **New tools for improved community protection**

In late 2015, the NSW RFS launched the new *Guide to Making your Bush Fire Survival Plan*. This new resource was developed using research from the

2013 NSW bush fires, and with guidance from experts in behaviour change. Extensive consultation with members occurred in the development of the new guide. Community testing was also conducted, to ensure the resource achieved the desired result.

The Service also launched the *Guide to Working with School Communities* during the reporting period. The Guide was developed to provide members with ideas and supporting material to assist with actively engaging with school communities. The Guide is based on the Primary School Education Framework:

- Lower Primary - Helping students gain an understanding of bush fire safety and develop personal skills to ensure their own safety during a fire.
- Middle Primary - Helping students to increase their personal fire safety awareness and develop an awareness of the safety of others during a fire.
- Upper Primary - Encouraging students to reinforce and further develop personal skills to use in a bush fire or other emergency. Students should also develop knowledge and skills that will enable them to contribute to their community's bush fire preparedness.

## **Improving operational capacity**

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

### **Response to 2013 Wambelong bush fire**

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. The following key recommendations are in progress within the NSW RFS.

#### ➤ Increased fire prediction capability

The NSW RFS has identified 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 has also identified a weather balloon capability, used to assess weather conditions during fires, which may have an impact on fire behaviour. In the reporting period one of the four Fire Behaviour Analysts had been appointed.

## SUMMARY REVIEW OF OPERATIONS

### ➤ Mid-week burning by mitigation crews

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 establish 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 if volunteer availability is low during the week, can assist with burning.

### ➤ Strategic Fire Trail Networks

The NSW Government is introducing legislation to give the NSW RFS powers to create and improve a standardised and integrated Fire Trail Network across NSW. The Bill to implement the legislation has been passed through NSW 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.

## Response and Coordination

During the reporting period, the NSW RFS continued with the program of centralised dispatch with an additional three districts coming 'on line' bringing the total to five. Further districts are scheduled for 2016/17.

The Service continued to engage with the Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) on a number of issues, including the formal documentation of the national Arrangement for Interstate Assistance and the establishment of the National Resource Sharing Centre. While also ensuring that the current Memoranda of Understanding between the agencies in other states were reviewed and maintained, other agreements continue to be forged and reviewed by the Service with NSW agencies. These included the Service's arrangements with NSW Volunteer Rescue Association and Marine Rescue NSW.

The Service continues to support the Ambulance Service of NSW by operating a number of Community Fire Responder units across the state and two NSW RFS Officer's continue to work within the NSW Police Force Counter Terrorism Unit and the Arson Squad.

The establishment of a Marine Working Group and a review into marine firefighting operations, including consideration of training requirements, regulations and standard vessel designs continues with the development of three classes of vessel design. The light Cat 15 prototype vessel was completed in September 2015 and the first boat is in service at the Christians Minde Brigade in the Shoalhaven District.

The upgrading of operational technologies continued over the reporting period with enhancements to ICON, mobile mapping connectivity and the Common Operating Picture, with future enhancements in Incident Action Plans and S52 Plans of Operations planned for 2016/17.

## Fire Behaviour Analysis

In response to the recommendations from the inquiries into the 2013 Wambelong bush fire, the NSW Government recommended that the Fire Behaviour Analysis Team's capability be enhanced to include four additional Fire Behaviour Analysts (FBAn).

These positions will be located in each of the four regional offices and will provide decision-making support to Incident Management Teams. This enhancement will also include the commencement of the Enhanced Situational Awareness project which involves the unit bolstering its weather observation equipment to include an additional four portable automatic weather stations (PAWS); bringing the total capability to 12 and adding four portable atmospheric sounding units. These sounding units will enable the unit to be able to gain a better understanding of dangerous fire and other weather phenomenon (such as storms) and in particular provide a tool that can be used to interpret atmospheric stability. The equipment will improve the weather forecasting ability of the Bureau of Meteorology and in turn improve fire behaviour predictions enabling operations to make more informed decisions in relation to weather and fire behaviour.

In the reporting period further enhancements were made to reports, checklists, training and disclaimers arising from recommendations from the 2013 Wambelong bush fire inquiry.

Compared to previous seasons, the preparation of fire behaviour products for NSW was relatively quiet with around 70 fire behaviour predictions prepared. The majority of these were prepared early or late in the season. The unit did, however, support significant international and interstate deployment of FBAns. These deployments included support to Canada, Western Australia, Victoria and a major deployment of personnel and equipment to Tasmania for over six weeks.

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 deployment of Portable Automatic Weather Stations.

The 2015/16 saw the unit pilot a number of new projects including taking a lead role in the project to develop a new National Fire Danger Rating System, commencement of enhancements to the Smoke Plume Model and enhancements to Grassland Fuel State assessment and Predicted Forest and Woodland Fuel Load processes. The results of these projects are promising and it is expected that these projects will continue into the next fire season.

Further enhancements to the Fire Weather Portal were completed and the unit facilitated grassland fire behaviour experiments in Braidwood in collaboration with the CSIRO and the Victorian Country Fire Authority. A further two NSW RFS fire behaviour analysts have been assessed as competent against the National Module this reporting period. 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.

### **Arson prevention**

As a result of the combined efforts of NSW RFS fire investigators and the NSW Police Force, 2,485 fire investigations were conducted which resulted in 29 referrals to Police for action and with several persons apprehended for arson-related offences.

Improved information sharing between agencies has been made possible by the Arson Trend Analysis System (ATAS) analysis undertaken by the NSW RFS Arson Intelligence Office.

As a consequence of greater powers to issue fines for careless ignitions by landholders, a total of 434 Penalty Notices were issued for illegal fires.

Legislation introduced in 2015 which allowed for infringement notices to be issued for those who discard lit cigarettes saw 881 notices issued during the reporting period.

The Penalty Notice and Legal Process policies continue to be reviewed and updated to ensure arrangements remain appropriate and protect the community.

### **Operational Doctrine and Standards**

During the reporting period 22 District/Operational Officer Induction Courses were conducted with involving 264 participants and included the national Level 2 Incident Management Team subjects (Control, Operations, Public Liaison, Intelligence, Planning and Logistics).

The annual State Operations Exercise was designed

by the unit and held in August 2015, supported by state and regional personnel.

Incident management training and assessment continued in support of the Incident Controller Major Incident (ICMI) program for senior incident managers, notably in the design, refinement and conduct of a series of nine sophisticated assessment events for 20 participants.

A further nine Incident Management Courses were conducted with 81 participants.

Operational Doctrine and Standards unit continued to refresh current operational procedures and develop new operational procedures including updating the Firefighters Pocket Book and app.

## **Operational and Mitigation Services**

### **State Mitigation Support Services**

Throughout 2015/16 NSW RFS Mitigation Crews based around NSW continued to provide essential hazard reduction preparation works, in support of volunteer brigades.

Mitigation Crews also completed 840 services as part of the Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents (AIDER) Program, and completed 793 mitigation tasks including 5,109 kilometres of vegetation management as part of mitigation requests.

SMSS crews were deployed to a range of operational activities, including a six week commitment in Tasmania where a 300-person base camp was established at Mole Creek.

Other deployments included providing assistance to the Hawkesbury Section 44 while also still engaged in the Northern Territory on Elcho Island.

SMSS provided equipment and personnel support for state logistics covering a total of 124,483 kilometres in distance, transporting a range of inventory.

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

In 2015/16 remote area operations continued to grow the services capability with the establishment of three new Remote Area Units located in Monaro, Southern Tablelands, The Lakes and further increasing the operational numbers of Remote Area Firefighters to 410 in 23 rural fire districts.

A trial of trail bikes was introduced with 16 remote area volunteers trained to operate the trail bikes. The trial also includes the testing of portable backpack style CAFS and impulse guns. The trial has been expanded in 2016/17 with an increase in the number of trail bikes and operators.

## SUMMARY REVIEW OF OPERATIONS

In January 2016 remote area operations deployed to Tasmania to assist with widespread fire activity throughout parts of the Tasmanian Wilderness areas. The deployment consisted of 155 remote area volunteers and continued for 47 days including 12 separate deployments. This is the first interstate remote area deployment that was completely self sufficient with NSW RFS providing all specialist firefighting equipment, vehicles, trailers, base camp accommodation and two Service-owned BK117 winch helicopters. It was also the first time NSW RFS had undertaken winch operations in another state. The deployment successfully demonstrated the benefits of this type of access into remote areas during firefighting operations.

In 2015/16 the Rapid Aerial Response Teams (RART) undertook 21 standby days and responded to 18 fire calls utilising four aircraft. The Down the Wire Technician program expanded to incorporate assisting other agencies with search and flood related operations.

The Heavy Plant Program continued with the Heavy Plant Register having more than 450 contractors with over 3,500 items of plant preregistered with the Service. The continued training program for Plant Operations Managers and Heavy Plant Supervisors has seen greater control and operational management of heavy plant while undertaking operations.

### Community Resilience

#### Community Protection Plans

During the 2015/16 reporting year, 34 Community Protection Plans (CPPs) were completed for communities at risk of bush fire across NSW. A further 63 were in progress. This brings the total of CPPs completed for NSW communities since the commencement of the initiative to 85.

#### Planning and Environment Services (previously Customer Service Centres)

In April 2016 the NSW RFS Customer Service & Support Group changed its name to Planning and Environment Services. The Planning and Environment Service Centres (PESCs) are located in Batemans Bay, Coffs Harbour and Glendenning. In conjunction with local district staff, the PESCs are responsible for the delivery of numerous programs and services including:

- Development Assessment Applications, referred under S100B of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* and S79BA of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*

- Identification, annual inspection and funding for works on Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSPs)
- Implementation of CPPs
- Completion of environmental assessments
- Delivery of the Hotspots program, in partnership with the Nature Conservation Council.

During 2015/16 the PESCs did not meet targets for development assessment referrals, due to an increase in the number of referrals received and staff turnover. During the same period the PESCs contributed resources to enable the increase of the total number of NSPs to 1,002, completed 34 CPPs, attracted 238 landholders to Hotspots workshops and completed all Reviews of Environmental Factors within agreed time frames, exceeding the targets for all four of these programs.

#### The Bush Fire Resilient Schools Program

In 2015/16, the NSW RFS completed 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. On the back of the trial, the program is being refined for implementation in 2016/17.

#### Neighbourhood Safer Places

Throughout 2015/16 the NSW RFS increased the number of Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSPs) within NSW to 1,002 sites in 129 Local Government Areas. In addition, the NSW RFS conducted inspections of all of these sites and facilitated works to improve the resilience of a number of NSP sites.

Read more about Neighbourhood Safer Places on page 46 and Appendix 1.2.

#### Hotspots Fire Project

Coordinated by the NSW RFS and the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC), the Hotspots Fire Project provides landholders with the skills and knowledge to actively participate in fire management for the protection of life and property while ensuring biodiversity is protected in healthy productive landscapes. During the reporting year, 12 workshops were delivered to 238 landholders in areas of high fire risk and biodiversity value. This produced 117 fire management plans covering 12,878 hectares. A notable achievement was the

piloting of an online fire management planning tool created to help facilitate completion of property fire management plans.

### **Firesticks Project**

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 bush fire risk and bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities together to achieve better results for land management.

During 2015/16 the NSW RFS worked with local Aboriginal communities from the Far North Coast of NSW to deliver bush fire training to 40 Indigenous Rangers and field staff from a number of Indigenous Protected Areas, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Working on Country Program. In return NSW RFS staff received training in cultural awareness.

### **Bush Fire Program Funding**

The NSW RFS has a long standing funding arrangement with the NCC supporting their Bush Fire Program. In 2015/16 this financial support contributed to the delivery of four bush fire resilience workshops with peri-urban communities and supported NCCs representation on Bush Fire Management Committees across NSW and their input on fire policy for NSW. This brings to a close the 2013-2016 funding agreement. In June 2016 the continuation of financial support by the NSW RFS over the next four years (July 2016 – June 2020) was approved by the Hon. David Elliott, MP, Minister for Emergency Services.

### **Local Government Amalgamations**

In May 2016, the NSW Government announced changes to local government arrangements across the state, including the formation of new councils in some areas. The NSW RFS has a long-standing connection to local government, including through funding contributions and the areas in which the Service operates.

To ensure a clear transition to the new arrangements, the NSW RFS has established a working group to assess the key areas of impact, such as potential changes to district operating and staffing arrangements where local government boundaries have changed, and significant changes to all NSW RFS operating systems.

## **Improvements in infrastructure**

### **Building Management**

In collaboration with Government Property, NSW RFS have 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 also re-negotiated preventative maintenance contracts for all critical infrastructure including, electrical services, security services, mechanical services, hydraulic services and audio visual services. In the previous reporting period, the reliability and resilience of the State Operations and State Air desk video walls were enhanced by integrating the power supply of the video walls into the building Uninterruptable Power Supply (UPS) system.

### **Building Projects**

Significant effort has gone into the development of new Fire Control Centre (FCC) Infrastructure across the state. Construction has commenced for new Fire Control Centres in Castlereagh District in Coonabarabran and Chifley/Lithgow District in Bathurst.

A new FCC in the Liverpool Range in Quirindi has complete the planning phase in the reporting period with the finalisation of tender and the appointment of a Principle Contractor. Planning is in the closing stages for new FCCs in Tamworth and Glen Innes.

A renovation of the Shoalhaven FCC was completed in June 2016. Renovations and extensions commenced for the Lower North Coast FCC in Kempsey, with works to be completed in the next financial year.

Consultation has been conducted in the districts where FCCs have been recently constructed. These valuable lessons learned have influenced the plans and specifications of future Centres. Such adjustments include utilising Design Develop and Construction standards, thus providing broader savings across projects through innovative design and construction methods. This has enabled a fit-for-purpose product that looks, feels and functions as required. Indications suggest overall costs will be reduced by these recommendations.

More than 60 new fire brigade stations have been constructed in the reporting period. A further 40 stations have undergone renovations or upgrades to improve facilities such as adding tanker bays, resolving door height matters and other general improvements to the building's facility.

## SUMMARY REVIEW OF OPERATIONS

### Equipment Research and Development

Work continues on the next generation Bush Fire (Wildland) Personal Protective Clothing (PPC) ensemble. The PPC Working Group facilitated field trials involving over 100 NSW RFS members throughout the state. Based on the member's feedback, the garment has been further adjusted to include designs specific to male and female requirements.

As of 30 June 2016, the PPC design was in its final stage. It will now be subject to a regime of testing identified through the Australian Standard, before being endorsed as the final product by NSW RFS.

A total 4,962 of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) have been serviced as part of a two year program to ensure the items are ready and capable of deployment in the event of an emergency in the reporting period.

**More than 60 new fire brigade stations have been constructed in the reporting period. Another 40 have undergone renovations.**

### Radio Communications

NSW RFS communications systems utilise over 490 radio towers that support the Private Mobile Radio (PMR), Government Radio (GRN) and Paging networks. These networks are used to minimise the impact of bush fires and emergency incidents on people, the environment and the economy.

The massive four-year program to upgrade the radio network to P25 Digital PMR and Simulcast VHF Paging networks and architecture concluded in the reporting period. The program represented a total investment of some \$50 million over the four year program and ensures that volunteer firefighters have the most up to date, reliable and resilient communication capabilities possible.

The new PMR and Paging Systems are technically sensitive and complex solutions and require a prescriptive and structured maintenance regime to ensure reliable and efficient operations. In keeping

with the new system requirements, the NSW RFS commenced a variety of planning, budgeting and contract processes to facilitate centrally coordinated maintenance and management of the network. A state-wide maintenance program will be delivered across NSW in the next financial period.

### Procurement

The NSW RFS continues to evolve its procurement function through the implementation of best practice principles aligned with the improvement recommendations identified during the accreditation process.

The capability of the procurement team has been enhanced with two members completing Diploma level studies and progressing on to study for an Advanced Diploma. This core capability supports ongoing training provided across the state to non-procurement staff. Work has commenced on establishing the foundation for a future procurement e-Learning program.

Category Management planning processes are being progressively implemented with five categories under active management and a further eight plans in various stages of development. All are scheduled to be approved, implemented and operating before the end of 2016.

An audit of contracts has been completed, representing an important input into the development of an electronic Contract Lifecycle Management System. Business requirements have been gathered and documented and procurement planning was commenced. Implementation is expected in the coming reporting period.

### Headquarters Relocation

Land use planning changes announced by NSW Planning & Environment known as The Carter Street Urban Activation Precinct, directly impact on the NSW RFS. The current NSW RFS Headquarters lease at 15 Carter St, Lidcombe will not be extended beyond its scheduled expiry in November 2018.

As a result, NSW RFS has established the Headquarters Relocation Program, with the aim to relocate by July 2018. A number of program outputs were delivered during the reporting year including completion of NSW RFS Headquarters Location Analysis, detailed Facilities Survey and a supporting business case. An extensive risk review was undertaken across various directorates to identify appropriate risks and mitigation strategies. Initial infrastructure design requirements for ICT, Building Services, Communications and Operations have been compiled and are subject to final building design.

## Information, Communications and Technology

Aligned to the NSW Natural Disaster Risk Assessment was a recommendation for improved sharing of information between Emergency Services Organisations in NSW. Based on this requirement, NSW RFS has developed a State Common Operating Picture for Emergency Services (SCOPEs). The solution is hosted by NSW RFS and enables events to be displayed in a single multi-agency display.

NSW RFS has also successfully implemented a joint agency solution, named Emergency Management Operating System (EMOS). EMOS is a web based information management system to support the Emergency Operations Centres.

NSW RFS successfully moved its public facing website ([www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au)) to a cloud environment. This allows for a highly available solution, which has an ability to be scaled up to meet the highly variable and extreme demand for bush fire incident and event information.

Work also concluded on the next module of the SAP solutions being Enterprise Asset Management (EAM). Aligned to the Australian Standard for ISO 55000 this solution was implemented across the three SAP partners FRNSW, NSW SES and NSW RFS.

ICON enhancements are progressively being implemented.

A full Disaster Recovery (DR) test was successfully implemented in the reporting period.

Several projects as well as minor enhancements have been completed across all modules of SAP throughout the 2015/16.

## Digital Security

Processes and systems have been implemented to comply with security requirements and guidelines. These include the NSW Digital Information Security Policy and establishing the foundation for further ISO 27001 compliance. An improved antivirus system was implemented, while ICT successfully performed a security 'penetration test', further ensuring security of the Service's systems and networks.

The Digital Information Security Annual Attestation Statement can be found in Appendix 2.3.

## Fleet

The Service delivered two new prototype firefighting appliances in the reporting period. The first was a Category 1 single cab carrying 4,500 litres of water, fitted with a remote controlled front mounted monitor. This prototype also has the revisions undertaken in terms of improvement to manual

handling, suction hose storage and rake hoe storage.

The second was a Category 10 Urban Firefighting appliance, also built as a prototype. This Cat 10 urban pumper will be made available over the next 12 months to various districts to validate the build concept. Lighting and livery upgrades across all firefighting fleet were tested and will be installed during the builds in future delivering an improved level of visibility and functionality, now becoming the standard for all service tankers.

A retrospective view of the in service fleet was taken in regard to pump operating noise, with noise output assessments undertaken on over 120 in service tankers, informing improvements in new builds and to develop program of noise mitigation which will be seen over the next reporting period.

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

## Our members

### Youth Participation

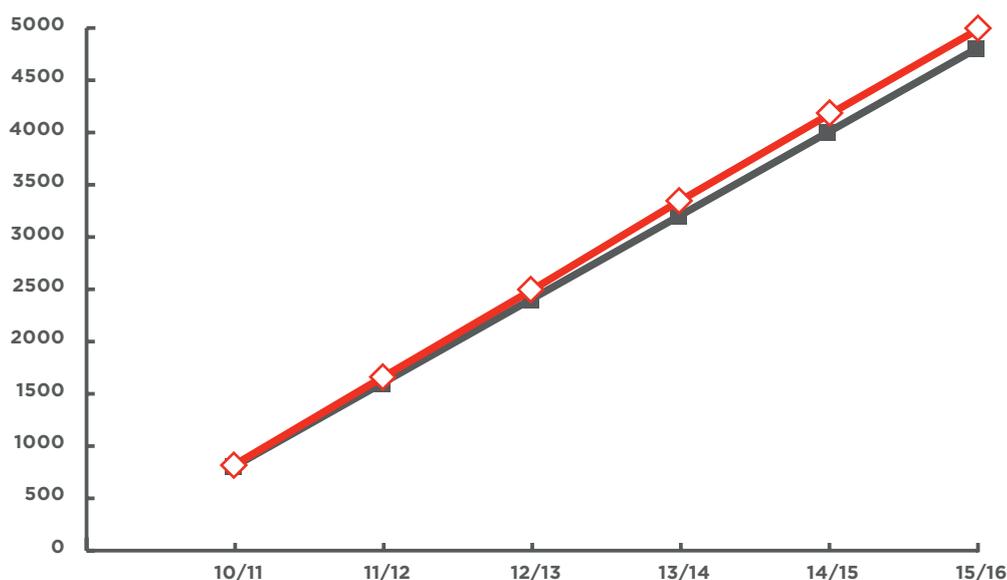
In 2015/16 the Secondary School Cadet Program continued to grow with 56 programs run in schools across the State. The program offers school students in Years 9 and 10 the opportunity to develop practical skills and to gain an appreciation of emergency service volunteering.

The cumulative numbers of Secondary School Cadets completing the program since 2010 are shown in the chart and table on the following page.

### Secondary School Cadet of the Year

At a presentation held at Parliament House during National Volunteer Week, the Minister for Emergency Services the Hon. David Elliott, MP announced Sophie Cox from Hay War Memorial High School, as the NSW RFS Secondary School Cadet of the Year 2015. Sophie was recognised for a number of attributes including her excellent communication skills as a team player and leader, her understanding of firefighting and excellent memory of the procedures and technical language used on the fireground, her community spirit through volunteering for many local community organisations, and; being an exceptional role model representing the school with pride and respect.

## Secondary School Cadet Program



	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
<b>Cumulative total number of Secondary School Cadet Program students - commencing 2011/12</b>	814	1,654 (840)	2,484 (827)	3,341 (860)	4,164 (823)	4,975 (811)
<b>Cumulative target number of Secondary School Cadet Program students</b>	800	1,600	2,400	3,200	4,000	4,800

### Child Safe, Child Friendly Plan 2014-17

In 2015/16 the NSW RFS continued to deliver outcomes from the Child Safe, Child Friendly Plan 2014-17. The Plan includes measures to keep children and young people safe from all forms of harm and to create an environment where children and young people are valued, respected and welcomed.

Some of the highlights included:

- 14 Youth Participation Workshops were conducted with 133 participants, mainly from Region West and Region East. The workshops are aimed at leaders and coordinators of programs involving junior members.
- The release of an online video during Youth Week 2016. This video recognises the efforts of our youngest members and encourages other young people in the community to consider joining their local brigade.
- A section on MyRFS, the online portal for members, was established as a single point of reference for information about working with children and young people in the NSW RFS.
- A Guide for Parents was produced to inform parents of young people seeking to join the NSW RFS about the policies and processes in place to keep their children safe.

## Workforce Diversity and Equal Employment Opportunity

The NSW RFS recognises the value of having an equal employment opportunity work environment which includes employees with diverse backgrounds and experiences. The NSW RFS seeks to increase the diversity of our workforce, through inclusive and flexible membership practices. Workforce diversity initiatives implemented or progressed by the NSW RFS in 2015/16 included the following:

- The Next Generation Workforce Plan was updated for the period 2016-2021 and approved on 1 June 2016. The 2016-2021 Plan reinforces the commitment of the NSW RFS to workforce diversity and includes specific strategies and actions to ensure our membership is reflective of the diverse communities we serve.
- Service Standard 1.1.42 Respectful and Inclusive Workplace was released. 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 support of the development of women in leadership positions, four volunteer and two staff members were sponsored to attend the Women in Emergency Services, Enforcement and Defence Leadership Summit in April 2016.

In 2016/17, the NSW RFS will:

- Update policies on Equal Employment Opportunity to align with changes to the *Government Sector Employment (GSE) Act 2013*, by embedding diversity goals into a broader workforce planning framework. Sections of the existing EEO policy dealing with bullying, harassment and discrimination have already been transferred to the Respectful and Inclusive Workforce Service Standard.
- Continue to promote and support the principles of the Flexible Membership Model, which seeks to provide more options and greater flexibility within our volunteer membership.

## Multicultural Plan

The NSW RFS Multicultural Plan 2014-2017 builds on the achievements of the 2011 Plan. The 2014-2017 Plan was developed in accordance with the Multicultural Policies and Services Program (MPSP) and reflects the three Activity Areas and the seven Outcomes which form the MPSP framework.

In accordance with the Multicultural Plan targets, the NSW RFS:

- Developed and formalised the Next Generation Workforce Plan 2016-2021, incorporating strategies and actions to improve organisational diversity.
- Continued to improve mechanisms to collect and report on workforce diversity profile with diversity data collected through the membership application process. Approximately 18 percent of the volunteer workforce now has a completed diversity profile and data is reported to the senior executive annually.
- Provided training to District staff and managers on engaging volunteers from culturally diverse backgrounds through the Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Kit.
- Distributed a Multicultural Engagement Toolkit to over 400 community engagement practitioners including fact sheets translated in 12 languages.
- Promoted brigade involvement in community events such as Harmony Day, and case studies featuring recruitment of culturally diverse volunteers, through internal channels and our public facing social media channels.
- Partnered with Australian Red Cross to deliver the Many Cultures One Community pilot project, aiming to increase the emergency preparedness, response and recovery knowledge of CALD communities in the Griffith area.
- Identified a Refugee Employment Champion to be responsible for ensuring the NSW RFS is contributing to toward the overall public sector employment targets for humanitarian entrants.

In 2016/17 the NSW RFS will continue to support ongoing actions within the NSW RFS Multicultural Plan including the following:

- Roll out training workshops for learning and development staff including a component on training delivery to a culturally diverse membership.
- Develop a District Volunteer Workforce Planning Framework containing tools and guidelines to assist districts conduct workforce planning to ensure their volunteer workforce reflects the diversity of the community.
- Participate in Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre projects on the recruitment and retention of culturally diverse volunteers.
- Evaluate the outcomes of the Many Cultures One Community Project and other partnership projects for wider application in the NSW RFS.

### Disability Plan

During 2015/16 the NSW RFS developed and introduced a new Disability Plan 2016-2018. This new two year Disability Plan builds on our past achievements and allows us to continue implementing initiatives and programs that support people with a disability. The Plan supports the overall vision and objectives of the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan to address barriers within government departments and local communities for people with a disability. The actions within the Plan focus on programs, policies and service standards associated with employment and participation, and service delivery for people with a disability.

The Disability Plan 2016-18 was developed in a process of consultation with stakeholders and is linked to the NSW RFS Corporate Plan's Key Focus Areas and objectives.

In 2015/16 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 usable by people with disabilities, including using Auslan interpreters during periods of major bush fire.
- Continued to promote the NSW RFS Flexible Membership Model which promotes the full spectrum of roles available to volunteer members to encourage greater participation from people (including people with disabilities) who in the past might not have contemplated membership.
- Continued to support the AIDER (Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents) program. This program supports some of our most at-risk community members by helping them live more safely and confidently in their home in areas where bush fires may start.
- The adoption of W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2 (WCAG 2.0) to Level AA is an ongoing standard to benchmark the technical accessibility of websites and apps, and the first stage in the transition to accessible digital resources. In 2015/16 the Organisational Communications unit developed the NSW RFS Accessibility Implementation Plan outlining strategies for, and commitment to, addressing accessibility issues in the Service's digital content and services. The Plan documents the accessibility status for all current NSW RFS digital assets and a sustainable pathway for achieving and maintaining WCAG 2.0 compliance.

In 2016/17 the NSW RFS will continue its focus on delivering and building on the initiatives outlined throughout the Disability Plan.

### Aboriginal Services

In 2015/16 the NSW RFS developed and introduced a new Aboriginal Services Plan 2016-2018. Through our commitments in this plan the NSW RFS seeks to make a contribution to improving outcomes for Aboriginal communities across the state. The key aims of the NSW RFS Aboriginal Services Plan are to:

- Actively focus on fire prevention and increase Aboriginal communities' resilience and preparedness for fires within their local community.
- Develop internal capabilities to understand and meet the needs of Aboriginal communities.
- Improve service delivery to Aboriginal communities by involving Aboriginal people and organisations in the design, development and implementation of relevant NSW RFS programs.
- Actively work to attract, recruit and retain Aboriginal people to help achieve our objective of having a diverse, skilled and adaptable workforce.

In 2015/16 a number of local projects commenced or continued which have helped inform the development of the new Aboriginal Services Plan.

During the year the NSW RFS:

- Conducted the first 'community champions' workshop as part of the Creative Spaces: Indigenous Community Engagement Specialists and Art as Engagement Project on the Far North Coast. The Project aims to increase participation and capability of Aboriginal communities in fire safety and emergency management through delivery of culturally appropriate programs.
- Provided bush firefighting training for a group of Aboriginal rangers in the Northern Rivers area. Participants from Minyumai, Ngunya Jargoan and Dorrodong Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs), the Darrunda Wajaarr (repair country) team and the National Parks and Wildlife Services Yaegl Aboriginal firefighting team now have TAFE NSW accreditation and skills to manage potential bush fire hazards and care for country across the Northern Rivers.
- Worked in partnership with Local Land Services to deliver bush fire training in Wagga Wagga, including a cultural burning component, which will help to increase the NSW RFS volunteer membership of Indigenous background, as well as provide opportunities for employment with the Service and other Government agencies.

## Volunteer to Career

Over 70 percent of members currently employed with the NSW RFS are either drawn from the Service's volunteer membership or have become volunteers following employment. Volunteer members are encouraged to pursue a career in the Service through the Volunteer to Career Program (V2C). This is the ninth year this successful program has been run, the 2015/16 program was held on 9 April 2016. To date 580 volunteer members have attended the program.

## Government Sector Employment Act 2013

The NSW RFS has continued to make significant progress in the implementation of the GSE Reform, which commenced on 24 February 2014 with a three year transition period. Two of the four key reforms areas, Senior Executive and Recruitment, have been fully implemented. The Service's GSE Reform working group continues to meet monthly. Progress towards the implementation of the two remaining key reform areas to date have included:

- **Capability Framework** - Significant progress continues to be made to the transition of role descriptions from the 2008 Capability Framework to the 2013 Capability Framework under the *GSE Act*. Most role descriptions for areas within Headquarters have been finalised. Progress towards rolling out revised role descriptions across regions and districts is nearing completion. The Capability Framework reform is on target to meet its time frame of full implementation by August 2016.
- **Performance Management** - The Membership Services Group reviewed a number of Performance Management Systems being implemented across the Public Sector. During 2016 the performance management system "SuccessFactors" was selected as the best fit for the NSW RFS. In May 2016 the Executive approved a twelve month trial of SuccessFactors with pilot groups from each of the four Directorates. A SuccessFactors Working Group was established and it is anticipated the system will go live in 2016.

## Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research

During 2015/16 the NSW RFS partnership with the national Bushfire and Natural Hazards Co-operative Research Centre (BNHCRC) focused on two research areas:

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

The NSW RFS participated in the BNHCRC

Research Advisory Forum (RAF) in Brisbane held from 17-18 November 2015. The RAF focussed on science and engineering projects related to: coastal management; monitoring and prediction; next generation fire modelling; prescribed burning and catchment management; and hardening buildings and infrastructure research clusters.

The NSW RFS also participated in the RAF held in Hobart from 11-12 May 2016. The focus of this forum was on Resilience and Policy projects related to: governance and institutional knowledge; economics, policy and decision-making; scenarios and loss analysis; communications and warnings; understanding and measuring social resilience; sustainable volunteering; and emergency management capability research clusters.

In April 2016 the NSW RFS, in conjunction with the BNHCRC, hosted a research presentation by Dr Sarah McCaffrey. Dr McCaffrey is a leading community engagement researcher with the United States Forest Service, and has a particular interest in developing fire adapted communities.

Details of the NSW RFS Research and Development contributions are set out in Appendix 3.10.

## Industrial Relations Policies and Practices

In September 2015, the NSW RFS commenced a Section 19 Award review of the Crown Employees (NSW Rural Fire Service) Award 2012 and the Crown Employees (Rural Fire Service Major Incident Conditions 2011) Interim Award 2012. The Section 19 Award review is an Award review across the Public Sector in accordance with the *Industrial Relations Act 1996*. The purpose of the review is to modernise, consolidate and to rescind obsolete awards and occurs at least once every three years. It is anticipated the review will be finalised in early 2016/17.

Separate to the Section 19 review process, in May 2015, the Public Service Association (PSA) notified the NSW RFS of its intention to renegotiate a new Crown Employees (Rural Fire Service) Award. In November 2015, the NSW RFS received a log of claims from the PSA. Through the Workplace Advisory Committee (WAC) the log of claims has been disseminated to all NSW RFS staff for comment. Central to negotiations of a new Award is compliance with NSW Public Sector Wages Policy 2011 to ensure there is no financial impact on the sector and any changes to an Award are cost neutral. The NSW RFS and the PSA have determined a time frame for the remainder of the consultation and negotiation process for a new RFS Award which is set to conclude in July 2017.

## SUMMARY REVIEW OF OPERATIONS

### Statement setting out WHS performance

Further developments to the Service's Health and Safety Management System occurred during the reporting period. These included:

- The development of a NSW RFS Health and Fitness Initiatives Plan 2016–2021. This plan defines outcomes supporting and promoting the health and fitness of members, to enhance their own wellbeing and the capability of the NSW RFS to provide fire and emergency services to the community.
  - The development and implementation of health and safety related tasks and projects responding to the internal OHS Audit Program 2011/12.
  - The ongoing rollout of Part B Health and Safety Site Management Plans (SMP) to all NSW RFS fixed facilities.
  - Reviewing system documentation associated with health and safety investigations and planning to implement improvement opportunities to achieve best practice.
  - Procurement and design of a new on-line NSW RFS Work Health and Safety incident and hazard reporting system for all members.
  - Upgrade of the chemical database for NSW RFS site based chemicals accessible by all NSW RFS members and the preparation of associated chemical risk assessments.
  - Continuous monitoring of all reported WHS incidents (including injuries, property damage, near misses and hazard reports) and collating statistical information. Monitoring assists by providing advice to the Service about incident trends and tracking investigation recommendations and associated actions. Refer to Appendix 3.6 Reported Injuries and Registered Workers Compensation Claims 2015/16.
- 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.
  - Pilot the use of Large Air Tankers to combat fast-moving and dangerous bush fires, often in rugged and inaccessible terrain.

### Financial Services

The NSW Budget allocation for the total expenses of the NSW RFS was \$361.6 million; an increase of \$28.7 million or 8.6 percent.

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.