

# BUSH FIREbulletin

THE JOURNAL OF THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

## Our history

A story worth telling

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AFTER THE  
GEROGERY FIRES

FIRES UP NORTH

### ADDITIONAL STORIES:

SOUTH COAST: FROM DROUGHT TO FLOODS  
CREWING WITH THE COMMISSIONER

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL IN CALIFORNIA  
VISIT FROM PRESIDENT OF BOTSWANA





Korea  
2010-2012  
VISIT KOREA YEAR



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Korea  
Be Inspired

# FOREWORD



For many of you, climbing onto a truck, doing activities around the station, teaching new recruits or being on the end of a hose is a regular occurrence. For me, in my role as Commissioner, it's not too often I get that opportunity and it is something I miss from my days as a volunteer.

Recently, I had the opportunity to spend a day with members of the Williamtown / Salt Ash Rural Fire Brigade near Newcastle, who 'won' the Crew with the Commissioner competition in the *Bulletin*. The Brigade, like many of our brigades, has been doing some great work with young people and it was a pleasure to work alongside these junior members (see page 42). I was pleasantly surprised by the number and quality of the applications in the Crew with the Commissioner competition. In fact I would like to see this competition continue and there is an invitation to get involved once again on page 36.

For some brigades, it's been a busy few months dealing with storm damage. Our members were in action in the field on the far south coast dealing with storm cleanup and I know the communities in these areas are thankful for the efforts of all involved. I'm sure most of you have seen photos or footage of the 'tornado' which caused considerable damage to Lennox Head on the north coast. Our members were there just after the storm hit, working alongside our colleagues from the SES, NSW Fire Brigades and NSW Police Force.

Notwithstanding the wet weather experienced across many parts of the State, there has still been considerable progress made in the area of hazard reduction. This work will continue as conditions allow.

One of the great success stories of recent times is the work of our mitigation crews. These crews have now prepared more than 1100 kilometres of fire trails, containment lines and Asset Protection Zones. Our AIDER (Assistance for Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents) program has also assisted well over 400 of our most vulnerable residents in the past year. This work will also continue in the lead up to the next bush fire season, now only a matter of weeks away for some of us.

As you would be aware, the final recommendations of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission were handed down on 31 July, 2010. In all, there were 67 recommendations, which are being reviewed by the NSW RFS. Implications will be communicated to members through channels such as MyRFS and I encourage you to be across the latest information before the start of the bush fire season, to ensure we are all delivering accurate advice to our community.

Finally, I would also like to thank members who have recently participated in the Service's new Consultative Committees. These committees, made up of both staff and volunteers, are an important avenue for ensuring the views of volunteers are heard and considered in the Service's decision making processes on issues such as equipment, membership and strategic direction.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the *Bush Fire Bulletin*.

Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM  
NSW RFS Commissioner

## IN THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE WE VALUE

community and environment

support, friendship and camaraderie

knowledge and learning

integrity and trust

one team, many players and one purpose

adaptability and resourcefulness

mutual respect

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## Cadet of The Year announced

Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan, presenting the Cadet of the Year award to Maddy Stoyles

A student from Braidwood, east of Canberra, has won the inaugural NSW Rural Fire Service Secondary School Cadet of the Year Award.

Minister for Emergency Services, Mr Steve Whan presented Maddy Stoyles with the award at NSW Parliament House in Sydney in May.

Maddy participated in the Secondary School Cadet program at Braidwood Central School in 2009 and was nominated because of her achievements during the course. Nominations were judged on leadership, teamwork and initiative skills displayed during

the program, commitment to and understanding of volunteering, the ability to be a good representative of the school and NSW RFS and the degree of personal growth shown throughout the program. All nominations were of an extremely high standard.

Cadets from both the NSW RFS and State Emergency Service (SES) were presented with awards during National Volunteers Week.

Mr Whan said the awards were open to students who participated in the NSW RFS and SES school cadet programs during 2009, to recognise the invaluable role of young people in the NSW emergency services.

"Maddy is a committed member of her school cadets program at Braidwood Central School," Mr Whan said, "She has shown great skill in a range of areas, along with a real willingness to use her training to make a real difference to her community."

The NSW Rural Fire Service Secondary School Cadet Program offers the opportunity to follow the training and service ideals of the NSW RFS. Year 9 and 10 students, cadets of other organisations or individuals are welcome to join the 10 week program that is held within the school year.

For further information on the program please contact Amy Blackwood, Youth Development Officer 02 8741 5161 or amy.blackwood@rfs.nsw.gov.au

## President of Botswana backs work of NSW RFS



LEFT: President of Botswana, His Excellency, Seretse Khama Ian Khama, Botswana High Commissioner, His Excellency, Selepeng Molosiwa and Foreign Minister Phandu Skelemani met with the NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, Russell Taylor, Supt Brian Graham and Group Officer Peter Evans in Sydney in March 2010.

The NSW Rural Fire Service has embarked on a five year fire management program with the Republic of Botswana supported by the State and Federal Governments. In the first year, 16 members of the Service (14 of whom were volunteers) travelled to Botswana to provide training and other expertise.

The Government of Botswana and the Australian Government have agreed to increase funding for the program for the next two years. This will provide the opportunity for more NSW RFS members to experience the different fire management issues in another part of the world.

Further examples of the high level of interest and support given to this program was the visit to Australia of the Botswana Foreign Minister and the visit our Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Stephen Smith, made to Botswana.

These high level representations, the first of their kind, paved the way for the President of Botswana, His Excellency Seretse Khama Ian Khama to visit Australia in March this year.

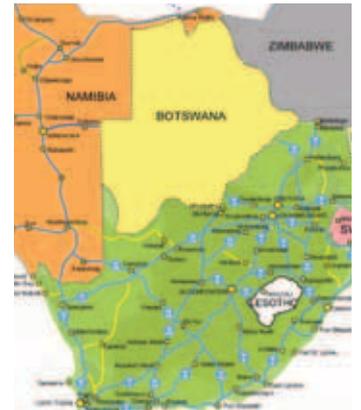
At His Excellency's request a meeting was held in Sydney between the President and the NSW RFS. The Commissioner, myself (Russell Taylor),

Superintendent Brian Graham and Group Officer Peter Evans from Sutherland joined the President to discuss the expertise that the NSW RFS could provide to Botswana.

We were initially given 30 minutes in His Excellency's busy schedule. Such is his interest in the program, however, he gave us an hour and a half! The discussions were wide ranging, though all were centred on improving fire management.

This meeting was significant recognition of the dedication, professionalism and expertise of our Service and its members.

In the coming year we will be working with Republic of Botswana to train their trainers to offer the basic training package. We will also begin crew leader training and introduce the concept of Incident Control Systems as practiced by the



NSW RFS. In addition we will be developing Standards of Fire Cover methodology, providing advice on national disaster/emergency policy and developing a legislative framework in which a Botswana rural fire service could be established.

*By Russell Taylor, Group Manager, Executive Support*

## It's time!



## ...to get ready for the 2010 NSW RFS State Championships

To be held in Dubbo over the weekend of 24-26 September 2010, this year's State Championships look to be bigger and better than ever.

The Dubbo Showground provides a wonderful all-weather venue for the Champs and plenty of flexibility, space and amenities. For the first time all events will be able to be staged in the one location. We are expecting each Region will field a full complement of senior and cadet teams while some of our sister Services from NSW and interstate will take up our invitation to participate.

This year the social activities will be 'themed' in character with the Dubbo area. There will be plenty to interest, amuse and engage. The Championships are open to all members of the Service and the public.

So why not note the dates and come and see the latest equipment and vehicles and meet the people who provide them?

Check MyRFS for all the latest in news from the 2010 NSW RFS State Championships.

## A sign of things to come?



A sci-fi style vehicle inspired by the Black Saturday fires could be a sign of the future for fire-fighting vehicles.

The Amatoya Fire Reconnaissance Vehicle and its designer, Liam Ferguson were awarded the 2010 James Dyson Award which is the student category of the Australian International Design Awards in June 2010.

Amatoya (named after a 17th century American Cherokee Chief, Amatoya Moytoy, who was known as 'The rain

maker'), is a specialised, high-performance vehicle designed to offer a faster and safer response in first line defence against bush fires. It was inspired by the devastation of the Black Saturday bush fires in Victoria in 2009.

Designer Liam Ferguson helped defend his family's home during the fires.

"We were completely surrounded by the flames within seconds and had to defend ourselves," says Liam. "There was a point when we thought we wouldn't make it."

Although Liam's family's property was saved, it inspired the young designer to work with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to come up with the Amatoya.

The vehicle requires just two crew members to operate. The body is treated with anti-swelling and fire resistant materials (thermo-ceramic in-tumescent paints and advanced aerogel laminated insulation) to maximise safety. In addition, Amatoya's unique design allows the vehicle to carry 2,200 litres of water, positioned low and centrally to increase vehicle stability. A

thermal imaging camera along with directional spotlights assists in 'hotspot' location to determine the most effective direction of attack.

"Amatoya was a standout for all the judges; it took a problem and applied innovation, design and technology to develop a solution. Liam had done the research, working with both the CFA and automotive industry experts and provided a comprehensive entry, including a knock-out model," said Ross Cameron, Managing Director of Dyson SEA and member of the judging panel.

## VALE: Rose Johnson

The NSW RFS Manager Financial Services, Rose Johnson, passed away in early January 2010.

Rose had been a key member of the NSW RFS for over 22 years, having commenced duties in the Finance section in August 1988. Before Christmas 2009, the Finance team and the Commissioner were able to catch up with Rose and present her with her NSW RFS 20 Year Long Service Medal - an achievement she was most proud of. She had also achieved her qualification as a Certified Practising Accountant (CPA) - a goal she had been working towards for the past

10 years. Her passing was a huge blow for all who knew and worked with Rose, particularly those in Finance. The team are a very close unit and supported Rose right throughout her battle with illness. Never one to give in, Rose ensured she made special events such as the Financial Services team Christmas party to celebrate with her friends.

Ron Anderson, Peter Hennessey and the Commissioner visited Rose in hospital a few days before she passed away. It was her 53rd birthday. Afterwards the Commissioner commented: "Her spirits remained high right

until the end and her focus was on her boys, Peter and Greg, family and friends and of course, her two dogs, Maddy and Banjo."

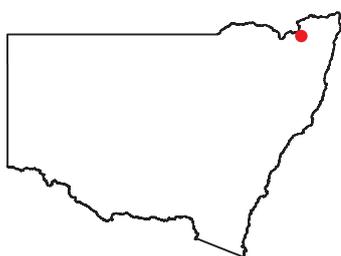
Members of the NSW RFS spent time with Rose and her family right throughout the difficult last weeks and continued to provide the necessary support and care after she passed on.

Throughout her battle with illness, Rose repeatedly expressed her love and gratitude for her 'RFS family' and how it had played such an important and meaningful role in her life.



# A BUSY SEASON FOR THE STATE'S NORTH

By Konrad Sawczynski, Learning and Development Officer, Northern Tablelands. Photos by Deputy Captain Steve Blunt, Glen Innes Brigade



It was in late November, after an already busy early fire season, that the Northern Tablelands and New England experienced a *Section 44 Bush Fire Emergency* in the Thunderbolts Way, Torrington and Rivertree Road areas.

The Thunderbolt Fire quickly burnt out around 17,500ha of bush land and several other fires started in the Torrington, Flagstone and Tungsten areas. The Tungsten fire directly threatened the village of Torrington resulting in the

first of the new emergency warnings to be activated in the area. Torrington Brigade had completed several hazard reduction burns on the northern edge of the village in August, which stopped the spread of the fire and undoubtedly saved houses and allowed crews to focus on the head and northern flank of the fire.

Strike Teams from Region North coastal areas and Region East travelled to assist local NSW RFS, National Parks and Wildlife Service and State Forests crews.

Although several containment lines were breached throughout the campaign across the firegrounds, crews were able to get hold of the situation by early December and at 1700hrs on 5 December the *Section 44 Bush Fire Emergency* was revoked.

On the evening of 5 December, however, numerous dry storms rolled through Inverell and on the north side of Tenterfield. Hundreds of lightning strikes over the area started numerous fires. A *Section 44 Bush Fire Emergency* was declared once again on 7 December for the Tenterfield, Glen Innes and Inverell rural fire districts with New England Zone joining two days later.

The storms had started two more large fires north west of Torrington and Bark Hut to the south. By this time the local crews were exhausted, so a call was put out to source Strike Teams from Region North coastal brigades. As the month progressed crews from Regions East, South and West, the ACT Rural Fire Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) joined the fray.

From 8 December the Tenterfield crews were teamed up with QFRS strike teams to extinguish six fires that were burning between Tenterfield and the Queensland border.

New England crews and New England Remote Area Firefighting Teams (RAFT) worked with the ACT Rural Fire Service Strike Teams on numerous fires in the New England area, including Cathedral Rock, Maiden Creek and Reedy Creek fires.

Throughout the campaigns crews were backed up with aviation support including aerial ignition and aerial bombing. A regional airbase was set up at the Glen Innes airport that supported New England, Northern Tablelands and the Namoi Gwydir areas. Several refuelling points were

LEFT: Flames engulfing trees at the Rivertree Road fire where NSW RFS crews were assisted by Strike Teams from Queensland, 6 December 2009

TOP RIGHT: Glen Innes Cat 7 working on the Torrington fire line on the outskirts of the Torrington village, 6 December 2009

CENTRE RIGHT: Glen Innes Brigade Senior Deputy Jeff Smith (left) in tactical discussions with other crews at the Torrington fires, 12 December 2009

BELOW RIGHT: Control burning and mop up operations at the Rivertree Road fires, 12 December 2009

established over the district due to the large distances covered by the aircraft.

While there were a number of properties under threat in the Rivertree Road, Carpet Snake Creek, Bark Hut Creek, Black Creek, Hawthorn, Kangawalla Thunderbolts Way, Diamond Swamp and Reedy Creek fires and crew strength was stretched, there was no loss of houses throughout the fire season.

The Northern Tablelands Communications trailer was deployed to Namoi Gwydir on the 8 December to assist with communications and Northern Rivers deployed their Communications bus to Northern Tablelands on 10 December.

In total there were 128 fires burning across the New England and Northern Tablelands, on the busiest day there were 43 large fires burning simultaneously. A total of 140,000ha were burnt during November and December 2009.

Over the November/December period, average temperatures hovered around the low to mid 40°C and relative humidity was below 10 percent. The weather patterns resulted in dry lightning storms over areas that have not seen fire in generations.

Local fire managers and other locals noted that the fires this season did not follow the traditional fire paths. A number of locals said they had never seen fires in some of the areas that were affected this season. As a result, the fuel loading was high and the fires were very intense. We believe this is because of the extended drought, fire regimes and the location of the large amount of dry lightning strikes.

## Accidents

During the season, a number of accidents involving crews and vehicles occurred, highlighting the danger of working on firegrounds. One of these included the crash of a Cat 1 tanker which hit a tree, with its crew avoiding any serious injury. A formal investigation found fatigue was a factor in this

incident. Due to the potential consequences of firefighter fatigue, a working party has been examining fatigue issues.

Group Manager, Response and Coordination, Steve Yorke is chair of the Fatigue Management Working Group which has been given a wide term of reference in order to generate the best possible practice for fatigue management.

The incident is also a sober reminder of the impact of fatigue on driving skills and the importance of taking personal responsibility when tired. All drivers in the NSW RFS should be familiar with the Safe Driving Standard Operating Procedures which is available on [myrfs.com.au](http://myrfs.com.au).

In another incident a National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Cat 9 was destroyed in a tree strike incident. The National Parks crew was at the location to fell the tree which had been previously identified as dangerous. No one was injured in this incident.

## Early in the season

Previously, from the end of August through to November there was an increased number of fires due to the high temperatures and the extremely dry conditions. There were several Class 2 fires in the Tenterfield and Inverell areas from the 25 to the 28 August 2009. These fires were handled at the local level in partnership with the local NPWS utilising three helicopters and three dozers. In this early part of the fire season, there were major fires at seven locations: Long Gully Rd, Frazer's Cutting, Duttons, Bruxner Hwy, Drake, Rover Park, Pindari Dam and Rockview. All of the Northern Tablelands crews did a fantastic job working long hours to get the fires under control. These fires burnt approximately 20,000ha.

Northern Tablelands and New England teams would like to thank all of the local and out-of-area volunteers and staff who came to assist us during this fire season. Your help and professional attitude was very much appreciated.



# THE PINNACLE SWAMP FIRE

By Inspector Jayne Leary, Deputy Fire Control Officer, Cudgegong District



A farm building saved by the firefighters near White Rock, Rylstone.  
Photo by Mathew Ross, Griffith Fire Control Centre



A storm through the Cudgegong District on Thursday 19 November 2009 resulted in numerous fires ignited by lightning strikes.

While the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) dealt with many of the fires in remote National Park areas, the NSW Rural Fire Service concentrated on the Pinnacle Swamp fire, 10kms west of Rylstone and

33kms south east of Mudgee in the Central Tablelands of NSW.

With vegetation already dry and temperatures of 41°C on Saturday 21 November, the fire made its run. Firefighters spent Saturday and Sunday protecting properties. All had stories of close calls to recount. All were successful. There were no homes lost.

For many days the towns of Rylstone and Kandos, as well as the village of Clandulla, were on alert. Community meetings were conducted and were well received.

A base camp was set up at the Mudgee Small Farm Field Days site to accommodate the many Strike Teams that travelled to help.

The fire burnt out 5,400ha of forest, scrub and grazing land. While no homes or stock were lost, one hayshed and about 155kms of fencing were burnt. A substantial amount of irrigation equipment in a hazelnut grove was also destroyed. The damage is estimated at \$1.6 million.

Some farmers were 100 percent affected. Having lost all pasture and fences, they had to sell all their stock.

The Pinnacle Swamp fire is yet another example of team work by many agencies and organisations. The local NSW RFS volunteers worked tirelessly alongside Strike Teams from Regions West, South and East and from NSW Fire Brigades. Staff from DECCW worked both on the fireground and

in the Incident Management Team. Aviation and heavy plant were vital in containing the fire. The Salvation Army deployed a brand new catering truck and provided all meals for crews for ten days. The NSW Volunteer Rescue Association (VRA) and State Emergency Service (SES) delivered meals and anything else that was needed. The Department of Industry and Investment replenished farm dams with water used by helicopters and provided emergency fodder supplies. Local business offered their services or their time for free.

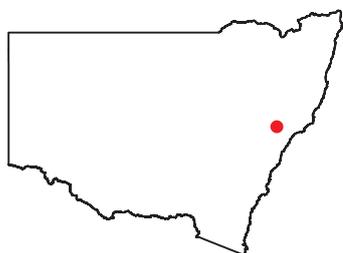
The good news is that in 2010 the district has received good rain over several months and throughout Winter experienced pasture growth and optimism.



# BRIGADES CALLED IN AS FREIGHT TRAIN DERAILS

Story and photos by Inspector Steve Brown

'As the on-call officer for the Hunter Valley Team, I arrived first on the scene to find two locomotives and eight wagons had derailed with one locomotive upright and the other on a dangerous lean leaking approximately 6,000 litres of diesel.'



Three days of coal shipments worth an estimated \$75 million were lost when a train derailed in the Hunter Valley in March 2010.

The 28-carriage freight train was travelling north when it derailed at a set of points about 300 metres north of Range Road and 5km south of Singleton. NSW RFS crews from Whittingham and Darlington Rural Fire Brigades responded to the derailment on Saturday 13 March.

As the on-call officer for the Hunter Valley Team, I arrived first on the scene to find two locomotives and eight wagons had derailed with one locomotive upright and the other on a dangerous lean leaking approximately 6,000 litres of diesel. NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB) Singleton arrived soon

after followed by NSW RFS Darlington and Whittingham Brigades.

NSW Fire Brigades NSWFB stations from Muswellbrook HAZMAT and Newcastle Heavy HAZMAT also responded.

Crews from NSW RFS set up initial attack hose lines while awaiting advice from NSWFB HAZMAT crews on dealing with the large amount of fuel that was leaking.

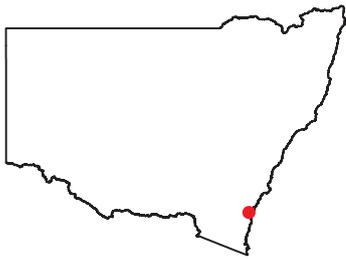
Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) staff were already on scene when I arrived as they had been working nearby on the Minimbah Third Rail Line Project. They treated the drivers and contacted Triple Zero (000). They also contacted the Rail Control room to advise of the accident

and have all trains stopped on the lines. The driver and co-driver of the train were taken to hospital with minor injuries as a result of the accident.

Recovery involved lifting the damaged locomotives and wagons off the tracks and then repairing the damaged lines.

NSW RFS was involved for about three hours on the Saturday and was called back again the following day while the locomotives were lifted clear of the diesel spill.

The derailment closed the Hunter Valley rail line to all passenger and freight trains for three days, effectively halting the supply of coal from Hunter Valley mines to the coal loader at Newcastle.



# AFTER THE DRY, THE FLOODS

By Andrew Gray, Far South Coast Team

After a hot dry Summer, the Far South Coast experienced dramatic flooding in February and rural fire brigades found themselves dealing with the impact of an excess of water.

Prior to February, the KBDI (soil dryness index) for Eurobodalla was around 120 and for Bega 150 which is very dry. Rain had been sparse and conditions seemed set for a bad fire season. The picture changed completely in February, however, when the area experienced three significant periods of rainfall. Local records were broken and the rain led to heavy flooding and damage to houses and roads. On the right are the official rainfall figures which show that rainfall for this period was around three times the average.

The majority of brigades within the Far South Coast Team assisted within the communities in the flood effort. They were moving furniture in flooded homes, assisting landholders to move stock, removing trees on local roads or around homes, checking roads for land slips and accessibility in their local area and assisting other emergency agencies as required. Apart from this some brigades needed to attend to their own needs to clean out brigade stations from flood damage and ensure readiness for response.



	Feb 1-6	Feb 13-14	Feb 15-16	Total for Feb	Average
Batemans Bay	105.3mm	30.6mm	157.2mm	303.8mm	104mm
Moruya	101.2mm	56mm	222mm	385.2mm	106mm
Narooma	177.8mm	79mm	313.4mm	580.4mm	83mm
Bega	166mm	29.8mm	185.2mm	383mm	78mm
Merimbula	110mm	50.2mm	197mm	358mm	99mm

Figures courtesy of the Bureau of Meteorology



Dalmeny/Kianga Brigade station was one of the stations flooded. Volunteers reported fish swimming through the station which is located approximately 10m to 15m from the edge of Mummuga Lake.

Members were salvaging office equipment, firefighting equipment and PPE from the rising flood waters when they saw the Poddy Mullet swimming past. The crew left the fish to fend for themselves and rushed to gather floating PPE that had been washed out the roller doors when they were opened. This was around the peak of the flood on Tuesday 16 February.

Central Tilba Brigade Captain Bruce Allen reported on the floods further south, he wrote: "The first flood was 4, 5 and 6 February with a total rainfall of up to 295mm being reported by locals with a small flood and minor damage to fences, roads and structures. The second flood was on 14 and 15 February with a total rainfall reported of 600mm plus. Rain gauges in the Punkella area could not handle the volume of rainfall on Monday 15 February so we are not sure

*exactly how much rain fell. The Punkella Creek went from 2m wide to an estimated 1km wide and from a depth of 0.5m to approximately 6-10m in some locations.*

*An area known as Wild Horse Creek in the Gulaga National Park, had to be cleared before the road could be opened. After the flood waters receded, we estimated 400 tonnes of sand and gravel had been dumped on the flats surrounding Wild Horse Creek. It took more than three days to clear Wild Horse Creek Rd with a front-end loader. It was reported that up to 8km of fencing was lost and one shed had been washed away.*

*The involvement of the NSW RFS was mainly to assist with clearing trees, moving stock and helping local landholders who had been caught short by the rising flood waters. The brigades also assisted NSW Police Force with the rescue of a person who was trapped in his car while driving through flood waters."*

During the heavy rains the coastal lakes throughout the area, which are usually closed

and discrete, were open to the ocean. Mummuga Lake, near the Dalmeny/Kianga Brigade, was flowing into the ocean as was Brou Lake, Kianga Lake, Nungudga Lake and Corrunna Lake.

A newly completed walkway/ bicycle way on Dalmeny Drive between Dalmeny and Kianga built by volunteers from the community and Council support was unseated by the flowing currents. Fortunately it was repaired in time for the official opening a couple of weeks later.

The Princes Highway was closed due to the flood waters in three locations on the afternoon of 15 February. The Road Traffic Authority (RTA) allowed traffic through the following day. Debris removal and repairs to the highway and bridges were conducted over the following month.

On the Far South Coast, the Paddy Otton Bridge, across Double Creek in Brogo, was swept away and over 20 bridges were damaged.

NSW RFS volunteers from Moruya, Dalmeny/Kianga, Narooma and Central Tilba brigades were most involved on 15 and 16 February, but all members continued to assist where and when they were needed.

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TOP: Top of the Murrah River known as Dry River (but not in February 2010!).  
Photo by Greg Potts

BELOW: Dalmeny/Kianga Brigade station was one of the stations flooded. Volunteers reported fish swimming through the station.  
Photo by Jon Poyner

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TOP LEFT: Wapengo Causeway, East of Bega. Photo by Greg Potts

TOP RIGHT: House on Mort Avenue, Dalmeny.  
Photo by Jon Poyner

LOWER LEFT: Cuttagee Lake exit to the sea, 9km south of Bermagui. The pressure waves at this point were over one metre high.  
Photo by Greg Potts

LOWER RIGHT: Murrah River flats 1km from estuary mouth to ocean. This area is normally dry farming land. Photo by Greg Potts



## QUICK ACTION BY ILLAROO ROAD BRIGADE

Story and photos by  
Tracy Griffiths, Secretary,  
Illaroo Road Brigade



Illaroo Road Rural Fire Brigade were heading home from a day of meetings and a clean up exercise in March 2010, when they noticed a thick plume of smoke engulfing the town centre of Nowra.

TOP: Nowra's local surf shop and motorbike shop well alight

CENTRE: Elected at the AGM held just before the incident took place were Illaroo Brigade Captain Vic Judson, Snr Dep Capt Michael Evans, Dep Peter Bye, Dep Mick Judson, Equipment Officer Shannon Fryer and Treasurer Ron Witz

They arrived on scene to see the local surf shop and motorbike shop ablaze. Flames were flowing from all sides of the building, local residents were standing around viewing the scene.

Illaroo Road Senior Deputy Captain Michael Evans, in charge of the day's operations, radioed FireCom who instructed the Illaroo Road Brigade to respond and investigate.

Illaroo Road Brigade 1 and 7 crews quickly set up initial 65mm and 38mm hose lines, stand pipes for the extra water resources and then launched into first attack on the eastern side of the building upwind and out of the hot zone (Illaroo Road is not a Village 2 brigade and therefore does not have breathing apparatus.)

All crew members from our Cat 1 and 7 were fully engaged in the incident for at least five minutes before the NSW Fire

Brigades (NSWFB) arrived to take control.

Smoke from the building was toxic due to the hazardous materials within the buildings. Adding to hazard was the location of the fire right on the Princes Highway. Traffic had to be diverted around the incident and through the centre of town.

Extra Breathing Apparatus crews were called to assist from Group 1 and Group 2 area as well as NSWFB crews from Berry, Kiama and Wollongong. Other emergency services were also involved including NSW Police, Ambulance Service of NSW, Integral Energy and the local council.

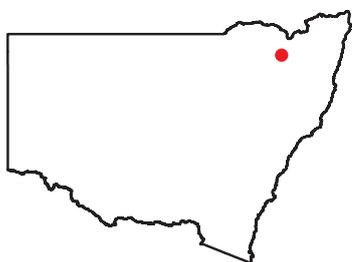
The fire burned for three and a half hours before crews could take a well-earned rest and gratefully eat the lunch kindly provided by the NSWFB. Illaroo Road Brigade left the scene in the early evening.



# HERITAGE BUILDING LOST IN FIRE

By Inspector Konrad Sawczynski, Learning and Development Officer,  
Northern Tablelands

Photos by Senior Deputy Captain Ottley Irwin, Gilgai Brigade



A 109-year-old commercial and residential building in Inverell was destroyed in a structure fire on 24 January 2010.

The joint effort between NSW Fire Brigades and NSW Rural Fire Service crews was outstanding and their combined efforts resulted in the fire being contained to a relatively small area.

The NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB) were alerted with a Triple Zero (000) call very early on Sunday. After the first units arrived on scene and discovered the size of the fire and its potential to spread to adjoining buildings, a call for assistance was made to the NSW Rural Fire Service. NSW RFS units responded quickly.

The building was erected in 1901 and was a two storey double brick and tin roof construction. The building housed numerous shops and residential units. A number of occupants were

evacuated by NSW Police and NSWFB.

The fire occurred at around 0100hrs. The firefighting strategy started as offensive but very quickly turned to defensive. There were concerns about the possibility of the building collapsing and later firefighters suspected a gas leak inside the burning building. The blaze was contained at approximately 0530hrs.

The fire destroyed 10 shops on the ground floor, 24 units on the first floor and three cars parked out the front of the building. There were no injuries or deaths.

Cooperation between the NSWFB and the NSW RFS was excellent as firefighters from both organisations worked shoulder to shoulder to stop the fire spreading to neighbouring premises.

NSW RFS units on scene were:  
Inverell 1 and 2  
Gilgai 1 and 7  
FCO 5

Also on the scene were NSWFB Inverell Pumper and Tanker, NSWFB Glen Innes Tanker, NSW Police, NSW Ambulance, Country Energy and The Salvation Army.





Community engagement officers in the Riverina were quick to follow up after the startling fires in December 2009.

# AFTER THE RIVERINA FIRES, BRINGING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER

By Kelwyn White and Marg Wehner Community Safety Officers, Southern Border Team  
Photos by David Bent, Thurgoona Brigade and Kelwyn White



Photo courtesy of The Border Mail

Community engagement is vital for increasing awareness of bush fire risk and helping people prepare for bush fires, however engaging the community during and after an incident can be just as important for the recovery effort. After the Walla-Walla Gerogery Fire on and around 17 December 2009 the impact on the community was of great concern to fire agencies and the local councils.

On Thursday 17 December 2009 gale-force winds and 40-degree temperatures had combined. The efforts from local brigades were outstanding yet five homes were destroyed in the flames. One firefighter was injured and another firefighter lost his home in Gerogery. The Gerogery Brigade, Southern Border Team and Greater Hume Shire Council and the Greater Hume Shire Council Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) decided to act and held several community meetings and social events over the following months.

### 23 December 2009

Less than a week after houses were lost to fire in the Gerogery township, the Greater Hume Shire Council LEMC Recovery Committee got the ball rolling. They hosted a community barbeque at the Gerogery Memorial Hall on the Wednesday prior to Christmas. The intention was to build community morale. Well over 200 members from Gerogery and Walla-Walla attended. Apart from the welcome food and good company, information was disseminated, updates given and the community was briefed about all support networks available to them.

### 4 January 2010

Several weeks after the fires the Captain of Gerogery Brigade, Stuart Byrne, was aware of the concern in the community and suggested a public information meeting be held.

The meeting would be a place where community members could have their questions answered about the fire on the 17 December and also to learn

more about being prepared for bush fire.

The public information meeting was held on Monday 4 January 2010 – two and half weeks after the fire and was hosted by the Southern Border Team and Gerogery Brigade. Present at the meeting were representatives from the Greater Hume Shire, NSW RFS Southern Border team Manager George Alexander (who was also Incident Controller during the fire), NSW RFS Community Safety Officer, Marg Wehner and several Group Captains. Once again about 200 people attended.

During the meeting community members had a lot of questions about how and why the fire ignited, why some people were evacuated and why access to their homes during the fire was restricted. They also wanted to know more about the strategies employed by the NSW RFS in the battle to contain the blaze.

Overall the meeting was a very good opportunity for people to express these concerns, for answers to be given and the community to be reassured.

Equally so, it was an ideal opportunity for NSW RFS to explain how an event of this nature unfolds. We impressed on the community the need for people to stay aware of the environment in which they live and to be prepared for bush fire. The meeting consisted of information about fire behaviour, public messaging information and general fire safety education.

Community Safety Officer Marg Wehner presented information on how fires affect properties and some of the reasons why houses catch alight. She reviewed the way that information was disseminated on 17 December. She also gave a thorough guide on how to find the best information during a fire and how to use the NSW RFS tools before the fire season even starts.

Aerial photographs of the fires' path were presented. Successful strategies implemented by land holders who had saved their properties were explained.

'The intention was build community morale. Well over 200 community members from Gerogery and Walla-Walla attended.'

Bush Fire Survival Plan pamphlets were distributed and the opportunity was given to individuals after the meeting to speak to NSW RFS representatives one on one.

### 1 February 2010: Firefighters thanked

A barbeque to thank the NSW RFS was held in Gerogery on Monday 1 February 2010. The barbeque was attended by 75 members from the brigades involved in the Walla-Walla Gerogery fire on 17 December 2009. Also in attendance was Greater Hume Shire Council Mayor Denise Osborne, Greater Hume Shire Council General Manager Steven Pinnuck and NSW RFS staff from the Southern Border Team and members from the Critical Incident Support Services (CISS) Team.

Nine new members of the Gerogery Brigade were signed up!

### 15 February 2010: Schools visits

The impact on children in the area was also of concern and Gerogery School Principal Stephen Broomfield and Community Safety Officer Kelwyn White decided to offer support there too. Kelwyn White visited both the Gerogery and Walla Walla Public Schools on Monday 15 February 2010.

At each school Kelwyn allowed time for parents to meet with her regarding the fire and prevention measures. She then spent a few hours with the students discussing what they had felt and experienced on the day and during the fire. The students were encouraged to express their feelings by drawing pictures of their experiences.

They discussed the changes they could see in the environment and how they felt a couple of months after the fire.

The Gerogery School was presented with an aerial overview of the school surrounded by blackened trees and scrub and scrub showing them how close they came to a disaster if it had not been for the efforts of the local rural fire brigades.



# FIRE BOAT EXERCISE ON THE HAWKESBURY

By Daryl Johnson, Muogamarra Brigade | Photos by Filip Mincev, Westleigh Brigade

The Fifth Annual Combined Districts Fire Boat Exercise was held on the Hawkesbury River at Fishermans Point in March 2010.

The event was hosted by the Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai District and involved 14 firefighting vessels and over 140 firefighters participating in mock scenarios.

The Combined Districts Fire Boat Exercise is designed to develop firefighting skills, knowledge of incident management procedures and is an opportunity for firefighters to experience multi-agency coordination.

Simulated scenarios involved a fire and rescue on the local charter ferry *Emily Melvey*, a marina boat fire, a power pole fire, a LPG cylinder fire and a

navigation exercise which took crews off the water to a grass fire.

The NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS), Marine Rescue NSW, Volunteer Rescue Association, NSW Police, and the Maritime Authority all provided supporting crews and vessels for the exercise. In addition there were six private boats used for activities on the day.

The NSW RFS brigades and crews who participated on the day included: Hornsby / Ku-ring-gai: Berowra Waters, Brooklyn, Milsons

Passage  
Warringah / Pittwater: Scotland Island, West Pittwater  
Cumberland: Regentville  
Gosford: Bar Point, Brisbane Waters  
Manning Team: Forster/Tuncurry

Brooklyn Boat was awarded top rank on the day, followed by the Regentville Boat and Berowra Waters Boat Alpha.

Special thanks go to the RFS for their sponsorship and support along with the Berowra Waters Brigade as the driving force behind the event.



# TESTING A BUSH FIRE PROOF HOUSE DESIGN

These photos show a steel-framed house at the height of a CSIRO flame test at the Eurobodalla Training Centre in April 2010.

Eurobodalla Training Centre is the only facility in the world with a bush fire flame front simulator that enables testing of different materials in the open under worst case bush fire conditions.

CSIRO scientists 'flame-tested' the steel-framed house to see how the structure would respond to ember attack, extreme levels of radiant heat and direct flame contact.

Fire researchers are testing the idea that a house constructed predominantly of steel should be able to survive in the flame zone of a real bush fire, assuming that windows or other external openings have not been breached. The concept is that the entire non-combustible building façade, insulation and frame acts to protect the habitable space.

The test involved exposing the steel structure to ember attack, escalating levels of radiant heat and flame immersion to simulate the bush fire attack that would be experienced by a house situated only a few metres from the bush. The test may help inform future building policies for bush fire prone areas.

Bush fire researchers from CSIRO and the Bushfire CRC observed the house burn-over from a safety area where they can monitor live feeds of data from numerous sensors and heat measuring devices which were located internally and externally to the structure as well as within the house cavities.

Testing is being conducted in partnership with the construction industry body, the National Association of Steel-Framed Housing, the Bushfire CRC and with support from the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Photos courtesy of the CSIRO





# DANGEROUS TREES

Roman candles or chimneys are different terms for the same thing. They occur in hollow trunks or limbs with apertures at the lower end and open holes at a higher point. When fire enters at the lower hole, the funneling effect creates a roaring fire inside the hollow section with the consequence that lighted sparks and glowing embers 'spew' out of the top – creating the 'roman candle' effect. The sparks increase every time the wind blows and can easily start spot fires.

Very often the only solution is to keep watch, control any spot fires and wait for the tree to fall and then break it up. This becomes a more complicated issue with burning limbs, as after they have fallen the fire still burns in the remaining hollow limb. Once the limb has fallen, a risk assessment may conclude that it is safe for the tree to then be felled.

A South Coast photographer, Jonathan Poyner, took this photo in June 2004 during back burn near Narooma.

"The fire was along the side of the road on the Princess Highway, just outside of Narooma," he said, "The fire actually crossed the road."

"I took the photo with a four second exposure. The embers swirled around and made the image of a man."

Roman candles, chimneys or fully involved tree trunks while spectacular, are always a matter for caution for firefighters.

*Chief Superintendent  
Alan Brinkworth, AFSM  
Manager State Operations*

# TENTH REGION NORTH EXERCISE

By Bryan Daly, Operations Manager, Region North  
 Photos by Alex Chesser, Media Services and David Purdon, Diggings Brigade



The tenth Region North Exercise was held over the weekend of 26-28 March 2010 in Glenn Innes and was another outstanding success, according to the people who attended.

Region North held its first annual Exercise in 2001 in South Grafton. It was the first time NSW RFS volunteers and staff had gathered in this way for training. They proved a popular and efficient way to develop skills and improve communications between brigades throughout the region. Since that time, Regional Exercises have now become a regular part of the NSW RFS calendar for all regions.

The first Region North Exercise saw 240 volunteers and staff attend. This year saw twice that many involved. In total over the ten years, 3,668 personnel have attended a Region North Exercise. All in all that's a lot of training hours.

In 2003 the Region North Exercise was held at the Glenn Innes Showgrounds where a comprehensive base camp was established to house the majority of participants. It has continued to be held at the Glenn Innes Showgrounds ever since. The Northern Tablelands Team staff and volunteers go out of their way to support and contribute to the success of the annual event.

On Friday afternoon 26 March, the Showground was transformed into a NSW RFS staging area with 53 fire trucks and 430 volunteers and staff making it their temporary home for two days. Crews from across Region North made the long journey to Glen Innes, and were joined by a crew from Gosford and Communications Officers and Strike Team Leaders from other Region East Districts.

The volunteers from across the Region who make up the catering units started arriving at Glen Innes on the Thursday to prepare and cook the 3,000 odd meals that were consumed over the weekend.

The crews were challenged throughout the weekend by 12 scenarios that tested their skill level, team work and leadership.

This year, the Exercise Committee was keen to look for more challenging 'hands on' scenarios to test the crews and sought to provide something special that would be remembered for years to come.

This year the scenarios that challenged the 53 crews included a fire overrun scenario featuring a MFR Bedford tanker from Canobolas; team challenge; leadership; water challenge involving SES flood boats; vehicle fire; pumping;



plane crash; structure fire and basic skills. One of the highlights was the running of the Fire Investigation scenario that led to the accreditation of 212 volunteers in 'Protect & Preserve Incident Scene'.

Once again, the Exercise was supported by the RFSA and Country Energy. The ongoing success of this Exercise relies on the support of these organisations. Additionally, the SES provided two flood boats and crews for the water challenge scenario, which provided an opportunity for our crews to see how flood boats work and become familiar with their operation.

Also for the first time, Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFRS) crews took part in the Exercise and from all accounts, had a great time.

The social side of the weekend is an important part of the Exercise and this year, thanks to the sponsorship of the RFSA, well-known country singer Darren Coggan entertained the crews on Friday night. A great rock band, Fossil Rock provided a great night's entertainment on the Saturday night.

The Basic Skills lane is used to select the best teams to represent the Region at the State Championships. Following

some strong competition, the 2010 winners were the Grafton City crew from Clarence Valley while the Willow Tree team from Liverpool Range came in as runners up.

The Scenario Marshals voted for the Best Crew Leader and Strike Team Leaders they saw during the weekend. This year saw Aaron Bayliss from Narara (Region East) nominated as Best Crew Leader and Jillian Guest from Namoi Gwydir Team nominated as Best Strike Team Leader. Both of these members displayed outstanding commitment and leadership to their crews and ensured that their respective crews were well looked after during the whole weekend.

The effort required to run an Exercise of this size requires a considerable commitment from a lot of people. This year Bert Brand and Jim Jameson from Northern Rivers Team and Pat Bradley from New England Team, were recognised. They have shown dedication over many years, and their passion for encouraging and teaching volunteers has been outstanding and much appreciated.

Having successfully run the 2010 Exercise, attention now turns to 2011, and ensuring that the standard set over the past 10 years is maintained, and where possible, improved.

# A BALL OF A TIME!



By Carolyn Cuello, C4K Ball Coordinator  
Photos by Adam Hollingworth, Hired Gun



Guests danced the night away



Guests were treated to a free Pandora gift bag



C4K Team Member Peter Marshall shows off one of the many prizes auctioned on the night!



CEO of The Children's Hospital at Westmead, Dr Antonio Penna spoke about the work of hospital and benefits brought by C4K

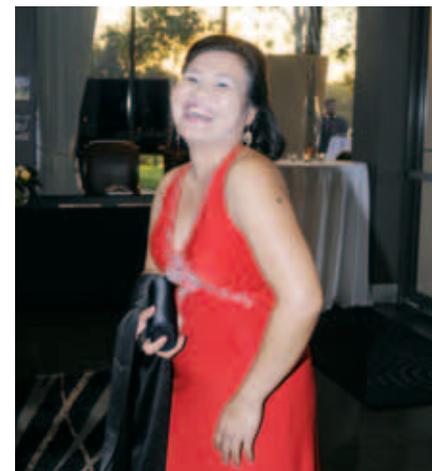




The Enormous Horns back by popular demand!



Masters of Ceremonies for the night, Phil Langdon and Matt Schroder



Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons laughing with special guest comedian Anh Do

The NSW RFS's official charity raised more than \$15,000 for kids at the annual Coffee4Kids Ball.

Guests from around the State supported the C4K Foundation and its major beneficiary, The Children's Hospital at Westmead, by attending the 2010 Ball in March.

Building on the success of the inaugural event in 2009, the C4K Ball ran without a hitch thanks to the sponsors and the support of over 30 helpers and 45 prize donors making it an even bigger Ball!

The 2010 Ball was another demonstration of the enormous support the NSW RFS staff

and volunteers, agencies and the public give to the C4K Foundation. Sponsors this year were *DATS Environmental Services Group* and *DATS Skip Bins* and *Martin & Luscombe Associates* with donations from *Corporate Air* and *Dick Smith*.

NSW RFS volunteers had come from as far away as Wingello with more than 220 people letting their hair down on the bigger dance floor. The return of the very popular jazz/covers band, *The Enormous Horns* and special guest comedian Anh Do (pictured above with the Commissioner), were just some of the highlights.

"Anh Do made you laugh and cry – he was just amazing!" said one inspired guest.

Guests were moved by stories from The Children's Hospital at Westmead. CEO Dr Antonio Penna (pictured far left) and Staff Specialist Dr Jonathan Egan from Intensive Care, provided an insight into the impact the Foundation makes through its contributions.

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, C4K Ambassador, and Mark Crossweller, C4K Founder, also thanked all supporters. Ball Coordinator, Carolyn Cuello, remarked that it

was rewarding to see something like this come together but urged us to remember the support for C4K all year round.

"From the brigades and Fire Control Centres who continue to fill C4K money tins and organise fundraisers to all those who visit HQ and Region East and support through the very successful chocolate sales... It is the whole package that makes this so special."

The C4K Team is already in the planning stages for the next signature event for 2011 with details to be confirmed later in the year.

## LIKE TO SUPPORT C4K?

Would you like to help promote the Coffee4Kids Foundation in your area? Or would you simply like to know more? If so, please contact the C4K team at [C4K@coffee4kids.org.au](mailto:C4K@coffee4kids.org.au) or call (02) 8741 5220 to speak to a C4K Advisory Committee Member today. To register your interest in the Foundation, please visit [www.coffee4kids.org.au](http://www.coffee4kids.org.au).



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For more information, contact the NSW Manager Fred Brown on:

p: 02 4256 5084 | m: 0408 424 994 | [www.gaam.com.au](http://www.gaam.com.au)

# Our Service's story

Our Service's Story is part of the NSW RFS History Project. Stories are being gathered from volunteers and staff, as well as State Library, State Records, local council records and committee minutes. Newspapers and journals are being pored over for the rich personal memories of significant fires, brigade formations and equipment developments.

The graphic in this second *Bush Fire Bulletin* Souvenir Liftout is a reproduction of the commemorative mural in the foyer of the NSW RFS Headquarters. The timeline accompanying the mural is an excerpt from the history boards which are also displayed.

Much of the NSW RFS history is captured in photos and in many cases the source, the detail and facts of the photo have faded into folklore. The photo featured on the front page of the *Bush Fire Bulletin*, and seen here, is a classic example of how the history of the NSW RFS is pieced together with memories, official records, hearsay, conjecture and good old fashioned story telling.

We asked NSW RFS members if anyone knew who had taken this photo. Luckily, it seems that the photo was familiar to many members...

*The photo is reproduced courtesy of Fairfax Photos.*



Piecing together the information sent in by members, we discovered that the photo was taken on 17 December 1979 in the Terrey Hills district in Sydney's northern beaches by *Sun* photographer John O'Gready. It was first published in the *Bush Fire Bulletin* in 1980.

The photo was probably taken after a couple of days of heavy firefighting in the Terrey Hills area, possibly on the Larool Trail. A Total Fire Ban had been declared on Saturday 15 December 1979 and a Bush Fire Emergency was declared at 1300hrs on Monday 17 December.

Manager State Operations, Chief Superintendent Alan Brinkworth, also a long-time member of the Terrey Hills Brigade, provided us with his personal notes taken at the time of the fire:

## **Warringah – Section 41f**

Started East of Bobbin Head Road near Cowan Creek at approx 1524 Sunday 16th December, 1979;

Declaration 1310 Monday 17th December, 1979; 14,200 hectares (142 sq km); Losses: 15 homes, outbuildings, motor vehicles & caravan; Injuries: one broken ankle; Section 41f terminated 1600 Wednesday 19th December, 1979; All Units stood down 1930 Friday 21st December, 1979.

Duffys Forest captain at the time was Dennis Joiner. He recognised the photo immediately.

*"Possibly 1979, the rear vision mirrors on the Duffys AB160 are right for that time. Probably not in Duffys Forest, more likely in Terrey Hills. Duffys was working in Myoora Rd / Amuna Rd area, and on the Larool Rd Fire trail on the morning of the 1979 fires...."*

*In fact, they were overrun on the Larool Rd trail before being sent back to Duffys about 11am....where they got overrun again on Booralie Rd. I think most agree that the overrun on Larool Trail was about 1100hrs...."*

This photo could have been taken just prior to the overrun on the Larool trail. To test our theory Alan Brinkworth revisited the path to see if he could recognise the spot captured in the photo. The growth of the trees in the past 30 years made him unable to say for sure.

Dennis Joiner continued his observations:

*"The firefighter on the left walking down the drive looks very much like Col Turnbull...sleeves up, long boots, ex-Warringah, FCO Cessnock...now deceased, and very much missed...one of those old bushies that knew fires backwards..."*

*Most of the crew had been out all the previous day...The crew had been relieved about 2200hrs, and then had come back on at 0700hrs...By lunch time every available member was back in Duffys....and all manner of chaos had broken out..."*

*In Forty Flaming Years, a history of the Terrey Hills Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade 1942-1982, author Robert Charteris drew on the Fire Control Officer's reports and eye witness accounts. At about 1100hrs:*

*"Terrey Hills sped round the corner and along the trail, joining Duffys Forest and other brigades. Minutes later the fire jumped the trail. Members pressed themselves as close to the ground as they could as the inferno passed only feet above them."*

*For the next two hours...all brigades were on the move continuously as the fires surged in an uncontrollable fashion."*

*About half past eleven the first home was lost...from the city a huge pall of smoke could be seen covering the entire area."*

It is only one photo among thousands held in the NSW RFS archives, yet it turned out to be a story worth telling.

# The history of the Service



New South Wales  
Rural Fires Act 1997 No 65  
Bush Fire Council of NSW

# 1960-2009



## 1960-1980

### Devastating fires in the 1960s

In the 1964-65 season, fires raged in the Snowy Mountains, Southern Tablelands and outer metropolitan areas of Sydney. The Chatsbury/Bungonia fire covered 250,000ha and destroyed the village of Wingello. Three lives were lost. In March 1965, the Tumut Valley fire burnt out 80,000ha. Three years later during the 1968-69 seasons, major fires in Wollongong destroyed 33 homes, five other buildings and devastated rainforest. During that same season, fires in the lower Blue Mountains were fanned by 100kph winds destroying 123 buildings. Three lives were lost. The end of the decade saw a savage fire in Roto, east of Ivanhoe which burnt 280,000ha over a three week period.

### 1970: The Bush Fire Council and Coordinating Committee

In 1970 amendments to the *Bush Fires Act 1949* made further provisions with respect to the prevention, control and suppression of bush fires. The Act provided for the establishment of a Bush Fire Council of NSW and the appointment of a Chief Coordinator of Bush Fire Fighting.

That same year, the Bush Fires Branch was established within the Chief Secretary's Department to provide specialised administrative support to the Council.

### 1975: The Bush Fire Service

In 1975 the Bush Fires Branch of the Chief Secretary's Department integrated with the State Emergency Services (SES). It was renamed the Bush Fire Service and was responsible for providing technical and general advisory service on bush fire matters and acted as the administration arm of the Bush Fire Council. Three years later the branch was subsequently separated from the SES and attached to the Department of Services.

### Large fires in the east and west

1975 also saw the most severe fire season for perhaps 30 years in the far west of the State with 3,755 million hectares burnt, 50,000 stock lost and 10,170km of fencing destroyed. One and a half million hectares were burnt in the Cobar Shire and 340,000ha in the Balranald Shire. At that time, the Moolah-Corinya fire was the largest fire ever to be put out by firefighters. The perimeter was over 1,000km. Three people died in the fire, 100 were hurt and 40 homes were destroyed.

In the late 1970s, the Blue Mountains endured two bad fire seasons. In late 1976, 65,000ha were burnt. The following year, 49 buildings were destroyed alongside of a further 54,000ha. Serious fires occurred in the Southern Highlands two years later in 1978-79. Major fires were widespread for the 1979-80 fire season burning over one million hectares in total across the State.

### Comprehensive firefighter training

The 1980s began with the transfer of the Bush Fires Branch to the Office of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

Around this time comprehensive training programs were being developed by the Service. Basic training modules were introduced in 1983, which began the formalised State-wide training system - a system that would be adopted later by other bush fire services in Australia.

## 1980-1997

### Fires in the 1980s

The early 1980s saw some of the worst bush fire seasons since the 1950s. In the 1980-81 season, eight people tragically died and over 887,000ha were scorched. The following year, a pine plantation worth \$12 million was destroyed in Southern NSW. This fire was so hot that it burnt 24,000ha in just two and a half hours. Lightning strikes on Christmas Day in 1984 ignited more than 100 fires in the grassed areas in Western NSW. Half a million hectares were burnt as a result. That year 6,000 fires raged. Four people lost their lives and a total of \$40 million of losses was recorded. The decade closed as it had begun, with major fires burning in the eastern part of the State.

### Department of Bush Fire Services

In 1985 the Chairman of the Bush Fire Council became Executive Officer of the Bush Fires Branch. The position was held by Phil Koperberg.

The 1993-94 fire season saw the most protracted and largest firefighting effort in Australian history with 18,300 volunteer firefighters deployed at over 800 fires throughout NSW. Four lives and 206 houses were lost. The subsequent Coronial Inquiry eventually resulted in the Government introducing legislation for a single Rural Fire Service in 1997 with a single chain of command. Phil Koperberg as Commissioner was to head this single Service.

### The Rural Fires Act

The *Rural Fires Act 1997 No 65* was proclaimed 1 September 1997. The Act established rural fire districts, constituted around local government boundaries, as well as the NSW Rural Fire Service to be comprised of the Commissioner, other staff and volunteer firefighters. The operating capabilities and organisational structure strengthened by the new Act, laid the groundwork to simplify how the NSW RFS was to be run.

## 2001-present day

### A unified organisation

On 1 July 2001, Fire Control Officers became employees of the State Government. Service Level Agreements were developed to allow a Council to delegate any or all of its responsibilities, as defined by the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, to the Commissioner of the NSW RFS. Service-wide operating standards, procedures and a raft of associated business improvement programs were commenced under this change program.

### Legislation for the environment

In the following year in August, the *Rural Fires and Environmental Assessment Legislation Amendment Act 2002* amended both the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* and the *Rural Fires Act 1997* to provide a stronger and more streamlined system for building developments in bush fire prone areas.

Legislative amendment in 2002 followed on from the Joint Select Committee on Bushfires and the Report on the Inquiry into the 2001-2002 Bushfires. The amendments were specifically designed to strengthen the regulatory framework relating to prevention and mitigation strategies to minimise the impact of fire on the NSW community.

### New Commissioner

In October 2007 Shane Fitzsimmons became the second Commissioner of the NSW RFS. In April that year Phil Koperberg had resigned to begin a career in politics.

The year also boasted a remarkable number of members participating in a new online communication channel with 10,600 members registered using the MyRFS volunteer website.

### The NSW RFS today

The NSW RFS is the combat agency for bush, grass and structure fires in rural fire districts. It is also the lead agency for coordination of bush firefighting and prevention throughout the State.

For the year ending June 2009, the NSW RFS recorded a membership of more than 2,065 rural fire brigades and 70,701 volunteers who were equipped, supported, trained and operational across the State out of 50 control centres.

That same year the Service reported 4,000 tankers, 72 catering vehicles, 41 communications vehicles, 55 bulk water carriers and 2,000 qualified trainers delivering 314,680 local hours of training. Completed hazard reductions protected 118,021 properties and 2,773 community education programs were conducted across the State. In partnership with community and through the professionalism of its members, the NSW RFS continues to grow and to improve - while always promoting the ethos of volunteering.

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# ARE YOU A PHOTOGRAPHER?

Your photo could feature on the official 2010 NSW RFS Christmas Card.

All members are invited to submit a photo that expresses the Christmas spirit within the NSW RFS.

A panel of judges will choose a winner who captures the 'NSW RFS Christmas spirit' in a creative way. You can see the cards from 2008 and 2009 above/below pls adjust as required.

To enter, all you need to do is submit a completed entry form. The entry form outlines everything you need to know about the competition. They are available on MyRFS, the staff intranet or from your local Fire Control Centre or DTZ office.

The winning entry will be officially printed on the 2010 NSW RFS Christmas Card with full acknowledgements.

All entries must be received by COB Friday 24 September 2010. The winner will not be announced until the release of the Christmas card.

Good luck!

Please submit your entries via email to [events@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:events@rfs.nsw.gov.au) or via post (CD ROM) to: 2010 Christmas Card Competition NSW RFS - Events & Promotions Section Locked Bag 17, Granville NSW 2142

Please note: Entries will not be returned after the competition, so please ensure you keep a copy.



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# BUSHFIRE CRC RESEARCH LEADS THE WAY

By Caroline Ortel, Project Officer,  
Corporate Research

Research prompted by the Victorian Black Saturday fires in 2009 will dominate the agenda for the Bushfire CRC for the next three years.

The Bushfire CRC recently presented its research projects to the partner organisations from around Australia at the NSW RFS Headquarters in Sydney. The NSW RFS was pleased to host the Research Advisory Forum as it was the first time the Bushfire CRC have held such a forum outside its own office in Melbourne.

Many of the topics presented for further study have been drawn from the Victorian Black Saturday fires in 2009.

The Research Advisory Forum was held on 6-7 May 2010 with representatives from 42 Australian fire and land management agencies, research partners and industry partners as Bushfire CRC partner agencies. The purpose of this particular forum was to present the agreed suite of research projects to the partner organisations for the first time. All project leaders gave presentations and provided details of the research activities they expect to pursue over the coming three years.

The Bushfire CRC was formed in 2003 and has led a nationally coordinated, multi-disciplinary research program into areas such as fire behaviour, smoke management, aerial firefighting, prescribed burning, fire weather, community education and building in fire zones. The original



Bushfire CRC was funded for seven years and this period ended on the 30 June 2010. The Commonwealth has now provided approval and associated funding for an extension through to 30 June 2013.

The comprehensive research plan for the next three years will set the agenda for longer-term studies. The CRC has drawn on an extensive data collection following the 2009 fires, discussions with leaders in the fire, land-management, local government, academic and

policy arenas, and the Council Assisting the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission.

The critical areas of concern to the community and the broader sector fall within three main program areas, which have been aligned to the widely accepted risk-management paradigm:

- Understanding the Risk
- Communicating the Risk
- Managing the Threat

An enhancement to the Bushfire CRC partner engagement process has been the formation

of a Research Advisory Forum which will be an important part of the establishment and monitoring of the research projects for the Bushfire CRC Extension Program. These Forums will provide partner organisations with regular updates on the progress of each of the projects and of the overall program.

For more information on the latest from the Bushfire CRC including the 2010-2013 Extension Program please visit <http://www.bushfirecrc.com/>.

## High fire

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons spoke at the recent The Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre's *Fire in the High Country* forum held in Albury.

The Australian Alps, in south eastern Australia includes the ACT, south east NSW and part of the eastern Victoria, present unique fire management issues. Rugged terrain, unusual climatic conditions, fuel arrangement and valuable environments all mean the high country needs its own focus. At the two day forum researchers and fire practitioners shared the latest findings arising from the High Fire research program.





## NSW RFS AT THE POLICE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES GAMES

By Mark Williams, Regional Mitigation Compliance Officer, Region South

Four NSW RFS members travelled to Hobart in February to compete in the 13th Australasian Police and Emergency Services (APES) Games. All four members did the Service proud, achieving personal bests and coming home with a swag of medals.

Clare Kesby, a volunteer from Brewarrina Brigade competed in Skeet and Trap Shooting. She came away with three bronze medals and won the Ladies section of the 90 Target Continental Championship.

Inspector Peter Jones, Community Safety Officer in the Riverina Highlands competed in Archery where he finished fourth in all three events. Considering the weather conditions (40kph winds and horizontal rain) he did exceptionally well.

Superintendent Mark Williams, Regional Mitigation Compliance Officer from Region South, competed in four events.

He won two Bronze and as defending champion of the Duathlon, he once again won Gold!

Superintendent David Hagarty, Operations/Learning and Development Officer in the Barwon Darling Zone competed in Skeet and Trap Shooting. He won two Bronze, a Silver and a Gold. He was even happier when on Sunday he visited the Hobart Gun Club and shot well to win overall in the 90 Target Continental Championship.

Congratulations to all four members!

TOP: Superintendent David Hagarty, Clare Kesby, Brewarrina Brigade and Superintendent Mark Williams with their swag of medals  
 CENTRE RIGHT: Superintendent Mark Williams winner of the Duathlon  
 LOWER RIGHT: Inspector Peter Jones competed in Archery at the APES Games



# YOUNG FARMERS MEET THE CHALLENGE AT THE ROYAL EASTER SHOW

Story and photos by Terry Jackson, Community Engagement Team

The NSW RFS was a major sponsor for the 2010 Young Farmers Challenge at the 2010 Royal Easter Show. The Young Farmer Challenge is an event for people under the age of 35 who come from, or are closely connected to, the farming community throughout NSW. The event saw young farmers competing in a variety of rural-based farming skills including assembling water pumps and undertaking a firefighting exercise.

The NSW RFS Community Engagement Team and Regional Services provided equipment and a supporting ground crew. A ground support team from the Marsden Park Brigade in Cumberland Zone, consisting of David Brown Captain, Don Deppeler Senior Deputy Captain, Keith Vincent Firefighter, Wayne Clarke Firefighter and Kenneth Siggee, Firefighter were kept



busy setting up the firefighting equipment for each heat and the main arena event for the State finals. Cumberland Zone supplied a Cat 1 Tanker and light truck along with water bins, hoses and nozzles. Sutherland District supplied portable pumps and equipment and Hornsby supplied fire trays. Regional Services provided Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Personal Protective Clothing (PPC) for all participants.

The Royal Agricultural Society also requested the NSW RFS to enter two teams in the event; with some negotiation the Service was able to enter three teams. During the heats a vacancy occurred and we were able to assemble a composite team from the Wagga and Albury teams giving the Service four competing teams.

The Camden West team was successful in winning their heat

and was promoted to a position in the State Grand Final to be held in the main showground arena. Some weeks earlier the Camden West Team had also participated in the Young Farmer Challenge at Camden Show and was declared Camden Show Young Farmer Challenge Champions.

The composite team from Wagga and Albury also won their heat and went through to the finals in the main arena.

The Camden West Team was placed second in the Championship and the Wagga/Albury Team placed fourth. It was a creditable achievement considering the heats were held on the same day as the final and that the competition from teams across the State was strong.

The participation of the NSW RFS in the Young Farmer Challenge has been recognised



as a successful venture by the Service and congratulations are extended to all who participated.

TOP: Scott Vale and Brenton Nicholson, Camden West Brigade

CENTRE LEFT: Robert Boardman, Camden West Brigade

CENTRE RIGHT: Runners up in the State Young Farmer Challenge Championship. Camden West Team

L-R) Robert Boardman, Scott Vale, Tim Boardman, Brenton Nicholson all from the Camden West Brigade.

BELOW: Fourth place getters: A composite team from Wagga/Albury: Chris Peel, Tarcutta Brigade, Robert Guttler, Lake Albert Brigade, Sam Yensch, Thurgoona Brigade and Stephen Young Lavington Brigade

# PLANNING THE FUTURE OF

# MyRFS

By Luuk Honings, Manager Online Communications  
Photos by Jacqueline Murphy, Bush Fire Bulletin



ABOVE: MyRFS welcomes aboard its newest team member Luke Hodges (above right with long time MyRFS team member Matt Gould)  
RIGHT: NSW RFS staff and volunteers taking part in workshops across the state to help shape the future of MyRFS

Since MyRFS was launched in 2005 it has grown to accommodate over 14,000 members who use this portal to assist with the administration of their brigade, check their call outs or incident information and find out all the latest news and happenings at the NSW RFS.

Building on the solid growth and success of MyRFS, the Online Communications Team, with your help, is already planning how to bring the public website ([www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au)), MyRFS and the staff intranet together within a unified web environment.

## What is a unified web environment?

A unified web environment is a set of integrated web portals that provide an organised and informative view of the services provided by the NSW RFS. It is an easy to use system which organises and facilitates online content (documents, text, audio, video, images) into one place

making it available to both our internal and external audiences, when they want it.

The Online Communications team has started face-to-face workshops and interviews with members, staff and members of the public from across the State to form a list of requirements that will ensure the new online platform is relevant to the needs of all users.

Close to 20 workshops and interviews have already been conducted in Tamworth, Forbes, Queanbeyan and at Lidcombe Headquarters for volunteers and staff. Our presence at the Royal

Easter Show recently was used to engage members of the public and receive their ideas..

Pleasingly, over 160 participants made up of around 55 staff, 60 volunteers and 45 members of the public and representing all four regions, have attended the workshops and interviews. They have helped us identify what content and functionality they would like to see within MyRFS, the public website and the intranet.

Hundreds of suggestions were made for new features on these websites which were then prioritised by the workshops.

While not every feature will be able to be introduced straight away, they have been recorded for possible future use.

The information gathered from the workshops and interviews was then tested for accuracy through follow-up interviews and online surveys, to ensure we have captured the priorities correctly.

The feedback from the sessions was overwhelmingly positive and Online Communications would like to thank everyone who has already provided their valuable feedback throughout the process.



# SAFETY ALERT 2009/1

**The practice of varying fuels/accelerants and mixture ratios in NSW Rural Fire Service supplied drip torch devices is unsafe and has the potential to cause unstable device performance and may result in serious personal injury to device users.**

- Drip torch devices supplied by the NSW Rural Fire Service have been designed and tested to operate safely when used in accordance with manufacturer specifications and safe performance of the device cannot be assured when deviating from the stated directions.
- Under no circumstances should any fuel or accelerant be used in these devices other than fuel and mixture ratios provided in the manufacturer directions.
- NSW Rural Fire Service supplied drip torches are to be used with a fuel mix of 25 percent petrol to 75 percent diesel (Type I or Type II). No other fuels or mix ratios are to be used with this device.

MANUFACTURERS WARNING REPRODUCED ON THE FILLER CAP OF DRIP TORCHES AS SUPPLIED TO BRIGADES BY THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



**NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE**  
[www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au)

# in focus:volunteers

Could this be your brigade?



## Crew with the Commissioner!

Your photo or story could win your brigade a VIP crew member for a shift - Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons.

In an interview with the *Bush Fire Bulletin* the Commissioner once said: *"I certainly miss not being on the end of a hose - to coin a phrase!...If time permits I would like to go back ... and participate in being a member and maybe doing some hazard reductions."*

He said it. Now it is your chance to take the Commissioner up on his word!

Send us a story and photographs about events in your brigade and you could "Crew with the Commissioner". Whether you are a member of catering brigade, communications brigade or you are putting the wet stuff on the hot stuff, we want to hear from you. You could be the one giving the Commissioner the order to put in

the line or have him rescue your hose bowl. Imagine having him using your call sign to provide a SitRep to FireCom.

Throughout the year, NSW RFS members from across NSW send in amazing stories and photos to the *Bush Fire Bulletin* depicting the highs and lows of firefighting.

So whether it's a story you have written about a local volunteer who is making a difference in their community, or an amazing photo a member of your brigade has taken of a structure fully involved in fire, we would like to receive your individual brigade contributions.

And don't forget – win or lose - the NSW RFS will publish the very best stories and photos in a future issue of the magazine. This may be the only chance to win this prize, so ...what are you waiting for?

## How to enter

Email your story or photograph to [Bushfire.Bulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Bushfire.Bulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au). (Please send photos as separate jpg attachments, in as high a resolution as possible.) Indicate in the subject line that you are entering for a chance to "Crew with the Commissioner". Then, be sure to read the next issues of the *Bush Fire Bulletin* to see if your brigade has won! See page 42 and 43 to see what happened when the Commissioner crewed with last year's winners, the Williamtown/Salt Ash Brigade.

**Terms & Conditions** • You must be a registered NSW RFS volunteer to be eligible for the prize. • Times and dates for the Crew with the Commissioner will be subject to the Commissioner's availability • Entries not selected to win a prize may still be published in the *Bush Fire Bulletin*. • Prize winners are at the discretion of the *Bush Fire Bulletin* editorial team and all decisions are final. No correspondence will be entered into.

## Engaging at the Easter Show



The Royal Easter Show has been a part of the NSW RFS for nearly 60 years.

Like so many people from regional NSW, cadets from Tumut and Gundagai made their way up to the Royal Easter Show this year. Steven Simmonds and Ronald GardnerThompson are seen here on the Taipan Roller Coaster Ride with Gundagai Cadets Chris and Stacey Lewin.

The NSW RFS display at the 2010 Sydney Royal Easter show was a huge success and as a result was awarded Silver in "Commercial Section around the grounds."

To assist in promoting the stand at the show Community Engagement held an Easter Show ticket giveaway. Over 80 entries were received from NSW RFS staff and volunteers. The winning responses to the question: "What do you think community engagement means?" received entry tickets to the show.

Some of the winning entries defined community engagement as:

*"Creating an informed, prepared and resilient community that will make communities safer and help save lives and property."*

*"Community Engagement means building a mutual partnership with the community. Engagement is more than just informing, it is a conversation between members of the community and the Service about needs and solutions. Collaboration through community engagement means the community takes an active role in preparing for the challenges they face."*

*"Forming relationships with the communities we serve to optimise bush fire outcomes to all, wherever possible. This is opposed to the traditional 'one-way' public education approach where we now engage both ways to foster cross-ownership and communication of bush fire issues."*

Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate.

*The Community Engagement Team*

## Drama on display at the Armidale Show



Members of the Diggings and Devils Pinch brigades entertained thousands of spectators at the recent Armidale Show with a five-man gas attack and small gas bottle display.

The display began with the ignition of the gas bottles and the sounding of the Cat 1 siren. Firefighters got to work with rolling two 38's, pump started and primed while everyone donned heavy village jackets and formed up their attack.

The group was led by Crew Leader Deb Donaldson (Diggings). Despite the noise from the gas fire and equipment, the group also had to contend with a large amount of noise from the fairground. Deb, who is not known to be quietly spoken, still had trouble being heard above the noise! However the crew had the fire under control within minutes.

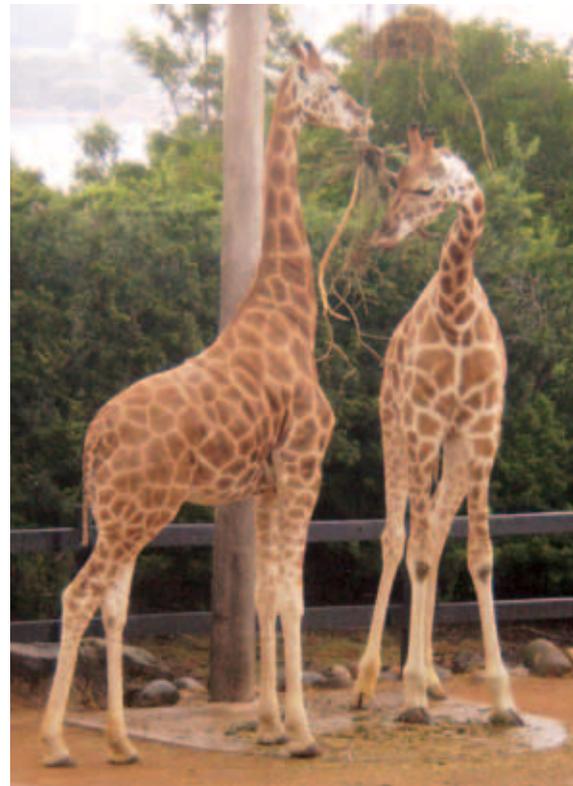
"In training you normally don't have 3,000 people waiting for you to make a mistake," Deb said, "The heat is really something. You are thankful for good equipment and plenty of water. We really love our pump operator!"

Others in the brigade had the opportunity to show the audience how an ignited 9kg bottle can be turned off without incident. There was stunned silence when Pete Fothergill gave the nod to start the display. On ignition of the gas bottle, those in the front row of the audience took a nervous step backwards. Neil Clayton (Devils Pinch) had the job of reaching through the fine curtain of water spray and turning off the bottle. Once the fire was extinguished a small cheer came up from the crowd.

*Story and photo by David Purdon, Diggings Brigade*



All the NSW RFS visitors agreed that Pathi Harn stole the show



## WE ARE GOING TO THE ZOO, ZOO, ZOO...



EnergyAustralia recently donated 260 Taronga Zoo tickets to NSW RFS volunteers to thank them for the world class service they provide to the people of this State.

In February 2010, EnergyAustralia in conjunction with NSW RFS Corporate and International Relations gave 65 lucky volunteers four free passes to either Taronga Zoo or Taronga Western Plains Zoo.

The promotion was part of the ongoing partnership agreement between the NSW RFS and EnergyAustralia.

Volunteers rushed to submit 25 winning words for their chance to go into the prize draw and more than 370 entries were received. Entrants were asked in 25 words or less, to explain what they liked about the giveaway.

The judging team thoroughly enjoyed reading through all the entries that were received. Due to the overwhelming response, all the unsuccessful entrants were given 2-for-1 tickets to either zoo as a thank you for taking the time to enter the giveaway.

For 65 lucky winners this was an opportunity to take their families to the zoo for the day. Here are some of the stories the prize winners told about their day at the zoo.

### WHAT OUR WINNING TICKETS TO THE ZOO DID FOR OUR FAMILY

We travelled to Taronga Park Zoo on the ANZAC long weekend.

The dinner conversation that night never left the topic of our day at the zoo.

There were many memorable highlights...of course the baby

elephant, Pathi Harn, was a show stealer but the family favourite was the Free Flight Bird Show.

Our family has now become much wiser on conservation issues all thanks to the work done at Taronga. This family for one is going to make a conscientious effort to refrain from buying products with palm oil, the production of this product is causing much of the habitat of animals to be destroyed.

*Deirdre Heitmeyer  
Mount Royal Brigade*



**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Graeme Wilson (Limeburners Creek Brigade Captain), Winnie Wilson, Mike Van Balkom (Deputy Captain) and his wife Joslyn. The snake is a Black-headed Python

### A FIRST VISIT TO THE ZOO

I've lived in Australia for 19 years and had never visited Taronga Zoo. The timing was brilliant with the dramatic birth of Pathi Harn (the baby elephant) just weeks earlier.

I went with my husband Graeme and two friends. We arrived right on opening time and rushed straight down to the elephant enclosure. It was worth it. Pathi Harn is absolutely adorable and quite happy playing in between mum's legs. His cousin (or is it his half brother?) would not leave him alone. It was like watching a game of hide and seek between them. We couldn't stay watching the elephants all day, so we pulled ourselves away to explore the rest of the zoo.

To see the anacondas and boa constrictors in real life made me speechless. They were huge and they did nothing to improve their likability with me. We took the plunge to have a photo taken with a black headed python. Funnily enough, when the appointed time came for the photo we couldn't find Graeme anywhere! We finally dragged him into the photo but as you can see he was not that enthusiastic. He is the one on the left.

I would like to thank the NSW RFS and Energy Australia for this wonderful opportunity and I will not leave it so long for a return visit.

*Winnie Wilson  
Limeburners Creek Brigade*

## WESTERN PLAINS ZOO VISIT

We were one of the lucky winners of the family pass to Taronga Western Plains Zoo.

Mum, Dad and two girls attended for two days during the school holidays. We pedalled and walked our way around this great attraction, thoroughly enjoying the experience. My daughter Erin (7) wrote the following:

*"At the zoo my favourite part of the day and animal was the hippo when they were brushing it's teeth. They brush their teeth and use a hose. The hippos have sharp teeth. At the zoo it was the best day ever."*

*The Gates family  
March Brigade*



Erin, seven years old and Claire, three, enjoying the 'elephants' at the Taronga Western Plains Zoo



## RASCHELLE'S DAY OUT

We arrived at the zoo at 10am. I was so excited, I couldn't wait it had been so long since I had been here. Everything seemed so different now I was older. Despite all the ongoing renovations, we had a wonderful day exploring. The grounds are beautifully kept and the animal displays are superb.

The biggest highlight of the day was the opportunity to see the new baby elephant. He is so cute! He doesn't leave his mum's side. The other big highlight was to sit and watch the Free Flight Bird Show. It is

amazing to see our wild birds having been trained in such a manner as to fly around amongst the crowd on command and perform tricks and return back to their appropriate homes on cue. We were entertained by the gorillas at feed time, as well as hearing a very informative talk on their habits.

We left the zoo about 4.30pm with very tired feet and made our way back home totally exhausted. Thank you NSW RFS and Energy Australia for giving me this wonderful opportunity.

*Raschelle Webb  
Booral Brigade*

## GRANDPARENTS' DAY

Yesterday we took two of our grandkids, Daniel, 8 and his big brother Matt for a day at the zoo. We saw lots of animals including the baby elephant. It looked so small next to its mother. The fishing cat with only three legs was a surprise. We wondered what had happened to the other leg. We hoped a big fish hadn't chomped it off!

We were pretty tired by the end of the day, but not too tired to enjoy the ferry ride back to Circular Quay. Thanks again Energy Australia and NSW RFS.

*Nancy Irving  
Kanimbla Brigade*



## BELLOWS IN THE DARK

We wish to thank you for the opportunity to take our grandson, aged 2, to the zoo. We had a wonderful day. We saw the giraffes, the elephants, the snakes, the seals, and the 'meow meows' (tigers).

Nathaniel loved it all. He yelled over all the spectators at the seal show and tried to run down to the water to talk to the seals. We went on Thomas, The Tank Engine. We bellowed in the dark when the notices said, 'Be quiet, do not disturb the animals'. But I think his favourite animals were the giraffes eating their dinner from a tree. Perhaps he will eat his greens now!

*Many thanks again  
Patricia and Ken Grant*

**EnergyAustralia are offering NSW RFS members more free tickets to the Taronga Zoo in Sydney or Dubbo. Look out for the launch of the competition soon!**

# BRIGADE IN PROFILE

## Name of Brigade:

Byron Bay Rural Fire Brigade

## Year brigade formed:

15 December 1968

## Current Captain:

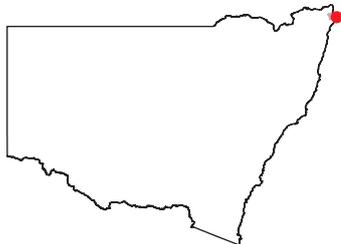
Gregg Miller

## Current President:

Stuart Amos

## D/T/Z:

Far North Coast



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

Byron Bay Rural Fire Brigade was formed in 1968 after the Suffolk Park Progress Committee made a request to the local council for a brigade to be formed. The Suffolk Park Progress Committee created the brigade on the 15 December 1968.

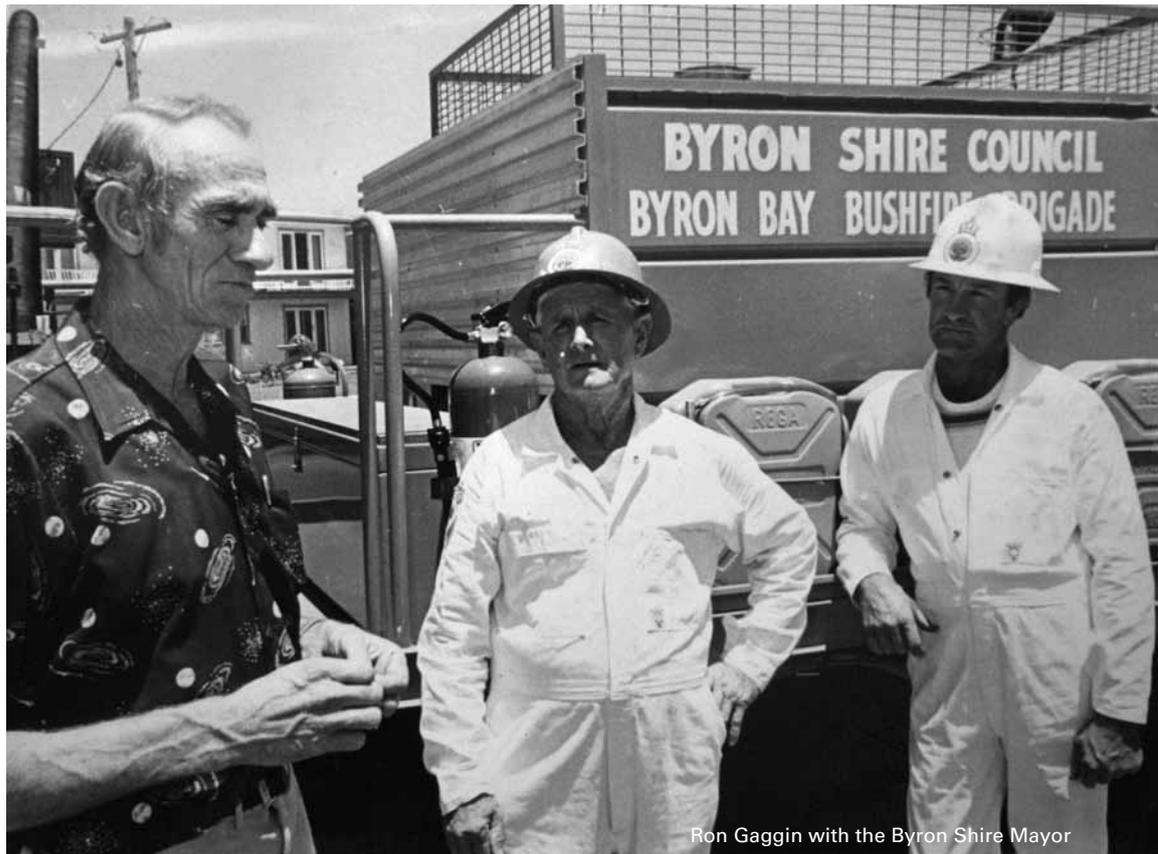
The brigade was run out of the home of brigade member Ron Gaggin until 1974. He had all the equipment at his home which was basically just a trailer and some equipment.

Ron Gaggin owned some land in Alcorn Street right on the beachfront and he decided to donate it for use as a brigade station. In 1974 the local council granted the brigade the princely sum of \$250 to build the station on the land owned by Ron. Both Ron Gaggin and Snow Virtue built the brick station by hand.

The land and park next to the station are known as Gaggin Park in memory of Ron and wife who both were Life Members of the brigade. We would have to be one of the few stations in the State to be located right on the beachfront and in the middle of an urban area.

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

In December 2008 we celebrated the 40th anniversary of our brigade with a large anniversary and Christmas party. Over 100 guests came along to the station as well as Regional Superintendent John Parnaby and local Member for Ballina, Donald Page MP including regular guest to the brigade Mayor Jan Barham.



Ron Gaggin with the Byron Shire Mayor

Also attending the party was Ron Gaggin's daughter and Snow Virtue's wife, along with representatives from all emergency services and many past and present members.

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

The shire is 556 square km in size and the brigade covers an area from Bundaleer (halfway between Byron Bay and Lennox Head) to Bangalow, along the Pacific Highway to Grays Lane and then out to the coast. This area has a mixture of vegetation types with rainforest, heath and dense forest. Due to the high sand content of soils in the area the land stays dry most of the time which includes our driest months from July to November.

As we are located in the urban area of Byron Bay, we also provide a dual response with NSW Fire Brigades to the 28,757 people who live in the shire.

## What types of incidents does your brigade attend?

We are a Village 2 brigade and attend approximately 60-100



Some of the new Juniors at the 2010 Anzac Day March featured in the local newspaper. Photo by Stuart Amos

calls each year. Our area includes a nine kilometre stretch of the Pacific Highway. It is a dual lane highway and the main route through to Queensland. It is a notoriously dangerous road and during the wet season and school holidays, sadly we attend many motor vehicle accidents (MVs). Throughout summer we attend many grass and bush fires and are also deployed out-of-area. Our members have attended major fires including, Sydney (2001), Canberra (2003) and Victoria (2009).

## What vehicles do you have?

Our first ever truck was an old Dodge then we moved on to a Category 9. Currently Byron Bay Brigade has two trucks: a Category 1 and a Category 7 tanker.

We received the Cat 1 and Cat 7 approximately 11 years ago, but had renovated the station to make room for the larger appliances.



Beach view behind station (view to Broken Head)

Most of the renovations were completed by our members and they included not only doubling the tanker bay size but also provided us with a larger kitchen and training room which includes overhead projection and mapping tables as well as a fresh coat of paint.

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

We have a 12-month training program in place and plan scenarios by the seasons. In winter we focus our monthly training events on village skills, MVAs and electrical incidents. During the summer months, our training is on bush firefighting, overrun scenarios, pumping at the quarry and hose skills.

Our brigade has an annual team-building day where we focus on communication skills and team-work. On this day there are organised games and events where every brigade member is ranked at the same level. It's always lots of fun and builds upon the camaraderie of our brigade.

We are thrilled to have commenced our new Junior Member Program in February 2010 and have plans to expand this into a Cadet Brigade for the Byron Shire in the near future. The Cadet Brigade would be the first on the Far North Coast. We currently have twenty Junior members ranging from 12-16 years of age from all over the Byron Shire. This is a great initiative for the area as

it will lead to new members transferring to the adult brigade throughout the Zone and boost volunteer numbers.

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

We are a fully equipped CABA brigade with 28 active members including four women, the youngest being 17 years of age. The majority of our members are male but we do have a female Senior Deputy Captain. Our members come from all walks of life and range from those employed as executives to tradesmen all members are locals to the Byron Bay area; however we do have some who hold dual membership through work commitments.

**What are some unique features of your community?**

Byron Bay is located on the most easterly point of Australia and the town holds many regular festivals throughout the year which attract many tourists. While the population of Byron Bay usually hovers at around 28,757 it can swell to over 40,000 during the Christmas / New Year period and the annual festival periods.

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

The Byron Bay Brigade actively participates in the local community and provides fire control for events such as the East Coast Blues and Roots Music Festival and Splendour in the Grass Arts and Music

Festival. We also attend the Lions Club Annual Beach Craft Fair, St Finbars School Annual Fire Works and our Annual Australia Day Celebration attracted over 300 people to the station this year. We assist the Byron Shire Council to hold the Suffolk Park Family Fun Day in Gaggin Park and in 2009 this attracted over 170 visitors to the station.

Our members are very proactive in the community, with the locals used to seeing, current Captain Gregg Miller out with his dog, personally handing out flyers for an upcoming brigade or community events! Gregg also conducts the monthly hat collection at the local Suffolk Park Hotel and has personally visited every home on the brigades rural boundary with community safety information, he also conducts regular Community Safety talks on local radio. Gregg Miller was recently awarded 2010 Byron Shire Volunteer of the Year.

Local elections turn into 'Election Collection Day', for our brigade and is a significant source of donation income for our brigade.

**Any final thoughts or comments you would like to add?**

Since 1989 the Byron Bay Brigade has attended over 879 incidents and provided over 10,000 community hours which does not include major festival events to the community or Section 44s.

# CREWING WITH THE COMMISSIONER

Story and photos by Brendan Doyle,  
Media Services

Ever wondered what it would be like to have the Commissioner in your brigade?

Well it is no longer a mystery for the Williamstown/Salt Ash Rural Fire Brigade - the winners of the *Bush Fire Bulletin Crew with the Commissioner Competition*.

It all started with a competition in the *Bush Fire Bulletin*. In an interview with the *Bush Fire Bulletin* the Commissioner had said: *I certainly miss being on the end of a hose. If time permits I would like to go back and participate in being a member.*

So the *Bulletin* took him up on his word! We asked all brigades and volunteers to submit a story or photos about their brigade to win a day with Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons.

A story written by Melissa Morris about the juniors at the Williamstown/Salt Ash Brigade, north of Newcastle, caught our attention. Melissa described the vibrant group of juniors at her brigade who, she said, had "made themselves indispensable".

On 8 May 2010 the Williamstown/Salt Ash Brigade had the services of the Commissioner for the day.

The day started at 0900hrs sharp with the brigade full of enthusiasm for the arrival of the Commissioner. Proceedings started with a quick introduction and a tour of the station.

The Commissioner took position in the back seat of Salt Ash 1 with four juniors and Senior Deputy Kim Forward. Junior Sarah Watters took much delight in calling Firecom informing them of their movements: "Firecom Salt Ash 1, proceeding to Oyster Cove for training. Crew of six and....we have the Commissioner on board!"

On arrival everyone jumped straight into the hose drills. The crew were keen to see the Commissioner's black helmet in action.

The juniors and the Commissioner worked on a hose attack simulating a bush fire with the goal of knocking over as many of the witches hats as



quickly as possible. After the hose drill the crew of Salt Ash 1 set to attacking a car fire which saw the Commissioner on the end of the hose being backed up by the junior crew.

Then it was time for the more formal part of the day. The Commissioner officially opened the Michael Bainbridge Memorial Garden at the Williamstown/Salt Ash Brigade station. The garden was built by brigade members as a place to reflect on past members and their contribution to the brigade and the broader community.

Michael Bainbridge had been a friend to all in the brigade and had a hugely positive impact on them all. Michael had Ataxia Telangiectasia which meant he relied on a wheelchair. He was passionate about propagating new seedlings and he never missed a Saturday selling the plants that he had grown. It was Michael who had supplied the plants that started off the brigade's own garden. In early 2009 Michael was diagnosed with cancer and sadly passed away in May 2009. The members of the Williamstown/Salt Ash Brigade made Michael an honorary member and chose to

remember his passion by naming the Memorial Garden after him.

The Lower Hunter Catering crew had cooked up a storm for lunch and afterwards there wasn't a hungry firefighter left wanting.

Once lunch had settled it was time to prepare for the adventure that was Stockton Beach.

The Williamstown/Salt Ash Rural Fire Brigade covers a large area including the RAAF Base, Newcastle Airport and a number of high traffic roads. It also has responsibility for half of Stockton Beach which is a 32km stretch of



sand. Williamtown/Salt Ash has responded to a number of MVAs, car fires and most recently, a plane crash along that stretch of beach.

The Commissioner jumped on board Salt Ash 9 and clearly enjoyed the opportunity to see the beach environs. Once out on the beach the Commissioner was surprised to see how many public vehicles were venturing onto the sand. It became clear why the brigade gets so many calls to the area.

By 1600hrs it was evident we had a tiring crew - including the Commissioner. Back at the

station, a small presentation of gifts marked the end of an excellent and very rewarding day.

The *Crew with the Commissioner Competition* was a success and we thank all those involved and especially to the Williamtown/Salt Ash Rural Fire Brigade for their efforts on the day and the continual dedication and service.

**New competition**

The Commissioner is keen to do it all again. Look out for more information about how you could Crew with the Commissioner on page 36.



# THUMBS UP FROM THE KADINA KIDS

By Bert Brand, Group Officer, Northern Rivers Team and Bronwyn Waters, Community Safety Officer, Northern Rivers Team | Photos by Theresa Mason, Rosebank Brigade



Sixteen school students at the Kadina High School in Lismore have thrown themselves into a NSW RFS Secondary School Cadet Program and their enthusiasm is contagious.

“The job is most rewarding when you see the enthusiasm of the cadets involved with the program,” said Group Captain Jim Jamieson. “They are so keen and so quick to pick up what we are trying to teach them. It is a joy to work with them!”

“The cadets themselves have nothing but praise for the program as well. It is a rewarding experience for all involved and I can heartily recommend it to others.”

The idea to implement the Secondary Schools Cadet Program in the Northern Rivers Area was first raised in early 2009 by our District Manager Superintendent Michael Brett.

After liaising with Amy Blackwood from NSW RFS Headquarters in Sydney late in 2009 and again in March 2010, we worked closely together to make the program a reality.

On 21 April students from Kadina High School, Lismore began their 10 week journey. The 16 Year 10 students including six females, were kitted out with their PPE (personal protective equipment) and enthusiastically began learning about the various roles and responsibilities of the NSW RFS, bush fire awareness, behaviour and suppression and the importance of leadership, communication and teamwork.

The dedicated team of instructors who gave up their time on Wednesday afternoons for the 10 weeks are: Tullera Brigade Captain John Hildebrand, Deputy Group Captains Jim Jamieson and Christine Hartley and firefighters Nathan Cawley and Theresa Mason.





# WHO'S AT HOME WHEN THE FIRE COMES?

## A CASE FOR BUSH FIRE SAFETY INFORMATION TARGETING WOMEN

*Over time, history has shown that society places the highest priority on saving the lives of women and children thus the term 'women and children first' is often adopted.*

*This is not always the case. In emergency situations, research shows that women are often left behind to keep the family together but also respond to the emergency in an effort to protect the home and property.*

*The fires on the Lower Eyre Peninsula in South Australia, on 10 January 2005 claimed nine lives: two men on a private fire unit and seven women and children, six of whom were in cars fleeing the fire.*

**Dr Helen Goodman, Research Fellow at RMIT School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning,** interviewed women who had survived the Eyre Peninsula fires and looked at the effectiveness of Women Skills Workshops held after those fires. The following is her report on the importance of including women in community engagement strategies.

To be effective, community fire awareness programs need to address the different needs of people at the community, household and individual level. In households, women generally perform a different and complementary role to men. This means that often they have different responsibilities, concerns and skills that need to be addressed by community safety programs. Directing fire programs to groups of women has the potential to improve both their technical skills and confidence in the face a bush fire.

At the time this research was carried out, it had been observed that the number of women dying in fires in Australia had increased over the past 30 years as a proportion of total bush fire-related deaths. Late evacuation and passive sheltering still accounted for most of these deaths. Despite community safety messages to target women for bush fire safety awareness, their needs and skills need to be understood and addressed.

### BACKGROUND

Women are not a homogeneous group with the same interests and capacities, and households containing women vary

greatly in many ways. Within a household, when facing extreme hazards such as bush fires, the approaches taken by women often differ from those of men. In studying community education programs and exploring different responses within and between households, the specific skills, needs and responsibilities of women in bush fire events was investigated.

Both the Wangary fire research publications and the Women's Skills Workshops are based on a severe fire event at Wangary, on the Lower Eyre Peninsula in South Australia, on 10 January 2005. This largely agricultural area includes Port Lincoln and encompasses mainly farming communities, native scrub and areas of heavily forested National Park. The fire also claimed nine lives: two men on a private fire unit and seven women and children, six of whom were in cars fleeing the fire. At the time, this was the largest number of deaths in one fire since Ash Wednesday. As a result of the fire, 93 homes were destroyed.

### Part A: A gendered analysis of the Wangary in-depth interviews

In July 2005, semi-structured interviews were carried out to inquire into levels of community

preparedness, with 35 residents from 17 households selected from the initial 191 willing residents.

Of the 17 households in the in-depth interview study, six households had school age or younger children. Of the occupational groupings, seven were farming families, three were retired households, and seven households were noted as 'other', which included trade work, retail and hobby farmers. Of the 17 women in these households, nine were away from the home by the time the fire front hit, and eight were at the home. (The fire occurred during the school holidays, when mothers were the main carers of children.) In order to focus on the potentially gendered aspect to the decision-making within the household in relation to the fire event, we set aside the women who were away from the home at the time for reasons unrelated to the fire. We only concentrate here on the remaining 14 women.

Of the six women who left the home at the time of the fire, due to the impending fire event, only one was regarded as leaving 'early enough' – as their farm was some distance from the point of origin and her husband accurately tracked the fire's

passage. Two of the six reported leaving of their own accord, and the remaining four on 'advice'; of these four, three left on advice from their husbands, and one on advice of a visiting tradesman. Of the two who left of their own accord, one had always planned to leave with her children if a fire threatened, while the second felt she needed to reach her children, who were in town that day.

Of those who left 'on advice', each situation was complex, but the overriding finding, was that these women depended on the advice of others, and in most cases, their husbands. They all reported they lacked confidence and skill in knowing what to do. By contrast, of the eight who remained at the property, two reported acting on advice from their husbands about how to prepare for the fire, and the remaining six reported making their own decisions, but also being positively influenced by the presence of their husbands. Several of the women in both groups (those who stayed and those who did not), reported that they were dependent, in greater or lesser degrees, on the male partner. Some reported being particularly anxious and ill prepared, particularly those who left their properties. Those who stayed, in the main, reported as being grateful for their partners' greater knowledge and skill.

Women's sphere of household responsibility is often around nurturing – children, their partners, the elderly, and pets, and at the community level, around neighbours and other community concerns. Often these roles are carried out in 'ordinary' (non emergency) times, but can flow over into emergency events. For example, during this study, those women who stayed were involved in tasks such as telephoning neighbours, preparing food and putting out spot fires.

There was limited opportunity to closely examine the specific impact of children on decision-making in this study, as there were fewer families with children at home at the time. However, where women are caring for children, and where the prevailing view is that children should be removed from the fire threat, this by definition exposes women and children to the particular danger of a late departure and being caught on the roads. Men traditionally adopt a different spectrum of caring roles that involve the technical and practical side of defending their family and property. In farming or semi-rural communities, this often

requires developing the technical skills needed to prepare for and deal with a bush fire hazard. Sometimes their role includes deciding whether the family should stay and defend or leave, when the property is under threat. Some of the men reported this role as burdensome.

The research results demonstrated that the different roles sometimes taken up by men and women need to be recognised, and both strengthened, and in some cases, reconsidered, so that both men and women are prepared with information, and the emotional and technical skills needed to cope together with an extreme event.

## Part B: A creative response by partnership agencies – tailoring fire workshops to target women

The Wangary fire exposed the particular vulnerabilities of women, highlighting a lack of technical and fire specific knowledge and skills to feel confident in responding to a fire. This led Rural Solutions SA and the Country Fire Service to develop a workshop-based fire program which could help equip women with the technical skills and confidence to face a bush fire.

The Women's Skills Workshops involved three phases:

- a pre-workshop survey study
- the workshops themselves,
- and an analysis of the workshop evaluation documents completed by the participants.

This work was started in 2007 by distributing 682 surveys to women's groups on the Lower Eyre Peninsula to identify the aspects of bush fire management women were interested in learning about. More than half of the women who responded to the pre-workshop survey were aged over 40, and around one in five lived alone or were sole parents. The survey data (from 133 surveys, a return rate of 19.5 percent) showed:

- a high interest in workshops
- a low interaction between the survey respondents and their local fire brigade
- a moderate understanding of the "prepare, stay and defend or leave early" policy (although half reported that they had experienced a bush fire),
- variations in perceptions of risk.

Based on these findings, the topics for the first three workshops were developed: 'Preparing Yourself and Your family'; 'Preparing Your Property'; and 'Responding to Bushfire'.

A fourth workshop made up of three parts – networking (with other group members), managing anxiety and depression, and a property visit – was also delivered. The workshops' content was mostly derived from pre-existing materials on fire response and safety, with one major addition: a segment on emotional preparedness prepared by consulting psychologist, Jo-Anne Hamilton. Other innovative aspects included participatory workshop planning, workshop content that emphasised interaction, and specifically targeting the workshops at women.

The workshops were designed to combine specific fire-related information, the opportunity to practise skills, and scenario exercises in a supportive environment. Workshops were evaluated using a pre and post workshop questionnaire. The total number of women who participated in the first three workshops was 50 (with the fourth workshop held to meet specific needs). Attendees also distributed 22 workshop manuals to relatives, friends and neighbours.

On the pre and post workshop questions, women reported shifts in their knowledge, confidence and preparedness. Those who reported that 'prepare, stay and defend' was their strategy doubled in number, from 39 to 85 percent. Women also indicated confidence in their chosen strategy increased sharply, and knowledge about bush fire in general increased. The women particularly appreciated the material on psychological preparedness, particularly for those who had decided to "prepare, stay and defend".

The workshops revealed that a holistic approach to personal fire management requires appreciating the skills that men and women bring to the event and increasing women's abilities, in particular, to include the technical and practical skills required in the case of a fire. Women are important keys to preventing harm in the community through their roles as the primary carers of children, their husbands, the elderly and vulnerable. Through these roles they are important in communicating risk and educating others. To use their talents to the fullest they should be better prepared in targeted community programs and their specific needs should be better understood and addressed.



## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Several women noted that their motivation to learn centred on their role in protecting their family. Most of the workshop attendees were aged over 40, and although a crèche had been set up, few mothers with young children attended. No indigenous women participated. The workshop organisers also reported that they emphasised the importance of practising and reviewing what had been learnt. Developing education programs based on competency skills for the community would fill a need and be an important adjunct to other community education programs offered by fire services.

**END NOTE:** This research predated Victoria's Black Saturday bush fires of February 2009, which has since led to the re-examination of the 'prepare, stay and defend' policy.

This FIRE NOTE is published jointly by the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (Bushfire CRC) and the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC).  
[www.bushfirecrc.com.au](http://www.bushfirecrc.com.au)



## NSW RFS EMPOWERS WOMEN TO TAKE ACTION

The NSW RFS has been at work assisting women in rural areas to develop fire safety skills.

In 2007, Melissa Messenger, Community Safety Officer in Bland Temora Zone, developed a workshop specifically for women which has been held in Bland Temora over the past three years.

"We held our first run of courses in 2007," she said, "Other districts have contacted me and are using the program as well in their own way that suits their needs. I would like to see this area of capacity building pursued more as I believe it is important."

Cudgong, Wollondilly and Mid Lachlan Valley also developed their own workshops for women.

In all cases, the aim of the workshops was to empower women with the knowledge and understanding of how to Prepare. Act. Survive. from and in bush fires and house fires. The ideas shared at the workshops could also be applied to other emergency situations.

The workshops covered basic fire behaviour and the basics of the Bush Fire Survival Plan. According to responses from

women after the session, this was a valuable tool. The home fire safety module emphasised the need for working smoke alarms and evacuation plans.

The second half of the session included a practical demonstration of fire extinguishers and portable pumps. Most women who attended had the opportunity to use a fire extinguisher and again, this was very well received.

The workshop was heavily marketed across various mediums. This included local newspapers, school newsletters, posters in shop windows, flyers handed out to members of the community and word of mouth.

"We also had the opportunity to promote the workshops on ABC Riverina and ABC Central West, Melissa Messenger said.

"There was an overwhelming positive response to the workshops. There was also a strong interest in becoming an NSW RFS volunteer. It is also interesting to note that 100 percent of those who attended would like another workshop."

*Photos by Natalie Keene*



*"These workshops have been very successful. We hold it on someone's verandah or garden and talk and walk around the property. People attend because they see it as a social event and not as a lecture. They meet some of their neighbours that they have not met before. They compare issues and have come up with some local strategies for helping themselves and each other. We also learn a lot about the area and the specific concerns of the residents. We also get requests for individual property visits from those attending.*

*Residents are contacted personally by phone by a local brigade member or interested local resident. This personal invitation is much more successful than an advertisement or letterbox drop. It is promoted as a morning tea rather than as a meeting. It is conducted in an interactive manner and not as a lecture. There is a lot of questioning: What experience have you had with bush fires? What do you think it would be like during a bush fire? Do you live with children? How do you think they would cope in a bush fire? What would you do if the main road was blocked? The aim is to get people thinking about the risks and their own individual situation and start planning their own survival strategies. The discussion can go in the direction of the issues raised at each individual meeting."*

*Jayne Leary, Cudgong Community Safety Officer*

RIGHT ON THE SPOT AT THE **CALIFORNIAN FIRES**



ABOVE: Midday on the 27 August, we arrived to see the entrance to the Angeles National Forest go up in flames



The fire was impressive right from the first day

Last year a friend invited firefighter Andrew Roberts from Tumut Headquarters Brigade to experience America and to see some US firefighting up close. So he saved up his money, bought an air ticket and headed off in August 2009. These are his photographs and his story...

As it happens my friend, Alan Simmons is a retired Burbank fire captain and a video photographer with a very keen interest in fires. He makes training videos and he has suggested if there were any fires while I was in the US, I could accompany him. I ended up getting a fair share of flames and smoke as we did get to see one of the largest fires ever seen in California.

### 26 August 2009

My holiday started with a few weeks of sightseeing but then the firefighting action started late in August. We heard the first fire call come through on the US Forest Services radio on 26 August at 1520hrs – a brush fire in Angeles National Forest.

When we heard the call we were out in Alan's 4WD, so we turned around and headed in the direction of the fire. Listening on the radio, we heard the US

Forest Services arrive on scene and report there was three acres (1.2ha) of heavy brush involved in a rapid spread. The fire made its way into heavy fuel and steep terrain.

By the time we arrived the fire had already spread to 25 acres (10ha) and the fire was producing impressive large columns of fire. Later that night canyon winds caused spotting into a larger canyon making it very difficult for firefighters to contain.

### 27 August 2009

The next day we returned to the same area to observe and record the fire action.

We arrived at the entrance of the Angeles National Forest around midday to see flames blazing 20 or 30 metres high and consuming the signage at the front gate.



27 August the spectacular display of aviation power to contain the fire in the Angeles National Forest

Nearby a huge contingent of aircraft were operating so we drove to a ridge overlooking one of the large canyons in the National Forest to watch them at work.

Air operation in America is very impressive. Most counties, for example, have an airbase with Air Attack Aircraft. Firefighters regularly use airtankers ranging from the S-2T which holds 1,200 gallons (4,500 litres) and DC-10 that holds 12,000 gallons (45,000 litres).

That day the fire was making runs up the canyon and the air operations were in full swing. Four Airtankers were building retardant lines and three Air-Cranes were at work taking the heat out of the moving fronts. Elsewhere dozers were constructing containment lines.

**29 August 2009**

Late in the morning we entered Big Tujunga Canyon. This canyon starts at 5,000 feet (1,500m) above sea level and extends

down about twelve miles (19kms) to the flatlands at the edge of the Los Angeles city limits. It consists of timber and heavy brush that has not burned for around 50 years.

We saw extreme plume-dominated fire behaviour all afternoon. The fire raced through the canyon and three civilians were injured while attempting to defend their homes. Due to the heavy smoke conditions, the rescue helicopter was unable to reach the victims and the access road was blocked by fallen power poles and trees. It took two hours before ground crews were able to bring the injured people down the canyon where they were airlifted to hospital.

The fire raced through the canyon entirely uncontained and forty homes and businesses were destroyed as a result. By the end of the day the fire had burned 22,000 acres (9,000ha). The fire continued to burn uncontained for four more days and the fire behaviour was described as extreme.

**30 August 2009**

On the 30 August we visited the township of Acton and saw extreme fire behaviour on the outskirts of town with flame heights reaching 100 to 150 metres and a huge mushroom cloud of smoke around the town.

Later on in the day we heard the firefighters' worst nightmare over the radio:

MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY.

It was 1430hrs on 30 August. Then silence.

The call had come from south of Acton. A helicopter flew over the site and reported over the radio that a fire truck had overturned, rolled and had been engulfed in flames. Two Los Angeles County firefighters died in the incident.

We attended the Memorial Service for the firefighters a few days later.

**31 August 2009**

On August 31 the fire had burned 85,750 acres (34,000ha) and, according to radio reports, only five percent was contained.

Firefighters continued to build fire lines 120 miles (190kms) long. There were 52 dozers and 54 hand crews in the field at any given time.

By mid-September 2009 the fire was contained. According to the US Forest Services statistics issued afterwards it was the largest wildland fire in LA County history and the 10th largest in California's history. Arson is suspected to be the cause of the fire. Two firefighters were killed and 22 civilians were injured. It burned over 65,000ha - that's more than half the size of Los Angeles City! Ninety homes were destroyed although 12,000 were threatened throughout the firestorm. They estimate that there was \$85 million worth of damage.

Many thanks go to Alan Simmons for letting me ride with him and observe the fire up close.

This photo was taken in Los Angeles city looking back to the Angeles National Forest



27 August: On our way to see the aircraft in operation, we saw US Forest Service firefighters working on containment



Chilao Flats camping ground. On this day three people were injured and 40 businesses destroyed nearby

Chilao Flats camping group at the moment the fire crossed the road



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# BUSH FIRE BULLETIN READER SURVEY

Overall, how appealing did you find this edition?

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

Comments: .....

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

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

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

.....

.....

.....

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The *Bush Fire Bulletin* is the official journal of the NSW RFS.

We always welcome stories and photos from members.

We are looking for dynamic, colourful, engaging photos and stories that capture the life in the brigades.

It takes about three months to put together each *Bush Fire Bulletin*. So send in your articles in autumn for the winter edition, in spring for the summer edition

Contact the editor Jacqueline Murphy, on 02 8741 5480 or  
 Email bushfire.bulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au

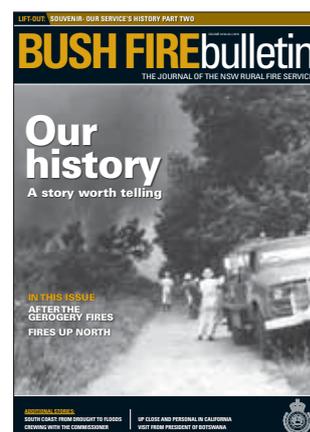
### WHAT IS A GOOD PHOTO?

Remember to send photos which are high quality, high resolution and that you have permission to use.

For photos of children under 16, permission from parents or guardians is required.

If you have the photo from a local newspaper, please ask for their permission so we can acknowledge them correctly.

Photos that look best in print are 300dpi or about 1MB in size.





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