

The official journal of the NSW SES Volunteers Association

the

# Volunteer

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kim.davis@nswsesva.org.au

### Vice President

**Shannon Crofton ESM CF** (Metro Zone)  
shannon.crofton@nswsesva.org.au

### Managing Director

**Erin Pogmore** (Metro Zone)  
erin.pogmore@nswsesva.org.au

### Director

**Megan Hamblin** (Wellington)  
megan.hamblin@nswsesva.org.au

## NSW SES VOLUNTEERS ASSOCIATION COORDINATORS & AMBASSADORS

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**Mark Elm**  
VA Rep NSW SES Awards Committee

**Anthorr Nomchong**  
Member Recognition Coordinator

**Cory McMillan**  
Mental Health Coordinator

## CRITICAL INCIDENT SUPPORT PROGRAM 1800 626 800

## CONTRIBUTIONS



### Please send all content to:

**The Volunteer Editor:**  
**Carlee Maccoll**  
Unit 1, 2-6 Lindsay Street, Rockdale NSW 2216  
Phone: 1300 0 SES VA  
Email: editor@nswsesva.org.au

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## Proudly supporting our local SES Volunteers

We appreciate the ongoing sacrifices  
of our SES Volunteers who often  
miss out on family gatherings and  
events to serve our communities.

Merry Christmas and best wishes  
for the New Year

**Sonia Hornery**

State Member for Wallsend



67 Nelson Street,  
Wallsend NSW 2287  
wallsend@parliament.nsw.gov.au  
(02) 4950 0955

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**KIM DAVIS ESM**  
PRESIDENT NSW SES  
VOLUNTEERS ASSOCIATION

**W**e've just walked out of a meeting with the Minister for Emergency Services, the Hon. David Elliot and since the last edition have also met with Federal Minister Kristy McBain.

We had the great pleasure of talking about our Open Day at the new VA property and some of the plans we have for it.

It was great to see so many members and their families come along, have a yarn and a sanger and explore the property. There's more about the property further in this edition.

We were again a sponsor of the Rotary Emergency Service Community Awards this year and would like to congratulate all of the finalists and winners. Along with having two SES members as finalists in the Rotary Inspirational Women's Awards – with both winning their category.

Congratulations to all!

**The VA was also a Finalist in the 2020 Mental Health Matters Award and we look forward to continuing our focus on Mental health and making a positive impact on our volunteers in this capacity.**



The VA was also a Finalist in the 2020 Mental Health Matters Award and we look forward to continuing our focus on Mental health and making a positive impact on our volunteers in this capacity.

With some restrictions lifting since our last edition, and hopefully even move over the Christmas season,

we hope that this means members who have been estranged from their loved ones will have the opportunity meet up and (hopefully!) also enjoy the holiday period.

We are expecting a wet and busy summer though, so please stay safe if you are activated and look after each other.



**The Government's message is that your mental health is important to us, when you are called to respond it is often on the worst day of someone's life, and we know this can take a toll.**



**THE HON DAVID ELLIOTT MP**  
MINISTER FOR POLICE AND  
EMERGENCY SERVICES

**A**s we come towards the end of a year like no other, NSW will be reflecting on the exceptional work of the NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) volunteers. We must remember that many of the volunteers that wear the iconic orange uniform have also been heavily affected by the events of this year, but continue to commit their time to the people of their communities. After significant floods, fires and then the COVID-19 pandemic, the volunteers who protect the people of our great State deserve our greatest thanks.

This month I was pleased to announce a record \$200 million budget for the NSW SES. This funding will ensure the volunteers of the SES have the resources they need to manage flood and storm emergencies, road accident rescues, bush search and rescue, and other disasters. The NSW Government has also announced a new \$36 million first responder mental health strategy for all of our emergency services. The Government's message is that your mental health is important to us, when you are called to respond it is often on the worst day of someone's life, and we know this can take a toll.

This year is set to bring us yet another challenge, with the Bureau of Meteorology predicting a La Niña event, that will bring a period of significant storms and potential flooding. I know the SES is up to the challenge and will be as prepared as possible if disaster strikes and the NSW Government will be there to support you in your efforts.

Since I last wrote to you all, I have had the pleasure of visiting SES Units



in the Blue Mountains, Dunedoo, Grafton, Hornsby, Kiama, St George's Basin, Nowra and Woodburn to handover a range of new equipment that will support you in your efforts. The Fleet Replacement Program has now delivered 132 brand new vehicles and vessels to NSW SES Units State-wide since July 2019. Thank you all for welcoming me to your units, I look

forward to visiting many more in the coming months.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. I hope the holiday period brings you quality time with your family, friends and loved ones. Thank you for your dedication to the protection of your communities. All the best for 2021.





**CARLENE YORK APM**  
NSW SES COMMISSIONER

**A**s we come to the end of 2020 and life returns to some form of normal, I want to once again thank you for your enthusiasm throughout the past 12 months. It is one thing to serve your community, but it is quite another to do it in the middle of a pandemic and amid so much uncertainty. This is not to mention the large number of requests for assistance we have responded to following the floods, storms and bushfires. Working together to overcome these challenges has made us stronger and more efficient. Despite the uncertainty of the past year, it has not stopped us working to improve and focus on what is important to the service and especially you as our members.

Recently, I celebrated the one-year anniversary of my appointment as your Commissioner. Although we have achieved many things together during this time, for me, the most satisfying was the creation of the Unit Funds Committee, an idea born out of conversations I had with many of you about your Unit bank accounts. This new committee will help you buy things that you need, including whitegoods, security systems, furniture and training aids, just to name a few. I hope that this helps make serving the community a little bit easier.

Focusing on your mental health, as you may know, is something that I am incredibly passionate about. Mental health has been topical this year, not just for us but for the community as well. Your mental health and wellbeing will continue to be my focus next year as I look to enhance support services, introduce a new mental health and wellbeing strategy along with training, resources, and tools, and even bring in our own organisational psychologists – a first for the NSW SES.

**Despite the uncertainty of the past year, it has not stopped us working to improve and focus on what is important to the service and especially you as our members.**

While we're on the topic of exciting news, members in the Northern Zone will be thrilled to learn that the NSW Telco Authority intends to activate more Government Radio Network sites before the end of the year. I know many of you have been waiting for years for this change and are excited that it's finally here. The pilot program in the Byron Tweed Cluster has been a great success, with increased protection such as the emergency duress alert and improved radio communications a hit with members.

Next year will see us get back to our core business of building resilient communities and working

with local councils to improve facilities like the brand-new Gooloogong Unit, which is being built as we speak. We are also refreshing our strategy and your responses to the recent survey will be used to make key decisions about the future mission, vision and strategic direction of the NSW SES.

I sincerely hope that you find time over the holiday break to relax with family and friends. Let's head into the new year with the confidence that we can tackle any challenges that come our way. Let's also hope 2021 is a little kinder to us.

As always, stay safe.

**THE VOLUNTEER MAGAZINE**

We value your input and want to acknowledge and promote the amazing work you all do!

We encourage all the Units and Zones to contribute and be a part of our Magazine

If you have participated in any Training days / Operational activities / Community Events, would like to Shout out a Volunteer or acknowledge an award recipient etc we would love to hear about it!

To have your unit featured please send in your articles and images to [editor@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:editor@nswsesva.org.au)

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**Talking brings perspective. It gets answers. It provides clarity. It makes sense of things. It allows our brains to get some traction.**



**STEVE HALL**  
SENIOR CHAPLAIN

## Talking Your Way Out of Hard

**A**t the end of every year we talk about what went on during the year – the good, the bad and the ugly. 2020 has been a big year. For me it's a time of reflection, a chance to recap what happened, how I responded and whether I am happy with my performance. Here's where my heads at as we wrap up this year.

I was called back from leave on January 1 to help put together our support strategy for all the members supporting the RFS. And it kept going from there. I lost the chance to recharge myself and ran with that deficit all year. I had to consciously make space for myself so that I could be there for others. I had to admit to myself that I am not bullet proof and not just press on blindly. I had to give myself permission to grab a day here and there to look after myself.

Former Commissioner Jim Smith used to talk about crucible leadership moments, events that made you reexamine your leadership and priorities. Was I going to let the relentless pace and pressure

overwhelm me? I had to dig deep and find a longer view that put this year into perspective. I had been in support of many major disasters – Black Saturday, Yasi – and my training and preparation hadn't let me down then and wouldn't let me down now.

All year I have been reminded of a very simple truth. I have normal reactions to abnormal events. It's the events that I face that are abnormal. My reactions are all very normal, very human. Just reminding those around me of this simple truth helps them know that they are not losing the plot because of their reactions amid the event.

Here's another simple truth, talking works. My brain has to order my thinking to get those thoughts into words. When I talk about what I am going through that ordering process brings clarity to me as well as those I am talking to. It cuts through the swirl of thoughts going round and round and settles me.

It's in my nature to be curious, to ask questions. It helps when everything comes at me at once. That avalanche

of information can stop me doing anything. Asking questions helps me find what is going on. It cuts through the noise to help find the facts. From there I can make plans and act. Even if it's just working out the next thing to do it helps me go forward.

The thread that pulls this conversation together is that you can talk your way out of hard. Talking brings perspective. It gets answers. It provides clarity. It makes sense of things. It allows our brains to get some traction. But it's not a silver bullet. I must have the courage to talk. I must practice asking the right sort of questions. I need to make space for this sort of talking to take place. And I need to ask for help. There are plenty of willing helpers out there.

Your challenge, if you've read this, is to do a bit of a stock take on your head. Does any of this strike a chord with you? Will you set some time aside to reflect on this year? How do you think you went?

I have learnt that I can talk my way out of hard.

**T**his time last year, we were in the middle of the 2019 – 2020 Summer Bushfires which were devastating for both communities and wildlife across Australia. The scale and intensity of the bushfires were so significant that it touched everyone across the nation. We all looked on in horror as photos and videos of the bushfires were broadcast daily and watched as the fires wiped out everything in their path - families and communities were displaced, hundreds and thousands of animals perished and we felt incredibly helpless watching it all occur.

As we were recovering from the devastation from the bushfires we were hit with another crisis

– COVID-19 which impacted society like we had not experienced before.

From drought & bushfires to then major flood and storm events - the work never stopped for our amazing, dedicated SES Volunteers who were operational every step of the way.

Despite the challenges we all faced this year, there were also many positives that came. Although the ceremonies & celebrations were a little different due to Covid restrictions, it was great to see our fellow Volunteers recognised and acknowledged for their exceptional work and efforts throughout the year – Congratulations to all the award recipients this year!

**Rotary District 9675**

**2020 Inspirational Women's Awards**

*We gratefully acknowledge the support of our Vice Regal Patron, Her Excellency, The Hon Margaret Beazley AC QC, Governor of NSW*

**Congratulations to our Managing Director Erin Pogmore  
Winner of the 2020 Rural Inspirational Woman of the Year Award**

Congratulations to our Managing Director Ms Erin Pogmore for winning the 2020 Rural Inspirational Woman of the Year Award at Rotary Inspirational Women's Awards.

Most of our SES members know Erin as a long term volunteer, flood rescue operator and media professional. Erin's popularity is a result of her work to increase support to SES volunteers in many areas such as personal support, advocacy and mental health. Erin has provided stability, confidence, leadership and direction to SES volunteers over past years.

Erin became the first female Managing Director in the 21 year history of the SES Volunteers Association in 2016. Prior to this Erin also worked in the Member Services area of the SESVA and later as Deputy Managing Director.

With a professional background in finance and banking, Erin has ensured the direction and focus of the Association to Volunteers, support and wellbeing. Erin is highly respected in both the professional leadership and director realms of Australia's emergency services.

Erin leads by having both professionalism and experience in the emergency field. She leads by example. Erin apart from her SES experience, is also a professional firefighter with Fire and Rescue NSW and works frontline at a primary rescue station. She is a qualified FRNSW flood rescue operator, primary rescue operator and Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team member attached to Australia Taskforce 2 for national and international deployments.

Erin has received local and international awards for her work in flood rescue and aviation and has advised and spoken at aviation conferences in both Australia and USA. We are very proud to have Erin as part of our Association and her continued work to ensure better support for volunteers.

2020 Rural Inspirational Woman of the Year Award



A special shout out to our Managing Director Erin Pogmore who was awarded the 2020 Rural Inspirational Women of the Year Award – we are all very proud of Erin and her achievements!

The VA has been a proud sponsor of the NSW Rotary Emergency Services Community Awards since its inception and we were excited to be in attendance at the various Award ceremonies this year to celebrate the finalists and overall Winners .

The award recognises emergency service personnel throughout the state who have gone above and beyond their call of duty and reflected the Rotary moto of Service above Self.

There has been a lot going on behind the scenes at the VA this year. Due to the confidential nature of a lot of what we do in the Welfare sector of the VA it is often not shared with our members. Our Member Service Manager along with our Managing Director are often out of the office on the road travelling thousands of kilometres, often spending days away from their families to provide welfare support and advocacy support services to our members.

To read more on how we assist our members and fellow volunteers please check out our website [www.nswsesva.org.au](http://www.nswsesva.org.au) – all enquiries and applications are purely confidential.





A big Congratulations goes to David King – Deputy Unit Commander – Hawkesbury Unit who was named the NSW SES winner of the 2020 Rotary NSW Emergency Services Community Awards.

David is the Deputy Unit Commander at the Hawkesbury Unit & has 43 years of SES volunteer service under his belt and is the leading specialist in large animal rescue (a skill which he shares by training others in this field). With his extensive and vast knowledge and experience within the SES, David is a perfect mentor for new recruits and other fellow volunteers.

David is also an active Volunteer in the NSW Rural Fire Service and has been for more than 36 years. With a long list of achievements and awards, David has also been a recipient

of the Emergency Services Medal, National Medal & Clasps 1 & 2, NSW SES 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35 & 40 Year Long Service Awards, two NSW SES Commissioner's Commendation for Service and the SES State Medal for the Hunter/Sydney Northern Storms.

Congratulations to the other three exceptional finalists who were nominated by their peers for the award and recognised for their achievements and commitment to the service and their communities. Well done!. The three other finalists, who have also made a huge contribution to the Service were

- » Ballina Unit Commander Gerry Burnage
- » Oberon Unit Commander Craig Gibbons, and;
- » Hawkesbury Unit Commander Kevin Jones.



NSWSEVA Vice President and Rotary Alumni Shannon Crofton ESM, presenting Bigga SES Volunteer and Ambulance First Responder Denise Perry with her award.

'Everyone knows SES volunteers and the work they do in their communities. Volunteers who conduct first response for NSW Ambulance in remote rural areas literally are the lifeblood of their communities.' Shannon said in his speech.

'Denise and the Bigga Unit have had a busy year with medical and trauma calls and it is wonderful to have this work acknowledged'.



Our Eat Sleep Respond range is growing and developing and we have now added active wear to our range Swimmer Chamois, branded coffee cups and socks. These will all be

dropping soon. Check out our website [www.eatsleeprespond.com.au](http://www.eatsleeprespond.com.au) to view our range of apparel and merchandise and don't forget to tag us in your gear on Instagram #eatsleeprespond

Keep an eye on the post as our 2021 calendar has now been released and sent out – thank you to everyone who contributed by sending in their images and also to all the members who voted we appreciate your input!

Check out our feature on the NSW SESVA Retreat open day which was held on Sunday, 22nd November 2020 at our new rural property located at Windellama – we hope to see you all there in the near future.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New year – Stay safe

Carlee Maccoll





# NSW SESVA Retreat Open Day

**O**n Sunday the 22nd of November we invited our NSW SESVA members to join us at our newly acquired VA Property located at Windellama NSW. It was a great day for members to come and see the property in its raw form and explore the 100 acres of land with their fellow volunteers and families. It was a great opportunity to discuss ideas and gain feedback on the future plans for the property in a laid back environment. We were fortunate enough to have ideal weather on the day and Members were able to explore the land at their own pace and enjoy a sausage sizzle on their return. The kids also had a ball and were able to go for an adventure ride in a Polaris and take a swing on the old tyre and look at the beautiful wildlife we have on offer – it is an ideal setting for individuals and families to relax and unwind.

Thankyou to all those that were able to make it on the day - we had members from far and wide join us and it was great to see the support and hear the positive feedback from those who attended.

If you have any ideas and suggestions for the retreat and property we would love to hear them – please email them through to [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au)

We look forward to welcoming you all there again in the near future.









# Thank you

for your work and dedication  
throughout what was a very challenging  
2020. *-Trish*

## Trish Doyle MP

Member for Blue Mountains  
Shadow Minister for Emergency Services



[bluemountains@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:bluemountains@parliament.nsw.gov.au)



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Authorised by Trish Doyle MP. Funded using parliamentary entitlements December 2020

**PROUD TO SUPPORT NSW SES VOLUNTEERS**

# Greg Hickey

4th Floor, Wentworth Chambers  
180 Phillip Street, Sydney NSW 2000





# Bankstown Presentation Night

**2**020, a year to forget, but what happened in 2019-2020? On Tuesday night it was with great pleasure that I spent the evening with some of the wonderful volunteers at our Bankstown Unit for a formal presentation of awards.

It was really a year to reflect on the what we did, what we did well and what we can do better.

We started 2019 like any other year with normal training and operations until about October when things warmed up, multiple bushfires and storms really kept us busy through till February when we flipped from fire support to floods and storm damage.

And then Covid-19 impacted the world, "unprecedented times" in which the members showed courage, professionalism and respect. They stayed home, they trained online, they worked digitally and still served the community without hesitation by going into the field and completing RFA's as required.

It was with great pleasure that we also recognised multiple members for their service not only to the unit, but the NSW SES and the greater community of NSW.

The Deputy Commissioner Daniel Austin presented the following awards.

- » First clasp to the National Medal
- » 4 National Medals
- » 25 NSW Premier's Bushfire Emergency Citations
- » 2 Life Membership awards
- » 8 SES Long Service Medals
- » 13 Five Year Pins

Thank you for your commitment and support in 2019 and 2020 and I am looking forward to 2021

## David Niven

Inspector, Unit Commander  
Bankstown Unit



**Steve Nguyen receiving the Mayor's Volunteer Of the Year Award with Mayor Khal Asfour Unit Commander David Niven.**



**Ahmed Atia receiving his NSW Premier's Bushfire Emergency Citation from Deputy Commissioner Daniel Austin.**



**Ron Holder – one of Bankstown oldest members receiving his National Medal.**





# Ipswich Deployment



On Saturday 31st October 2020, a number of communities in the Ipswich LGA in Queensland were pummelled by large hail, some even described as GIANT size. Within hours the Queensland State Emergency Service received over 3,500 calls for assistance.

Realising the severity and complexity of the damage a callout was made for interstate assistance. By Thursday morning there was over 30 volunteers from NSW SES and the same from SA SES on the ground and on roofs assisting QLD SES. The first round of NSW deployments the Alpha Group, consisted of six storm crews from Northern Zone. It was a welcome sight by the Ipswich community to see the convoy of six NSW SES light storm vehicles rolling into town, fully stocked with the required equipment and expertise to tackle the mammoth task ahead.

Personally, I'll never forget the feeling of heartbreak and disbelief as we first drove through the community of Springfield Lakes. House after house had suffered damage. Some more evident than others. Cars were sitting in driveways covered in dints and with windscreens completely shattered. Tiled roofs were spotted with broken tiles, some leaving gaping holes through to the ceiling. Nearly every solar panel had been shattered from what some were calling 'falling icebergs'. Some homes had already been fully tarped ... many hadn't.

The damage was so extensive that in some instances it took 3 teams working together for a whole day to complete one house. For three solid days, the Alpha teams worked tirelessly tarping roofs and making homes safe. The presence of so many in orange provided comfort and reassurance to the devastated communities.

Bravo group, comprised of teams from South Eastern Zone and Northern

Zone, then arrived in Queensland to continue on the work. Alpha group tried to fore-warn Bravo just what they were about to witness, but nothing really prepares you for it. By this time it had been over a week since the storm. Whilst the number of outstanding jobs had dropped quite considerably, there still remained a couple of hundred families waiting nervously but patiently for help. Bravo group again worked







tirelessly for another three days, tarping and making temporary repairs giving the residents some peace of mind that everything will be ok.

Amongst all the damage and uncertainty, we must praise the community for their resilience, their understanding, and for their care for each other and for the many volunteers out there helping them.

This being my very first deployment with NSW SES, gave me great insight and appreciation to the service. As a Deputy Unit Commander in BAU times, and as a Team Leader during this deployment, I'm more aware of just how much is involved in sending crews

for Out of Area Assistance. The mere logistics of moving over 100 people and numerous vehicles, interstate and during Covid is astounding. And what I felt was most impressive was how teams were made up of members, many who had never met each other previously, but all with that common goal of helping out the community and those a little less fortunate at the time. Teams bonded and worked well. Great leadership was shown by the Strike Team Leaders and Team Leaders, and all the field members supported and encouraged one another amazingly.

On a local note, Casino Unit was proud to have been able to send 5

members to assist, in varying roles. This was the first SES deployment for all of them. Each one says that being a part of it was very rewarding, and they will not hesitate in putting their hand up to go to any future deployments. Many friendships were made, and much knowledge was shared and embraced by everyone.

Thank you to Donna, Kirsty, James, Venus and Leann for your hard work and dedication to NSW SES and for representing the Casino Unit.

**Donna Lamont**

Deputy Unit Commander  
Casino Unit

# Nominations

## Timely and accurate recognition

In this series, NSW SES VA representative on the NSW SES Awards Committee, Mark Elm provides some useful insight and guidance into how to write an effective merit based award nomination.

**F**ormer Commissioner of the NSW Police Force, Commissioner Ken Moroney AO APM, best said it this way, 'timely and accurate recognition'.

In my career, I have sat on the NSW Police Force Commissioners Awards Assessment Committee, been the Team Leader of Recognition for the Australian Federal Police and now sit on the NSW SES Awards Committee, representing the NSW SES VA and as your voice I seek to fairly assess each application. I understand the processes involved, and I also understand that honours and awards processes can either cause a deep sense of pride of accomplishment in self and others, or conversely can cause, if not handled appropriately, a significant amount of distress, concern, dissatisfaction and in some cases anger.

I've had the honour and absolute privilege of emceeing at Awards Investitures, of being the ceremonial and protocol officer presenting awards, and also been fortunate to have been the recipient of numerous awards. Personally I derive no greater satisfaction than seeing good people being recognised for their service and their sacrifice. It sings to me. It allows a member, to have their family present to see the results of their courage, their service and their dedication. As one of my old line commanders said to me, "Your family are not going to see you do the dirty jobs, the long shifts, the body recovery's. They are not going to see you do the complex investigations, of you being verbally assaulted or at worst being injured



in the line of duty. They aren't going to see the exhilarating highs or the depressing lows. They aren't there to see the blood, the pain, the injured, and the dying. But they are there at these awards ceremonies to see the results of that labour, and our job is to make it mean something." That sage advice is equally relevant here in this space and to me, it represents what I am attempting to convey here, the importance of the nomination. Why is it important, because an award nomination can succeed or fail depending on the effort, care and due diligence the nominator has committed to.

Whether the award falls under the Australian Honours and Awards system, the NSW SES Commissioner's Honours and Awards system or any

other Honours and Awards system, each provides our membership with the opportunity to have heartfelt thanks for service and sacrifice being conferred. What it needs for this to happen is timely and accurate nominations. Let me break that down for you, the timely nominations relate to getting a nomination in as soon as practical after an event. The accuracy relates to a very comprehensive and accurate set of information so that the committee can weigh up the pro's and the con's of each nomination. The responsibility in getting a nomination assessed appropriately rests with the nominator.

The NSWSESVA wants to encourage all meritorious acts are considered, but to do so we need your help.

To assist you, we have recently provided input to make the nomination forms easier to provide the required information by using prompts on what should be included. I want to stress, these prompts are not time consuming if you act straight away.

### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Let's start at this juncture of the process. PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE, if you submit a nomination, you **MUST** ensure you have stated ANY conflict of interest.

So what do we as a Committee want from the nominator. We want you to outline any conflicts of interest. If you know the nominee/s state how you know the nominee/s. Chances are most nominators do know the nominee, either as a community







emotions and in all likelihood becomes dissatisfied. So what started out as an awesome gesture has led to a demoralised member. So, let us honour the 'Honours-In-Confidence' requirement.

### GETTING IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

OK, so the point I'm stressing here is there is no point putting in a lack lustre effort when nominating someone. If you feel strong enough to put a nomination in, then please make sure you put the effort into the nomination. Make sure it is thorough, unbiased, factual, highlights risk, highlights adherence or otherwise to policy and to legislation, provides all available evidence, and is written in plain English. Please don't use motherhood statements that are wishy washy or over emphasises a commitment. A worthy nomination will stand or fall on its own merits.

For the nomination to be successful, it needs to meet the award criteria, so we need the nominator to have a very good understanding of what you are actually nominating the nominee for. This sounds odd, but it does happen that nominators don't always nominate the most relevant award appropriate to the meritorious act.

Since representing NSW SES VA on the NSW SES Awards Committee, I have noticed that many nominations received, whilst submitted in good faith, do not have the requisite supporting documentation and thoroughness required when the committee seeks to assess. The outcome to this, is either a rejection by the committee, or having the nomination returned to the nominator for further information, forwarding the information to other referees or witnesses. This can include partner public safety combat agencies. This generates much more delays than is desirable, and can lead to an award not being able to be assessed in it's totality. So going back to the 'timely' criteria, get it right the first time and there should be limited delay in assessment. Out of fairness to the process and integrity of the system, combined

» continued on page 19

member, as a colleague, or through networks. This is not an issue per se, it just needs to be acknowledged.

Also, if you are a member of the NSW SES but also a member of another public safety combat agency and you only refer to the latter and not acknowledge as either a nominator or as a witness, in your NSW SES role, then you run the risk of destabilising the merits of the nomination. Please acknowledge your conflict of interest. This does not necessarily mean the nomination will be unsuccessful, on the contrary, what it means is that you have demonstrated integrity and you CAN speak as a Subject Matter Expert in your other role. But please, just make that acknowledgement. Please just be transparent. We must be fair to the nominee by being transparent in the entire process.

### HONOURS-IN-CONFIDENCE

Basically 'Honours-In-Confidence' means to keep confidential all nominations. Under no circumstances are you to advise the person being nominated that they are being considered for an award. Provisions under the Privacy Act give legislative weight to this position. I have become aware of this practice in many jurisdictions. It serves no one. In fact it may have the opposite effect. OK, so you decide to nominate Operator Bloggs for an ESM and you let Operator Bloggs in on this development. Operator Bloggs immediately has high expectations. The Committee subsequently reviews the nomination and does not support the nomination. Operator Bloggs is left hanging and then over time feels a range of negative

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On behalf of my community,  
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for always being there when  
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**Michelle Rowland MP**

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR GREENWAY

📍 Level 1, Suite 101C, 130 Main Street, Blacktown  
📬 PO Box 8525, Blacktown NSW 2148  
📞 (02) 9671 4780 📧 Michelle.Rowland.MP@aph.gov.au  
📱 f b i MRowlandMP 🌐 www.michellerowland.com.au

Authorised by Michelle Rowland MP, Australian Labor Party, Suite 101C, Level 1, 130 Main Street, Blacktown NSW 2148

# Julie Owens MP

Your local Federal Member for Parramatta



*Every year, SES volunteers work tirelessly to keep our community safe.*

*This year, you have stepped up to protect us during unprecedented bushfires and a global pandemic.*



*Thank you for your service in 2020 - I wish you and your loved ones all the best for the holidays and a happy new year.*

**Electorate Office:** 1/25 Smith St, Parramatta  
(entry via Macquarie Street)  
**Email:** julie.owens.mp@aph.gov.au  
**Phone:** 9689 1455  
📱 JulieOwensMP 🐦 @JulieOwensMP  
[www.julieowens.com.au](http://www.julieowens.com.au)

Authorised by Julie Owens MP ALP, 1/25 Smith Street, (enter off Macquarie Street), Parramatta, NSW 2150

I thank all NSW  
SES volunteers  
for their service  
and dedication to  
our community.



**Lee EVANS MP**  
Member for Heathcote

Authorised by Lee Evans MP, Shops 1 & 2, 17-23 Station Street, Engadine NSW 2233.  
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Contact: Nicole O'Neill  
Mobile: 0400 388 378  
Email: craig.tyack@bigpond.com

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» continued from page 17

with honouring the status of the awards themselves, the NSW SES VA will without exception ensure our voice on the committee is fair, balanced, unbiased and measured against the information provided vis a vis the facts of the matter. Every examination is evidenced based.

What we want you to do as a nominator, is to gather as much of the information yourself. Do not leave it up to NSW SES SHQ personnel to do it on your behalf. It's lazy and creates an enormous amount of workload. You need to communicate with other witnesses at the scene, other partner agencies, or project or activity, asking them to provide comment on the act of courage or service displayed. You need to highlight the complexity of the job. You NEED to also gather BOM data (if relating to a weather event). You NEED to consider MAPS, satellite imagery, Subject Matter Expertise (SME) statements. You NEED to include photographs taken

at the time or shortly after. You NEED to include BEACON data. You NEED to provide INDEPENDENT witness statements. You NEED to provide independent references. You NEED to provide an accurate summary and an accurate conclusion. Paint the picture for the committee. Plain English and uncomplicated. Timings and data.

To give you some comfort, if followed up as soon as possible, these additional requirements are easy and straightforward and not very time consuming. But if left late, the delays become a bit more burdensome.

Ideally the nominees Commander should be given an opportunity to provide comment. We recognise that in some rare occasions that there may be personality conflicts between a nominee and their line command. If you are aware of this, please convey this to the awards section under confidential cover so that an unbiased examination of the conflict can be explored and alternative comment can be sought.

## CONCLUSION

As your representative, it is my duty to ensure I am thorough in my assessment. Why? Well to keep the integrity of the awards process, to honour the awards being considered? To honour our members that we do not allow sub standard nominations to slip through the cracks. With your help we can progress an appropriate assessment.

I sincerely hope you consider your colleagues for timely and accurate recognition. Do not be put off by the work required, remember the earlier you get to it, the less burdensome it becomes.

The Commissioner values her people. If she isn't told of the good work being done, she may not be aware of it. If the Commissioner is to be told of the meritorious work our members are performing make sure the nomination is given the respect it deserves by committing to a thorough job.

Mark Elm

# Shout out

## 2020 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards

Congratulations to the following Volunteers who were recipients of 2020 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards



Upper North Shore Adult Volunteer of the Year – **Christopher Blogg**



Orana Adult Volunteer of the Year – **Megan Hamblin**



Southern Inland Volunteer of the Year – **Graham Kinder**

Far West Adult Volunteer of the Year – **Kevern Hobman**

Orana Young Volunteer of the Year – **Joseph McDonnell-Amatto**

Northern Beaches Young Volunteer of the Year – **Maja Dalby-Ball Olson**

To the valuable SES Volunteers

# Thank You

In this unprecedented year of catastrophic bushfires, floods, storm damage and the coronavirus pandemic - thank you for your unwavering service, sacrifice and going above and beyond to assist those through these disasters.

To you and your families, I wish you a very Merry Christmas and a safe 2021.



**ALEX HAWKE MP**  
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR MITCHELL

🏠 Suite 8, 23 Terminus Street, Castle Hill NSW 2154  
☎ 02 9899 7211 📧 alex.hawke.mp@aph.gov.au  
🌐 alexhawke.com.au 📺 AlexHawkeMPMitchell

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**Ed Husic MP**  
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**Office:** Shop 6, 15 Cleeve Close, Mt Druitt NSW  
**Email:** contact@edhusic.com  
**Phone:** (02) 9625 4344  
📧 ehusic 📺 @edhusicmp  
🌐 edhusic.com 📺 Ed4Chifley

Authorised by Ed Husic, ALP, 6/15 Cleeve Close Mt Druitt

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# World Mental Health Day

## 10 Oct 2020

**W**orld Mental Health Day is a global day of action. It is a day where people around the World get to their feet and mobilise to support those living with mental illness.

This is exactly what some members of NSW SES The Shire Cluster and a couple of their family members did that day. We walked from Menai Headquarters to Heathcote Headquarters and return. We put one foot forward to make a difference to the lives of people touched by mental illness and suicide.

We laced up, donned our orange and pounded the pavement in solidarity for

people in Australia living with mental illness. On top of that, we fundraised \$3,000 and teamed up with Black Dog Institute for their life-changing research into treatment and prevention of mental illness, as well as vital support services.

In Australia, every day 8 people will die from suicide and 1 in 5 people experience symptoms of mental illness each year.

Mental illness can be debilitating and can have devastating impact on not only those living with it, but those around them.

So, please talk to your mates, see if they are ok.

Or you can contact one of these numbers.

» **Lifeline: 13 11 14**

» **Beyondblue: 1300 22 46 36**

» **Sane: 1800 18 7263**

If you do not like talking on the phone, you can text 0477 13 11 14 between 1800 to midnight. It is service that is also provided by Lifeline.

Or you can liaise with NSW SES VA or one of their mental health coordinators.

Don't suffer in silence, we are stronger together.

**Teddy Haryjanto JP**





## Port Macquarie SES volunteers love having fun on the water!

**O**n a recent training night Port Macquarie SES decided it was time to take advantage of the longer days and beautiful weather and launch the boats for a fun night of training on the Hastings River.

The training was a great success as a number of the unit's flood boat operators were able to dust off winter cobwebs, check over the boats, and spend some valuable time driving and manoeuvring the unit's punt boat. This type of training help the unit to maintain the boats and operators to maintain their currency. Michael Brumby, one of the units 'in water flood technicians' donned his wetsuit and flood rescue gear to enable members the opportunity to practice talking to a causality in the water, throw the torpedo, use the reach pole, hone their throw rope skills and have some fun out on the river.

In the past the Port Macquarie unit has been tasked to assist NSW Police search for missing persons, and have had to retrieve casualties from the



river. A training night like this is the perfect opportunity to develop skills and learn how to safely assist in rescues and recoveries.

As part of the unit's continual development and skills maintenance the Port Macquarie unit aims to head offsite as much as possible. Another whole unit training exercise involved concurrent search and rescue activities. A 'BBQ Boat Crash' incident resulted in multiple casualties lost and missing with some members moulaged with



mock injuries to make the scenario more realistic. The unit deployed SES27 as the incident command vehicle, they had two land based teams searching the area upstream and downstream of the incident, and two teams in boats searching the river. Alfred Portenschlager the units deputy training officer said "I enjoy creating challenging but fun training nights for everyone. The incident controller and team leaders had to triage and prioritise the rescue of casualties both on land





and in the water". During the 2 hour training evening, the volunteers of Port Macquarie unit were able to work together and locate, access, stabilise and transport 8 live casualties and 7 Mannequins.

The Port Macquarie Unit Training Co-ordinator Katie Blake states "Keeping training fun, interesting and as realistic as possible is key to keeping our volunteers engaged. Often past rescues have provided us with the inspiration to come up with challenging scenarios that will

make our members really think and apply their skills on the training night" The unit commander Michael Ward has regularly said "the key to our unit's success is that we 'train hard, rescue easy' - training helps our unit maintain our capabilities, develop the skills of our new members and provide our experienced operators an opportunity to apply their knowledge in an effective and efficient manner in order to complete challenging scenarios in our 2 hour training timeframe'

The Port Macquarie unit has a dedicated leadership team that encourages, develops and supports members through training, professional development and promoting mental wellbeing. Most importantly the unit loves to have fun in all the things they do, to build teamwork, resilience and essential skills in order to 'save lives and protect our community'

**Katie Blake**

Port Macquarie Unit





## Auburn Unit Mass Casualty Scenario run with St John



**T**hankfully the SES isn't called in for too many USAR jobs as they can be some of the more gruesome and technical rescues. This was hammered home to some of the members of the Auburn Unit that took part in a mass casualty scenario with the local St John's Ambulance, who organised this event in conjunction with the Auburn Unit. With 6 casualties in varying states of health and difficult to reach positions chaos reigned until the Teams took over and secured the scene. St John's Ambulance and SES teams then commenced the Triage of casualties, tagging them and investigating how to extricate them safely.

The teams were split up and tasked with locating, Treating, stabilising (with help from our friends in green) and then extricating all 6 casualties. All while working within the tight constraints of vehicles, Storm drains and a good-sized rubble pile, just enough to make you unstable on

your feet. One of the teams having to remove the driver's seat of a car with a casualty still seated in it!

Overall, the teams performed exceptionally well, considering for some it was their first time on a rescue and with others not having put on their helmets since the start of COVID.

Working with St John Ambulance and seeing the high level of professionalism, patient care and skill, highlighted to us, how much more there is to First Aid. Each time we run one of these Scenarios our Volunteers learn so much more than we can teach in a classroom and it leaves them wanting to learn more and continue their journey in the SES.

Now to start planning the next one.

**Matthias Vangelista**

Capability Improvement Specialist-  
Auburn

**Photos by Daniel Lisoff**

Digital Imagery Team- Auburn





# SES Strategy Refresh

## Volunteers shape our new Intranet

**W**e have heard from our members that EOS (our old intranet) was difficult to find information and that even when they did locate it, there was low confidence it was correct. We needed to change from an organisation structured platform with poor search capabilities, to a functional and personal intranet with fast, efficient and trusted search. We wanted to enhance our users experience by collaboratively build tools which work for our members; hence the Digital Workplace program was started.

The Digital Workplace program is focused on implementing the technical foundations to ensure members have access to the right digital tools to complete their role. The two main elements of this program are mySES: our new intranet (our single source of truth for information) and Microsoft Teams (our communication and collaboration tool).

It has been a long, collaborative journey to develop mySES: our new Intranet. In February to April 2020, the Digital Workplace team completed workshops with members to identify what information they would like to access and where they would look for this information. The team then worked with relevant subject matter experts to capture and display this content in a simple way and ensure that it was scalable and mobile device friendly.

Throughout the program, the priority for the Digital Workplace team has been to ensure that mySES is easy and useful for members, collaborating with volunteers wherever possible. The same is true for their approach to testing, by starting testing early in August and running through to the end of October. This allowed them to incorporate as much member feedback as possible ahead of Go Live on 14 October.

As part of this User Testing, 95% of testers stated they believed mySES was an improvement from EOS. The majority of our testers were volunteers, who provided valuable input to what needed to be changed on before Go Live and beyond.

Andrew Turner from the Hills unit talked us through what he thinks of mySES. "I definitely think the bug bear of EOS was trying to find things. I think all the work that has gone into mySES has made it really easy to find what I need, when I need to find it."

old system and also providing ideas on what the new version should look like."

David Williams from Batemans Bay Unit provided this feedback following go live:

"mySES exceeds my needs as a volunteer. Suddenly accessibility to everything I need is so much easier and faster. I know the journey is not over (they never are) but you have made a wonderful start."

As David stated, the journey for the Digital Workplace is only just beginning, with the team seeking further feedback

----- “ -----

**... mySES is really geared towards the members. It has lots of aspects that are volunteer focused, and I think that's really great for both new volunteers and those who have been in the service for a long time.**

----- ” -----

Rebecca Cole, from the Sofala unit, stated "I think mySES is really geared towards the members. It has lots of aspects that are volunteer focused, and I think that's really great for both new volunteers and those who have been in the service for a long time."

The amount of time and effort by the volunteers who have provided input into the design and testing of mySES hasn't gone unnoticed. Daniel Austin, Deputy Commissioner stated "Programs like this across the organisation don't happen without the very valued input of our volunteers. A wholehearted thanks to the many hours these volunteers have given up, in both providing feedback into the

from members on what technology will make a difference to them and their volunteer experience.

You can access mySES by going to [my.ses.nsw.gov.au](https://my.ses.nsw.gov.au) and logging in with your SES email address and password. If you have forgotten your password, this can be easily reset by going to [password.ses.nsw.gov.au](https://password.ses.nsw.gov.au). If you need further support, please raise a helpdesk ticket.



**Alex Bragg**

Manager Change Management Office



# Fleet Reserve Vehicles

**F**leet have commenced building a pool of Reserve vehicles to support operational capability for the NSW SES. These vehicles will be multi-capability and strategically located to provide a replacement asset to fill gaps where vehicles are offline for major repairs, insurance write-offs or deployed during times of heightened operational response.

Recently, the Fleet team have been able to use these Fleet Reserve vehicles to support both Coffs Harbour and Batemans Bay Units when their rescue vehicles required major repair work. Had the Fleet Reserve vehicles not been available, both Units would have needed to go offline for General Land Rescue response until their vehicles were back in service.

Opposite are some feedback from both Unit Commanders outlining how they have benefited from the Fleet Reserve vehicles:

For more information on the Fleet Reserve vehicles, please contact your Zone team or Fleet via email: [fleet@ses.nsw.gov.au](mailto:fleet@ses.nsw.gov.au)

## CHRIS CHAPMAN BATEMANS BAY UNIT COMMANDER

"I believe the reserve fleet is a great asset to have within the Service. It allows us to continue supporting our communities with the capabilities we provide without having to worry about being a vehicle short.

Batemans Bay's rescue truck is currently off to get repairs as well as receive some much needed upgrades to allow us to use the best and latest gear as well as provide our members with up to date safety features".

## JAMES DANIELS COFFS HARBOUR CITY UNIT COMMANDER

"Recently Coffs Harbour City Unit was in need of repairs to our primary rescue vehicle, CFS45. During this time, Fleet was highly supportive and managed to assist with a Fleet Reserve, Medium Rescue Vehicle. This provided the Unit and our community a service that has previously not been available. Additionally, it has had many benefits including reducing stress, rescue training could continue and pre-post offline times of our primary vehicle, both vehicles were tasked to serve the busy community of Coffs Harbour.

The Fleet Reserve helped get the right people, to the right place and offer the best service to the emergencies they are involved with such as scene lighting.

In summary, it has been excellent working with Fleet on this new venture."

# New Light Storm Trailers

**T**he Fleet Replacement Program (FRP) team have been working in partnership with Operational Capability to finalise the design and fitout of 40 brand new Generation 2 Light Storm Trailers (LST).

The GEN 2 LST offers a more advanced level of storm response capability for many NSW SES Units across the State and will provide a significant improvement over the many aged storm trailers in service.

The GEN 2 LST is built as a service body on a tandem axle trailer. Having a maximum Gross Trailer Mass of under two tonnes (fully loaded), it is capable of being towed behind our existing fleet of General Purpose and Command Vehicles. Other features include:

- » electric brakes on all wheels;
- » an onboard car fridge;
- » a scene light and red/blue emergency warning lamps - special switching will ensure the red and blue lights cannot operate while the



trailer is being towed. The electricals are supported by deep cycle batteries charged by a shore power inlet and solar panels on the roof;

- » roller shutter doors both sides with pull out drawers/shelving; and
- » a long drawer at the rear provides stowage for shovels, picks and picket driver etc.

The GEN 2 LST carries the same equipment list as the GEN 4 Light Storm Vehicle, less the flood rescue kit (which will be carried in the towing vehicle). The long extension ladder is intended to be carried on the towing

vehicle, if required for operational response.

The LST has been designed with the same stowage capacity as all recent storm vehicles, with rear side stowing for all frequently accessed tools and consumable items.

These trailers are presently being manufactured by a panel of three suppliers: Varley (Sydney), QuikCorp (Melbourne) and Allweld Manufacturing (near Maryborough in Queensland).

The brand new LST's are expected to be delivered to various Units in early 2021.

# NSW SES Training Delivery and Exercising team update

## TRAINING BULLETIN

The continued impact of COVID-19 requires a modified risk-managed approach in order to best ensure NSW SES can continue to meet its service obligations to the community and maximise member safety from a skills-currency perspective.

A Close-Personal-Contact Risk Control Plan has been developed and will be utilised by Trainers/Assessors and Facilitators in conjunction with their local risk assessment. This has allowed training courses/activities previously restricted due to COVID-19 to recommence. The general COVID-19 safety requirements remain in effect along with additional newly developed resources and tools available. Further details are outlined in the *Training Bulletin 16/2020*.

## ADVANCED RESUSCITATION TRAINING

A pilot training program commenced in October 2020 with Surf Life Saving NSW delivering the unit of competency *HLTAID007 Provide advanced resuscitation*. Several members of GLR Units and members that deliver Flood Rescue training, have benefited from the training with more members scheduled in for the training this month.

## PRINT PORTAL COMING SOON

An online print portal will be available shortly for ordering learner and trainer guides, workbooks and other printable training resources, directly from our supplier. Once the authorised member has entered the order the system will automatically direct the order to a relevant authorised approver from the Training Delivery team. Once it is approved the system will release the order to the supplier, who will have it delivered directly to the required location.

## TRAINERS AND ASSESSORS

SES Members will have the opportunity to upgrade their Assessor qualification to a Lead Assessor qualification, this is an investment into the ongoing development of our assessors. As a Lead Assessor the member will be able to fully utilise the SES Assess app. 2021 will see additional professional development workshops for trainers and assessors. Training is also engaging external providers to run Trainer and Assessor courses for members who have not commenced this pathway.

## THE EXERCISE CAPABILITY TEAM

The Exercise Capability Team in cooperation with the Training Development Team are developing an Exercise Program to complement incident Management Capability Development across the NSW SES. These exercises are referred to as the Exercise Scorpis Program.

Planning has commenced for the Disaster Rescue Challenge Series of Exercises that are being conducted between February and April 2021, culminating in the State Disaster Rescue Challenge otherwise known as Exercise Thunderstruck 21 in July 2021.

The NSW SES will be conducting the inaugural State Road Crash Rescue Challenge in partnership with Fire & Rescue NSW in May 2021. This will provide an enhanced learning environment for Road Crash Rescue Operators as well as build on the strong relationship between our organisations in Road Rescue Capability.

We wish to thank all volunteers for the patience and commitment to new distance training initiatives over the past six months but also congratulate you all on a quick return to close contact training activities in recent times.

**Paul McQueen**

Senior Manager Training Delivery







## Focus on Boggabri Unit

**B**oggabri is a little town located between Gunnedah and Narrabri on the Kamilaroi Highway. With a population of approximately 1,000 people, Boggabri is a big agricultural community ranging from cotton to canola. They have 3 local open cut coal mines, with another due to open soon and one underground Coal mine.

I am Commander of the Boggabri SES Unit. I was Deputy Commander in 2017 and in 2018 moved into the role of Commander. I took over from Geoff Eather who was in the position for 45 years, prior to Geoff, my grandfather was the Commander of our Unit for many years.

We currently have 10 active members and we are also dual responders with Fire and Rescue for Road Crash Rescue.

This year has been particularly hard training wise because of COVID-19 restrictions, but we have managed to navigate our way through the pandemic.

We are very lucky to have such a close knit community where everyone looks out for one another.

**Victoria Gunther**

Commander of Boggabri Unit  
Western Zone

## Linda Burney MP

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR BARTON

*"Thank you to our wonderful NSW SES volunteers who have put their lives on the line this year in the most challenging of conditions. Whilst many of us this holiday season will be with friends and family, this dedicated and selfless group will be keeping us safe."*

Suite 203/13A Montgomery Street, Kogarah NSW 2217  
P: 02 9587 1555 • [linda.burney.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:linda.burney.mp@aph.gov.au)  
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Authorised by L. Burney, ALP, 203/13A Montgomery Street, Kogarah NSW 2217

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**FIONA PHILLIPS MP**

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR GILMORE

📱 Fiona Phillips MP 📧 @fiboydphillips



Authorised by Fiona Phillips, ALP, 3/59 Junction Street Nowra

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Wishing you and your families a safe & happy holiday season and a bright New Year

**Thank you all for your service**

## Edmond Atalla MP

MEMBER FOR MOUNT DRUITT

Phone: (02) 9625 6770 Email: [mountdruitt@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mountdruitt@parliament.nsw.gov.au)  
Office: Suite 201, Westfield Shoppingtown, Carlisle Avenue, Mt Druitt

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# Thank you for protecting our community



**MELISSA McINTOSH MP**

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR LINDSAY

Member of the NSW Legislative Council, 1999-2003

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# Vale Graham Wilkie

14/4/42 – 5/8/20

**G**raham joined the Bankstown State Emergency Service on the 28th April 200 and was an active member for in excess of 11 years.

Graham completed multiple training courses covering both field and office-based roles such as

- » First Aid
- » Radio Communication skill
- » Induction to the NSW SES
- » Introduction to the Australasian Interagency Incident Management System
- » Drive Operational Vehicles
- » Work in an aviation environment
- » Air Observer for aerial searches

During his service Graham had been involved in multiple operations during his service from Cyclone Yasi to numerous flood and storm events around Bankstown.

He had also also received both 5 and 10-year Long Service awards as well as an NSW SES Commissioners Commendation for Service for his involvement in the 2011 Cyclone Yasi deployments in which Bankstown Unit was the state staging location.

Graham worked mainly in the planning section, however during operations he often assisted by being the main radio operator communicating with the field teams.

On the lighter side, his peers have provided me with a few moments where Graham has excelled himself.

"Graham was responsible for publishing the unit weekly briefing notes on our internal website ... Often, he would spend more time trying to remember his password than actually doing the work."

"Graham was always known to have a good story to tell and when he combined these with his dad jokes ... Not much work got done those nights."

Finally, Graham always showed interest in the other members and their wellbeing.

A sign of his commitment and dedication to the SES was the fact that even during treatment he still managed to attend the unit every 2-3 weeks for a chat and to check up on myself and Tony Harb, his manager.

He will be greatly missed as member, a gentleman and a friend.

**David Niven**  
Unit Commander  
Bankstown Unit

## Dapto Unit Sandbag Filling Stations

**A**s we are head into the warmer months, we at the Dapto Unit are contemplating and discussing ways in which we can improve our response and execution during the extreme weather systems which brings "East Coast" lows to our southern region. For us in particular, parts of the Illawarra suffer from flash floods during these times. As a result of these systems we receive many requests for sandbags. The Dapto Unit is a relatively small Unit and we need all hands-on deck during these times to work on storm related RFA's. Our Unit Commander came up with an idea of having of Sandbag Filling Stations near well-known flood hotspots.

The idea of these filling stations is to supply the community with

the resources (sandbags and sand) needed to fill their own sandbags in the event of their property being inundated with water.

To establish appropriate governance, risk control, supervision and accountability of the resources we approached various Community Organisations to determine if they had members who would assist us in become "SES Spontaneous Volunteers".

We received replies from Dapto Lions Club and the Kanahooka Men's Shed, who each had members interested and happy to assist in this community initiative. We now have 14 people who are on standby and willing to assist when required.

These sandbag filling stations will operate when extreme weather

systems are forecast for a 2-3 hour period. Once notified of a weather system approaching, the Dapto Unit will organise delivery of all resources to the designated areas and activate the Spontaneous Volunteer roster.

This community initiative will ensure there are sandbags available to the community who need them, freeing up our Unit members to undertake other storm and flood related activities.

We will monitor the uptake and success of this initiative with the hope that if it is successful it may become a concept that other SES Units can utilise.

**Raelene Jones & Kirsty Emmett**  
Community Engagement Officers  
Dapto Unit

# Get to the chopper



**O**n the 10 August after assisting in Moruya with the South Coast Floods, Sapphire Coast Local Commander Michelle De Friskbom had the opportunity to be tasked as an air observer for an Intelligence gathering flight over the Shoalhaven. Michelle was well versed in the use of the Collector App which had been used extensively for door knocking data collection in the Bega Valley during the Black Summer Fires however, was told that she would be trialling a different App better suited for use in the air. After a quick call with Jamin, a Spatial Analyst from SHQ for some instructions, iPad in hand and Quick Capture downloaded, she was ready to go.

The NSW Rural Fire Service Firebird (HT201) deployed from Moruya with Careflight Pilot and Aircrew, Scott and Matt (who had plotted a course from the Lat and Longs received from the Flood Desk) and RFS Down the Wire Tech Bruce. Our mission was to capture data on isolated and inundated

properties across the Shoalhaven, this intel was then live fed directly to NSW SES Incident Management teams on the ground, allowing them to deploy critical resources where they were needed the most. After the initial fly over, a refuel at HMAS Albatross in Nowra, and a check on the intel gathered so far, a few additional points were added for the return journey.

The view from the air truly highlighted the vastness of the flooding and easily identified areas that required additional ground resources deployed. All in all, a very successful multiagency mission which demonstrated that intelligence gathering plays a vital role in major events and not only ensures the right resources are tasked appropriately, it also allows informed decision making for future planning.

**Michelle De Friskbom**  
Local Commander  
Sapphire Coast Cluster









# Ballina Unit

## Biggest Ever Search

### 1km line scours Brooms Head campground

**N**SW SES Ballina Unit recently assisted with a search for a missing camper in Brooms Head near Yamba, participating in the longest search line. Here are photos of the searchers, briefing and terrain. Many Units from across the Northern Zone attended. For some of our members who attended, it was their first land search and first time on a job as members! We're really proud of their efforts and commitment to NSW SES.

The five-day search was sparked after an elderly Coffs Harbour woman was last seen walking to the toilet block 100m from her campsite on the Tuesday. Her husband raised the alarm and emergency services including SES, RFS, National Parks and Wildlife, the rescue helicopter and Police Command have scoured the area up to five kilometres away in the search.

More than 60 people, including members of the local community took part in an extensive line search of the Lake Arragan campgrounds and surrounds as the search for a missing woman entered its fifth day.

On a video released by Coffs Clarence police from the briefing, a member of police rescue unit describes the search as one of the biggest single searches he's ever run, with the line stretched over one kilometre.

The search gained Australia-wide attention with the Australian Missing Persons Register Facebook page asking for help.

The Search was suspended 5 days later and Grafton police station officer-in-charge Chief Inspector Jo Reid said that they would continue to do all they could to keep the investigation at the forefront of people's minds.

Ms Jeffery is described as being of caucasian appearance, with a slim build and grey hair. She was wearing a red and pink top, woollen leggings, red shoes, and a beanie.

Police are appealing for any information related to the case, and urge the public to contact Crimestoppers.





# The 99th Koala

## Rescue and Resilience on Kangaroo Island

**D**uring the 2019-2020 devastating Bush fires, Kangaroo Island lost half of its koala population, with many more left injured and starving. The 99th Koala is the inspiring story of someone who dropped everything to go and help. When Kailas Wild – arborist by trade and conservationist at heart – heard that there were injured koalas on Kangaroo Island who could only be reached by a tree climber, he drove 1500 kilometres to volunteer.

Seven weeks later, he had crowdfunded \$65,000, rescued more than 100 koalas and had formed a special bond with a baby koala – Joey Kai. His social media posts gained tens of thousands of views and press attention around Australia and overseas.

The 99th Koala shares his experience, in words and pictures, and introduces us to some of the koalas of Kangaroo Island. Sometimes tragic, sometimes hopeful, Kai's story above all commemorates our unique wildlife, and demonstrates the power of one person trying to make a difference.

The 99th Koala takes readers through a very personal and emotional journey that is both heart-breaking and inspiring. These raw insights not only capture Kailas's experiences, they also reflect the emotions that most animal rescuers would have felt over the summer. No doubt, the experience has had a deep and profound impact on Kailas as it will on readers. The 99th Koala is also filled with amazing pictures that will really help readers understand the devastation caused by the fires and the often dangerous situations that Kailas (and his team) had to put themselves in to rescue koalas.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kailas Wild is a fellow NSW SES Volunteer, a climbing arborist, conservationist, wildlife rescuer and surrogate father to the orphaned koala Joey Kai. He lives in NSW.



----- “  
**‘At a time when many people have felt helpless to act against the immensity of the fires or the threat of climate change, Kai’s daily descriptions and videos of saving helpless animals have been a welcome dose of personal courage and deep humanity.’**  
 ----- ”

- ABC



The 99th Koala is available to purchase from all major book retailers

# WDO Course

## Casino Unit

**W**ith COVID restrictions slowly starting to ease and storm season slowly starting to approach, Casino Unit jumped at the opportunity recently to run a Storm & Water Damage Operations course. This is quite an intensive course run over 4 days and members have now learnt about sandbagging, pumping and water diversion, use of hand tools, how to work on a roof safely and so much more. Most of these members had just joined pre- and mid-COVID so a lot of their time had been mostly on Zoom and Teams meetings. They were keen to start some real hands on activities and all approached training with great enthusiasm and eager to learn new skills. Dealing with COVID restrictions and requirements is the new normal for everyone, so with a few little tweaks on distancing, sanitising equipment and catering we were able to safely and successfully complete this course.

With the knowledge and guidance of some great trainers we are proud to announce that Casino Unit now has another 5 members qualified at heights, and another 2 for ground crew. This equates to now 85% of our members are 'Storm' qualified. That is a great statistic to have as we understand that field work is not for everyone in the NSW SES.

Casino Unit Commander Karen Rea and Deputy Unit Commander Donna Lamont work closely together to ensure their members are afforded every opportunity to expand their skills and be a part of a warm friendly unit that welcomes everyone.

### Donna Lamont

Deputy Unit Commander  
Casino Unit











# Chainsaw Assessment

## Dorrigo Unit

**O**n Sunday the 8th of November 2020 a Level 1 chainsaw assessment was held at the quiet town of Dorrigo, NSW, roughly an hours drive inland of the city of Coffs Harbour along the beautiful Waterfall way.

Being assessed on the day were five members from Coffs Harbour SES unit, one member from Urunga SES unit and one member from Dorrigo SES unit. There were two course trainers from Bellingen and Dorrigo Units, an Assesor from the Dorrigo Unit and another member who assisted on the day.

Due to COVID-19 and other factors the course was organised for those that already had some experience with chainsaws (which also helped shorten the course to only a few weeks).

The day started at 0730 at Dorrigo SES unit to give the members being assessed a chance to use pole saws (outside of the course/assessment criteria). By 1200 Participants were transported to Dorrigo Golf club where the Assessment took place. Participants in groups of three were taken to do their assessments while the others were given the chance to practice their developing Chainsaw and teamwork skills.

The assessment required the Participants to understand the hazards of chainsaws, be able operate a chainsaw safely while making a step cut, plunge cut, angled cut and a straight cut, and then required them to clean and sharpen the chainsaws after use.

The assessment concluded at 1600 where all participants were given their Assessment results and comments from the trainers and Assessor.

The joint unit training and assessment gave great opportunity to learn from each other and to make new personal contacts with members from neighbouring units, I am personally looking forward to more joint unit training in the future and wish those that passed the chainsaw course a massive congratulations and look forward to working with you all in the field.

Thankyou to the Dorrigo Golf club for holding the Assessment at their venue and also to the Dorrigo Unit for providing Lunch to the participants on the day.

**Hayden Tarran**









Jessica Abbo from the Murwillimbah Unit using a portable radio to talk to the State Operations Centre during a boat support and training exercise on the Tweed River on 20 October 2020. Photo by Grant Frost.

# GRN expansion a big hit in Byron Tweed Cluster

**B**yron Tweed Cluster Local Commander Peter Mair is a fan of the Government Radio Network (GRN), also known as the Public Safety Network.

The GRN is a digital network that provides greater voice clarity over larger distances than analog Private Mobile Radio networks. It also enables central support from the NSW SES State Operations Centre, including emergency duress alert.

Peter's Units switched over to the GRN for the first time on 21 September 2020 to coincide with the Operational Communications Strategy (OCS) pilot program.

"I've really been looking forward to it," said Peter. "I've been actively involved in the project for a while and it has finally made it into my backyard!"

"Before we were operating on a single channel across the whole Byron

Tweed area. The GRN opens up a lot more repeater sites than we had in the past."

"When it gets busy, we can use other channels as there is a reserve pool which they can allocate down to a cluster, or even to a unit level, depending on the size of the operation."

For Peter and the Byron Tweed Cluster, the GRN is a completely new way of doing radio communications.

"With this new system the State Operations Centre can monitor our dispatch channel. It means increased safety for our people on the road because the channel is monitored 24/7."

The Stay Safe Keep Operational (SSKO) team, who are running the roll-out of the Operational Communications Strategy, are weaving the feedback from Peter's Units into

their roll-out plans for the rest of the state. They are also working closely with the NSW Telco Authority to monitor the usage of the GRN in the Byron Tweed Cluster.

"The NSW Telco Authority is expanding the GRN in the NSW SES Northern Zone from 28 Private Mobile Radio (PMR) sites to 79 GRN sites. Once complete, the GRN will cover 90% of the Zone and reduce the reliance on an ageing PMR network," explains Stephen McRobert, Director of Information Communications and Technology.

The Byron Tweed Cluster is the first of many Clusters that will transition to the GRN in the Northern Zone. Other clusters will follow this transition as more sites are activated by the NSW Telco Authority throughout 2021 and beyond.

The GRN expansion and the OCS are part of a suite of programs currently



“

**It means increased safety for our people on the road because the channel is monitored 24/7.**

”

underway to improve operational communications and Member safety. Delivered through the SSKO program, additional initiatives include the Cell on Wheels (CoW) and the Mobile Incident Command Centre (MICC).

Members can read more about these programs by visiting the SSKO Intranet on mySES:

[membersesnswgov.sharepoint.com/sites/mySES-SSKO](http://membersesnswgov.sharepoint.com/sites/mySES-SSKO)



A GRN tower in construction near Scone as part of the expansion of the GRN in the Northern Zone under the Critical Communications and Enhancement Program. Photo by NSW Telco Authority.

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# It is going to be a late night!

It is Monday evening, just on a quarter past seven and we had just finished our evening meal – lucky for me. The SES pager goes off for a road crash rescue call – male trapped, 4WD vehicle into a tree some 30kms north of Gilgandra on the Castlereagh Highway.

Whilst responding, to such an incident, there are some issues that one should be on heightened awareness of and thinking about –

- » team make up, skill mix and experience
- » safety of the team members – first priority
- » incident located on a part of the highway, remote from other resources. Back up rescue/medical resources > 60 minutes away
- » it is night time, dark - no street lights out there and it is just past a 'new moon' in the lunar cycle
- » the location is a portion of open highway with a speed limit of 110kmph
- » a clear, warm night. Hydration and heat stress can be an issue – a hazard which must be considered and monitored
- » getting the priorities and functions clear in one's mind – scene approach/assessment, what services are already on site...liaison with other services, the various functions like traffic safety, scene lighting, extrication, patient handling, assistance with emergency helicopter landing zone
- » communication availability back to the State Ops Centre e.g. GRN portable radio, GRN mobile radio (greater power over the portable radio) mobile telephone or satellite telephone
- » keeping an 'eye out' for the members – physical and mental fatigue

It took us around 20 minutes to get to the scene – a team of 6 x of us in 2 x vehicles. Three of us responded



**Above: the view of the crash scene (post release of the patient) from the top of the embankment from the roadway. The passenger's side of the vehicle was left mainly intact. Much of the vehicle debris and tree limbs had been moved away by this stage.**

in our GP vehicle (*Gilgandra 56*) and the main rescue truck (*Gilgandra 46*) arrives some five minutes after us. One member (non SRB accredited) is already on scene, living close to the scene and having travelled in his private vehicle.

I request two of our senior rescue operators, on arrival at the scene to proceed immediately to the vehicle and commence assessment and liaison with the NSW Ambulance paramedics on scene.

We selected an appropriate parking location for *Gilgandra 46* upon it's arrival – considering traffic safety, traffic flow, an escape path, the need for scene lighting and access to hydraulic spreading and cutting equipment. Once parked, we set about setting up scene lighting and meeting immediate traffic safety needs and the marking out of the location of our equipment dump.

The early assessment identified –

- » 1 x male patient, fully conscious
- » Badly trapped by the dash, firewall, both the 'A' and 'B' pillars and driver's door of the vehicle – lower legs and feet totally inaccessible
- » We were dealing with a larger 'mining/forestry/agricultural' style of 4WD vehicle – relatively strong construction with a full chassis.
- » The vehicle had hit a large tree, it is a high speed impact



- » Colliding with the front, driver's side corner of the vehicle. This caused major deformation of the driver's side of the vehicle along with major intrusion into the driver's compartment of the vehicle
- » The vehicle came to rest around 1.5m from the tree (a positive matter for us)
- » The vehicle was located some 15m from the road, on flat ground at the bottom of a 2m high steep embankment off the side of the road – significant trip/fall hazard
- » The surrounding grass is long and littered with tree limbs and vehicle parts – trip/fall hazards

On initial approach from the road side above, the passenger's side of the vehicle did not look that badly damaged. On closer examination, it was a totally different story on the driver's side.

Working closely with the responding NSW Ambulance paramedics, the extrication took around 90 minutes. The extrication process was physically demanding, technically challenging and mechanically, heavy going. The process involved –

- » vehicle stabilisation
- » patient protection/shielding
- » cutting of the steel roof rack & 2 x 'A' pillars
- » opening and removal of doors
- » a 'dash roll' on the driver's side
- » cutting of brake and clutch pedals





SES rescue operators the setting up of the hydraulic equipment for 'dash roll'



SES rescue operators are cutting the clutch and brake pedals.



The view of the driver's side of the vehicle showed the true extent of the damage to the vehicle as a result of the impact with the tree.



Lighting and assisting at the patient treatment area.

The removal of the driver's side 'B' pillar would have been nice but could not be achieved due to the location of the patient.

Whilst the extrication process was in progress, in consultation with NSW Police, SES team members also put in place, more extensive traffic management resources e.g. 'Traffic Accident Ahead' signage and e-flares, 1 km each side of the crash scene.

In consultation with the Ambulance Supervisor and Police, it was decided that the most appropriate location for the retrieval helicopter land zone, would be on the road way to the north of the scene. This would require the road to be blocked. Landing in the adjacent paddocks would have resulted greater risk (closer to trees) in crop damage and the need to cut boundary fences – we went with the roadway option.

The next issue was powerlines in the area. 1.5 km of the highways was searched with spotlights on both sides with the detection of 1 x powerline – running east to west (90° to the roadway). Advice was provided to the helicopter via radio and a police car, with beacons activated, was parked directly under this – as a marker.

A pyrotechnic flare was activated upon approach of the helicopter to indicate the preferred landing zone along with wind direction and strength.

Upon release, the patient was removed with the aid of an extrication board and moved up the embankment, to the ambulance stretcher, with the aid of a stokes litter. Further treatments were undertaken by the Ambulance Helicopter Retrieval doctor/paramedic prior to transport to the helicopter. This required the setting up of appropriate area lighting.

Upon being released from the crashed vehicle, the patient was moved, up the embankment, to an area on the roadway, with the aid of a stokes litter stretcher. At that location, additional assessment and stabilising treatments were conducted by the NSW Ambulance Helicopter doctor and paramedic. This required good quality, area lighting which was achieved by our Pelican brand, portable remote area lights – an excellent resource for this purpose. Our SES volunteers continue to assist in this area with patient handling.

#### Geoff Kiehne

Inspector/Unit Commander  
Gilgandra SES Unit

**Photography Authority – All photographs were taken, for training and review purposes. This was done so with full approval and knowledge of the immediate family and police, present on scene.**

# Shout out

**S**hout out to Griffith SES Unit Members (& dual members) Brad Palmer, Anthony Hatch, Jeremy Bradshaw, Peter Bill and Chris Pilon for their dedication and commitment to their unit and members!

"I was hoping to let you know about some amazing people who have been guiding our new recruits (me included!) through a fairly rigorous and tightly packed training schedule over the last few months.

Brad Palmer, Anthony Hatch, Jeremy Bradshaw, Peter Bill and Chris Pilon are our seniors and have given up time with their families and even sacrificed work hours to ensure we are kept up to speed in a slew of training programs recently.

Because we trainees also have family and work commitments, these trainers have given up their own extra



time and effort to train us if we have to miss a session - they often come in and do a one on one for us if we have to miss one night, or they sacrifice their own training night to bring us in and show us something new.

I know this seems like what everyone must do, but these guys have

gone above and beyond for us.

This week, they have spent every single night out collecting vehicles that have been volunteered for the unit for our RCR courses coming up. They give us their own gear to use if we are still waiting on kit. They ensure we are happy and healthy and understand everything every step of the way.

When I joined this organisation, I assumed that because it was volunteer based, it would be one set day a week for training, as people wouldn't want to sacrifice their own lifestyle for others - but I could not possibly have been more wrong.

This organisation has given me a new life to lead outside of just being my boring old self, and without these men, I would never have found it. "

**Erin Sinclair**

## Emergency Organisations Day at Kempsey PCYC

**E**ight members of the Kempsey unit recently attended an Emergency Organisations information day at Kempsey PCYC. This day is held each year and is aimed at young people who are about to start learning to drive and those that recently got their license. After informative talks from each organisation and seeing what can happen to them if they are in an accident, it is hoped they make smart choices and drive safely in the future. Members of the Kempsey unit have attended this day since its inception. Regards Greg Gill Media and Community Engagement officer Kempsey SES







# Japan Earthquake and Tsunami 2011

## A tale of two schools

**O**n March 11th, 2011 at 14:46 an earthquake occurred off the east coast of Japan. At magnitude 9, it is one of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded. The shaking lasted roughly six minutes. Twenty minutes later, a powerful tsunami made landfall. In some areas, the tsunami washed almost ten kilometres inland. With peak wave heights of between 10 to 14 metres, the tsunami repeatedly inundated communities causing wide-spread destruction and loss of life. According to the United States Geological Survey, the earthquake was so powerful that

it shifted the main island of Japan - Honshu - roughly 2.4 meters east of its original position.

The human cost of the disaster was truly tragic. Eighteen and a half thousand people were killed as a result of the earthquake and tsunami. A vast majority of the deaths (up to 90%) were due to drowning. Further, 50% of those who died were over the age of 65. To this day, 3000 people are still reported as missing. The March 11th disaster has been labelled the 'world's costliest disaster' by the World Bank (the estimated cost to the Japanese economy was over US\$200 billion).

Japan is often referred to as the 'most prepared' country in the world when it comes to natural disasters. Despite this, the human, economic and social cost of the March 11th disaster was incredibly high. As such, examining this case study may provide vital insights in regards to future natural disaster management for emergency service agencies, staff and volunteers. Of particular interest is the planning and preparedness framework that has become common in natural disaster management.

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Tsunami waves breaching the sea-walls on March 11th. Japan has invested heavily in sea-walls to protect its coastal communities. The sea-walls are built to an average height of 10m. Once the sea-walls were breached, it slowed the water from draining back out to sea. Image credit; Mainichi Shimbun. Reproduced from War News Update, 2011.

## » continued from page 45

This case study will seek to firstly explore the general framework of planning and preparedness in Japan. It will then focus on two Japanese schools - Okawa Elementary School and Kamaishi East Junior High School - and their response to the March 11th disaster. Finally, this case study seeks to examine and compare both the 'knowledge oriented' and 'attitude oriented' approaches to planning and preparedness and community engagement in the disaster risk reduction space.

## A HIGHLY PREPARED COUNTRY AND SOCIETY

Located on the junction of three major tectonic plates - the Eurasian, the Pacific and the Philippines, Japan has a long history of large and frequent natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides, cyclones and volcanic eruptions. Due to the exposure to such hazards, planning and preparedness has become second-nature in Japan. For example, since 1960, September 1st has been designated National Disaster Prevention Day in memory of the Great Kanto earthquake which occurred in 1923. On September 1st, everyone

from the Prime Minister, to business, teachers, students, emergency agencies and local communities are encouraged to plan, prepare, update emergency manuals and practise evacuation drills.

Natural disaster planning and preparedness is also embedded in the Japanese school curriculum from kindergarten through to high school and teachers practise evacuation drills frequently with their students. Japanese schools need to have robust planning and preparedness measures in place as 90% of schools in Japan are designated evacuation centers





for students, teachers, parents and members of the local community. It is often said that one of the safest places to be during a natural disaster is a Japanese school. Of the 18,500 people who died on March 11th, 351 were school-aged children (a large number of them died because they were not at school that day).

The Japanese government and local authorities have also invested heavily in infrastructure to protect vulnerable communities. New buildings, like those in Tokyo and Kyoto are built to strict earthquake and fire codes. Additionally, a network of sea-walls (with an average

height of 10 metres) have been built to protect coastal communities against tsunamis. The largest sea-wall was built across the channel in the port city of Kamaishi. This sea-wall measured 1.4 km in length (made in two sections 660 m and 770 m in length) and stood in water 63 metres deep. It took three decades to complete at an estimated cost of £1.1 billion.

Underpinning this high level of preparedness is a very sophisticated detection network that operates across Japan. This network has a large number of State owned seismic devices (for detecting earthquakes

and volcanic eruptions) that are supplemented by devices that are privately owned by businesses. The privately owned devices help to overcome any 'blind spots' in the network. They also provide businesses with advance warnings to allow for shut-down protocols to be initiated as early as possible. This helps to minimise damage and protect staff and members of the public. The Shinkansen (bullet-train), for example, can be automatically slowed down in the event of large-scale earthquakes.

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The tsunami was so powerful that it washed debris up to 10 km inshore. At places, the peak wave was as high as a two-storey building. Here, the tsunami deposited a ferry on top of a building. Image credit; Asahi Shimbun. Reproduced from The Sunday Times (2012). <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/million-victims-from-next-tsunami-japan-disaster-experts-warn-gc3tx7vpw8s>

## » continued from page 47

Further, a series of tidal gauges have been deployed off the coast of Japan to provide warnings against approaching tsunamis round out the natural disaster surveillance network. Both the State and private devices feed information to the Japanese Meteorological Agency (JMA) which is responsible for issuing alerts, warnings and evacuation orders when seismic activity (above a certain threshold) is detected. Due to Japan's high level of geological activity, the computer algorithms used by the

JMA needs to be accurate and fast enough to mitigate against false warnings.

In the event of a natural disaster, there are a number of different ways in which the authorities can issue alerts, warnings and evacuation orders to at-risk communities. The JMA can send notifications within 60 seconds of a confirmed event such as an earthquake directly to special computers in schools and community centres. Warnings are also broadcast over loud-speakers which have been installed in public spaces such as tall buildings, parks and beaches. In many areas, volunteers

and local officials have access to cars mounted with loud-speakers to help broadcast warnings. Complementing the loud-speakers are SMS push notifications that JMA can send to every phone within an at-risk area. Further, the national broadcaster NHK as well as other media agencies are required by law, under the Meteorological Services Act (1952), to issue alerts and warnings to their audience. Many of the television and radio broadcasts are done in multiple languages to ensure that as many people as possible receive these warnings.





### A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS Okawa Elementary School

When the earthquake occurred at 14:46, students at Okawa Elementary School (OES) were getting ready to finish for the day. As soon as the shaking started, the teachers activated their emergency training and ushered the students under their desks. However, routine rapidly gave way to panic and then terror as soon as the students and teachers realised that this earthquake was different. The shaking lasted longer than normal and seemed to gain strength the longer the earth shook.

When the shaking finally stopped, the teachers escorted the students out onto the school grounds as per their training. It is far safer to be outside after an earthquake in case of aftershocks. On March 11th, aftershocks were recorded at 14:51, 14:54, 14:55, 14:58, 15:03, 15:06 and 15:12. While outside, the students were lined up and their names checked off by their respective teachers as per the emergency protocols.

At 14:49, the JMA issued the first tsunami warnings for the north eastern coast of Japan, including prefecture where OES is located. "Super-tsunami

imminent; Evacuate! Evacuate!" could be heard broadcast throughout the local area over the loud-speakers (both from buildings and vehicles). The next part of the story has been pieced together from interviews with students, teachers, parents and locals months and years after the March 11th disaster. Specifically, what happened in the time (approximately 51 minutes) between the students and teachers evacuating to the school grounds and the tsunami reaching the school.

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Evidence suggests that as the students and teachers stood out in the open, the teachers started to consult their school manual, referred to as The Education Plan on next steps. The Education Plan is a national template that is provided to all schools across Japan and is adapted to the local context and regularly updated. Among other things, The Education Plan acts as the emergency manual for schools and sets out appropriate protocols for steps to follow during a natural disaster. The OES manual stated;

*“Primary evacuation place; school grounds. Secondary evacuation place in case of tsunami; vacant land near school or park etc”*

While the teachers consulted and debated the vague instructions for ‘secondary evacuation’ in The Education Plan, a few students got scared and ran up the hill immediately behind their school to get to higher ground. Years of evacuation drills and the knowledge of natural disasters had taught the students that a tsunami was highly likely after a powerful earthquake. This had been confirmed by the warnings broadcast through the loud-speakers and by the parents and locals who had converged at the school to seek shelter and collect their children.

However, the run-away students were asked to return to the main group by their teachers who then returned to their debate. Several other factors made it incredibly difficult for the teachers to decide the next best steps. Some believed that the school was safe as it was far enough from the coast to be out of the reach of the tsunami. Local hazard maps did not help with the decision-making process. The maps showed that the school was located in a safe area. Others pointed to the fact that there had been an earthquake two days prior – a magnitude 7.2 – and that there had been no large-scale tsunami. They also argued that the hill immediately behind the school may be too dangerous for the students to climb in the snowy dark conditions. This was despite the fact that the students had climbed the hill many times before to forage in the pine groves as part of their regular classes.



**A clock that was found inside one of the classrooms on the second floor at Okawa Elementary School. It shows the precise moment the school was struck by the tsunami. This was a crucial piece of evidence that prompted the investigation into what went on in the 51 minutes between the earthquake and the tsunami on March 11th.**

**Image credit; Alamy. Reproduced from The Guardian 2017.**

**<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/24/the-school-beneath-the-wave-the-unimaginable-tragedy-of-japans-tsunami>**



**Okawa Elementary School that was devastated by the tsunami. Note the hill immediately behind the school where the children could have easily evacuated to for safety. It would have taken the group less than five minutes to climb to the top of the hill.**

**Image credit; Carsten Knoche. Reproduced from Flickr 2011. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/carstenknoche/5876774520/in/photostream/>**

The decision-making process and the chain of command was further complicated by the members of the local community. Community elders, mostly older men, pointed out that historically, a tsunami had never reached the location where OES was located. Their involvement reflected an undercurrent of cultural norms where the concerns of parents who had arrived to collect their kids, predominantly mothers who had heard the warnings on the car radio were ignored by the older men.

Eventually, when the decision was made to evacuate. However, it was in the wrong direction. Instead of

evacuating up the hill behind the school and away from the tsunami (a climb that would have taken less than five minutes to complete), the group headed towards a car park located next to the Kitakami River. By now, the tsunami had surged up the river, gaining speed as the river funnelled the rushing mass of water. Sadly, by the time the teachers and students realised their mistake, it was too late. They were swallowed by the raging tsunami.

Seventy-four students and ten teachers perished that day (there were 78 students and 11 teachers at school that day), largely due to a vague





**This photo was taken on March 11th. It shows students from Kamaishi assisting younger students as well as adults to evacuate to higher ground after deciding that the aged care facility (initial evacuation site) was not safe enough. Image credit; Unknown 2011. Reproduced from Katada (date unknown). [https://www.jst.go.jp/ristex/en/e\\_example/example.html](https://www.jst.go.jp/ristex/en/e_example/example.html)**

evacuation manual, the time that was wasted in decision making, a messy chain of command and trust in local hazard maps. The tragedy at OES stands in stark contrast to the 'miracle' of Kamaishi East Junior High School (KEJHS).

### **The miracle of Kamaishi**

Just like the students at OES, the students and teachers at KEJHS sheltered under their desks during the earthquake. When the shaking stopped, the students and teachers began to assemble outside. By now, the JMA had started to issue its tsunami warnings through the different channels. As the warning was being broadcast at KEJHS, the school's loud-speakers failed due to a power-outage. Regardless, the students at KEJHS evacuated themselves as they had practised as part of their planning and preparedness measures. The difference was that the teachers did not stop to consult their Education Plan.

As the high school students evacuated to higher ground, they encouraged everyone around them to do the same. Across the road, teachers and students at Unosumai Elementary School (UES) who had initially taken

shelter on the third floor to escape the tsunami also evacuated with the high school students. The designated evacuation site was an aged care facility up the hill from both schools.

When the evacuees reached the aged care facility, the high school students noticed that the site was not safe. The tsunami could be seen surging up the hill towards them and the earthquake had caused a landslide near the evacuation site (which was at risk from further aftershocks). Based on their safety assessment, the high school students encouraged everyone to evacuate once more to another location. Along the way, the older students assisted people from the aged care facility and a nursery school to reach the new, safer location.

Further, many of the school aged children who were not at school on March 11th also managed to save themselves and their family members. Of the 3000 school-aged children in Kamaishi that day, only five died. Many people believe that University Professor Toshitaka Katada was responsible for laying the foundation for this 'miracle'. Through his research, Professor Katada has found that when it came to disaster response, many people were relying

more and more on local and State agencies, rather than on trusting their own judgement. Further, he found that children were more likely to evacuate during natural disasters if an adult member of the family was present and willing to evacuate.

Professor Katada's work has led him to believe that the long-standing 'knowledge oriented' approach to natural disaster planning and preparedness, such as increased community information about local hazards and hazard maps might actually be unhelpful. He argues that while these resources serve as good engagement tools, they may also be underpinned by a set of assumptions that is eventually proved false and could thus be detrimental to the community. He argues that there needs to be a shift towards an 'attitude oriented' approach to disaster planning and preparedness. This attitude oriented shift is based three principles (as championed by the Professor);

1. Do not trust the experts, evacuation maps or warnings
2. Adapt to the situation
3. Take initiative

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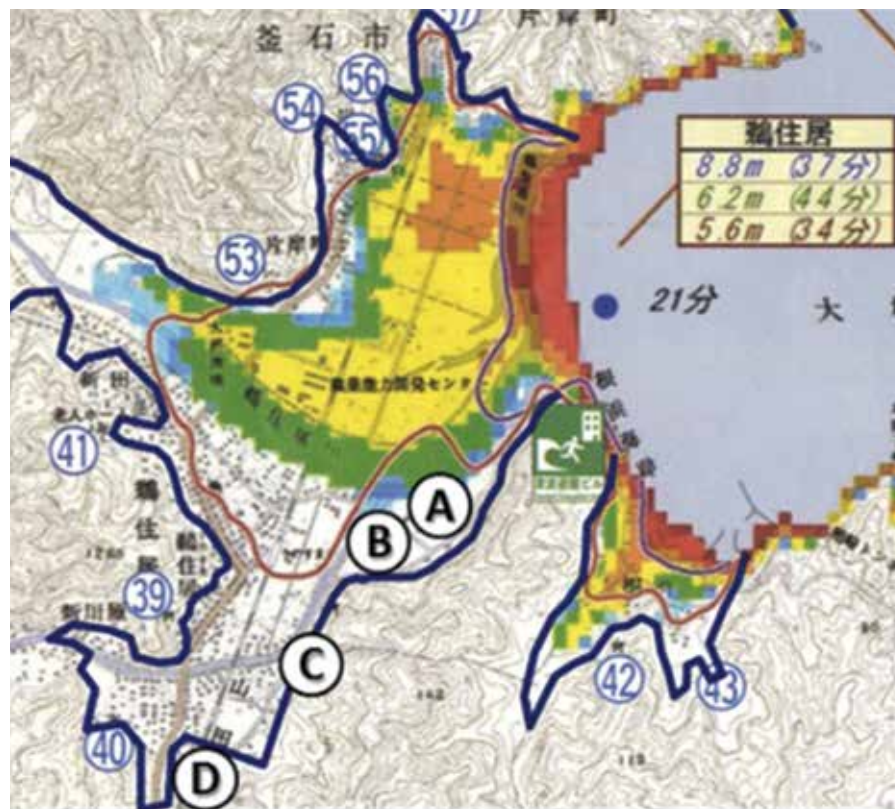
KEJHS and UES are both located roughly 1km from Otsuchi Bay. Kamaishi and Otsuchi Bay were both protected by the world's largest sea-wall. Further, hazard maps available at the time indicated that both schools were beyond the reach of a tsunami. Had the students trusted the hazard map and the biggest sea-wall in the world, they would most likely have perished on March 11th. The sea-wall failed as soon as the first tsunami wave struck it and the hazard map that had been prepared by local authorities was based on the Meiji Sanriku tsunami which occurred in 1896.

Rather, the students trusted their own instincts, evacuated to a safe area outside of their school and encouraged members of their own community to head to as high ground as possible. Inspired by the actions of the students of KEJHS, schools across Japan have started to adopt more of an 'attitude oriented' approach to disaster planning and preparedness.

## CONCLUSION

Japan is one of the most geologically active countries in the world. Earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, landslides and cyclones are all part of the nation's identity and are ingrained into its culture. As such, Japan is considered the most 'prepared country and society' in the world. However, despite the high level of community vigilance towards natural disasters, the human and economic cost of the March 11th disaster was staggering. Two days prior to March 11th a magnitude 7.2 earthquake occurred off the east coast of Japan and caused minor disruption to local communities. On that day, the students of Okawa Elementary School activated their emergency plan and returned to class when it was safe to do. The 7.2 earthquake did not cause a large-scale tsunami and communities along the coast remained safe behind their 10 metre high sea-walls.

The March 11th disaster resulted in a re-examination of the high level of planning and preparedness that has been adopted throughout Japan. On that day, 90% of the sea-walls failed (they had been designed based on the 1896 Meiji Shinriku



**Hazard map of the port city of Kamaishi. A = Kamaishi East Junior High School, B = Unosumai Elementary School, C = first evacuation site, D = second evacuation site. Circled blue numbers = designated evacuation sites. Red line = extent of inundation by last tsunami. Blue line = extent of inundation on March 11th. Image credit; unknown. Reproduced from Katada and Kanai, 2016.**

tsunami) and so did much of the early warning systems as power went out and buildings collapsed. Communication channels such as SMS push notification systems became flooded with people calling and texting loved ones immediately after the large earthquake. This delayed updated safety information from being relayed by authorities to affected communities. In some instances, people simply did not believe that a tsunami would follow as there was no past history of tsunami where they and generations of their family members had lived. Further, despite having the most sophisticated detection devices in the world, the JMA was also criticised for issuing incorrect tsunami warnings (the waves were higher than JMA predictions) which added to the false sense of security.

March 11th also calls into question the 'knowledge oriented' approach to planning and preparedness that is common among emergency service agencies. As this case study shows, access to a high level of information, a very sophisticated detection and early warning network and repeated evacuation drills failed to protect

the lives of the students at Okawa Elementary School. By contrast, the students from Kamaishi East Junior High School not only survived, but also saved the lives of people around them. Largely, this was because they were taught to disregard warnings, maps and manuals and to simply trust their instincts. Simply put, instinct or an 'attitude oriented' approach to natural disasters saved their lives and the lives of those around them. This so-called Kamaishi miracle is now inspiring schools and local agencies in Japan to adopt new approaches to their emergency protocols to help prepare for the next big event.

**Hasmukh Chand**

I would like to thank Philip Huynh, Peter Foster, Julie Powell and Isabel Cornes for their help in proof-reading this submission. I hope that it inspires discussions within Units about planning, preparedness and community engagement. If you have any comments or feedback, feel free to email me: hasmukh.chand@member.ses.nsw.gov.au



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