

BUSH FIREbulletin

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THE JOURNAL OF THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

Fire whirl

The startling Riverina fires

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Gulaga Fire: Mountain comes under threat

The Commissioner on 'Catastrophic'

Hotspots program makes an impact

ADDITIONAL STORIES:

NEW EMERGENCY ALERTS
NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFER PLACES

AUSTRALIA DAY AFSM RECIPIENTS
NEW FIRE CONTROL CENTRES OPENED



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FOREWORD



Once again, I would like to thank all members across the State for their hard work during what has been a very busy time for the NSW RFS.

The pre-season forecasts were for the most challenging bush fire season in recent years due to prevailing drought conditions and expected high temperatures. This prediction proved true, with around 50 Section 44 declarations and approximately 5,000 bush and grass fires reported.

Across the season, there was extensive damage to farmland, stock, farming equipment, fencing and the unfortunate loss of 24 properties. Our thoughts must go to those members on the land who have experienced losses, in what was already proving a difficult time due to the drought.

Tragically, the fire season also saw the death of National Parks ranger, Aaron Harber, who was killed in a helicopter crash near Dorrigo in December. A number of other serious injuries were also reported across the season, including a father and son who were defending their property from fire at Vittoria near Bathurst.

The 2009-10 bush fire season was the first since the Victorian bush fire tragedy, and the first using a new national framework of fire danger ratings, alert levels and community messaging. Such changes do not come without some challenges, however, they have resulted in an improved way of communicating with the public and there has been much positive feedback from the community.

In coming months, there will be reviews of these changes and the NSW RFS will be participating in these, building on the experiences of this fire season and working with other states and territories to determine if any changes are required. Later this year, there will also be further recommendations from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and the NSW RFS will review these recommendations once handed down.

In contrast to the hot and dry conditions in the lead-up to Christmas 2009, this season has also seen our members involved in work supporting the State Emergency Service across NSW, dealing with flood and storm damage. Once again, the versatility of our members has been on display.

In Autumn and Winter, there will again be an increased emphasis on hazard reduction across the State. I know in many areas, this work has already begun in earnest and I encourage all members to be involved in these activities and get to know their senior volunteer representatives on local Bush Fire Management Committees so their opinions on this important work are heard.

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

Congratulations to the A.C.T.



Photo by Adam Hollingworth

In January 2010 Assistant Commissioner Mark Crosweller took up the role of A.C.T. Emergency Services Agency Commissioner, after 25 years with the NSW RFS, most recently as Director of Strategic Services.

Mr Crosweller is now responsible for a number of

emergency service agencies in the A.C.T. including A.C.T. Fire Brigade, A.C.T. Ambulance Service, A.C.T. Rural Fire Service and A.C.T. State Emergency Service.

Mark has extensive leadership experience in both the operational and strategic areas of fire and emergency

management. He started out with the NSW RFS as a volunteer and has held many staff positions. For the past 11 years Mr Crosweller has been an Assistant Commissioner and member of the NSW RFS Executive.

NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons congratulated Mr Crosweller.

"Over the past 25 years, I have personally worked with Mark, so I do know the loss to the RFS that Marks' move means.

"There is no doubt though that Mark is most deserving of this unique appointment and challenging opportunity. Any selfishness I may have concerning his loss, is clearly outweighed by knowing we will remain friends and colleagues in new capacities for many years to come."

Welcome to the NSW RFS Terry Hill

In November 2009, Terry Hill was appointed as Aboriginal Services Coordinator for the NSW RFS. It is the first time that ties with Indigenous communities will be a focus for the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Mr Hill comes to us with a 30-year-long history of working with Aboriginal communities in NSW. He spent the past nine years with NSW Fire Brigades.

"I'll be focussing on increasing Aboriginal volunteer rates and breaking down barriers to participation," he said.

"I volunteer at my local sports clubs myself, and I value what

volunteers bring to our society," he said, "Without volunteers there would be much suffering in the world."

Terry is looking forward to assisting the development of partnerships between Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal people and the NSW RFS, as well as developing resources for staff and volunteers to better understand history and culture of Aboriginal Australia.

He plans to launch an online Aboriginal resources kit within the first half of 2010. The kit will be a self-paced learning tool focussed on cultural awareness.



Photo by Jacqueline Murphy, Bush Fire Bulletin

Premier visits NSW RFS Headquarters



Photo by Jeff Herbert, Newspix

The NSW Premier Kristina Keneally visited the NSW Rural Fire Service Headquarters on 5 December, a day after becoming the NSW Premier.

Ms Keneally launched the first live trial of the new telephone and

SMS Emergency Alert, designed to let people know of bush fire, floods or other significant emergencies in their local area.

Warnings will be given to people via both voice message to landline phone and text messages to

mobiles registered in areas directly under threat. The trial took place in December and the system was used throughout the bush fire season. (See page 16 for further information about this alert system).

Premier Keneally visited the NSW RFS Headquarters once again on 9 December at the announcement of the sad death of a National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) ranger during a firefighting operation in the Dorrigo region. An aircraft accident saw the 41-year-old ranger killed and the pilot seriously injured.

The Premier expressed her condolences to the man's family, including his wife and two young children, his friends and colleagues. She was joined by the Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan and the Minister responsible for NPWS, Frank Sartor, NPWS Head Sally Barnes as well as our Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons.

Before the press conference the Commissioner also briefed the Premier about the state of fires burning in NSW. That day there were around 110 fires burning across NSW, with just under 2,000 firefighters deployed (pictured left).

New bush fire danger signs across NSW

Hundreds of new roadside Bush Fire Danger signs have been rolled out across the State in bush fire prone areas.

The new signs incorporate the new national Fire Danger Ratings of Severe, Extreme and Catastrophic which were introduced nationally this past bush fire season.

Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan and Member for Menai Alison Megarrity inspected the first of the 470 new signs with Menai Rural Fire Brigade Captain, Don Carter and Assistant Commissioner Dominic Lane and District Manger, Andrew Pinfeld in November 2009. (right)

The signs continue to be installed on high visibility locations across NSW.

Photo by Anthony Clark, Media Services





Photo courtesy of The Border Mail

FIRE WHIRL THE STARTLING RIVERINA FIRES

Fires fanned by gale-force winds and 40-degree temperatures destroyed eleven homes in Gerogery and Ournie, in the State's South West on 17 December 2009.

The Fire Danger Rating for Thursday 17 December 2009 was forecast to be Extreme with 37 degrees, 10 percent humidity and North-West winds of 45-60kph. Two fires absorbed Riverina firefighter's attention that day. One in the Walla Walla-Gerogery area, 30km North of Albury and the other, 90kms to the East, near Tooma.

The town of Gerogery was engulfed by smoke, two firefighters were injured and five homes were destroyed. Eyewitnesses reported fire whirls with flames up to 30 metres high, as seen on the front cover of the *Bush Fire Bulletin*.

In the area between Ournie and Tooma, 11,500ha were scorched and six homes, two of which were primary residences, were destroyed.

By the end of the day, damage included 17,000ha scorched, (5,500ha in Gerogery and 11,500ha in Tooma), 26 sheds destroyed, hundreds of cattle and around 5,000 sheep dead, nearly 3,000 tonnes of hay and 150km of fence destroyed.

During these fires, the new emergency alert warning system was used for the first time to alert people in the areas under threat. (See page 16)

The following is an account of the two fires and their aftermath.

WALLA WALLA-GEROGERY



Photo courtesy of The Border Mail

Thursday 17 December 2009

Morning

Four fires are reported on Nail Can Hill in Albury. Lavington Brigade responds and quickly extinguishes the fire. At 1030hrs, due to increased winds, a request to cease harvesting is broadcast over the paging/radio system and through media outlets.

Afternoon

A Triple Zero (000) call is received early in the afternoon at Albury Fire Control Centre, indicating that the Walla Walla Tip is on fire. Walla Walla Brigade, Gerogery and Glenellen Brigades respond and over the next hour further brigades respond from across the Hume Zone.

A text message is sent by the NSW RFS (Albury FCC) to the local media shortly after and this is followed up with an email to the local media, warning of extreme fire conditions for the Walla-Gerogery Road area. This is followed by broadcasts to air on ABC, 2AY and StarFM radio stations. About half an hour later a further email is sent to the media warning of extreme fire conditions in the Gerogery West area.

The rail line between Sydney and Melbourne is closed around this time and rail services do not resume until 2200hrs.

The Gerogery Captain Stuart Byrne, reports that the fire may impact the Gerogery township.



Photo courtesy of The Border Mail

There were now 40 crews working the area. Residents and fire crews work diligently to protect the many small acreages along the Walla Walla-Gerogery Road. Most property is safe but unfortunately one house is destroyed.

Eyewitnesses report dramatic fire whirls up to 30 metres high in the Gerogery area. Information from the Albury Airport weather station at 1446hrs, indicates that the temperature is 39.3 degrees, 37 percent humidity, there are North West winds of 76kph, gusting to 107kph.

1500hrs: A Section 44 Bush Fire Emergency is declared by the Commissioner.

The town of Gerogery comes under threat and four houses in the township are caught in the flames. Deputy Captain of the Gerogery Brigade, veterinarian Ian Byrne, suffers burns to more

than 20 per cent of his body while defending his property at Gerogery. He is taken to Melbourne's The Alfred Hospital where the prognosis is that he will need specialist care for over 12 months but will fully recover. Another firefighter, Tony Halpin from the Gerogery Brigade, also loses his home in the fires. (See photo above.)

Evening

The Gerogery fire continues in a South Easterly direction before a South Westerly change causes more havoc for firefighters.

The wind turns to the West South West, forcing the fire along the base of the Yambla Range to the North East. Although this prevents the fire from being pushed up into the range, the wind pushes the fire through viable cropping and pasture land and destroys crops, hay and stock.



Photo courtesy of The Border Mail



Photo courtesy of The Border Mail

Two aircraft begin working with fire crews on containing the fire along the foothills of the Yambla Range and assist with containing the head as it moves to the North East.

Support crews arrive from the Riverina area (Wagga Wagga), Corowa and Berrigan and assist local crews into the evening and overnight.

Later that night, the fire is contained 8km North of Gerogery, East of the railway line.

Although four houses are lost within the Gerogery township, and one house is lost within the farming community of Walla Walla, many other properties are saved. During the day, most of Gerogery's homes had come under threat as did many dwellings on small acreage along the path of the fire. Firefighters and residents have been able to save the majority.

During the firefighting, other fires are reported on Nail Can Hill and at Waterview West of Albury. They are both extinguished quickly by Lavington, Splitters Creek Rural Fire Brigades and NSW Fire Brigades.

Friday 18 December 2009

The Gerogery fire has been contained overnight and crews continue to work to strengthen these containment lines. There is no threat to homes or property and crews continue to work in the area to fell burning trees and assist residents in mop up and recovery.

Additional aircraft arrive and begin working on the containment lines East of Gerogery.

Back burning operations take place along the Yambla Range containment line and around the Walla Walla Tip in case of wind change or further storm activity. More than 30 crews remain in the area and specialist tree felling

crews are working on trees that remain alight. These crews from within Greater Hume and Wagga Wagga, work tirelessly to fell over 150 burning or damaged trees over this period.

Country Energy crews are at work in the area to re-establish power and to ensure the safety of power lines in affected areas.

Saturday 19 December 2009

Mop up operations are in full swing.

Hundreds of houses remain without power or phones as the utility authority crews work on restoring both.

Firefighters continue to douse trees still burning by the roadsides, monitoring the fireground for any hint of outbreak. Tree felling crews are at work.

Farmers are kept busy counting the cost of dead livestock and administering to those affected by flames or smoke. This is a difficult time for farmers as they bury some of the animals they have tended. Some smaller landholders find this particularly harrowing because the livestock are pets. Six horses were taken by the fire and several dogs and cats.

All haystacks and shed fires have been extinguished, although smouldering rubble is observed from the air.

The Walla Walla Tip continues to burn and is being monitored

by the Walla Walla Brigade and the Greater Hume Shire. The Environmental Protection Authority inspects the site and concludes that the refuge in the tip will need to continue to burn before it is safe to douse and cover.

Thirty crews are working in the Gerogery area, assisting landholders with extinguishing trees and helping recovery efforts. In Gerogery township, firefighters continue to improve containment lines with back burning and mop-up operations.

Monday 21 December

1200hrs: The *Section 44* is revoked for the Greater Hume local government areas.

PREVIOUS PAGE:

TOP LEFT: Bucki Brigade members: Crew Leader Warren Dale with Mathew Davidson, James Weston and Wayne Parker

TOP RIGHT:

Startling fire behaviour around the township of Gerogery mid-afternoon on 17 December 2009

LOWER RIGHT:

Gerogery Brigade member Tony Halpin. Exhausted after loosing the fight to save his home

THIS PAGE: TOP:

Jindera Brigade with their Cat 1 and crew

LOWER LEFT:

The day after: Specialist tree felling crews from Greater Hume and Wagga worked tirelessly to fell over 150 burning or damaged trees

A large, intense fire whirl rises vertically from a fire at night. The fire is bright yellow and orange, and the whirl is a column of fire and smoke that tapers as it goes up. The background is dark, making the fire stand out.

WHAT IS A FIRE WHIRL?

A fire whirl, also known as a fire devil or fire tornado, is a rare phenomenon in which a fire, under certain conditions (depending on air temperature and currents) acquires a vertical vorticity and forms a whirl, or tornado-like vertically oriented rotating column of air. Fire whirls may be whirlwinds separated from the flames, either within the burn area or outside it, or a vortex of flame, itself.

A fire whirl can make the fire more dangerous as it encourages the fire to spot.

This photo was taken on 17 December, 2009 in the Gerogery area.

Photo courtesy of The Border Mail

OURNIE-TOOMA



Thursday 17 December 2009

Afternoon

A Triple Zero (000) call is received reporting that there is a fire 15km East of Jingellic on the River Road in Tumbarumba District. Ournie Brigade responds immediately, followed by Jingellic and Lankeys Creek Rural Fire Brigades.

Tumbarumba Group Central, Tooma, Courabyra and all remaining Tumbarumba Rural Fire Brigades respond as crews become available.

Houses and other farm buildings come under threat. Local warnings are issued to residents in and near River Road.

Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) Strike Teams from Victoria respond across the State border to assist.

The fire jumps Welaregang Rd impacting on farming properties to the East.

DSE and CFA aircraft are released from Victoria to assist Operations.

1700hrs: A *Section 44 Bush Fire Emergency* is declared for the Tumbarumba local government area.

The fire comes close to Tooma village and properties along Tooma-Khancoban Rd. Winds recorded at 90kph threaten to push the fire front across the Tooma River.



Early evening

The wind drops dramatically to 5kph and from the South. The cool change brings the temperature down to 30 degrees and relative humidity rises to 35 percent. Crews concentrate on containment lines for the first time.

Late evening

A light rain falls across the fireground which does assist firefighters, however the fire remains uncontained. The temperature recorded at 2200hrs is 22 degrees and relative humidity is 76 percent.

Thousands of hectares have been burnt out between Ournie and Tooma with significant loss of property. Six dwellings are confirmed as destroyed and rural properties, dairy, beef and sheep farms at Tooma have been affected. One hundred and fifty kilometres of external and

internal fencing has been lost and 14 sheds destroyed.

Friday 18 December 2009

Although 11mm of rain falls on the fireground overnight, the fire remains uncontained on its Northern and Eastern edges. Focus moves to the edge of the fire, North of Tooma village in the Bogandyra Nature Reserve and along private properties where approximately 20 fire tankers and more than 60 firefighters endeavour to strengthen control lines with the assistance of aircraft.

The fire stays North of the Murray River along its Southern flank and West of Mannus Creek, and is contained to mostly pasture. The Northern flank of the fire extends into the Bogandyra Nature Reserve and is ultimately contained with the assistance of heavy plant and aircraft.



Thursday 24 December

Country Energy has 60 staff in the field, replacing all 67 power poles affected by the fires. All high voltage and power to homes still standing is restored.

Monday 26 December

1800hrs: The *Section 44 Bush Fire Emergency* is revoked for the Tumbarumba local government area.

ABOVE:

Properties impacted by the Ournie-Tooma fire on Big Hill Flat Creek Road at Welaregang. Photos by Patrick Westwood, Community Planning



LONDONDERRY: HOUSES UNDER THREAT

Photo by Nick Moir



Photo by Nick Moir

Searing temperatures and strong winds on Thursday December 17 caused difficulty in extinguishing a fire in Londonderry, in Sydney's West.

Temperatures soared into the 40s and blustery winds triggered some dramatic developments in Londonderry on the outskirts of Sydney.

"That elevation in temperatures and gusty wind has really been problematic for firefighters," NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said.

A caravan and several sheds were lost during the fires which did threaten homes although no other property was lost.

Two firefighters and a number of residents were treated for a range of problems, including dehydration, anxiety and smoke inhalation.

The Londonderry fire broke out early in the day but the situation worsened dramatically about 1430hrs.

People were asked to avoid the area with roads closed and about 330 firefighters and several

aircraft, including an Air-Crane, were active in the area.

As a precaution, the small number of students on holiday care at the St Paul's Grammar School, were taken home early by their parents. The school itself was actively protected by the school's Category 8 tanker which was crewed by two staff who are NSW RFS members. Another 12 staff and adult ex-students also defended the property with fire hoses.

NSW RFS helicopters also used the school's dams for water and its sports oval as a landing/refuelling area.

By mid-evening the fire activity had dropped off and a cool change came through at about midnight, further easing the situation.

The following week was spent shoring up containment lines while milder conditions continued.

CENTRE RIGHT: Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan, visited the fire affected areas on 18 December 2009.



Photo by Ben Shepherd, Media Services

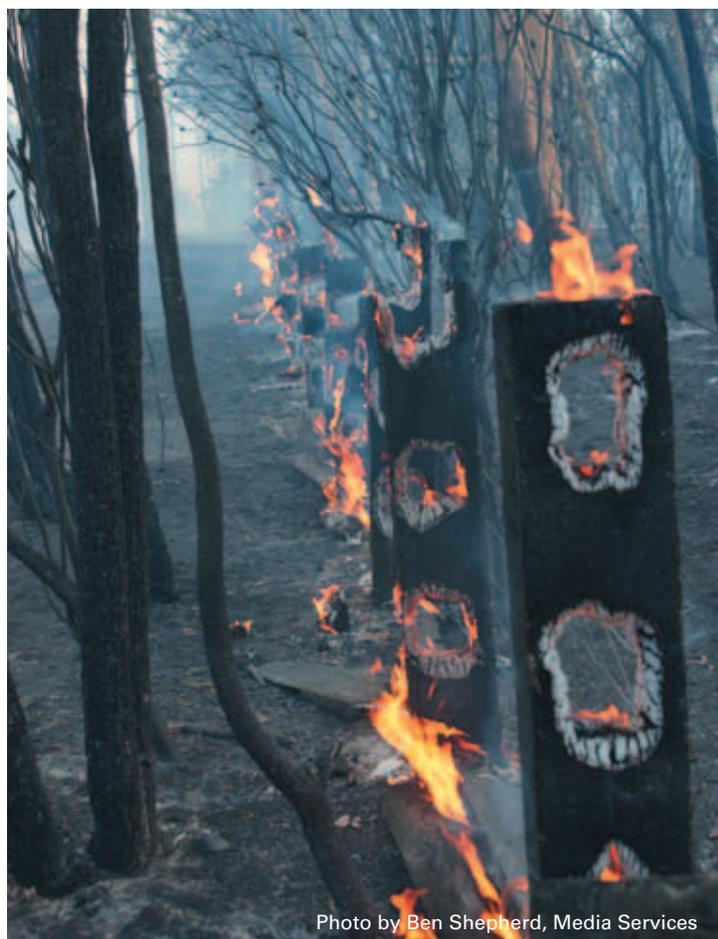


Photo by Ben Shepherd, Media Services

Mt Gulaga fire seen from offshore where a pod of about 60 Humpback whales were feeding off Narooma. Photo by Jon Poyner



FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN BECOMES A BLESSING

By Nadine Morton, Bush Fire Bulletin

Early in the 2009-10 fire season, the Eurobodalla and Bega Valley District on the south coast had a *Section 44 Bush Fire Emergency* declared in their area threatening the culturally significant Mount Gulaga.

The mountain had not experienced fire for 40 years and after an extremely dry Winter, the fuel loading was high. It set the community on edge.

The Yuin people of the Far South Coast area consider Mt Gulaga (also known as Mt Dromadery) as a place of ancestral origin and is especially sacred for women. The mountain is also home to some ecologically rare and distinctive vegetation communities that are sensitive to intense wildfire. Max Beukers of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) in Merimbula said the mountain has a remnant of cool temperate rainforest on the very top.

"We can presume that the rainforest remnant has been there since the last Ice Age and if it goes up in a fire, it is lost forever."

So when a Forests NSW hazard reduction accidentally spread on the Mount Gulaga in late August 2009, there was considerable concern in the local communities. Landowners at the base of the mountain were nervous.

After the fire had been contained Forests NSW apologised for the fact that the fire spread from their lands into the Gulaga National Park. Martin Linehan, Operations Manager of Forests NSW, acknowledged that the fire's spread caused: "very considerable stress and angst within the local community and required a considerable effort from large numbers of people to manage it appropriately."

The Forests NSW hazard reduction burn in Bodalla State Forest West of Gulaga was conducted in early July 2009. It had produced numerous re-ignitions and outbreaks in the area and the strong winds and high temperatures on Thursday 27 August created another flare up. The following is a detailed account of the incident.



Thursday 27 August

The fire moved uphill on Mt Gulaga towards Tilba and the Gulaga National Park. Mr Linehan said that the fire "took off under a Westerly wind with high temperatures and relative humidity around ten percent, and by the time it came out to a road where firefighters might attempt containment, it was unsafe for them to do so."

The fire moved into an untracked area of Mt Gulaga and headed towards the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community. Around this time an Incident Management Team was formed at the Eurobodalla Fire Control Centre and the fire was declared as a Class 2. The fire then moved to the South East corner of the mountain and local NSW RFS crews responded to this area.

Friday 28 August

"Most of this area hasn't been burnt since 1968...the terrain consists of a lot of ridges and hills that aren't easily accessed," Fire Mitigation Officer Greg Potts, Far South Coast Team said.

The IMT was upgraded at this point.

1400hrs: Community meeting conducted by NSW RFS at Dingnams Creek Fire Station, this community was the first in line in the fire's path.

1800hrs: Community meeting conducted by NSW RFS at Central Tilba Town Hall with over 170 people attending.

Firefighting strategies were discussed at the meetings and residents had the opportunity to place themselves on an email register for updates to be emailed to them two or three times a day.

1900hrs: A *Section 44 Bush Fire Emergency* was declared for the Eurobodalla and Bega Rural Fire District.

Saturday 29 August

The fire was now wrapping around the mountain and had reached the top on the Western side. There was also intense fire behaviour on the Southern side with helicopters water bombing to defend houses in the area.

Sunday 30 August / Saturday 5 September

With pressure on the Northern end, the fire started heading towards scattered rural dwellings in the Punkalla area. Traditional firefighting commenced from here with containment lines being constructed and back burning in place.

Sunday 6 September

Due to the efforts of the NSW RFS, National Parks and Forests

NSW the fire was now contained and the immediate bush fire threat to the local community has subsided.

Monday 7 September

The fire was now classified as a Class 1 and was under control of National Parks with ongoing involvement from the NSW RFS, in particular Tilba Rural Fire Brigade. The town's waterline had been damaged during the fire and local residents were now relying on tank water.

1300hrs: The *Section 44 Bush Fire Emergency* was revoked for the Eurobodalla and Bega Rural Fire District.

Tuesday 8 September / Friday 11 September

Containment of fire continued.

Saturday 12 September

Very High Fire Danger Rating with temperatures over 30 degrees and increasing winds.

Sunday 13 September

Total Fire Ban declared.

During a back burn being put in place by ground and aerial crews, the fire again spotted near Central Tilba leading to another containment line needing to be established. A new fire



ignited in Guerilla Bay and all 23 Eurobodalla brigades, supported by 10 brigades from Bega Valley were on the fireground.

Monday 14 September onwards

There were now no active fires within the containment lines so the NSW RFS conducted a number of small back burns in the area on non-native species.

Tilba Rural Fire Brigade was now monitoring the situation and investigating as required.

Damage kept to a minimum

The Mt Gulaga fire covered a total of 3,060ha and at its height had more than 100 NSW RFS firefighters, 40 trucks and three helicopters along with 16 National Parks and 16 Forests NSW crews

working to contain it.

Throughout this campaign there were no injuries and no property losses, although there were some damaged fences in the area.

The distinctive ecosystems on the mountain were not substantially damaged and aerial mapping after the fire indicated that less than one percent of the rainforest gullies on the mountain had been impacted by the fire.

“Now, six months later, the mountain is recovering really well,” said Max Beukers of the DECCW in Merimbula who conducted the impact survey after the fire.

Mount Gulaga: Why the mountain matters

Mount Gulaga is a site of great spiritual significance to the local Yuin people and in May 2006 the NSW Government formally handed back Gulaga National Park ownership and management to the Aboriginal communities on the Far South Coast.

Mount Gulaga has been described by Aboriginal people as the place of ancestral origin for all Yuin people and the mountain itself is said to be the mother and is of deep significance for Aboriginal women.

Over 60 million years ago Mount Gulaga was an active volcano and its peak was some three kilometres high. Now it is less than 1,000 metres high but still dominates the Tilba landscape. It can be seen from almost everywhere in the region.

It also has a unique environment. Max Beukers of the DECCW in Merimbula said the mountain has a remnant of cool temperate rainforest on the very top.

“It is an isolated remnant of rainforest with pinkwood and southern sassafras,” he said. “The mountain also has some rare heath among the rocky outcrops – zieria tuberculata– which is a vulnerable species.”

“There is lots of regrowth and we have seen that the rainforest gullies were not burned at all. It seems that the fire came right up to the cool temperate rainforest and stopped. It’s quite amazing.”

The traditional owners of Mount Gulaga advised local forestry staff that they do not believe the cultural and spiritual values relevant to their people have

been significantly compromised by this fire.

TOP AND LEFT: The Mt Gulaga fire covered a total of 3,060ha and at its height had more than one hundred NSW RFS firefighters, 40 trucks and three helicopters along with 16 National Parks and 16 Forests NSW crews working to contain it.

Photos courtesy of
The Narooma News

PREGNANT WOMAN RESCUED

In early February, the Mullumbimby Brigade was called to rescue a woman in labour when she was stranded in her home by flooding.

The woman's home in Upper Wilsons Creek, near Mullumbimby, was isolated when seven causeways between the home and the local hospital were flooded. The area is thick with rainforest, bush and scrub and the roads are very narrow and subject to flash flooding.

Two hundred and fifty millimetres of rain fell overnight and all the causeways flooded quickly. At the same time as the rain deluged the area, the woman began labour.

"We are often called in to perform rescues or do food drops for people from Upper Wilson's Creek," laughed Leah Ross, Senior Deputy Captain from Mullumbimby Brigade, "But never a woman in labour before. We had a rather interesting debate on the way up there about who **wouldn't** be delivering the baby!"

"I've had three (children) myself but never delivered someone else's."

Byron Shire State Emergency Service was alerted of the woman's situation at 5am on Sunday 7 February and the midwives at Mullumbimby Hospital were on standby.

The SES called for assistance from the Mullumbimby Brigade. Firefighters Nev McLean and Leah Ross arrived in the 4WD Category One truck which was capable of crossing the flooded causeway.

"Nev and I have done this before," Leah Ross said, "The first two causeways are the worst ones. The trouble is you don't know what is underneath the water. We put the truck into four wheel drive and with each of us hanging our heads out the windows we drove through - like two emus driving along!"

Two paramedics from Ambulance NSW accompanied them up into the hills.

"The best bit was the directions we got. They told us to follow the signs to the baby shower and sure enough, there were signs all the way. She certainly got a shower!"

Grateful for the rescue, the woman in labour and her partner were surprisingly calm.

On the way back they drove slowly through the floodwaters with the woman in labour in the back seat, her partner and two ambulance officers. It took about an hour to travel the 15 kilometre return journey from Mullumbimby - they were keen to avoid the bumps.

At Malcolm's Crossing the woman was transferred to a waiting ambulance.

"It is actually pretty tricky to get a nine-month pregnant woman out of a fire truck." Leah said, "She had to come down face forward - so we all grabbed an arm and a leg."

"She was in her own little world," Leah said, "So we said good bye and good luck."

Leah and Nev returned to the station to find many requests for interviews from the local newspapers and radio.

"I guess it's interesting because it's not the usual," Leah said, "But I'm not used to this media stuff!"

The woman successfully delivered a baby boy two days later at Mullumbimby Hospital.

FROM TOP: Nev McLean testing the waters before crossing in the Mullumbimby Cat One.

Video footage courtesy of Peter Murray



Prepare. Act. Survive.

BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE TELEVISION COMMERCIAL FILMING

Photos by Anthony Clark and Brendan Doyle, Media Services



The Prepare. Act. Survive. media campaign was one of the important ways the NSW RFS informed the general public about changes to the Fire Danger Ratings this past bush fire season.

The media campaign focussed on announcing the new

national Severe, Extreme and Catastrophic Fire Danger Ratings and new bush fire alert messages as well as encouraging everyone to prepare a Bush Fire Survival Plan.

The campaign featured actor Peter Phelps along with several NSW RFS brigades from

northern Sydney. It targeted people living in or travelling through bush fire prone areas.

You see here photos from the two days of shooting that took place in locations around Sydney prior to the launch of the bush fire season.

The campaign also coincided with the launch of a new web-based program to help residents assess their homes in terms of bush fire danger. This Bush Fire Household Assessment Tool is available on the NSW RFS website:

<http://bfhat.rfs.nsw.gov.au/>.

ON 'CATASTROPHIC'



In January 2010 there was some public debate about the new Fire Danger Ratings, the new system of community warnings and, in particular, the use of the word 'catastrophic' in relation to fire danger. Internal Communications Officer, Keiran Smith asked NSW RFS Commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons about his response to the debate and what the next steps might be.

The following is a transcript of the conversation which was first published as a podcast available on the NSW RFS intranet and MyRFS.

NSW RFS Internal Communications Officer, Keiran Smith:

Shane, there has been some publicity about the new Fire Danger Ratings and community warnings, what is your response to this?

NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons

My response is that less than 12 months ago, on 7 February 2009, Australia experienced its worst ever bush fire tragedy resulting in 173 people losing their lives, literally thousands of homes were completely destroyed, not to mention those significantly damaged, and community infrastructure was razed to the ground.

As would be expected, there was a need to learn from the enormity of this tragedy. It was for this reason that the new Fire Danger Ratings, community information and alert levels have been developed. It is part of a measured, national response focusing on learning from that tragedy and informing the community.

Much of the recent debate has centred on the semantics of the word 'catastrophic'. We need to keep in mind this is a national collaborative effort to do something meaningful in response to the tragedy in Victoria. The interim findings of the Royal Commission pointed

to the need to be stronger and clearer about the exposure to risk for communities and the need for decisive action.

A group of leaders came together to collaborate and develop these new Fire Danger Ratings. And it wasn't just the fire services. We had media outlets (commercial and ABC) and other communication authorities. We had scientists in fire behaviour, we had scientists in structures and dwellings, and we had experts from the meteorology departments who know the science behind the modelling of Fire Danger Ratings, not to mention experts in human behaviour.

It is a fact that 'catastrophic' is a confronting and emotive word. But the reality is, and research across this country and in other parts of the world shows, way too many people living in bush fire prone areas are complacent about their risk. They have done little planning or preparation about what they would do in the event of a fire.

So we had to emphasise a new message: Prepare. Act. Survive. as well as encouraging people to prepare a Bush Fire Survival Plan. The new Fire Danger Ratings simply show the potential for fire on any given day so people can make better decisions.

Keiran Smith:

How do you believe communities have reacted on days of Catastrophic Fire Danger Ratings during this past fire season? What response have you seen from those communities?

Commissioner:

Well in NSW we have now had six occasions where the forecast conditions were such that we saw ratings tip into 100 plus category and that triggered Catastrophic Fire Danger Ratings.

We have seen a very measured, a very sensible and very practical response from those communities affected. But our message too, has been very measured, very simple and clear and that is: plan your activities on days of on Catastrophic ratings to avoid being in bush fire prone areas.

We backed that advice up by doing things like closing bushwalking and access into National Parks to avoid people being unnecessarily at risk.

We worked with the farming communities to encourage more sensible arrangements regarding harvesting. For example, moving harvesting to late evening or overnight or early morning.

So we have seen a very measured considered and sensible reaction from communities. We certainly haven't seen panic, confusion and all those other phrases used in the public debate.

I think it is also important that we cast our mind back to the weeks preceding Christmas, when on the 17 December, with Fire Danger Ratings at Severe, Extreme or indeed tipping into Catastrophic, many people lost their homes and individuals were severely burnt.

Fire is a very real threat and the damage and destruction is very real.

Keiran Smith:

And what are the next steps in the process?

Commissioner:

This new system has only been in place since 1 October 2009. This is our first fire season where we have applied this new nationally consistent methodology. That in itself is a monumental leap forward and unprecedented in terms of national collaboration. Clearly we will seek to modify and adjust messaging in concert with the Fire Danger Ratings.

We have already made some adjustments to our systems based on the experience of the first few months. There will be a national review to seek to learn the lessons and make any necessary adjustments to the system according to what we consider appropriate and indeed what our colleagues from across the country bring to the table.

In my mind there can be no denial that we are better off today than we ever have been. If we do need to 'debug' and modify a few things, well we are always open to that. That is part of our culture and that is part of our policy implementation. We will look forward to the review in April and I am sure any adjustments made will only better what is already a monumental improvement in Fire Danger Ratings and community messaging.



The first Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSP) were announced in late 2009. Currently, the NSW Rural Fire Service have identified more than 700 NSP across the State.

NSW Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan said the Neighbourhood Safer Places are an additional safety measure for bush fire prone communities and praised the NSW Rural Fire Service for quick work in identifying so many NSP.

The concept of the Neighbourhood Safer Places evolved out of the Royal Commission into the tragic Victorian bush fires in February 2009. The Royal Commission's Interim Report, released in August 2009, recommended the identification of Neighbourhood Safer Places for use by the community during a bush fire emergency.

"Neighbourhood Safer Places are a place of last resort where people can go at short notice if a major fire threatens, or if they had decided to stay and

defend their home but then find this is too dangerous in the fire conditions," Mr Whan said.

Reducing the impact of bush fires is a shared responsibility between government, emergency service organisations and the community. As such, it is vital that people who live in bush fire prone areas are aware of nearby NSP locations and prepare a Bush Fire Survival Plan.

What is a Neighbourhood Safer Place?

Neighbourhood Safer Places provide a higher level of protection to human life from the effects of a bush fire. The designated building or open space is capable of withstanding the passage of a bush fire and is a place of last resort.

The space around a Neighbourhood Safer Place and its distance from bush fire hazards is key. Designated NSP are surrounded by large asset protection zones in order to provide passive protection

and achieve the life safety requirements.

The Neighbourhood Safer Place is really a back up plan for those who live in bush fire prone areas. This back up plan should be implemented when:

- the Bush Fire Survival Plan has failed; or
- the fire event exceeds your capacity to protect your home; or
- the Fire Danger Rating is categorised as Catastrophic and you do not have sufficient time to relocate to your designated safer location (e.g. family or friends property, shopping centres, clear open space areas etc) prior the onset of fire.

Last minute relocations are the greatest danger for those living in bush fire prone areas. NSP aim to provide a local place of shelter that can be readily accessible by the surrounding community and reduce long distance travel while a bush fire is impacting on the area. However, they are not a substitute for having a Bush Fire Survival Plan and a well designed and prepared property.

Locations in NSW

The locations of the Neighbourhood Safer Places are available on the NSW Rural Fire Service website www.rfs.nsw.gov.au.

"The website will be updated as new sites are confirmed and it is a credit to the NSW Rural Fire Service given that these recommendations from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission were only delivered on August 17.

"People living in bush fire prone areas should make sure they are aware of any Neighbourhood Safer Places in their community and note it in their Bush Fire Survival Plan," Mr Whan said.

While many NSP have been already identified across NSW, there are still more to go. The identification process will be ongoing and brigades are encouraged to look around their local area to determine if any suitable locations exist. Not all towns will be able to provide for a NSP. In these circumstances other measures will need to be considered.

Signs being distributed

Signage will be provided to identify Neighbourhood Safer Places to the local community.

The NSW Rural Fire Service have recently obtained 1,000 NSP signs which will be distributed across NSW in the first half of 2010 and erected with the assistance of local councils.

WARNINGS TO ARRIVE VIA PHONE

In December 2009, a new tool was introduced to provide communities with information during bush fires.

Emergency Alert is a national telephone warning system, available to emergency services such as the NSW RFS, which can be used to send alerts to affected areas. The Emergency Alert system was used in NSW twice in the past bush fire season in NSW.

The Emergency Alert system can deliver text messages to people in a designated area, based on their mobile phone billing address. The system can also deliver recorded messages to landlines based on the address of the phone connection.

The system was established in response to a call in April 2009 by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), with the Federal Government allocating \$15 million to deliver the system. At a national level, Victoria led the development of the system, with a view of having the system in place for the 2009-10 bush fire season.

In December, following comprehensive public trials in Victoria, the Emergency Alert system was made available for use by NSW emergency services.

The Emergency Alert system is an addition to the suite of tools already used by the NSW RFS, including media, doorknocks, NSW RFS website, 1800 Bush Fire Information Line and community meetings. The new system does not replace any of these, instead it will supplement them, by giving emergency services another option to deliver information to affected communities.

The decision to use the Emergency Alert system is made by an Incident Controller (IC), in consultation with NSW RFS State Operations. Before using Emergency Alert, the IC and State Operations will consider the nature and size of the threat, what information has already been developed and the weight of the firefighting response.

Once a decision has been made to activate the system, the area to receive the message is electronically overlaid on

YOUR PHONE MAY NOW BE USED TO DELIVER EMERGENCY WARNINGS.

During times of emergencies such as bushfires and extreme weather events, your landline or mobile phone may now be used to deliver a critical warning. This 'Emergency Alert' phone or text message is another way for authorities to inform you on what you may need to do. If you don't understand the message, ask a family member, friend or neighbour for assistance. Learn more about this system at emergencyalert.gov.au

EMERGENCY ALERT. BE WARNED. BE INFORMED.

Do not call 000 (TTY 106) unless you are in critical need of emergency services (police, fire or ambulance). Do not rely on a telephone warning to act.

a map. The system will then identify the landlines in the area and mobile telephones with a billing address in that area.

Messages are then created, up to 140 characters for text messages and 180 characters for fixed line services. For landlines, the messages are converted by a text-to-speech engine. The system can deliver up to 300 mobile phone text messages every second and 1,000 voice messages to landlines. At the same time, the information contained in the message is delivered via the NSW RFS

website, 1800 number and the media, to ensure timely and consistent information.

While telephone-based warnings are a valuable addition to the ways that information can be delivered to the community, it's important that people do not rely solely on receiving a message on their telephone. Residents must still be prepared and monitor a range of sources of information including local radio, the NSW RFS website and 1800 679 737 number to stay up-to-date with emergency situations.



VERY LARGE AIRTANKER ARRIVES IN VICTORIA

The first operational trial of the very large airtanker took place in Victoria this bush fire season.

The VLAT was based at the Avalon Airport in Victoria from December 2009 and was available for operational use until March 2010.

It is the first trial of the large water-bombing plane in Australia. The Bushfire CRC will evaluate the operational trial and will prepare a series of reports on the airtanker by mid 2010.

The airtanker has the capacity to drop approximately 45,000 litres of water or 42,000 litres of fire retardant - up to five times the amount of the high-volume helicopters such as *Elvis* and *Isabelle*. Its volume is 15 times the amount of our largest fixed-wing bombers.

The plane can land, refuel, reload and be ready to take-off again in approximately 30 minutes, depending on circumstances. It is likely to have a minimum flying altitude of 300ft and its minimum

speed is approximately 150 knots. CEO of the Bushfire CRC, Gary Morgan said the trial will assess the effectiveness of the VLAT in Australian conditions.

"We need to know what this aircraft can do and what it can't do in Australian conditions. This type of aircraft has not been used for firefighting in Australia and is quite different to anything in the current fleet of aircraft and helicopters.

It is important that we take the time to fully understand its capabilities and its limitations under Australian conditions," he said.

The airtanker can be used to build retardant lines in remote areas and to provide fire suppression on the flanks of bush fires.

There has also been extensive trialling in non-operational situations in landscapes unique to Australia such as dense eucalyptus forest, grass fuels, flat terrain, hilly terrain and with



a range of payloads (water, retardant). To date, this class of aircraft has not been tested in all of these conditions.

"The Bushfire CRC will bring its broad expertise to the trial of this very large aircraft and will share the outcomes with firefighting agencies around Australia and internationally," said Mr Morgan.

The Bushfire CRC researchers are from the CSIRO and from Australian firefighting agencies, who will work closely with the U.S. aircraft crews. An S76 helicopter from Canada accompanied the researchers in their task.

"This helicopter is a vital part of the trial because it has the speed and responsiveness to keep pace with the DC-10 and it is equipped with all the necessary monitoring equipment to ensure that each

aerial drop can be properly assessed," he said.

Leased by the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) and funded by the Victorian State Government, the DC-10 was the largest aircraft ever to be used in aerial firefighting in Australia.

NSW RFS Aviation and Specialist Equipment Manager, Maryanne Carmichael welcomed the trial being held in Victoria.

"We will be involved in the trials and carefully watching how the VLAT performs in Victoria," she said, "the capabilities of these aircraft need to be tested under Australian conditions and the opportunities provided by the trial in Victoria will assist in determining its operational effectiveness."

HOTSPOTS: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO FIRE MANAGEMENT

By Lana Andrews, NSW RFS Planning Officer (Hotspots)



ABOVE:
Field day discussions at Toonumbar in June 2009.
Photo by K. McShea

TOP RIGHT:
Field Day Three: Landholders and agencies preparing for a planned burn at Drake, September 2009.
Photo by Lana Andrews

CENTRE LEFT:
Hotspots planned burn at Toonumbar in June 2009.
Photo by K. McShea

CENTRE RIGHT:
Senior volunteers assist with exercises in the field at Toonumbar in June 2009.
Photo by K. McShea

A new collaborative approach to managing fire for biodiversity is taking off in parts of NSW.

The Hotspots Fire Project was established five years ago and is based on best available science combining biodiversity concerns with fire management knowledge.

NSW RFS Community Safety Officer in the Manning Team, Terry Kitching was instrumental in delivering the Hotspots program across northern NSW.

“One of the biggest benefits is the huge change in attitude that you see in the participants from the beginning to the end of the program,” he said, “You can see a tangible improvement in the relationship between agency staff and private landholders.”

Over three field days, landholders join fire authorities,

land managers, fire-ecology scientists and natural resource managers in a practical approach to learning about managing fire for biodiversity.

The Hotspots Fire Project works closely with University of Wollongong’s Centre for Environmental Risk Management of Bushfires and well regarded regional fire ecologists. Prior to each workshop, these groups produce fire and vegetation literature reviews of the local area. These scientific reports form the underpinnings of Hotspots’ educational materials. The science is not only translated into landholder friendly products but it also provides realistic management options for landholders to apply on their own properties.

Professor Ross Bradstock, Centre for Environmental Risk Management of Bushfires, is

very enthusiastic about the Hotspots program.

“I think Hotspots is probably one of the most interesting programs of its kind,” he said, “I can’t think of a better way to inform people about this critical issue of understanding fire and understanding the needs of our native plant and animals with regard to fire.”

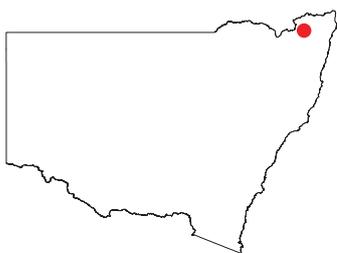
The Hotspots program is hosted by The Nature Conservation Council and is delivered by NSW RFS, Forests NSW, National Parks, CMA representatives and independent facilitators. The NSW RFS is a key project partner providing staff, volunteers and resources to the program.

So far, the program has been operating in the Northern Rivers, Southern Rivers, Hawkesbury Nepean and Central West Catchment Management Areas



(CMAs) of NSW and is funded by the NSW Government's Environmental Trust and the Commonwealth's Natural Disaster Mitigation Program.

Drake: A Hotspots Case Study



Drake, a small rural community in Northern NSW has recently been the subject of a successful Hotspots program. Drake is located on the Bruxner Highway approximately 50km East of Tenterfield with a long history in timber and mining. Private property in the area is typically small to medium landholdings

which are managed for grazing, conservation and other enterprises and often borders national parks or state forests.

It was the Drake landholders who requested that the Hotspots program come to their area. The training field days were held between November 2008 and September 2009.

Field Day One

The NSW RFS, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Forests NSW, Richmond Landcare Services met with an ecologist and local landholders. They spent a day discussing issues such as risk planning, legislation, the fire history of the local area, the protection of threatened species, vegetation types and their response to fire and fire regimes and habitat. The day also included visits to a number of field sites and time in

a local hall, where agency staff gave presentations and engaged landholders in discussions.

Afterwards landholders started their fire management plans and began collecting data.

A visit from local ecologist

Following the first field day, a local ecologist visited each participant's property to identify vegetation types and any plants or animals of particular interest. Landholders gained a better understanding of the native vegetation on their property and were able to set the standard for their fire management plan.

Landholders began discussing their fire management plans with their neighbours and started to build a picture of regional land and fire management issues for the area.

Field Day Two

Four months later, agency staff and volunteer brigade members joined the Hotspots participants for a second field day. The NSW RFS members assisted with planning and provided advice on possible strategies for fire management.

Issues raised included a lack of understanding about operational fire management issues, fragmentation of land ownership, lack of suitable equipment to prepare for and manage fire and completion of regulatory requirements before burning.

"I have been around the country all my life and have experienced bush fire," one participant said, "My father always kept fuel low around the property. Attending Hotspots has confirmed many of my views in relation to fire management. We will be



taking what we have learnt from Hotspots to future meetings with our neighbours.”

Landholders recorded on-ground actions they would implement for each management unit on their properties. Over one third of landholders in the Drake group included some planned burning in their fire management plans. For this reason the NSW RFS staff decided Drake would be eligible for a third field day, when a prescribed burn would be implemented.

Choosing a suitable site for a burn

A suitable site was chosen to host this third field day. The local ecologist prepared a short report on the site which included a site description and assessment, dominant species, fire history and ecological objectives for the burn. The local Community Safety Officer then wrote a burn plan based on the site assessment.

Field Day Three

In September 2009 the third field day and the prescribed burn was held. The morning was spent walking through the chosen site. Participants discussed weather, topography, fuels, plant and animal response to fire, risk assessment, lighting

patterns, site preparation and burn planning. Landholders shared their own experiences and assisted in some site preparation prior to the planned burn.

A briefing was conducted by the local Drake Brigade, senior NSW RFS volunteers trained in Hotspots and NSW Forests and National Parks Wildlife staff. Staff from all these organisations worked together to undertake the burn and some of the Hotspots participants, who were also members of Drake Brigade, formed part of the crew.

After the burn was conducted landholders reviewed the day and were given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the burn process. They also walked over the site after it was declared safe and the local ecologist discussed possible vegetation responses after the fire.

Members of the Drake Brigade are happy to be involved in Hotspots. A volunteer of six years, Mick Schultz, said:

“Brigade members would rather volunteer a few hours assisting with a planned burn, than spend days chasing a wildfire,” he said, “Hotspots has been a great opportunity for the brigade to give landholders the confidence

and basic skills they need to implement a controlled burn with the appropriate preparations and resources.”

Gaining confidence

Overwhelmingly, landholders at Drake felt that the information and experience provided through Hotspots was practical, useful and provided information from a variety of perspectives.

After the Drake program, the local landholders commented that they had a better understanding of fire behaviour, fire history as well as a better understanding of the bush. Using a practical on-the-ground approach, the Hotspots field days gave landholders more confidence.

In early 2010, Drake landholders were already implementing actions from their fire management plans including site preparation for burning, fuel management around key assets and meetings with neighbours to discuss future actions. As a result of the Hotspots program at Drake, further monitoring of the field day site will be done by the landowner, ecologist and NSW RFS to examine ecological responses of vegetation and fuel loads.

Hotspots achievements to date

Across NSW over 400 private landholders and 110 public land managers have participated in 49 field days conducted in the Hotspots Fire Project. Approximately 120 map-based fire management plans for individual freehold properties have been developed and these plans cover a total of over 80,000ha. The majority is native vegetation.

The Hotspots team has also produced a unique set of science-based materials addressing fire management in each CMA region, including six in-depth, regionally-specific literature reviews. Hotspots has also developed comprehensive delivery guides, a training framework and case studies for each participating CMA.

The Hotspots Fire Project program has also created an improved understanding of obligations under the *Rural Fires Act 1997* and relevant approval processes and permits for landowners. Brigades have reported that after the program the connections made have led to new volunteers joining the NSW RFS.



Hotspots Fire Project Partners



The overall higher awareness of the science and knowledge of fire behaviour has resulted in more properties being prepared for fire, an increase in notifications, a decrease in escaped burns and a general increase in effective fuel management.

Hotspots into the future

The Hotspots Fire Project team is in negotiation with several new project partners as the program gains momentum. Funding has been sourced from Land Alive (a NSW Department

of Environment, Climate Change and Water initiative) to deliver the program with two Aboriginal Land Councils in the Northern and Southern Rivers and the Northern Rivers CMA has provided funding to deliver the Hotspots program to a landholder group in the Northern Tablelands area.

For any enquiries regarding Hotspots contact Lana Andrews on 8741 5555 or email hotspots@rfs.nsw.gov.au or visit www.hotspotsfireproject.org.au

The Hotspots Fire Project is proud to work with the following partners: Nature Conservation Council, NSW Rural Fire Service, Department of Environment Climate Change and Water (Parks and Wildlife Group), Forests NSW, NSW Farmers Association, Local Government Shires Association, NSW Catchment Management Authorities, University of Wollongong and the SEQ Fire and Biodiversity Consortium.

TOP LEFT:

Toonumbar landholders observe a planned burn in June 2009. Photo by K.McShea

TOP RIGHT:

Drake landholders discuss post fire response with the local ecologist in September 2009. Photo by Lana Andrews

CENTRE LEFT:

Drake landholders observe a planned burn in September 2009. Photo by Lana Andrews

CENTRE RIGHT:

Drake landholders discuss fire management with public land managers in September 2009

AUSTRALIAN FIRE SERVICE MEDAL: AUSTRALIA DAY 2010



Group Captain Ian Smith



Deputy Captain Col Dowling



Group Captain Neville Roberts

On Australia Day 2010, seven members of the NSW Rural Fire Service were given the Australian Fire Service Medal. Congratulations to seven outstanding members of the Service.

Group Captain Ian Smith has been tireless in his dedication to the NSW Rural Fire Service for over 44 years and he continues to give an outstanding commitment to the Service. Ian joined the Yerrinbool Brigade in 1965.

After many years as Senior Deputy Captain, in 1992 he was appointed a Group Captain, a position he holds today. He has been President at Yerrinbool Brigade for 10 years and Vice President for five years.

As a trainer for the Wingecarribee District, he has actively encouraged training among volunteers. He has attended several out-of-area incidents and has been a Divisional Commander during several major incidents.

He brings a vast firefighting knowledge and experience to the Deputy Group Captains who he has mentored over the years.

Deputy Captain Dowling has offered 45 years of selfless devotion to duty, quiet contribution and dedicated commitment to the NSW Rural Fire Service. He officially joined the Bunglegumbie Brigade in 1963 and was elected Captain the same year.

Col has held significant positions in the Service every year ever since joining. One of his contributions has been to organise Open Days at Burrabadine Station - long before it became common practice in the NSW RFS. Countless social, training and fund raising events have been organised by Col over the years.

Raising and donating funds to build the Burrabadine station, lending a hand to brigade members in trouble and encouraging junior members into the brigade, are all part of Col Dowling's outstanding contribution.

As a trainer at the Dubbo Fire Control Centre, Col brings creativity to his training, continually developing better ways of demonstrating his topics of interest.

Group Captain Roberts has been a member of the Euromedah Rural Fire Brigade for approximately 40 years. He was appointed Group Captain in 1995 and has been a very active member in this role.

In his role as Group Captain, he has overseen training, firefighting, communications, hazard reduction, volunteer input and the modernisation of equipment. He alone drove all parties to modernise the aged and mainly petrol-fuelled fleet to become an all diesel-fuelled fleet.

He has been a very strong advocate for the training of the brigades in the rural and remote areas of Narromine. He has been a pillar of support for the Fire Control Officers and staff of the Orana Team, often staffing the Fire Control Centre during incidents, taking and receiving Triple Zero (000) calls and providing wise counsel to management on volunteer issues.

He is also a leader within the Narromine community and this year was named the Narromine Citizen of the Year.



Group Captain Lance Howley

Group Captain Lance Howley joined the Weimby Rural Fire Brigade, situated in the Balranald Shire in February 1974. In 1975 he was elected to the position of Deputy Captain.

During his fourteen years as Deputy Captain, he was involved in attending many incidents and provided strong leadership to his fellow brigade members. In 1989 he was elected to the position of Group Captain for the Group of Balranald Brigades, a position he still actively holds today.

Group Captain Howley continually strives to ensure his members have the best possible conditions, equipment and information. He is an experienced pilot and was even known to fly over bush fires so that his members on the fireground have the latest, most accurate information.

He consults widely with his brigade members and holds their safety and welfare as paramount. Lance Howley's 35 years of distinguished service to the NSW Rural Fire Service and to the communities in Western NSW have made him an inspiration to all who meet him.



Superintendent Angelo Baldo

Superintendent Baldo joined the Glenorie Rural Fire Brigade as a volunteer in September 1978. He soon held the position of Deputy Captain and was recognised as someone willing to be involved in every aspect of the Service.

His career as a salaried staff member commenced when he was appointed as the Deputy Fire Control Officer and later Fire Control Officer at Campbelltown. One of his outstanding career achievements was the Mutual Aid Agreement between the NSW Rural Fire Service and the NSW Fire Brigades in 1996. His efforts helped turn around a strained inter-agency relationship in that area.

In October 2002 he was appointed as the Fire Control Officer at Hornsby. On numerous occasions since, his leadership qualities have been recognised by his appointments as Section 44 Incident Controller. He was one of the key members of the Executive of the Rural Fire Employee's Association and as such was able to contribute to a smooth transition from Local to State Government employment for District staff in 2000. Since that time he has been an active member of the Executive of the Rural Fire Service Association and is currently Manager of State Mitigation Services for the Service.



Captain Gregory Green

Captain Greg Green joined the NSW Rural Fire Service in 1977 and he is currently the Bargo Brigade Captain, a position he has held since 1992.

Captain Green has attended numerous major incidents within the Wollondilly District and also twenty four out-of-area bush fire emergencies. For three of these deployments he was the Group Leader.

He was a founding member of the Wollondilly Remote Area Fire Team. One highlight of this team was a 12 kilometre fire trail made by 40 members in one day during a fire.

Captain Green is a strong enforcer of fireground safety and is well regarded amongst his peers and subordinates.

There have been a few occasions when he has attended an incident and has either taken control or been given control due to his knowledge of bush fire behaviour and his ability to remain calm during crisis situations.



Captain Rick Parish

Captain Rick Parish joined the Bringelly Rural Fire Brigade in 1981 and he quickly became actively involved in all aspects of the brigade, responding to incidents on a regular basis.

On gaining his Rural Fire Instructor Qualifications in 1992 he spent a considerable period of time instructing on zone training courses. In 2004 Captain Parish and the brigade helped build a 'Firewise' trailer including a smoke house (for 'get down and go' education and training) and a 'hoses and ladders' game.

He and his dedicated support crew now travel all over the zone to school fetes and other community events, educating the public on fire awareness.

In 2007 he coordinated the first community-based ten week Cadet Course in the zone and went to give a very successful school based program. Captain Parish also provided assistance in the inaugural National Cadet Championships held in Penrith in 2007.



SAFETY ALERT

USING FUEL CONTAINERS SAFELY

A recent incident resulting in serious personal injury to a Service member, has highlighted the need to reinforce the correct procedures for using approved fuel containers in a safe way.

- Fuel containers must be placed on the ground with the container opening facing away from the operator. All fuel containers should be treated as if pressurised
- Prior to opening, Service members must ensure that they are positioned behind, and not leaning over the container, and wearing the correct PPE when engaged in refuelling activities
- Containers should be opened by initially 'cracking' the cap which is designed to safely vent pressurised vapours away from the operator. In the event that a container is significantly pressurised a resultant surge in fuel will be directed safely away from the member
- The fuel container must be earthed while re-filling; by placing it on the ground you may prevent serious injury to not only yourself but those around you.



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE
www.rfs.nsw.gov.au

Our Service's story



A history and research project is underway in the NSW RFS. Volunteers and staff have been contributing stories photos and personal memories of the Service. State Library, State Records, local council records, committee minutes, newspaper articles and other archival resources are all being used to unfold this rich and rewarding history.

Building on existing publications, including '50 Years of Fire in NSW' published in 2000, the project aims to build real awareness of who and what the NSW RFS is and how it has evolved. Particular attention is being paid to the unique volunteering history and heritage of the Service.

Some of the artwork from the project is previewed in this edition of the *Bush Fire Bulletin*. Public displays, photos and information boards will initially be on show in the NSW RFS Headquarters building – which is host to many public events, school and community group visits and Service ceremonies - but will also appear throughout the State over time. In the following pages you will find a brief history of key legislative milestones for the NSW RFS and a mural depicting the years 1890-1969.

Keep watching upcoming editions of the Bush Fire Bulletin for the next instalment of our Service's story.

The history of the Service

1890-1969



The NSW Rural Fire Service is now the world's largest volunteer firefighting organisation. The geographic area of NSW is 800,630 square kilometres, which is approximately 10.4 percent of the Australian land mass. The NSW Rural Fire Service has jurisdiction over 99 percent of the State land area now, but it had humble beginnings. During the 19th century, coordinated firefighting was almost non-existent, with many landowners forced to defend their own properties.

By the beginning of the 20th century, in response to particularly serious fires, the NSW State Government formalised control of fire prevention which led to the formation of the first formal brigade at Berrigan in the State's south. According to the Berrigan Advocate newspaper, the brigade was formerly recorded in November 1900 at a meeting at the Royal Hotel on the Murray River. It is the first official record of a formal bush fire brigade in NSW.



1890-1912

Fires in New South Wales

Bush fires have always been an integral part of the NSW environment, occurring with regular frequency as a result of lightning strikes. Indigenous Australians used fire to their own advantage using fires as a tool for hunting, farming and regeneration of the environment. The character of the bush was altered when European settlers began planting crops and grazing stock. In this changing landscape, planned and unplanned fires led to devastating loss of life and property.

Firefighting and legislation

The first mention of fire in legislation was in the *1867 Municipalities Act* which identified the legally constituted Municipalities. Section 153 of this *Act* noted that: "The Council of any Municipality may from time to time make by-laws for preventing and extinguishing fires."

The *1884 Fire Brigades Act (No 3)* constitutes the second mention of 'Fire Prevention and Control' in legislation. This *Act* determined such operations to be formally organised through State Government (NSW Fire Brigades). Twelve years later, in 1896, the first volunteer bush fire brigade was established in Berrigan and was formally recorded in November 1900. In the 1901 census the population, exclusive of Aborigines and Maoris, in New South Wales totalled 1,354,846.

As the new century began, two further Acts of Parliament, namely the *1901 Careless Use of Fires Act* (revised 1906, 1912, 1930) and the *1906 Local Government Act* were passed to ensure that brigades could be formed through local councils.

1919-1949

Local management of rural fires

As the century unfolded, and the fires continued, more responsibility was put onto each local government area to manage the firefighting response.

The *Local Government Act 1919* covered the use and misuse of fire and prevention of fires escaping from property boundaries and spreading out of control which enabled the local management of firefighting in rural areas. This was further enabled when the *Careless Use of Fires Act (1912)* was amended to become the *Bush Fires Act* of 1930. The *Act* enabled local councils to appoint bush fire officers.

A central advisory body

Although efforts were underway to enable the local management of resources and firefighting response, the NSW Government saw advantages in centralising certain planning roles associated with bush fire management.

In 1937 the Bush Fire Advisory Committee was established at a conference held at the Chief Secretary's Department. It was a committee of seven key decision makers. This committee included the Chief Clerk of the Department of Works & Local Government, the Chief Officer of the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW, and representatives of the Police Department, the Forestry Commission, the Graziers' Association, the Rangers' League, and the Education Department. Representatives from the Rural Bank of NSW, the Shires Association and the Soil Conservation Service attended later meetings. The Bush Fire Advisory Committee had no statutory powers.

The Bush Fires Act

The Second World War (1939-45) brought with it increased Federal Government wartime security regulations. In 1942 regulations to coordinate access of fire brigades to all areas for the purposes of protecting and vacating properties was empowered under the *National Security Act*. This enabled local authorities to coordinate the securing and protection of premises. These regulations and the powers they facilitated were to become the *Bush Fires Act 1949*.

The first significant public display of firefighting equipment, posters, pamphlets, prevention techniques, including interviews with landholders was held at the Royal Easter Show in Sydney in 1940.

Around this time the Bush Fire Fighting Fund was established. Local government could purchase equipment for their volunteer brigades from this fund.

1950-1969

Organised fire prevention

The move towards organised local firefighting got a boost with the *Bush Fires Act 1949 (No 31)* which gave greater powers to councils in relation to bush fire prevention, control and suppression. The Bush Fire Committee established through this *Act* was to provide advice, coordinate the work of the volunteer firefighting groups as well as provide community education. A report issued by the Bush Fire Committee in 1950 listed 1,378 bush fire brigades with an average membership of 20 and total personnel of over 26,000.

The bush fire brigades of NSW have gone on to become a powerful volunteer force who have dealt with the majority of significant disasters in NSW since World War Two.

In 1952 a specialist radio subcommittee was set up to recommend appropriate radios for use in firefighting and to allocate frequencies.

In 1958 the first Fire Prevention Association was established. The Association was concerned with developing firebreak systems and other means of preventing fires on vacant Crown Land. The Association was allocated funds under a Treasury Appropriation for the purpose of developing firebreak systems.

The first residential school for volunteer firefighters was also established in Heathcote Scout Hall in 1959 at an estimated cost of £250. The training lasted for one week and was conducted annually thereafter. The training was aimed at developing personal judgement rather than laying down rules of procedure.

Devastating fires in the 1950s and 1960s

Midway through the century, extremely hot temperatures and winds brought difficult conditions. In the 1951-52 season, fires raged through forest north of Newcastle as well as through forests on the South Coast. In 1951, 370,000ha burnt in a single fire event in the Pilliga. At the end of the season, about four million hectares of land in the eastern and central zones had been burnt.

The next significant fire season occurred in 1957 where bush fires driven by gale force winds encircled Sydney and destroyed houses, shops, schools, churches and a hospital. Worst affected was the Blue Mountains area where the town of Leura was devastated. Temperatures were above 100 degrees Fahrenheit and hundreds of firefighters were deployed. At least 600 people were left homeless. Fires also burnt out half a block in the main street of Wentworth Falls, where 25 homes were destroyed. Other fires causing severe damage that season occurred in Lithgow, Woy Woy, Gosford, Narrabeen, Dee Why, Condobolin and Armidale. These fires led to the overhaul of the *Bush Fires Act 1949* and the creation of the position of Chief Coordinator of Bush Firefighting who could operate across local government boundaries.

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 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.



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The view from above. Photo by Precision Helicopters

COFFS HARBOUR DISTRICT

The new Mid North Coast Fire Control Centre was officially opened on Sunday 1 November, 2009 by Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services, Mr Phil Koperberg and Assistant Commissioner Keith Harrap, representing the NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons.

The Coffs Harbour Fire Control Centre was built at a cost of \$2.7 million and is the third NSW RFS Standard Design Fire Control Centre to be built in the past 12 months. The building will be used primarily by the NSW Rural Fire Service to control operations and administration for the Mid North Coast Team area. It is also the Primary Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) for the area. Since the opening, the building has been used as an EOC during the November floods which affected Coffs Harbour and it functioned well in this capacity.

The opening of the new Fire Control Centre sees the NSW RFS moving from a smaller and older building close to the Coffs Harbour CBD, to a large open space near the local airport. The location will make the coordination of aerial operations easier and the bigger space means the NSW RFS operations can be handled with ease.



"The old FCC is a small building of less than 24 squares with nine staff working from the building," said Paul Norton, Coffs Harbour Manager, "There was no room for extended operations, no proper training/planning facilities, no meal room and one toilet. Basically the building was too small for large fire or emergency operations."

"The new structure is a much larger space, with training, planning and dual operational capability," he said, "It offers

a better work environment for the staff and provides a comfortable training centre for the volunteers."

The building is also being used by other local Emergency Services to conduct meetings and training. The five bay shed incorporates the PPE (personal protective equipment) and equipment store and allows for the Mid North Coast Team to easily store vehicles when required.

ABOVE: Unveiling of the plaque and Official Opening of the Mid North Coast Team Fire Control Centre, Coffs Harbour. (L-R): Supt Paul Norton, Mid North Coast Team Manager, Assistant Commissioner Keith Harrap, Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services, Mr Phil Koperberg, MP, Mr Keith Rhoades, Coffs Harbour City Council Mayor. Photo by Trinity Hook



Two new Fire Control Centres set the stage for **FUTURE** FIREFIGHTING

By Mark Sugden, Community Safety Officer, Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai. Photo by Peter Marshall



Photo by Mark Sugden



Photo by Mark Sugden

A Fire Control Centre is a regional hub for fire operations. There are 49 Fire Control Centres in NSW. Two new Fire Control Centres were commissioned in 2009 and were both officially launched in November 2009 - one on the outskirts of Sydney and the second on the Mid North Coast.

HORNSBY/ KU-RING-GAI DISTRICT

The Hornsby Ku-ring-gai District proudly opened its new Fire Control Centre on 7 November 2009 with Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan, officiating at the opening.

“The centre is a significant boost for volunteers in the Hornsby/ Ku-ring-gai area, who will benefit from the advanced training and operational facilities in this outstanding design,” the Minister said.

At a cost of \$4.3 million this new Fire Control Centre provides a specialised major incident command centre to better coordinate bush fire emergency resources within the Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai local government areas.

Local volunteers were joined at the official launch by Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, Leader of the Opposition, Barry O’Farrell, State

MP Judy Hopwood and Mayors Nick Berman(Hornsby) and Ian Cross (Ku-ring-gai).

The day after the official opening, NSW RFS staff and volunteers hosted a community Open Day inviting members of the public to see the new facility. Over 150 residents enjoyed guided tours and took the opportunity to talk to NSW RFS members about their fire-related concerns and ways that they can better prepare for the upcoming fire season.

The new Fire Control Centre is built on the old Berowra toll gate site and it provides a coordination point for the day to day activities and operations of the NSW RFS and all agencies involved in bush fire suppression and mitigation.

The facilities include the administration office which can seat up to 17 staff members,

conference/meeting rooms, and a large training room with the capacity to seat up to a 100 people, as well as specialised areas for Incident Management Team (IMT) roles such as planning, the Public Liaison Unit, logistics and operations.

Renewable energy generators

Some of the noteworthy features of the building are a wind turbine and solar photovoltaic (PV) system. These renewable energy generators will produce 31,000kwh of electricity per year (enough to power four average households) and will save 33 tonnes of greenhouse gas annually. The Centre also incorporates water harvesting tanks to reduce the demand for mains water.

The building is a north-south orientation to allow penetration of the northerly sun and

incorporates features to ensure natural light to all open spaces. Cross ventilation is achieved via glass louvre system to the south facade and opening glass/aluminium framed windows to all other facades. This is one of the first NSW RFS Fire Control Centres to incorporate eco-friendly infrastructure.

TOP: The new Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai Fire Control Centre is built on the site of the old Berowra toll gates on the F3

CENTRE LEFT: The photovoltaic cells on the roof of the Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai Fire Control Centre

CENTRE RIGHT: The official launch was attended by Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan, Mayors Nick Berman (Hornsby) and Ian Cross (Ku-ring-gai) and Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons



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DOCUMENTARY REVIEW

INSIDE THE FIRESTORM

ABC Documentaries

***Inside the Firestorm* is “the catastrophe seen through the eyes of those who were there.”**

This documentary traces the 24 hours of Black Saturday in a simple timeline format. It binds together personal accounts of survival with an overview of the massive fires that roared through country Victoria on that day.

While the media coverage was so overwhelming and hardly any Australian could have missed it, I for one was not clear about the passage of the fires, how they

“We see the movement of the fires, how quickly and how unexpectedly they moved...”

moved and how it happened that they could catch so many people unawares.

Writer and producer Jacob Hickey said:

The single most important aim of this documentary was to convey what it was really like Inside the Firestorm. The survivors were the only people who knew. And so over an intense research period of several months, we visited the worst hit areas and talked for many hours to those good enough to welcome us in.

This documentary really helps create the narrative of the day. We see the movement of the fires, how quickly and how unexpectedly they moved and how these fires and these weather conditions were unlike any other. Computer generated graphics and maps are used throughout

to show the path of the fires and its many unexpected characteristics. Through watching the documentary the predicament of the people in those areas becomes real and understandable.

The documentary is riveting. There is something so engaging about such dramatic and unprecedented fire events mixed with the genuine shock and awe that still reverberates in the faces of those who were there.

Behind all the stories, and woven into many of them, is the death of ordinary Australian men and women. In this way it is a heart-breaker.

Watch this documentary in order to learn from the Black Saturday fires, in order to pay homage to those who survived, in order to honour those who died and in order to fully appreciate the nature of the Australian fire landscape.

How to view this documentary

Inside the Firestorm

ABC Documentaries
Available online at the ABC TV Documentaries website
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/geo/documentaries/interactive/firestorm/>.

A number of copies are available through the NSW RFS library. Or it can be purchased at the ABC Shop. **\$19.95**

Review by Jacqueline Murphy,
Bush Fire Bulletin



MESSAGE

FROM THE COMMISSIONER

February 7 2010 marked the first anniversary of the Victorian Black Saturday Fires.

On that day, some of you may have watched the documentary aired on ABC Television, titled *Inside the Firestorm*. The program covered a number of aspects of that terrible day, including the very personal stories as told by survivors recounting their experiences, losses and memories of the day. While many stories were simply tragic and heartbreaking, there were also stories of considered action, bravery and survival.

The program also featured amateur video footage which was filmed on the day of the fires, showing the visual experience of the intensity of fire behaviour and associated conditions but also including commentary from those operating the camera about what they were seeing, feeling and thinking at the time.

I know some of you watched the program and would agree that it was indeed emotional. It is also most compelling viewing and a fitting testament to the communities affected.

I would like to encourage all members, who didn't get the chance to see it, to take the time and watch this program.

Regards

Shane Fitzsimmons, NSW RFS Commissioner

in**focus**:volunteers



Courage looks like this



On Sunday 18 October 2009, dressed in yellows and driving a Cat 1 tanker, with three of my fellow Warringah/Pittwater RFS female members on board, we arrived at Manly Wharf for a morning tea in support of breast cancer survivors.

The Mini Field of Women is a national event held for breast cancer survivors. Among the crowd of survivors was the recently diagnosed Mayor of Manly, Jean Hay AM. We too are all breast cancer survivors. Three of us have been diagnosed with the disease within the past 12 months. That means we have undergone surgery recently and are continuing with treatment.

As we travelled to Manly in the Coal and Candle Brigade's Cat 1, we got to talking. We realised that between the four of us, we had in excess of 100 years of service with the NSW RFS. We also all shared an appreciation for the support and concern shown to us by our many fellow firefighters over our cancer journeys.

Our day at Manly was full of laughter - and some tears. We were encouraged to hear the many stories others had to tell and we came away very humbled as our own journey with cancer continues.

Heather Martin,
Coal and Candle Brigade

TOP: (L-R): Lesley Woods (Elvina Bay Brigade), Heather Martin (Coal and Candle Brigade), Christine Mitchell (Communications and Mackerel Beach), Claire Dunstan (Coal and Candle Brigade)

Photos courtesy of Heather Martin





VALE: Michael Roper

A quick response

Wyndham Brigade has recently considerably reduced their response times thanks to an increase in the pager coverage footprint.

Bega Fire Control Centre have been working to remove black spots in the radio coverage in their area and it has benefitted Wyndham Brigade.

After an electrical storm in the Far South Coast on 16 January 2010, the Wyndham crew responded to a lightning strike on private property. On-duty members Deputy Captain Damian Wister, Mick Donohue and Greg Saarinen responded in extra quick time - 15 minutes from the call to the incident.

Using a live reel the crew foamed and blacked out the area and the lightning strike was quickly contained to five square metres. The crew returned to the shed, after assuring the local residents that the lightning strike was extinguished and no further strikes were located, just over two hours after the initial call.

The homeowners had previously lost a house to a lightning strike so they were especially anxious when lightning struck again. But they weren't the only ones grateful for the quick response from the Wyndham Brigade. As the photo shows, the farm's four-legged residents were glad to see Deputy Captain Damian Wister and his crew.

By Daryl O'Pray, Captain, Wyndham Brigade
Photo by Jodie Dickenson

Forty-one-year-old Inspector Michael (Mick) Roper devoted over 27 years of his life to the NSW Rural Fire Service.

He was active both as a volunteer and staff member in the Warringah/Pittwater and Namoi Gwydir Districts.

He unofficially joined the Forestville Volunteer Rural Fire Brigade (now Davidson Rural Fire Brigade) in 1982 at only 14 years of age and continued to provide a dedicated service to the NSW RFS until his death in early September 2009.

Mick became an official member of the Brigade in 1984 and successfully completed his Basic Firefighter, Crew Leader, Rural Fire Driver, was one of the first to do a CABA course in the Shire, First Aid, Advanced Resuscitation and Tree Felling. He was a Chainsaw Instructor and seldom missed a course. Mick had many a good weekend in the Watagans and loved anything to do with chainsaws. He would pride himself on how good his scarf cuts and back cuts were.

Mick was appointed a Deputy Captain from the late 1980s, a rank he held until January 2004. Mick's duty crews were always well attended and often included a BBQ, down some fire trail in some of the most beautiful areas in Sydney.

In January 2004 Michael was appointed Deputy Fire Control Officer, Community Safety in Cunningham (later to be Namoi/Gwydir) which includes Narrabri, Moree Plains and Gwydir. This appointment meant he

had to stand down as an officer from his beloved Terrey Hills Brigade and move to Warrialda. The Terrey Hills Brigade honoured Mick's contribution by making him a Life Member.

Mick also pursued his love affair with aviation, obtaining many qualifications and making a significant contribution to this specialised section. Mick also served as both a volunteer and staff member at many significant 'out of area' commitments.

Mick received his 15 year National Medal and Bush Fire Council Long Service Award in 2000 and this year received the 20 year NSW Rural Fire Service Long Service Medal.

Mick had a melanoma on his leg which was detected approximately nine years ago. He endured several operations and chemotherapy, however, in 2008 the disease spread to the lymph glands in the groin. He did go through further treatment but the cancer spread to other areas.

In July 2009, the Warringah/Pittwater RFS Welfare Fund organised a benefit in Mick's honour to raise funds both for his treatment and the long term assistance of his wife Alina and two-year-old daughter, Brooke. Over 300 people turned up to celebrate with their colleague Mick.

Mick died only two months later in September 2009.

Photo by David Jenkins, courtesy of Digital Masters Australasia

THE GRAFTON STRIKE TEAM:

A VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE

By Leigh Pilkington,
Senior Deputy Captain, Avoca Beach Brigade



ABOVE: Joshua Hall, Senior Deputy Captain of Brisbane Waters Brigade, arrives on the fireground for his final day of deployment. Photo by Leigh Pilkington

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: The base camp at the Grafton Hockey Centre was faultless with clean rooms, great food and enough hot water for all

It appears that a Strike Team is not always just about firefighting, it can also be about what you learn about your own skills and the skills of your team-mates from your own district.

This was certainly my experience at a recent two week Strike Team deployment in the Grafton region. Last October, firefighters from the Gosford District joined others from all over the State to assist Grafton crews in containing, mopping up and patrolling fires that had been active in the area for an extended period of time. For some on this crew it was a first or second Strike Team, and for others it was the most recent in a long history of heading to other areas to help out. Common across all members, however, was a willingness and enthusiasm to

learn. As a result, I believe we all left Grafton as better firefighters.

Leaving Gosford in the late afternoon on Monday 19 October, the crew was transported to Sydney airport after picking up another bunch of willing bodies in Hornsby. After a short wait, over 30 firefighters from the Central Coast and Sydney flew to Grafton where we were met by departing crews who gave a short and snappy brief on what to expect before boarding their flight home after a long week of hard work.

After being transported to the Grafton Hockey Centre we were greeted with very clean and hospitable quarters. Much to our satisfaction we discovered that there was more than enough hot water, great catering and good

support from staff. Throughout the week in Grafton, the catering and camaraderie in the base camp was astounding. While crews were recuperating in camp, an onsite engineer was doing a fine job of looking after the appliances with full field services being conducted each evening.

One thing that made this Strike Team stand out, was a new (to me) approach to transporting firefighters to and from the fire ground – helicopter!

On the second day of our deployment our crew headed to the Blue Flat fire south west of Grafton. After a three-hour drive the IMT (Incident Management Team) made the decision to leave the appliances at the fireground and fly crews back to Grafton. Replacement crews were also brought out at the same time. It gave all members the rare opportunity to get an aerial perspective of the fire. The quick helicopter ride also meant that firefighters were able to recover far more effectively. It was a great reward after a strenuous day.

After two weeks of assistance, the Gosford crews and appliances were ready to return to the Central Coast. In another strategic move designed to battle fatigue and minimise risks, fresh crews were flown to Grafton to drive the tanker and personnel carrier back to the Coast. At the end of our last shift there was nothing more universally satisfying than not having to drive an appliance all the way back to Gosford.

For the entire two weeks in Grafton, I was struck by the general feeling of respect and friendship among the crews on the fireground. While there were several members that were open to learning new skills and techniques, this was easily complemented by other members who were eager to teach and be taught. It was heartening for me to see members with years of experience impart their knowledge to others in a mutually respectful manner.

There are several things that will bring members back to Strike Teams. The self-satisfaction of helping out is enough for some; the genuine gratitude that is expressed by locals and graciously accepted by the crew is another; for others, the feeling of being part of something greater than yourself is immense and reward enough to return again.

CENTRE LEFT: (L-R) Bruce Sharples, Tracy McDermott, Leigh Pilkington, Tony Garland and Joshua Hall – you do get time to stop and smell the roses, no matter how smoky they may be

CENTRE RIGHT: The movement of firefighters in helicopters gave many members a new perspective of air operations and a greater understanding of the process they may be

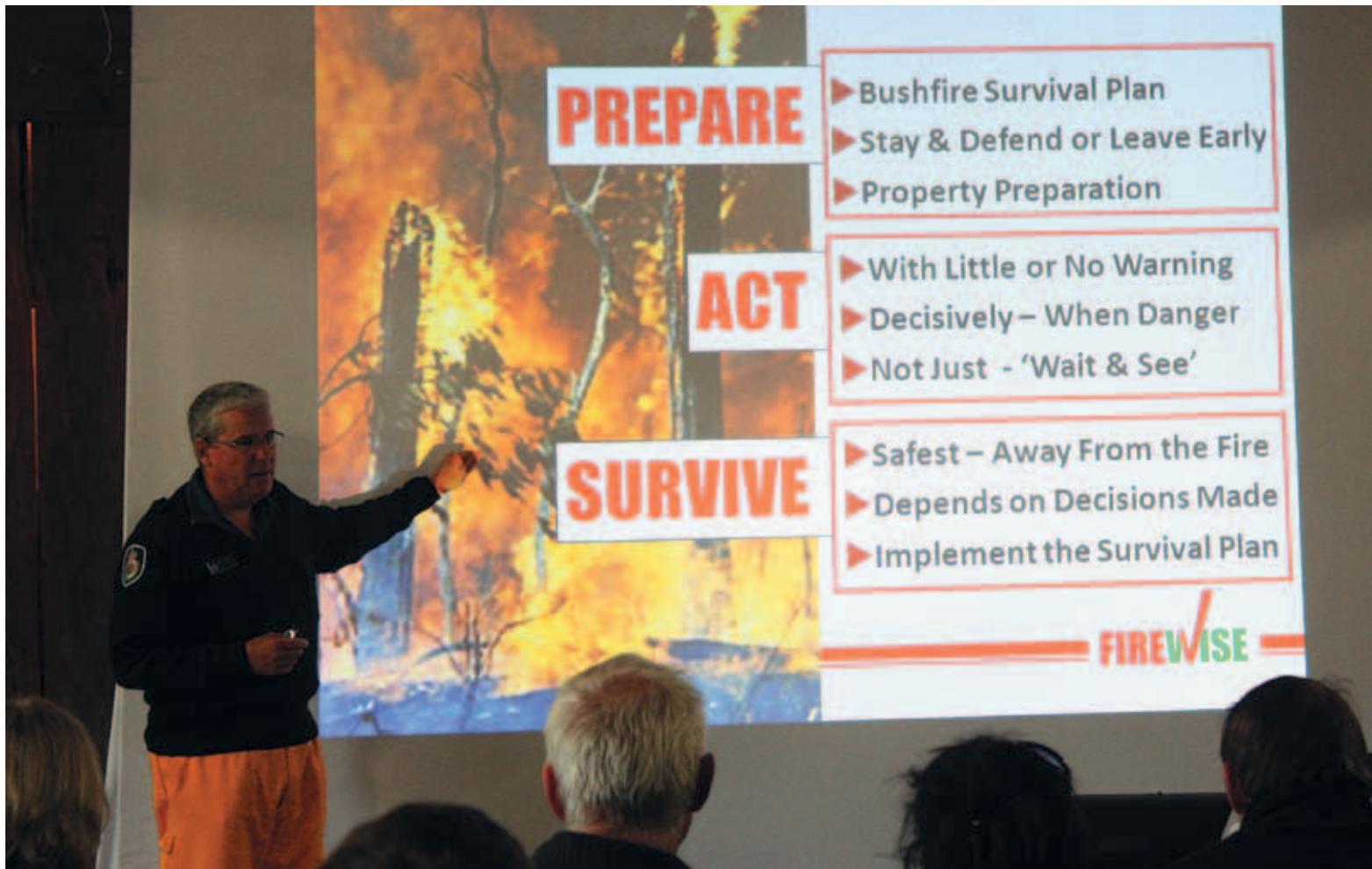
BELOW LEFT: By alternating days, Joshua Hall, left, and Leigh Pilkington shared the load of crew leading which gave both an opportunity to further develop different skills

LOWER RIGHT: Faced with a three-hour drive back to camp, the helicopters presented a welcome reprieve for tired firefighters. Photos by Tony Garland, Brisbane Waters Brigade and Leigh Pilkington, Avoca Beach Brigade

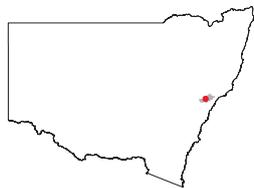


WOLLOMBI GETS WISE

By Glenn O'Rourke, Deputy Captain and Community Engagement Officer, Wollombi Brigade



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Engaging with the community to Prepare. Act. Survive. is a very challenging task, however, in the Wollombi Valley, located in the Lower Hunter, great progress is being made.

The Wollombi community comprises a combination of permanent residents, as well as a significant number of 'weekenders' who have sought out the Valley for its rich natural beauty and access to surrounding national parks, forest and wilderness areas.

A large proportion of this community have never experienced bush fire. With the tragedy of Black Saturday in Victoria last year, along with the forecast of a long, hot bush fire season, many Wollombi residents have a heightened level of concern and are looking to their

local brigade to help them learn about how to prepare.

Wollombi Valley responds to community concern

To respond to this need, an integrated program of Community Engagement activities was developed, targeting the communities in the Buralong and Wollombi Valleys. The local brigades held Open Day Firewise displays and presentations, a Firewise Information Display at the Wollombi Community Market Day and two Community Firewise Meetings.

Promotion for the program included advertisements in the local community newspapers and on the community website, as well as posters, email

invitations and letterbox drops throughout the Valley.

Prepare. Act. Survive. set the theme for the presentation with the following topics covered via a combination of slide and video content:

- New Fire Danger Ratings and alert levels
- how fires behave
- preparing a Bush Fire Survival Plan
- how to prepare yourself and property for bush fire
- how to make the *leave early, or stay and defend* decision
- what to do in the event of fire

Information on the history of fire in the Wollombi Valley and the events and findings arising from the Black Saturday fires in Victoria were also addressed. Each meeting concluded with questions and a discussion about the fire season ahead.

Stay & Defend

remember....

- ▶ Only if properly prepared
- ▶ In a defensible position
- ▶ Physically & mentally able

CATASTROPHIC ▶ No Circumstances



A significant rise in community knowledge and understanding

Attendee feedback demonstrates the power of successful community engagement. Following both Community Firewise Meetings attendees were asked to assess their level of knowledge and understanding about how to prepare for bush fire. They were asked to compare their own level of knowledge and understanding before and after the presentation.

The number of people who categorised themselves as having a 'high level of knowledge and understanding' rose significantly after the meetings.

Burralong Valley Community Firewise meeting:

30% before the Firewise meeting
85% after the Firewise meeting
(refer Figure 1)

Wollombi Valley Community Firewise meeting:

16% before the Firewise meeting
84% after the Firewise meeting
(refer Figure 2)

In addition, locals also positively acknowledged the value of attending the presentation:

"very informative and really emphasised the take home message of decisiveness and safest option = leaving early!"
"very well prepared – good information"

"a very beneficial meeting for us to attend. Thanks for hosting"

"very professional and comprehensive presentation"

Buoyed by this positive feedback from participants who are spreading the word about the value of the Firewise meetings, an ongoing program of community engagement activities is planned for 2010.

The challenge continues

While these initiatives have been acknowledged as a great success in helping local communities to understand the risk of bush fire it is only the first step in achieving longer term success - that of a truly Firewise community.

The challenge of actively engaging with our communities continues with our focus on reinforcing the Firewise message so as to achieve tangible changes in behaviour.

A copy of the Community Firewise presentation can be viewed on the Wollombi Valley Community Website 'Wollombi Valley Online' – at <http://wollombi.nsw.au/firewise>.

Special thanks also to Inspectors Brian Milsom and Glenn Byrnes Lower Hunter for their support and participation in the program.

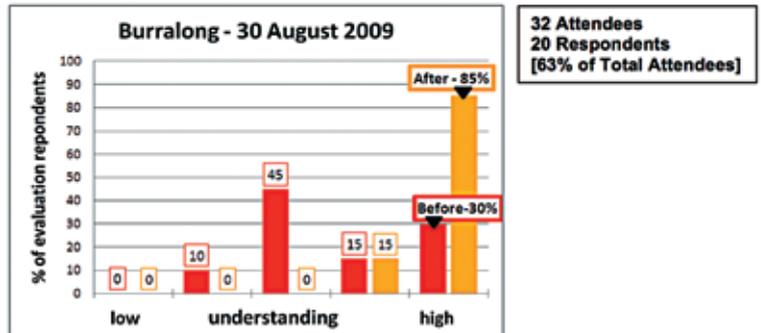


Figure 1 – Burralong Valley 'knowledge and understanding' assessment

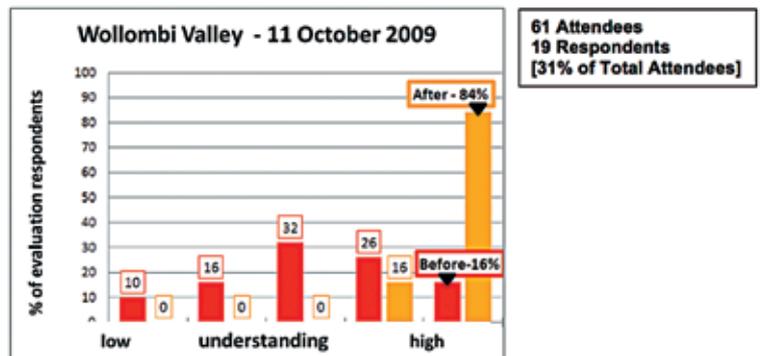


Figure 2 – Wollombi Valley 'knowledge and understanding' assessment

LEFT: Glenn O'Rourke, Deputy Captain and Community Engagement Officer, Wollombi Brigade. Photo by Peter Firminger

TOP: Leanne Bell Deputy Captain, Wollombi RFB and Chairman Lower Hunter Community Engagement Committee. Photo by Peter Firminger

The story of the Chifley/Lithgow HOT FIRE TRAILER PROJECT

Story and photos by Mick Holland, Learning and Development Officer, Chifley Zone/Lithgow Team



Interesting and realistic training in the brigades is a good way to get new members and keep them interested. But for this we need the right facilities and aids.

In my role as Learning and Development Officer in the Chifley Zone/Lithgow Team my main question to myself was: where would we put a facility to service three council areas, knowing that members are not keen to travel for an hour each way for a two hour training session?

After conducting a feasibility report I came to the conclusion that the best and the most feasible solution was to take the facility to the members and not the other way round. We needed a mobile training unit.

We have found that if brigade members can train in their own area and at a time that suits them best, we achieve higher numbers and better results on training days.

The next step was to find some money to fund the project and for this we used the National

Emergency Volunteer Support Fund grant. After that we got some of the local trainers together and put together a wish list of props for the mobile training unit. Then we found a builder for the trailer that could licence the gas fitting and after many visits to the builder we had our base unit.

Customising the unit was the job of a local volunteer to apply his knowledge of training and skills to complete the project. The unit is fitted with LPG gas props, such as a car, mock gas cylinder and fire pans. It also has a hydrant for shipping standpipes, electric pole

fire and hydraulic pressure loss measuring equipment.

My main aim was to give the local volunteers something to make their training more realistic and interesting, this in turn should help the brigades kick-start their training regimes and keep members enthusiastic. Maybe even attract a few new members.

We used The Lakes Team Brigade Training Handbook as a resource so that the trailer can be used to conduct training anywhere and by any brigade.

BURNING TONIGHT

By Nadine Morton, Bush Fire Bulletin



Photo by Nadine Morton

Eglinton Brigade tried out the new hot fire training unit late in 2009.

As Senior deputy Captain of the most active brigade in the district, Greg Ingersole was quick to take up the opportunity to train Eglinton's 34 active members with this new unit.

Three different scenarios were organised to put the members through their paces: a gas bottle fire, a car fire and an electrical fire on a telegraph pole. With the brigade split between the three training stations there was a lot to do.

Greg Ingersole ran the gas bottle training scenario and had members running the 'five man fog attack' to both cool the gas bottle and protect the members approaching it. Working in teams of five, the members took turns in approaching the gas bottle safely and then turning it off to prevent further hazards.

"Team work is essential in this situation and members need to think about where their hoses are placed to enable a quick exit if need be," Mr Ingersole said.

Car fire training is also a part of the new mobile hot fire training unit and was important for Eglinton members due to the high number of motor vehicle

accidents they attend each year. Crews paired up to approach the burning car and were taught correct extinguishing methods by Deputy Captain Mark Bennett. Long-time brigade member Mark took the newer members through the car fire scenario that many had never dealt with before.

The brigade has recently had an influx of new BF graduates and other members who have yet completed their VF qualifications and this was a great opportunity for them to learn new skills.

Eglinton Brigade is the only CABA qualified brigade in Bathurst Regional District so many members took the opportunity to wear their CABA sets through the car fire scenario.

The last scenario on the training night was an electrical fire atop an electric pole. Deputy Captain Brett Taylor took members through learning how to deal with an electrical fire and the hazards to be aware of.

The hot fire training unit provided Eglinton Brigade members with realistic and interesting scenarios that will further aid their brigade in being able to provide effective and efficient responses to similar situations in their area.



Photo by Haley Billinghamurst

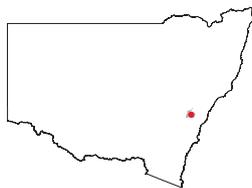


Nadine Morton, Eglinton Brigade member, after her training session. Photo by Haley Billinghamurst

PROUD TO TURN 50 YEARS

Hazelbrook Brigade celebrates with a Gala Day and Dinner

Story and photos by Mat Hunter, Senior Deputy Captain, Hazelbrook Brigade and member of Anniversary Committee



TOP: Gala Day at Hazelbrook Brigade's 50th Anniversary – local, Jimmy Carr performing

TOP RIGHT: Hazelbrook Gala Day

UPPER RIGHT: Captain Tony Jarrett receiving the commemorative plaque from Inspector Jack Tolhurst

LOWER RIGHT: During the course of the Gala Dinner there were a number of guest speakers but Terry Boyd contributed from his seat, throwing in his two cents worth. Very funny!

The lead up to the anniversary was hectic to say the least. Brigade members were well into constructing a new retaining wall in the front garden, while another group were making final decisions about table decorations.

A huge amount of time from a vast number of people went into organising the Hazelbrook Brigade's 50th Gala Day and Dinner.

To start with, an accurate list of past and present members had to be compiled.

This was probably the hardest part as we had a large number of members come and go over a 50 year period. Trying not to forget anyone was incredibly difficult and the committee went to great lengths to include everyone. Minutes of the previous meetings were sorted and a rough list of members

was compiled. Bill Hewson, our longest serving member of 50 years (see right), was consulted and he put together a comprehensive list of members and addresses. A letter was sent out to all known members asking for details of anyone they may know of who should be invited as well.

The 11 April was declared as the day for the celebrations - not only an anniversary dinner but also a community celebration during the day. It was around this time that things started to get interesting. Luckily there were many current brigade members willing to get involved and lend a hand. With 100 past and present members plus Blue Mountains District staff confirmed to attend, the 11th was shaping up to be a day and a night to remember.

The days leading up to 11 April were fine and warm and the

working bees in and around the brigade shed were fast and furious. The retaining wall was finished. Even the sky lights in the tanker bays were scrubbed. On the eve of the event when preparations were finally finished and even the table decorations were complete, I, for one, have never seen the shed look so clean. I was proud to be part of such a great event.

The morning of 11 April did not start as planned. It had rained during the night and we had quite a few outdoor activities planned. Lady Luck was on our side, however, and the rain held off until late in the day.

It was a fantastic day with many local businesses showing their wares as well as a huge array of local entertainment. There was everything from a bagpipe band to solo performers. A drama group managed to draw brigade

members into the performance. It was a sight for sore eyes and a real hit!

The evening came around very quickly and unfortunately so did the rain. The dinner was being held in the tanker bays but the pre-dinner drinks and awards were planned for the open air forecourt surrounded by the tankers (including a 1940's Blitz tanker that Hazelbrook members had restored to its shining glory).

As past and present members arrived for the dinner, I was absolutely caught up in the stories that were being told by the older members. Wow, how easy we have it these days with all the equipment, not only on the ground, but also in the air. Not to mention the support staff behind the scenes. I have to take my hat off to the firefighters of old - how the times have changed!

The celebrations kicked off officially with the presentation of a 50 Year Long Service Award to our oldest member Bill Hewson and a Certificate of Appreciation to John Howard. Inspector Jack Tolhurst (now retired) spoke of the good old days in the Blue Mountains and he also presented a commemorative plaque celebrating the Anniversary of the Brigade to our current Captain Tony Jarrett.

The dinner was prepared and cooked by a local café owner and Blue Mountains councillor, David Clarke. The food was fantastic and plentiful. Complaints? I think not!

During the course of the dinner there were a number of guest speakers. Jack Stevens spoke

of the 70s and Alan Catt the 90s and Tony Jarrett the current times. Terry Boyd could not help himself and had to throw his own two cents worth in as well. Very funny!

Throughout the course of the night a video diary was recording some very funny stories from the past and present members. I have not seen the footage but I cannot wait. It was great to get these stories on video, for these are all part of the history of our brigade.

The current brigade premises were built largely by the then current members as well as the fantastic support and donations from the local community. This was celebrated on the night by the unveiling of a plaque dedicated to all those that participated in the construction of 'The Shed' in the 1970s.

Finally an anniversary cake that had been made by one of our current members, Linda Dvorak was officially cut by Bill Hewson and Mitchell Grimes. They represent our oldest member at 95 and one of the youngest members at 16 years of age.

That concluded the official proceedings of the night but that was certainly not the end of the night. It was not until after midnight that the tankers were put back into their bays and tables and chairs packed away. Now after many months of planning and preparation, stress and worry, it was time to sleep and come back later to do the washing up.



VALE: Bill Hewson

Bill Hewson passed away on Saturday 30 January, 2010. Bill was 95 years old and Hazelbrook's oldest and longest serving member. Bill was a very active and passionate member and kept a keen eye on what was happening within the brigade right up to the last few months.

As one of the founding members of Hazelbrook Brigade he was an important part of the 50th Anniversary providing ideas and guidance throughout. A man of integrity, Bill Hewson was one of the reasons why the Hazelbrook Brigade has such a great reputation within the Blue Mountains' community today.



Inspector Jack Tolhurst (now retired) presenting Bill Hewson his 50 Year Service Medal and Certificate



Bill Hewson and Mitchell Grimes cutting the Anniversary cake – the oldest member (at 95) and one of the youngest

PILLIGA BOASTS A GOLDEN NOZZLE

By Peter Miller, Castlereagh Group Officer | Photos by Mervyn Sutherland and Jan Miller



The extreme fire prone country of the Pilliga in western NSW, has spawned a tradition called the Golden Nozzle.

Since 2005 the three local fire agencies in the area of Baradine – National Parks (Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water), Forests NSW (Department of Primary Industries) and NSW RFS – come together for a day of competition, training and some good country food. John Whittall, Area Manager for the National Parks conceived of the idea four years ago.

“It came about because we are often coming together to fight fires in the Pilliga. The agencies and the private landowners involved really need to be able to work together in harmony.”

“The Golden Nozzle is an opportunity to get together, have information forums, meet the personnel in each agency and

get to know each other before any fire starts. It is fairly unique as we all need to work together over a very large area,” he said.

The Pilliga is an area of about 400,000 hectares of scrub stretching from Narrabri to Coonabarabran and west of Boggabri to Baradine. It is extremely fire prone country. When a fire sweeps through the scrubland, the villages such as Bugaldie, Gwabegar, Kenebri and Pilliga on the edge of the Pilliga come under threat.

This year’s event was organised by Gary Miller (Forests NSW), John Whittall (DECCW) and myself, Peter Miller, Castlereagh Zone Group Officer.

The day began with a brief introduction from each agency explaining what resources would be available. Each agency presented a talk:

- property protection (NSW RFS)
- proper blacking out of fires

(Forests NSW)

- map reading and GPS (Forests NSW)
- Radio Communications (NSW RFS and DECCW)

Crews broke into four groups comprising members from each agency and then headed off to view the equipment and have its capabilities explained.

The crews then enjoyed a country style morning tea. A special thanks to Wendy Pickette and Jan Miller from NSW RFS for their scones cakes and slices.

After smoko, participants were required to drive through parts of the Pilliga to three different locations given by grid references. Once found, each crew was given a task to complete - drafting water from a dam to refill their own tank, lay a foam blanket suitable to back burn from and identify landmarks given compass bearings only.



The drive was 20 kilometres in length and had to be done quickly and safely - without speeding and without GPS. The accuracy of their map-reading determined how quickly their tasks were completed.

Then it was back to the staging area for lunch with lots of talk on how the morning transpired.

The afternoon consisted of four tasks inside the old racetrack at Baradine. Task 1 was to drive to a live fire, extinguish and construct a rake hoe trail around the burnt area. Penalties were incurred for incorrect procedures and unsafe work practices. Task 2 was to use a chainsaw to cut a log, observing all safety procedures.

Task 3 caused a few laughs. Participants had to manoeuvre their appliance through witch's hats guided by a crew member from outside the vehicle. Trouble was, the driver was blindfolded

and the crew member outside the vehicle directed the driver via radio. This proved more than a little challenging for many of the crews - with a lot of good laughs and some very flat witch's hats to boot.

The last task of the day was to use of water jet from a nozzle to move an empty foam drum about eight metres between two posts about a metre apart, restow equipment and crew then drive 20 metres to the finish line.

Golden Nozzle Awards

Paul Nies and Rebecca Cass from DECCW received the Perpetual Golden Nozzle Trophy for the crew that had the least amount of penalties.

The winners of the tanker section went to Tim Allen, Lee Howard and Justin Harris from Forests NSW.

The safest crew was Jim Coulton, James Grant, Megan Young and Daniel Lowrie from the NSW RFS who won the Chris Lord Memorial prize for their good work. Each of the prize winners received meal vouchers for one of the local hotels, which were donated by DECCW.

The encouragement award, donated by Baradine Rural Supplies, went to the NSW RFS crew of Bruce McConnaughty, Peter Johnson, Polly Montgomery, Brett Worrell and Aaron Edwards from the Gwabegar Brigade.

A special thanks to Christine Walton from Coonabarabran for staffing the radios during the day assisted by Gail Meyers from Gilgandra. Thanks also to Captains Andrew Young, Ronald Nash and Steven Walton, Group Officer Graham Bunyan, Inspectors Stuart Green

and Mike Fratturo from the Castlereagh Zone.

FAR LEFT: Gary Miller, Forests NSW, presenting a talk on blacking out

LEFT: Graham Bunyan, NSW RFS, explaining the finer points of the appliances

CENTRE LEFT: NSW RFS winners of the encouragement award, Gwabegar Brigade. Front Row (L-R): Polly Montgomery, Bruce McConnaughty, Brett Worrell Back Row: (L-R) Aaron Edwards, Peter Johnston

CENTRE RIGHT: Forests NSW crew member commencing spot fire extinguishment

TOP LEFT: National Parks crew extinguishing a (simulated) spot fire

TOP RIGHT: Stuart Green NSW RFS, with two National Parks personnel at the property protection talk

CADETS BRING RELIEF from the drought



ABOVE:
Ivanhoe Central
School Cadets 2009

Back:
Bill Britt
Adrian Whitaker (Cadet Captain)
Peter McKenzie
Mark McKenzie
Erin Mildenhall
Teacher: David Stedman
Brandon Pointon

Front:
Trelayne Highnam
Mackenzie Highnam (Cadet
Deputy Captain)
NSW RFS Commissioner
Shane Fitzsimmons
Kiaya Clark
Kanene Highnam
(Cadet Deputy Captain)
Emily Mildenhall
Corey Hughes
Photo by Shane Culbert

The unassuming town of Ivanhoe may be one of the most isolated towns in NSW, but the Ivanhoe NSW RFS cadet program is going strong.

Just before Christmas 2009, a group of 11 cadets and their teacher made the long journey to the NSW RFS Headquarters to receive their graduation certificates. The young people ranged from 11 to 16 years of age. For some in the group it was their first trip to Sydney.

"The memory cards on their cameras were already full by the time they got here," the Commissioner laughed, "and they hadn't even seen the city of Sydney yet!"

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons represented the Minister for Emergency Services at the ceremony where the students were presented with their graduation certificates and David Stedman, their teacher, was awarded his competency for Bush Firefighter Certificate.

Ivanhoe has a population of only 350 residents so there are very few activities for the youth. Learning and Development Officer from the Far West Zone, Inspector Bill Britt said that the NSW RFS Cadet program is being well received by both by the young and their parents.

"Ivanhoe and much of the rest of the Far Western NSW area, is suffering a severe drought which has devastated the district for nearly a decade," he said, "Families of the area have found it hard to remain socially active and it is especially so for the youth. It is difficult to access programs that will develop skills which help take them into adult life.

"The cadet program is engaging the youth of the town and provides stability and focus on developing skills such as leadership, participation, responsibility and community respect."

The 2009 cadet program at the Ivanhoe Central School





was held between April and November. In all, there are 35-40 kids in the school so the program was opened to all students who were eligible to become Junior Members of the NSW RFS including students from Years 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

Inspector Britt said the Ivanhoe cadet program is having a positive impact on the whole district. In fact the Shire Council recently recognised the success and importance of the program for the town of Ivanhoe. Central Darling Shire have named the Cadet Captain Adrian Whitaker as the Central Darling Junior Citizen of the Year Award for Ivanhoe.

“This is the first time the program has been offered in the Far West Team area,” Inspector Britt said, “Due to the success at Ivanhoe, the program will be offered to other remote schools at Wilcannia and Menindee.”

The graduation ceremony in Sydney provided the perfect opportunity for the students to spend the last few days of the school year celebrating their achievements both academically and as cadets.

“It was great to see the cadets enjoy their trip to the Maritime Museum and into Sydney and have a look around the harbour,”



Inspector Britt said. “We were well looked after by the NSW RFS and especially by our bus driver John, who drove us anywhere without question and provided our passes to the museum.

“A special mention and appreciation must go to Amy Blackwood and Paul Fowler who made the trip a great success by arranging flights, food and transport for the trip and Region West Office for providing the accommodation.”

TOP CENTRE: Packing up after assessment

TOP RIGHT: Ivanhoe Cadet, Peter McKenzie setting up for Village training. Photos by Bill Britt

MIDDLE CENTRE: Working with other emergency services

LOWER CENTRE: Nozzle training

CENTRE RIGHT: Cadet Captain, Arian Whitaker receiving his graduation certificate from the NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. Photo by Shane Culbert



TRAINING INFORMATION FOR NSW RFS MEMBERS

By Matt Reeves, Learning and Development Officer

Each year the NSW RFS offers members the opportunity to attend training programs.

While most training in the NSW RFS is undertaken at brigade and D/T/Z level, some programs are centralised, as they are specialist courses or are delivered by external organisations such as TAFE.

The 2010 Training Information Book (TIB) and training calendar (available on MyRFS and in hard copy) lists all the training programs that the NSW RFS delivers, the methods of delivery and other important information such as which qualifications you may have to have prior to attending a particular course.

An example of training programs that are delivered outside of your D/T/Z is Rural Fire Instructor and Assessor, Aviation Specialist courses, Community Engagement programs and leadership programs such as Leadership and Team Skills and Fire Line Leadership.

Some of these programs offer national accreditation and can contribute towards Certificate II, III, IV and Diploma qualifications.

A number of professional development and re-accreditation workshops are also scheduled for 2010. These workshops are aimed at existing instructors or members with specialist skills.

Such programs are the Breathing Apparatus Instructors Workshops which are being held in April (Nowra) and July (Cessnock) and are designed to up-skill current instructors by providing higher level knowledge and skills.

Another exciting program is the series of Fire Line Leadership programs. Facilitated by a U.S.-based training organisation, senior operational members have the opportunity to revise, learn and apply critical leadership skills in a unique learning environment.

All members, new or experienced are encouraged to look at the Training Information Book on-line or obtain a copy from your D/T/Z office and see what training programs are offered, the dates and locations and other information in relation to training in the NSW RFS.

See page 45 for the 2010 calendar of training programs.



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NSW RFS State Training Programs Calendar 2010

Month	Program/ Workshop	Training Location
March	Sat 6 th - Sun 7 th - Community Safety Facilitator (CSF). Tue 16 th - Wed 17 th - Advanced Dip. Management Workshop 1. Tue 16 th - Thur 18 th - Air Base Manager (ABM). Tue 16 th - Thur 18 th - TAA Certificate IV Upgrade. Thur 18 th - Sun 21 st - Leadership and Team Skills (LDR). Sat 20 th - Sun 21 st - Aviation Radio Operator (ARO) and Air Base Operator (ABO). Re-certification. Thur 25 th - Sun 28 th - Leadership and Team Skills (LDR).	Region North Orange Dubbo Homebush Coffs Harbour Glenn Innes Katoomba
April	Fri 9 th - Sun 11 th - Breathing Apparatus Instructors Professional Development. Tue 13 th - Wed 14 th - Advanced Dip. Management Workshop 2. Thur 15 th - Sun 18 th - Monitor Brigade Safety (SAF). Mon 19 th - Fri 23 rd - Command, Control and Communications Workshop (CCC). Thur 29 th - Mon 3 rd - Fireline Leadership Course 1 (FLL).	Nowra Orange Coffs Harbour Sutherland Batemans Bay
May	Thur 6 th - Sun 9 th - Monitor Brigade Safety (SAF). Thur 6 th - Mon 10 th - Fireline Leadership Course 2 (FLL). Tue 11 th - Wed 12 th - Advanced Dip Management Workshop 3 Tue 18 th - Wed 19 th - Planning for Bushfire Protection Workshop (PBfP). Tue 18 th - Sat 22 nd - Air Observer (AOB). Thur 20 th - 24 th - Fireline Leadership Course 3 (FLL) Sat 22 nd - Breathing Apparatus Technician Recertification (BAT). Thur 27 th - Mon 31 st - Fireline Leadership Course 4 (FLL). Mon 31 st - Fri 4 th - Command, Control and Communications Workshop (CCC).	Katoomba Coffs Harbour Orange TBA Mudgee Yanco Hornsby Yanco Sutherland
June	Fri 4 th - Sun 6 th - Aviation Radio Operator (ARO) and Air Base Operator (ABO). Sat 5 th - Sun 6 th - Community Safety Facilitator (CSF). Tue 8 th - Wed 9 th - Advanced Dip Management Workshop 4. Sat 26 th - Sun 27 th - Breathing Apparatus Technician (BAT).	Tamworth Region North Orange Port Stephens
July	Fri 2 nd - Mon 5 th - Aviation Radio Operator (ARO) and Air Base Operator (ABO). Sat 3 rd - Sun 4 th - Breathing Apparatus Technician (BAT). Tues 6 th - Sun 7 th - Advanced Dip Management Workshop 5. Fri 16 th - Sun 18 th - Breathing Apparatus Instructors Professional Development. Mon 19 th - Fri 23 rd - Command, Control and Communications Workshop (CCC). Sat 24 th - Sun 25 th - Aviation Radio Operator (ARO) and Air Base Operator (ABO) Re-certification. Sat 24 th - Sun 25 th - Community Liaison Officer (CLO). Sat 24 th - Sun 25 th - Community Safety Facilitator (CSF).	Forbes Baulkham Hills Orange Cessnock Sutherland Crookwell Canobolas Region North
August	Tue 3 rd - Wed 4 th - Advanced Dip Management Workshop 6. Mon 16 th - Wed 18 th - Air Base Manager (ABM).	Orange Dubbo
September	Mon 13 th - Fri 17 th - Command, Control and Communications Workshop. (CCC) Tue 14 th - Wed 15 th - Planning for Bushfire Protection Workshop (PBfP).	Sutherland TBA
October	Sat 9 th - Sun 10 th - Community Safety Facilitator (CSF).	Region South

Note: Nominations for training programs and workshops close four weeks prior to the commencement date
 Further information on each program can be found in the 2010 Training Information Book (TIB)
 All nominations should be through your D/T/Z Learning and Development Officer or Manager/ Supervisor

Members can view this calendar on MyRFS. Log in and use the 2010 State Training Courses tab at the top of the home page.

BRIGADE IN PROFILE

Name of Brigade: Bolwarra-Largs
Year brigade formed: 1968
Current Captain: Brian Worboys
Current President: Peter Henderson
D/T/Z: Hunter Zone, Region East



Can you give us a brief history of the brigade?

Bolwarra and Largs are two suburbs of the city of Maitland, which is situated in the Lower Hunter Valley of NSW. Bolwarra-Largs Rural Fire Brigade was formed at a public meeting on 3 December 1968 after a fire which seriously threatened the village of Largs.

The brigade currently has 31 active members and four junior members. Two of the original founding members are still active to this day.

Over its 40 year life, the brigade's equipment has changed dramatically. In 1968 Bolwarra-Largs was proud of its 300 gallon trailer tanker stored in a local shed. We now have three tankers which are stored in a four bay shed complete with a well equipped meeting and training room.

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

The brigade has always been self-sufficient, having funded and built the station ourselves. The building occurred in four stages between 1978 and 2003. All construction work with exception of bricklaying was completed by members. As with many brigades, for the first 20 years Bolwarra-Largs also built our own tankers.

Being geographically centred in the Lower Hunter Zone, the brigade training room is used regularly. It has the capacity to be used as a local control centre if the need arises.

Bolwarra-Largs Brigade has had some unique fund raising schemes such as a three year contract to clean and detail one large company's fleet of 15 vehicles on a weekly basis.

What are some recent milestones the brigade has achieved?

Bolwarra-Largs celebrated its 40th anniversary in



Some of the 31 active members, including four juniors and two of the original founding members, make up the Bolwarra-Largs Brigade today

September 2008. Highlights of the celebrations include the presentation of Long Service Medals by the Assistant Commissioner Rob Rogers and Mayor of Maitland, Alderman Peter Blackmore.

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

Bolwarra-Largs covers an area that is predominantly farm land but includes some urban development and bushland.

What types of incidents does your brigade attend?

The brigade attends incidents involving bush fires, grass fires, motor vehicle accidents, hay shed fires and structural fires. We also assist the SES when required such as during the floods in June 2007. We attend hazard reduction burns during the off-season or as required.

What vehicles do you have?

The Bolwarra-Largs Rural Fire Brigade has a Cat 1, Cat 7 and Cat 13 bulk water tanker.

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

The brigade conducts regular monthly training sessions and

occasional weekend training. During these sessions members are trained in the following areas: radio communications, nozzles and equipment, emergency drill, pumping and drafting, electrical fires, dangerous goods, motor vehicle accidents, mapping and GPS, vehicle maintenance and structure fires.

What are some unique skills and features of your brigade?

The brigade crews and maintains one of the Lower Hunter Zones Cat 13 bulk water tankers. Brigade members regularly travel to out-of-area incidents and Section 44 activities. We also have a resident social group, known as the Mindaribba Bird Watchers, who hold regular social outings to boost the brigade's funds.

What are some unique features of your community?

The brigade receives enormous support from the local community of Bolwarra and Largs through various fund raising activities including the Largs Village Ball.

What community events does your brigade participate in?

The brigade participates in various community events including school fetes and field

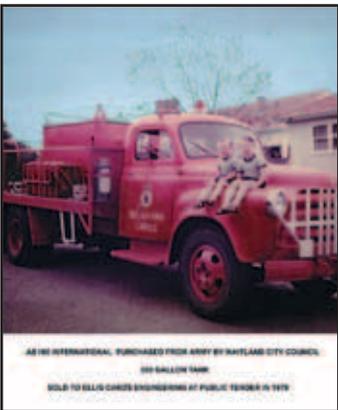
days. One event, which is keenly anticipated by the Bolwarra and Largs community, is the annual "Christmas Santa Run", during which brigade members and Santa drive around the local streets on the fire tankers and hand out lollies to the children.

The annual NSW RFS Open Day is another major community event. During recent years, the Open Day has had a large increase in attendance. We make it an enjoyable day for the local community with such activities as the 'target knock down' by the kids with knapsacks and the interactive fire blanket demonstration.

Any final thoughts or comments you would like to add?

We would like to acknowledge the continued support of Maitland City Council, the Bolwarra-Largs community and the commitment of past and present brigade members who all make this brigade what it is today.

Written by Brian Worboys and Bob Shorten



TOP: Today the brigade is proud of their four bay shed and two tankers plus a bulk water carrier

CENTRE LEFT: Founding members, See and Bruce Dark, celebrating the 40th anniversary of the brigade in September 2008

CENTRE LOWER LEFT: One of the highlights of the year was the presentation of Long Service Medals by Assistant Commissioner Rob Rogers (far right) in September 2008

CENTRE RIGHT: When the new tanker arrived in 1968 the brigade members could not have been happier

RIGHT: The NSW RFS Open Day is a popular community event for the people of Bolwarra and Largs



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Pack Includes:

- BL500V (Pre-Programmed to RFS channels)
- Single Bay Rapid Charger
- Heavy Duty Speaker Mike
- AC Power Adaptor
- DC Power Adaptor
- 2X 1800 mAH Battery pack
- Belt Clip & Antenna
- Nylon Case

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ACTUAL SIZE



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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
Incidents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Please list the types of stories, or specific story ideas, you are interested in reading in the Bush Fire Bulletin

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Advertising, Design & Artwork: Steve Byers: 02 9906 2444 // steve@carillongraphics.com.au

BUSH FIRE BULLETIN ADVERTISING RATES & SPECIFICATIONS

NOTE: ALL RATES ARE BASED ON PER ISSUE. Popular sizes shown here only.

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	Measurements (Width x Height)	Casual Rate Per Issue	RHP First 12 pages	12 Month Contract rate	12 Month Contract RHP First 12 Pages
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Full Page	<input type="checkbox"/> 210 x 297mm	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1550	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1780	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1470	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1690
1/2 Page	<input type="checkbox"/> 132 x 186mm	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1090	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1250	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1030	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1190
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NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

15 Carter Street
Lidcombe NSW 2141

Locked Bag 17
Granville NSW 2142

Tel: 02 8741 5555
Fax: 02 9737 0171

Email: Bushfire.Bulletin@rfs.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.rfs.nsw.gov.au

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