

The official journal of the NSW SES Volunteers Association

the

# Volunteer

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~~DROUGHT~~

~~BUSH FIRES~~

~~FLOODS~~

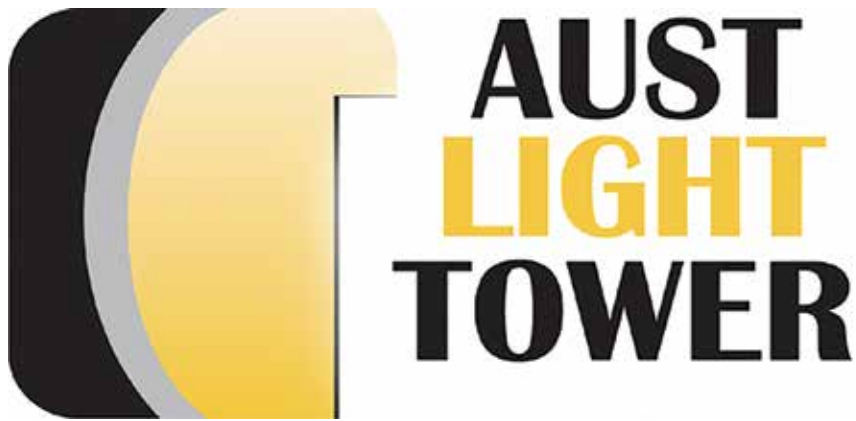
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# Important Message from the Board Of Directors

**C** OVID-19, floods and bushfires have created an unsettled and at times, scary world for us to live in.

Please be assured, that regardless of what may be thrown at us as a society, the NSW SES Volunteers Association will continue to support our members.

We anticipate that there will continue to be a need for us to evolve and come up with innovative ways to help our people – much like may of the

businesses you either run or work for.

We have trialled our own business continuity plans in the event we need to lock down, and with a small team working in the office, there have been measures put in place to manage social distancing and the event of a potential positive reading for COVID-19.

Mental Health and your personal wellness is our focus. The office remains able to be contacted, and the Board are also available if you need to

talk, seek advice on assistance or locate services.

We are all in this together, and even with rapidly changing situations, we will communicate with you if anything about the way we do business changes.

We must acknowledge the ongoing of support of our donors, whose ongoing help makes everything we do possible.

More than ever, look after each other and yourselves and get in touch if you need to.

## NSW Volunteers Association Members Database

If you need to update your details please contact the office at [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au) or call on **1300 073 782**.





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**The NSW Government has invested \$56.4 million to provide the SES with 270 vehicles, 124 marine vessels and 95 storm trailers over four years to support communities in times of crisis.**



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

**W**e've had an exceptionally busy start to the year with New South Wales facing an unprecedented bushfire and summer storm season. The 'Black Summer' broke Australia's heart, with twenty-five tragic fatalities, more than two thousands homes destroyed, and more than five million hectares burnt in NSW alone.

Close to 3000 of you were involved during the bushfire crisis contributing thousands of hours to support the Rural Fire Service. This involved a range of tasks including logistical support, chainsaw work, communications and community liaison.

As always, the SES played an important role in our overall response. I would like to thank all of you for your dedication and commitment to supporting and protecting your local communities.

During the first two weeks of February, many areas on the east coast of New South Wales received heavy

and continuous rain, extinguishing the fires but causing new problems,

391.6 millimetres of rain fell over the four days in Sydney, more than three times the February average. Flooding was extensive and power supply, trains, ferries and road transport were disrupted.

Once again, your dedication to helping others provided relief to thousands of residents.

Overall, the NSW SES completed a staggering 27270 jobs across NSW since the 1st January 2020.

The NSW Government has invested \$56.4 million to provide the SES with 270 vehicles, 124 marine vessels and 95 storm trailers over four years to support communities in times of crisis.

You all play a crucial role in keeping the community safe and we have to make sure your vehicles are up-to-date with the latest technology to provide effective and efficient capability during emergencies

One of these vehicles used widely in the north and south of the state during the bushfire crisis was the Cell on Wheels otherwise known as 'CoW'.

The CoW enhanced frontline worker safety by providing radio communications where there was no coverage resulting from damage to crucial infrastructure.

It was created based on key learnings from a number of incidents that identified the challenges associated with providing temporary emergency communications in difficult terrain and remote locations.

With the winter storm season fast approaching, I know you will all be busy training and helping prepare communities for the months ahead. Please take care of yourselves and loved ones during this time – your contributions will be invaluable.

Thank you all for your continued dedication to keeping New South Wales a safe and resilient state.



**President Kim Davis and Vice President Shannon Crofton with the Minister early this month**



It has been a hectic start to the new year, like our fellow volunteers the staff here at the VA have also worked continuously since the bushfire crisis began last year with no time off. We have had staff from the VA deployed at bushfires alongside our fellow volunteers, working in the office and also out on the road ensuring our members needs were responded to and they were supported at all times.

While the bushfire crisis calmed down we faced a new crisis which was the storm and flood events that impacted many communities recently, at which we are still recovering from. Our hero volunteers have spent hundreds of hours committed to helping keep their communities safe during these events and have been there every step of the way in the recovery process and for that we are extremely thankful for.

We have had some amazing members who organised donations for the VA (over 6.5 tonnes!) which have been packaged and distributed to our volunteers and units affected by the events. A huge thankyou to everyone who has helped in this process, it is truly appreciated! If you or any volunteer you know are doing it tough please contact the office so we can assist.

Although it is a small gesture, the VA has distributed hydration packs, t-shirts, hats and drink bottles from our Eat Sleep Respond range and Paddy dolls and coffee cups to our members who were deployed during these times. We also started a 'Nominate a Fire Champion' campaign and have received a huge response of nominations for our outstanding SES Volunteers – nominees have been sent a special thankyou gift and certificate from the VA.

With the recent flood and storm events we extended the campaign to 'Nominate a Storm and Flood Champion' as well. If you would like to nominate a volunteer who inspired you during these times jump online and nominate at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NSWSesVANominateAChampion>

I would like to take the opportunity to welcome all our new members who have joined the Association in the New Year. To keep up to date on what's happening at the VA check out our website and Facebook page which



Some members in our Eat Sleep Respond merch.

are updated frequently. We also have our NSW SES Volunteers Association Member Benefits Page on Facebook where you have access to exclusive member benefits, discounts and competitions. (We will be merging this information across to our website soon for those that aren't on social media to access). Our eNewsletter is sent out to our members each month to let you know the latest news and what the VA has been up to (they are also available to view on our website).

Our Eat Sleep Respond range of merchandise has been a big hit. Thankyou to all our members who have sent in pictures wearing our shirts and trucker caps, they look great! We have added new colours to our trucker hat range and now have navy hoodies available too. Items can be purchased from our online shop at [www.nswsesva.org.au/shop](http://www.nswsesva.org.au/shop)

To acknowledge the bravery and selflessness of Australia's volunteer first responders during





**Royal Thankyou Cruise – Royal Caribbean. Pics sent in from some of our members Enjoying the cruise.**

the recent bushfire crisis, Royal Caribbean donated up to 7,000, four-night cruise holidays on board their newest ship Spectrum of the Seas. A number of our NSW SES volunteers were fortunate to get tickets and sail on these amazing cruises and the feedback is outstanding!

**Thankyou to Royal Caribbean for supporting the NSW SES Volunteers and Emergency First Responders!**



Please note that due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the restrictions on gatherings and sporting events etc we will update you on the Football for Fires Exhibition Match which was planned for later this year at a later date. We will confirm whether the event will proceed once we have received advice from the Government and AHPPC.

The VA is here to assist our members during the good times and the hard times – if you or a fellow

member need assistance please contact the office on 1300 073 782 / E: [office@nswsesva.org.au](mailto:office@nswsesva.org.au)

Thankyou to all the Members who contributed to this edition of the magazine and sent in their articles and images. We value your input!

We have big plans for the year ahead and are excited about new opportunities and benefits for our members – watch this space. Stay safe !

**Carlee Maccoll**



# Bushfire Feature

## NSW SES Volunteers at various locations during the 2019 - 2020 Bushfire crisis

**T**he VA acknowledges the amazing courage and dedication of the NSW SES Volunteers who continually put their hand up and dedicate their time to protect our communities all year round and who worked tirelessly for months during the bushfire crisis. Some of these Volunteers travelled to other areas and regions to help protect the fire affected communities and continue to assist in the long recovery process hereafter.

There are a range of roles our Volunteers work in, whether it's on the frontline or those important behind the scenes roles ranging from communications and logistics to catering and support. Every single one of these roles is important and valued, and we recognise the contribution of all. You should all be very proud of the great work you do! Thankyou to all our members who sent in images of the great work and the amazing people who were involved over the last few months. We have included a small amount in this edition.

Keep up the great work and stay safe!

















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# Governor-General is Patron of Australasian Police & Emergency Services Games

**T**he Australasian Police & Emergency Services Games has gained support from one of our nation's highest ranking officials, Governor-General of Australia His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd).

Mr Hurley has accepted patronage of the Australia New Zealand Police Games Federation, which organises the biennial AP&ES Games.

The announcement comes as New South Wales prepares to host the 18th Australasian Police and Emergency Services Games, which will be held in Wollongong on 17-24 October 2020.

Mr Hurley said he was looking forward to this year's games and supporting the approximately 5,000 competitors which were anticipated.

"All Australians are proud of our police and emergency services personnel and grateful for the enormous contribution they make to our community," he said.

"That is why I am delighted to become Patron of the Australia New Zealand Police Games Federation. The games are as much about camaraderie as they are about competition and – most importantly – are an opportunity to highlight people who make an extraordinary contribution to our society."

The ANZ Police Games Federation will join such institutions as Commonwealth Games Australia, the Confederation of Australian Sport,



Australian Bravery Association and Australian Red Cross, for which the Governor-General is also Patron.

Chairman of the Australia and New Zealand Police Games Federation Inspector Dave Wilkins said he was delighted with the announcement.

"To have a Patron of the calibre of Australia's Governor-General is a tremendous boost to the profile of the Australasian Police and Emergency Services Games," Inspector Wilkins said.

"Our organisation's chief aim is to unite emergency services personnel across Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific and Mr Hurley's patronage will assist considerably in this endeavour. We look forward to working alongside Mr Hurley to promote this worthwhile cause."

The 2020 AP&ES Games is expected to attract an estimated 10,000 spectators, while AP&ES Games Sports Ambassadors include Australian swimming legend Dawn Fraser AC MBE and former Australian rugby union player Simon Poidevin.

AP&ES Chair NSW Police Force Deputy Commissioner Dave Hudson

APM said that, aside from the traditional Olympic events, the Games will include a range of competitions that maximise inclusion including darts, golf, surfing and crossfit.

"The Games are a great opportunity for all emergency services to collaborate, compete and show camaraderie," Mr Hudson said.

The Games will promote positive mental health in the emergency services, with official Games charities Beyond Blue, for which Mr Hurley is also Patron, and RU OK?

Beyond Blue's 2018 survey *Answering the Call* found that one in 2.5 emergency service employees and one in three volunteers have been diagnosed with a mental health condition in their life, compared to one in five of all adults in Australia.

The Games were first held in 1984 as the Australian National Police Games. From 1999, all full-time, retired and volunteer emergency services staff were also invited to compete.

For further information visit: [apandesgames.com.au](http://apandesgames.com.au)

# Award Recipients

**Congratulations to all the NSW SES Volunteers who have received awards in the New Year - It is fantastic seeing volunteers recognised for their dedication and community service.**



## **MALCOLM ROBAR**

### **Penrith Citizen of the Year**

Mr Malcolm Robar has dedicated his life to helping others in times of need as a member of the Australian Federal Police and as a volunteer for several organisations including the NSW State Emergency Service, NSW Rural Fire Service, and Marine Rescue NSW.

Malcolm Robar is a member of the NSW SES Metro Western Unit, and has worked with The Hills Unit on countless occasions in storms, floods and other events.

For the past 10 years, Malcolm has been a dedicated volunteer for organisations providing emergency responses to natural disasters including hail storms, floods, bushfires and other major events. He coordinated responses and worked to coordinate agencies to ensure people received help when they needed it the most.



## **WARREN TURNER**

### **Emergency Services Medal**

On Australia Day 2020, it was announced that Warren Turner, Local Commander of the Highlands Cluster SES had received an Emergency Services Medal (ESM).

Warren has been an active member of the New South Wales State Emergency Service for 15 years. During this time, Warren has served in several leading positions, consisting of: Team Leader, Rescue Officer, Training Coordinator, Incident Controller, Local Controller (Kiama and Wingecarribee) and Local Commander (The Highlands Cluster).

Both Units that Warren has led have been primary rescue units for General Land Rescue and Vertical Rescue operations, adding an extra degree of complexity to the leadership style required.

Warren's commitment to saving lives and protecting communities is outstanding.

Warren said, "It is truly an honour to receive this award, although it wouldn't be possible without the strong team of volunteers I work with and the support of NSW SES."

He added "We work together with the common goal of saving lives and protecting our community and it's a privilege to help people in their time of need."



## **ALLISON FLAXMAN**

### **Emergency Service Medal**

Congratulations to Metro Deputy Zone Commander Allison Flaxman who was awarded the Emergency Service Medal. Allison is responsible for taking care of those on the front line. Throughout her twenty-year career with the NSW State Emergency Service, Allison has been involved in managing numerous major emergencies across the state. **This year, she was awarded for her long and dedicated service with the Emergency Services Medal in the Australia Day 2020 Honours List.**

## **WARREN LENNON OAM**

### **Medal of Order of Australia**

## **ROBIN MILLER**

Deputy Unit Commander – Liverpool Plains

### **Liverpool Plains Emergency Services Community Award**

## **KAREN REA**

Unit Commander, Casino Unit  
**Richmond Valley Volunteer of the Year Award**

## **DONNA LAMONT**

Deputy Unit Commander, Casino Unit  
**Richmond Valley Volunteer of the Year Award**



# Shout Out to a Volunteer

## Shout out to the great efforts of one of our newer members at the Canterbury Unit

**Carol Debs ( 40-ish ) wife and mother to twins 17 yrs (boy and girl)**

**Works at** Canterbury-Bankstown Council as a Road Safety Education Officer

**Joined SES** March 2019 "Because I wanted to assist the community and learn new skills"

**Greatest fear** Forgetting my training when I need it

**Greatest achievement** Getting onto second storey roof (Don't like heights)

**What have you enjoyed most so far** Meeting new people and making friends. Pushing myself further then I thought I could.

**What is your goal in SES** To become a Chainsaw Operator "I don't have any previous experience with power tools"

**SES roles so far** Worked in Ops ( Beacon & radio ) and in the field during latest storm event. "Really opened my eyes to how busy we can get"

**Awards** Rookie of the Year 2019



## NSW SES Peer Support

The Peer Support team is available to all SES members and their families.

- » Peers are volunteers who are active within their own units and regions
- » Peers have been trained to be a listening ear when you or your family members need that ear
- » Peers have varying degrees of talents, skills and years of service within the NSW SES
- » Some of us are young; some of us are older and come from diverse backgrounds, race, cultures and experience

We are there to listen to whatever it is that is bothering you: it can be service related, family related or work related. We are a listening ear; there to talk to you and you can be assured it will remain confidential. Sometimes by just talking to someone you will be surprised at the clarity and sense of relief you will find.

Our Duty Officers in Peer Support are there to take calls from our members and their families. Like any other DO within the service – they are on call 24 hours a day 7 days a week – no time is a bad time to call

them. They are there to take calls at those times when you just need to talk to someone straight away.

We have peers, Chaplains and access to a psychologist depending on your needs.

Please ensure you have the **1800 626 800** number saved in your phones and in the phones of the ones you care about.

Watch this space over the next few publications on more of what we do and who we are. An EOI will be announced later for those of you who would be interested in training to become a Peer Supporter.

## CRITICAL INCIDENT SUPPORT PROGRAM

# 1800 626 800





# Auslan workshop

On Saturday 22nd February, Marrickville Unit members and the Auslan Liaison Team hosted a multi-hazard awareness and preparedness workshop for Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members. Coordinated by Community Engagement Officer Julie Powell, Marrickville Unit welcomed 30 participants to learn about risk awareness, safety messages, practical preparedness and resources. The workshop covered key messages common to all emergency services followed by agency-specific information for Fire and Rescue, RFS, SES and Red Cross.

The format also included 5 interactive stations:

- » Get Ready apps and resources for people who are deaf and hard of hearing
- » Australian Red Cross Rediplan – key documents and emergency kits
- » Staying safe in flood situations and sandbagging
- » Preparing your home – cleaning gutters, fixing leaks, preventing damage from storms
- » Basic First Aid/CPR

Participants engaged in practical activities aimed at building understanding and confidence to stay safe in floods, storm, fire and other



emergencies. Participants appreciated the opportunity to ask questions, to access appropriately targeted information, and to feel included and valued by emergency service organisations.

An attendee sent the following email after the workshop: *"Congratulations on what was an amazing effort from an incredible bunch of volunteers. I am so happy I attended. It*

*was a mammoth of a task but so valued for the Deaf community."*

THANK YOU Auslan Liaison Team, and members from Marrickville Unit, Ashfield-Leichhardt Unit, and Multicultural Capability Unit for your help throughout the day and your efforts to engage with marginalised communities to support resilience for everyone.

By Julie Powell and Mim Gardiner



# Mardi Gras Fair Day 2020

**N**ow in our third year, The City of Sydney Unit with the support of the NSW SES LGBTI and Allies Network recently hosted a stall Mardi Gras Fair Day.

“As a Unit we’re incredibly proud and privileged to represent the Service at such a significant and important event” Inspector Robert Cooper said. “We live in one of the most vibrant cities in the world and its fantastic to be able to celebrate the power and beauty of diversity, not only of our volunteers but the communities we serve” he further added.

Although the day was fun-filled, full of glitz, glamour, sparkles and sequins, there was also a serious message to the 50,000+ crowd, promoting the



NSW SES as an inclusive Service that welcomes and respects everybody regardless of gender, ethnic origin or cultural background., “Our strength as an Emergency Service is built on our diversity” Community Capability Manager, James Deering commented.

Joining the SES in showcasing the value of diversity, inclusion, and the breaking down of some of the remaining stereotype barriers that unfortunately still exist across some sections of the emergency services were NSWPf, FRNSW, ANSW and the ADF.





# NSW SES celebrates Mardi Gras 2020

**N**SW SES members from across the State joined Mardi Gras 2020 Festivities in February to celebrate our LGBTIQ+ members, our LGBTIQ+ allies, and our diverse community.

City of Sydney members hosted a fantastic community engagement stall at Mardi Gras Fair Day, while members from across the Service worked together to create and coordinate our Mardi Gras Parade entry in line with the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras 2020 theme: What Matters.

Televised live on SBS TV, our parade entry filled the streets with Orange Pride featuring Drag Queen Tempest Zest, a 12-member choreographed dance troupe, and our marching crew - all dancing up a storm led by Deputy Commissioner Operations, Daniel Austin.

Tempest Zest's dazzling appearance as a member of the NSW SES inspired confidence and courage among members across the

Service to feel safe being themselves, while simultaneously showcasing our inclusive approach to the wider community. Reflecting on her brave and purposeful decision to debut in this year's Mardi Gras, Tempest stated "her nature represents the power of a tempest, like the power we all have within us to bring about positive change and be a driving force for

solidarity, togetherness, inclusion and acceptance".

With over 400,000 people lining the parade route and cheering us on, 60 members representing the diversity of our Service publicly and joyfully demonstrated what matters to us:

» Standing up, standing out, standing with, and standing for LGBTIQ+ members.





## NSW SES CELEBRATES MARDI GRAS 2020



- » Individual diversity, shared humanity and community resilience
- » Members from all walks of life working together to weather all storms
- » Reflecting our diverse membership in everything we do - internally in the workplace and externally in the wider community.

Our participation in Mardi Gras every year for the past 12 years is a fantastic demonstration of our commitment to an inclusive service where everyone feels safe, valued and respected for who they are. Thank you to everyone behind the scenes and front of show, who made it happen. With creativity flowing, we've started planning for next year's Mardi Gras. Contact [diversityandinclusion@ses.nsw.gov.au](mailto:diversityandinclusion@ses.nsw.gov.au) if you want to be part of the MG 2021 Coordinating Crew.

**Dave Webber and Maggie Henderson**  
LGBTIQ+ and Allies Network Co-leads





# The Bungendore Fridge

**T**he fire season started south east of Bungendore on 26 November 2019. The North Black Range fire was triggered by lightning in Tallaganda National Park.

Over the next 8 weeks, NSW SES members from all over the state supported the NSW RFS as the lead combat agency in Lake George Zone. We liaised with the RFS at the Lake George Fire Control in Queanbeyan to help with logistics, answering phones, radio comms, and chainsaw teams.

The Hoopers, a local Bungendore family, decided to put a fridge out on the edge of the road. They stocked it with cold drinks and icy poles for RFS and SES volunteers as they drove to and from shifts on the fires.

Many grateful volunteers stopped to grab a cold drink or icy pole at all times of the day and night. They started showing their thanks by signing the fridge and taking photos with the fridge. As more and more people started posting these pictures on social media, the fridge became known as the 'Bungendore Fires Fridge'.



**The Hooper Family**

When the fires had died down, and the fridge was no longer needed, the Hoopers wanted to donate it to the local Bungendore RFS unit. The RFS suggested it should go to the National Museum of Australia, as a symbol of volunteering and helping others during the summer fires.

On 21 February 2020, the Bungendore Fires Fridge was escorted to the museum in a convoy of vehicles from NSW and ACT RFS, NSW and ACT SES, and Fire & Rescue NSW and ACT. Mix 106.3 set up a live broadcast and museum staff and many RFS and SES volunteers were there to cheer its arrival.

It was a positive note on which to end the long, hot summer of smoke and fires.

**Katina Manley**

Bungendore SES PIO





# FABS

**T**he NSW SES Commissioner has announced that the uniform and personal protective clothing provider will change from Stewart & Heaton to Australian Defence Apparel (ADA) in April this year. ADA currently provide uniforms for the Australian Defence Force and other agencies within the cluster, such as the NSW Rural Fire Service.

This change will include the implementation of a **new TAM Store (online ordering system)** in late June 2020. The new TAM Store will provide a better user experience through intuitive ordering screens and full integration with our SAP and ICT systems. It will bring a range of benefits to members such as automatic system access for new members, upgrade of access to increased uniform and PPC allocations for probationary members when they progress to full members, as well as automatic change of approvers when members act in different roles.

The available range will be the same as the previous provider and includes the Field Uniform (Oranges), the Official Uniform (Blues) and the

Corporate Uniform. Any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other items not in the current TAM Store remain separate to this change.

Uniform ordering will generally follow the same process and allow for orders to be shipped to the Unit's post office box or directly to member's home addresses. Whilst the new online ordering system is finalised, orders will still be able to be placed through completing a manual request form. It is important to note that NSW SES is required to transfer the remaining current stock from Stewart & Heaton to ADA, who will provide these clothing items prior to providing ADA manufactured clothing. It is expected that this process will occur over a period of a few months.

The expected schedule is as follows;

- » 31 March 2020 – Last date for exchanges to be received at Stewart & Heaton
- » 3 April 2020 – Last date for orders from TAM Store, noting these orders **need to be approved by close of business in order to be processed**.

- » 9 April 2020 – Last orders from the TAM Store will be dispatched & last date for returns to be received at Stewart & Heaton
  - » 20 April 2020 – Manual orders can be placed with the Procurement Team
  - » 1 May 2020 – New orders will commence with ADA
  - » Late June 2020 – New TAM Store will be available from ADA
- This will be a significant change, and NSW SES asks that members be supportive if difficulties occur during the transition. At this stage NSW SES is not looking to change the items provided but will commence an improvement program, starting with standardised sizing across the range of clothing items, in the next 12 months.

A frequently asked questions document regarding this change was recently emailed to all members. Further information will be provided over the coming weeks as changes are implemented. Please direct any specific enquiries through to [tamstore@ses.nsw.gov.au](mailto:tamstore@ses.nsw.gov.au).

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Volunteers Association

# Fires, Floats, Floods and Footy!



**A**s the sun set on the Sapphire Coast's training year for 2019, spirits were high, everyone was looking forward to a break and a "quiet" relaxing holiday period. We had been sending teams for months to support the fires in the north of the state as well as to our neighbouring Queanbeyan/Palerang Cluster. Nothing however could have prepared us for what was to come. To say we've been busy is the understatement of the decade,

we've been physically and emotionally exhausted, pushed to the absolute limit ... and then some. The Bega Valley featured on every news channel and radio station over the new year period, we didn't get the chance to celebrate the New Year, and for many sadly, it's one I'm sure they would rather forget.

On the 29th December, members from Bermagui and Bega were called to a land search at Barragga Bay, to the north of Tathra for a missing diver. SES teams as well as SLSNSW, the Westpac Rescue

helicopter and NSWPF were all on scene in a combined effort to locate the man. One of our SES teams located the diver, unfortunately it was not the outcome that the family were hoping for however, they were extremely grateful that he was found. As it turns out, this was the precursor for the difficult times that were just around the corner.

It's been extremely challenging for our tight knit community across the Bega Valley. Words and pictures don't even go close to accurately recount the





firestorms that tore through the Valley on New Years Eve. The devastating bushfires destroyed homes and took lives, many of our volunteers were significantly impacted. Some lost pastures and fences, beloved pets and livestock, some lost good friends and neighbours, others lost everything. We spent 40 hours in darkness during the height of the fires, and when we did see light it was an apocalyptic shade of orange and pink. The smoke was so bad it was difficult to breathe and see, evacuation centres were

full, and the heat was intense. Fires were burning to the North, West and South of the Valley and on January 9, as if the conditions weren't bad enough, one of the fire fighting helicopters ditched into Ben Boyd Dam. Throughout the entire event, Sapphire Coast Cluster members continued to support their community in the most professional and enthusiastic way, even those that had been impacted themselves.

With so many of our members impacted, the call went out to the NSW

SES Volunteers Association and they certainly delivered. They didn't just provide care packages for our impacted members, they also provided a bunch of great merchandise for ALL of our members who had been supporting the fire fighting efforts. They came armed with a listening ear and big hugs which we were all extremely grateful for. Two trips in as many weeks, we honestly cannot thank them enough for the work they did for our Cluster members.





We almost said no to Australia Day celebrations in the Valley, even though we had been planning on attending the Australia Day Float in Merimbula for the first time since January 2019! A unanimous decision was made, we needed to have some fun, so after attending the Official Ceremony in Bega, we headed to Merimbula with our IRB, two Ark Angels, a pink flamingo and a pineapple! Turns out it was just what the doctor ordered, so much fun including a fly over by three of the fire

fighting helicopters. We're already planning a bigger and better effort for next year! Sadly, our fun was short lived, we were back doorknocking residents a couple of days later as fire activity was expected to worsen once again.

We soon discovered that Mother Nature has a wicked sense of humour, a Severe Weather Warning was issued on February 5 for heavy rain, followed by a Flood Watch ... seriously? We quickly switched from a support role to the Combat Agency and started planning

in preparation for the rain that was forecast. Although the rain was most certainly welcomed and helped us out with the fires that were still burning, we would have preferred that amount of rain over a couple of weeks, not a couple of days! Sandbagging, flood rescues, resupplies to bushfire affected residents that were now cut off by flood waters, tarping and, you guessed it ... more chainsawing were some of the jobs that came out of this short lived flood event. Brogo Dam





prior to this event was sitting at 12 per cent capacity and within 48 hours was overspilling at 112 per cent. Many of our creeks were filled with sediment and soil that was washed down over fire affected landscapes which in turn compromised some of the Valley's drinking water. Lucky for us we still had the Army on hand to set up their water purification and desalination system. The Snowy Mountains Highway on the Brown Mountain was closed again, this time fire wasn't the issue rather a

landslip that caused two huge boulders to block the highway in both directions. Explosive experts were called in to remove the 30 ton and 80 ton rocks!

The EISS Super Sapphire Trial Tribute match between the Penrith Panthers and Parramatta Eels was played in Bega on February 29. In the days preceding this, the two clubs visited local communities and schools in a show of support and appreciation of the enormous efforts of the emergency service organisations throughout the

summer. Representatives from each of the Emergency Services joined NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian, Andrew Constance MP, RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and CEO of the NRL, Todd Greenburg on the field prior to the start of the match where they were thanked by the local community. There was also a fantastic line up of entertainment post-match, including Amy Shark as well as a great variety of local food vans. This was such a great opportunity to come together and share some good times,





enhance our sense of community and bring some much-needed dollars back to our struggling businesses.

As always, we try and look at the positives that have come out of these disasters. Who would have thought we would ever see Bushmasters rolling through the main streets of our Shire or have the opportunity to work alongside the Australian Army? We have had the pleasure of working with some fantastic OOA SES crews that we have welcomed

with open arms into our community including chainsaw crews, FR crews, Commanders and LO's. We've also strengthened the bond we have with our local Emergency Service Organisations and had the opportunity to work very closely with OOA NSWPF Officers. Some of our new and younger members have "come of age" and done an absolutely outstanding job, and as always there has been motivational leadership by Commanders and senior members of the Cluster. The recovery

process will be long, this we know, unfortunately we've been here before however we have demonstrated that we are an extremely resilient community and I know we will emerge from this stronger and even more prepared.

**Story: Michelle De Friskbom**

Pictures: Michelle De Friskbom, Rod Gould, BVSC, ADF, Bega District News, Neville Cowgill, Courtney McGuigan, Nicole Bray



# ProRescue Vanuatu

**T**he relationship between ProRescue and the NSW began with Gina Jones being in Vanuatu when we were kicking off ProRescue. Gina obviously saw merit in what we were trying to achieve, none of what has transpired over the past few years would've been possible if Gina had not got that ball rolling and remained a staunch supporter of ours on our journey.

Then the amazing Gina Jones organised for two trainers to come to Vanuatu and David King and Amanda Vidler were selected. This happened in early 2015 right before we were smashed by Cyclone Pam. This week of training centred around Road Crash Rescue, skills that we learnt during this week were invaluable and have been of real value (as in when it gets real) time after time.

From then until now, if we've had a technical question to do with training, if we've encountered something that we think we could've done better, through a simple Facebook message or email, David, Amanda and another obvious supporter of Rescue, Robbie Langdon, have always been there to assist and soon joining that group whom is always there to assist us in any way that he can is Paul McQueen whom we would meet in the next big event for ProRescue and all Emergency Services in Vanuatu was the Rotary Funded Vanuatu Emergency & Disaster Preparedness Training Team. David King would return wearing his RFS hat where they would spend a whole month with us.

The courses included:

1. Introduction to Basic Rescue
2. Basic Road Accident Rescue
3. Complex Road Accident Rescue
4. Inland Water Rescue
5. Urban Search & Rescue First Responder
6. Basic Life Support
7. Industrial & Domestic Rescue
8. Vertical Rescue
9. Basic Firefighting Techniques
10. Firefighting Pump Operations
11. Vehicle Fire Fighting
12. Firefighting Pre-Incident Planning
13. Police Incident Scene Management



14. Mental Health
15. Basic Training Techniques
16. Leadership.

These courses were attended by the 5 Emergency Service Agencies here in Vanuatu, The Vanuatu Police Force TRG and Traffic Police, Port Vila Municipality Wardens, ProMedical Paramedics, ProRescue & the VMF Fire Service. Some of these courses were tailored to the agencies own specific needs but in total throughout the 16 courses more than 60 Individual Certificates were handed out!

I was then invited to come across to spend some time with the NSW SES. It started with attending NSW SES State Disaster Rescue Competition in Bathurst. In the time there I did Vertical Rescue training with the Kiama SES and had a tour of their unit. Paul organised for Marine Rescue and the SES to do some water rescue training. I visited Hawksbury and Fairfield SES units and

finally joined SES members on their flood course at Penrith.

Our last involvement with the NSW SES was when four members of ProRescue travelled to NSW to observe the ARRO Challenge. In true SES fashion we put up in an SES members house Gavin Arnold when we were in Dubbo. We were also lucky enough to visit Hawkesbury SES for an introduction into Large Animal Rescue with David King and we were a part of an exercise at Marrickville SES.

This year we hope to get two trainers over again from the SES to conduct a Vertical Rescue course.

**Troy Spann**  
ProRescue Leader

**The NSW SES Volunteers Association would like to Thank ProRescue Vanuatu for their kind Donation!**

# Shea Cullen

## Gosford's first female L3 Flood Rescue Technician



Cullen on Gosford's flood boat.

**S**hea Cullen has been at Gosford SES for 2 years, quickly becoming an important part of the team, attending many call outs and being selected for Gosford's State Disaster Rescue Challenge team— but 2020 brings even more challenges for Cullen. In January this year, she qualified as a L3 Flood Rescue Technician, the first female in Gosford Unit to do so.

'It never occurred to me that there were no female L3s at Gosford, I only realised when packing the flood vehicles, the group was all guys' Cullen says, and while she thinks plenty of females from Gosford could and would qualify, there were a lot of barriers to getting on the course, and she knows there's plenty of down sides to being an L3. 'The inevitability of walking in

sewage,' Cullen answers when asked about the negatives.

Cullen knew from day one at SES she wanted to be an L3 'I actually thought everyone in the SES was an L3, so I assumed I would too when I joined. I love swimming, and I'll swim in any water - no matter how cold, dark, or filled with sharks'... Or sewage apparently.

It's not all sharks and sewage, Cullen talks about her first flood rescue and her mateship with the other L3s 'My first flood rescue call, Pete (Evans, Field Operations Officer) and I were finishing a tarping job and he didn't miss a beat. He reassured the owners, and suddenly we're in the car, lights and sirens blaring. On scene Phil (Whitmore, Deputy Commander) and Ryan (McIntyre,

Deputy Team Leader) were set up ready to go with Kai (Darwin, Gosford Team Member) giving them a hand. They had one person already from the water in the back of their car, Phil and Ryan headed back out to rescue a second person. They'd just came back safely when we saw the first person heading back out into the water, completely undaunted. The look on Phil's face was priceless. It was hilarious, and demonstrated perfectly what the L3 course trainer said repeatedly, keeping these people occupied and out of the water is really valuable."

Cullen has gained a lot of experience in her first 2 months as an L3, more than most. She's attended flood rescues, medical evacuations, searches, and animal rescues. 'Rescuing





**Cullen clearing a roof.**

sheep looks as funny as it sounds, you can see it in the video of the first rescue – Yes, first rescue – ‘we weren’t aware yet how much these two sheep loved being rescued by the SES’ Apparently RSPCA officers were on scene to relocate them, but it seems the sheep liked swimming as much as Cullen does, the Gosford Unit ended up rescuing the same sleep three times.

‘Seriously, the same two sheep, three times?’ Cullen laughs at the memory of it ‘that’s one of the best things about being an L3, the entertainment value – I know Phil and Pete rescued an umbrella once.’

Its stories like those that bonds the L3 team at Gosford SES, and Cullen is clearly appreciative of the support and training they give her. When asked

about who inspires her, she speaks sincerely and names almost every person at the Unit. It’s heart-warming to hear her speaking so highly of the other volunteers, female and male, in ops or in the field. ‘Gosford has a great team of professionals who are incredibly generous sharing their skills.’

The SES is no stranger to women in important roles, out in the field or in operations, however Cullen has the honour of first L3 Flood Rescue Technician for Gosford Unit, narrowly beating a few others who weren’t able to snag a coveted L3 spot. Cullen’s advice is to always keep training.

‘The best training for anyone who wants to become a flood rescue operator is the rescue competition. They really make you think and apply



**Cullen assisting an underwater search.**



**Cullen being decontaminated by Fire and Rescue crews after completing a Medical evacuation from floodwaters.**

your SES skills to different rescue situations. A big part of flood rescue is *rescue*. Get on a team if you have the chance, or help out as a casualty.’

Cullen seems unfazed being the first female L3 at Gosford, she is just pleased to be able to do something to help her community. ‘Doing nothing drives me crazy, I want to be a part of fixing the situation’ Cullen has a last word of advice to women, and anyone, who wants to join the SES and work towards becoming an L3; ‘Have fun and enjoy what you’re doing. Find the humour and joy in having a great team of people around you. And don’t be afraid to have a go. If you’re feeling a bit uncomfortable, that’s probably where you need to be to learn new skills.’



# Port Macquarie SES Taskforce Lord Howe Island



**T**he Port Macquarie SES Taskforce team have returned after 4 days assisting Lord Howe Island's local SES unit clean up damage after ex Tropical Cyclone Uesi passed over the Island late last week. Most of the damage was caused from fallen trees and debris which blocked roads and access to many homes on the Island.

Wind gusts in excess of 155km/h were recorded on the island during the storm causing damage across the entire island. The velocity of the wind also caused tree branches to spear into the roofs or sides of homes, with 1 branch spearing through 3 different rooms in one house. A large Norfolk Pine also fell onto an unoccupied house crushing the roof completely.

Overall there were 65 requests for assistance on an island with less than 400 permanent residents. Five volunteer members of the Port Macquarie-Hastings SES Unit and four NSW Fire & Rescue personnel were deployed to Lord Howe Island to provide additional resources and support in the clean-up efforts. Tony Day (NSW SES Division Commander for the Mid North Coast) said "Support from the mainland is part of the



Emergency Management Plan and this was able to be enacted seamlessly to ensure a timely response. The NSW SES is committed to saving lives and protecting communities"

When the Port Macquarie SES team arrived on the Island their first task was to assess the damage, prioritise jobs and determine if any jobs needed to be referred to specialist arborists. Locals spontaneously volunteered and helped guide members from the Port Macquarie SES and NSW Fire and



Rescue teams around the island to show them the affected properties and help assess the impact of the damage.

The resilience shown by the local community in preparing for the storm and then in the recovery process was demonstrated by how the community came together to help each other clear roads and start the clean-up process. When asked to sum up his experience Alfred Portenschlager from the Port Macquarie SES said "It is a great feeling to help a community in need. The local





'Islanders' of Lord Howe Island were such warm and welcoming people. We were happy to be able to help make things a little bit safer for them again"

The SES team of qualified storm water damage specialists also had working at heights, general land rescue and vertical rescue qualifications. Katie Blake who was part of the SES task force said "We were fully equipped to support the response operations on the island and support the local Lord Howe Island SES Unit. It was great

experience with some challenging and interesting jobs. Lord Howe Island is such a beautiful place to be deployed and it was great to help the Island to get back to business as usual".

Kevin Sherwood (Port Macquarie SES Task Force Team Leader) said "After four days of intense work we were able to complete all 65 jobs, cutting up fallen trees & branches, tarping the roofs of damaged homes, or referring some jobs to the local arborist. I am proud of how well we worked together

with the local SES unit and Lord Howe Island Board to share resources and utilise our skilled operators to help in the recovery process."

After completing all their jobs, the Task Force Teams were invited to attend and participate in the Lord Howe Island 'Discovery Day' festivities on Monday 17th February. The Lord Howe Island Board decided to go ahead with the event, showing that Lord Howe Islanders are a resilient bunch. The event celebrates the Islands history and discovery in 1788 and the community celebrate by holding an annual sports night. The combined Lord Howe Island and Port Macquarie SES team had a great time competing and took out first prize in the Tunnel ball and Tug-O-War competitions. Leonie Stevenson from Port Macquarie SES said "It was a fun-filled night and great to see so many now familiar faces, coming together to celebrate less than a week after Uesi passed over the Island. It was a privilege to assist the Lord Howe Island Community in their time of need and an honour to work with such a positive-spirited community".

**Kathryn Blake**





# Each for Equal:

## Engaging Men & Women in Championing Gender Equality

**E**ach for Equal was the worldwide theme for International Women's Day (IWD) 2020.

To celebrate IWD 2020, a Lead & Learn Session was organised at State headquarters, with Zone offices and members from across the Service joining via Skype.

The Lead & Learn session was opened with a message from the Commissioner marking the day as a chance to promote the benefits of gender equality for everyone, to learn about actions we can take to counter bias and broaden perceptions, and to challenge our own mindsets and behaviours. The Commissioner also took the opportunity to launch the NSW SES Diversity & Inclusion Strategic Framework 2020-2025 which sets up an agency-wide governance structure to support diversity and inclusion as part of (i) workplace culture; (ii) operational readiness and service-delivery; and (iii) community engagement and resilience-building.

Following the Commissioner's opening, a panel of members – Mim Gardiner (Metro Capability Southern Unit Commander and Metro Community Capability Officer),

Deepa Krishnan (Marrickville Unit Volunteer), Amanda Vidler (NSW Police Rescue Team Leader and Lismore City Unit Volunteer) and Paul McQueen (Acting Senior Manager Training Exercise Planning and Delivery) - shared examples and impacts of workplace discrimination, sexism and stereotyping on lives and careers. They also shared ideas for positively promoting gender equality. Suggestions included being mindful of how we prioritise male and female applicants for training and other opportunities, mentoring women, understanding participation barriers affecting women, and the importance of flexible work options to enable and enhance inclusion. Mim summed up the panel discussion, noting "It's not just about diversity, it's about inclusion. We must make an effort to change if we want to and it's not easy. Everyone makes mistakes, but let's all be willing and try hard to change for the better."

The panel discussion was followed by Diversity Council Australia representative, Zach Ghirardello, presenting 'A Partnership Approach to Gender Equality'. Zach's presentation helped us shift thinking from seeing

gender equality as 'a women's issue' to seeing it as an issue that each of us influences – positively or negatively – every day. Zach shared 10 top tips for engaging men together with women in championing gender equality, and also shared advice on the importance of inclusive language in showing respect for all workplace members.

Feedback from attendees included the following:

"The session was fantastic, we had quite a diverse team of people who spoke about different issues. I wouldn't say that we reached a conclusion, but we've reached a stepping stone to pave a better future."

"I wanted to say how much we enjoyed being part of the IWD Lead and Learn session. We enjoyed trying to guess which member had done what in their past. Sadly we did not get them all correct."

Thank you to our panellists, speakers, and attendees who helped us celebrate International Women's Day 2020. Thanks too to members who sent photos striking the 'Each for Equal' pose!

**Sherryl Reddy**  
Diversity & Inclusion Officer





The IWD 2020 panel session included an ice-breaker inviting attendees to reflect on their own conscious and unconscious biases. We all have biases, we're all influenced by stereotypes and we all make snap judgements based on gender or other aspects of difference, when we first see or meet someone. Readers of this article can have a go at the activity – see if you can match each of the 5 facts below with each of the panellists (pictured left to right: Amanda, Deepa, Mim, Paul) plus Deputy Commissioner Daniel Austin, who facilitated the panel discussion.



### MATCH THE 5 FUN FACTS WITH THE PANELLISTS AND FACILITATOR:

1. I have been to all four points (extremities) of the compass and the geographical dead centre of the Australian Mainland
2. In a previous life I taught special needs kids for 10 years and once spent a month in the USA as an assistant coach to the Australian Women's Under-19 basketball team.
3. I won NSW Police Officer of the year and Regional Police Officer of the year in 2019
4. I once worked as an undertaker and have seen the human body in many forms
5. Many years ago, I was on the front page of every newspaper in Australia when I was trapped and injured in a caving accident. And...my fun facts don't stop there....in a past career, I used to manage the NSW aircraft operations of the Big-5 Banks ensuring delivery of cheques to/from the Reserve bank.

Answers: 1. Daniel Austin, 2. Paul McQueen, 3. Amanda Vidler, 4. Deepa Krishnan, 5. Mim Gardiner



# NSW SES Volunteers at recent Flood and Storm events

## STROUD UNIT

Members at the Stroud Unit performing a Flood Rescue of 2 adults, 3 small children and a dog from a house surrounded by floodwater on the morning of 9th February at Crawford River. Sandy, along with one of the Unit's Flood Techs Gary, went across in their Jabiru, which they launched next to the driveway of the property and successfully extracted the family and their dog across the swollen creek. To keep the children from being frightened Sandy asked them to help her sing "row row row your boat" which they did. Another example of the dedication and commitment to keeping our communities safe.



Penrith Flood Rescue Team retrieved puppies from a registered breeder isolated by flood water at Shanes Park.











# The Rock Unit Training Exercise

On the 5th of December 2019 Members of The Rock SES Unit were called to a single vehicle crash with two people trapped and injured. Unbeknownst to the Members of the Unit (except for two members who knew what was about to happen) this was a training exercise - set up with people in full makeup to make it look as realistic as possible.

At 7 pm the call came over that there was a MVA just out of town with all the members responding to the scene thinking it was a real job - even The Rock RFS left the station just before the SES to make the scene even more realistic. Once on scene, the members got to work to release the people trapped.

Great work by the SES members who were involved and a big thankyou to the The Rock RFS for your support.



# Gosford Flood Rescue

It's been a while since the Central Coast have needed the SES like they did in February. But as we know, that doesn't stop volunteers. The Central Coast SES have been working hard to maintain their skills, and importantly, their community connections. None more so than the flood rescue technicians.

Peter Evans, Flood Rescue technician and Head of Field Operations at Gosford Unit talked about the team's hours training closely with the Fire and Rescue crews. "We have a great relationship with Fire and Rescue NSW, we often have professional development workshops - flood rescue, storm damage, and working at heights – where we work together on scenarios and familiarise ourselves with the different capabilities and equipment. Often at flood rescues we'll see familiar faces, which makes working together easier." Evans said the relationship between all the emergency services was noticeable during the flood rescues. "It was great to turn up to flood rescues with FRNSW, NSWPF and other emergency services in attendance. It gives us all a wider range of training, experiences, and equipment with which to complete safe and successful rescues. I also think the fireies get a laugh out of hosing us down at the end as part of the decontamination duties."

The team in part attributes the amazing result from the recent storm event to the relationships they have fostered. And the result is amazing, over 50 flood rescues and evacuations, and over 1700 calls for SES assistance on the Central Coast were all attended to in a matter of days. Phil Whitmore, Flood Rescue technician and Deputy Commander of the Gosford Unit said local services worked as a team to help the community 'All agencies worked really well together, everyone seemed to know their role, for instance police assisted with roadblocks and keeping the public safe, but they didn't enter floodwaters – they waited for us'

Whitmore found other emergency services more than happy to help out,



**Central Coast Rescue Volunteers (VRA) responding to flood rescues and evacuations with SES volunteers.**



**SES volunteers responding alongside with Police officers.**



**Police and SES volunteers discuss road closures at the site of a flooded road.**

but looked to the SES as the combat agency, 'Fire and Rescue assisted with some flood rescues, they also gave us a strike team to help with aftermath, the RFS supplied multiple teams and liaison officers from Sydney and the Central Coast, I know the VRA have a very close relationship with Wyong unit and they helped with multiple flood rescues. We also worked with the Police, FACS, Ausgrid, and local council - What was

great was all agencies sought advice from SES on how they could help us complete our tasking.'

Well done to all the volunteers on the Central Coast, and across the state, for the efforts during this weather event, but also for all the time in between weather events put into training and preparing for these moments. As seen on the Central Coast, It's definitely paying off.



# Focus on the Menai Unit

**W**hilst Menai SES Unit may be one of the youngest in the NSW State Emergency Service it was borne out of a need within the Sutherland Shire to provide a more proactive approach to assisting our community.

Although officially opened in May 2018 the unit has been operating from our base since September 2017. The unit currently has 56 active members supporting our LGA alongside our sister teams within the Sutherland Shire Cluster, and the broader NSW community. This was very evident over the last few months during the major bushfire and storm events experienced in NSW.

The Shire Cluster is made up of four units including Cronulla, Heathcote, Sutherland and Menai. There is a very strong sense of camaraderie within the Cluster where we interact regularly on training, support during busy times and technical issues.

Since the beginning of summer this year and the significant bushfire events, almost every week Menai members were actively supporting the Rural Fire Service. Some examples include:

- » deployment of strike teams, in support of the RFS, to Lake Conjola felling trees and clearing roads for the public
- » manning the Bushfire Information Line (BFIL)
- » deployment of members at Glenn Innes, Ballina and Grafton to assist the RFS in their Bush fire support, communication and logistic teams
- » working closely with the SES VA and SES Moruya Unit to support recovery efforts through collection, provision and transport of donations, from toiletries to animal food and NSW SES Volunteers Association thank you packs.

Within the Sutherland Shire, we also have been busy protecting and helping our own community.

Our storm season started in November. Since then through to 25th February 2020, The Shire Cluster received 1,947 Requests for Assistance (RFAs) with more than 10 operational events, one lasting for 8 days straight.



This is in contrast to our 2019 annual total of around 1,200 RFAs, this has been a mammoth effort.

In the period of 20 to 24 January we received over 750 RFA's, through which time we received tremendous help from over 40 other SES units within the State, and numerous RFS and Fire and Rescue teams. This really demonstrates the strong "family" support existing both within the State Emergency Service, and across the other services.

Following the recent storms in early February Menai, together with other units in The Shire Cluster, assisted in the evacuation of residents in flood zone areas, such as Sandy Point, Picnic Point and Voyager Point. Members were also part of a Community Liaison Officers project to assist the communities in Bankstown and East

Hills with help and to review if further assistance was required.

It has definitely been an eventful summer. However, Menai and our family at Cronulla, Heathcote and Sutherland have always stood shoulder to shoulder when accepting the challenge to help our community.

We are a young unit born out of The Sutherland Cluster creation, which has a very long and proud involvement in our community. As a unit we have clicked and in true to Aussie tradition, we support each other, teach each other, take the "Micky" out of each other, respond to "Nick-names" not real names, take Paddy on Holidays, and importantly, we look out for each other while not forgetting that we are there to serve our community.



# Finished for now

Last week our small team of Metro volunteers (Carol Bassam, Josephine Jones, Dave Johnston and Pam Richardson) finished the last two hampers for our country cousins that have been affected by the drought and fires.

In all, we have packed over 140 hampers with goods and gifts donated from volunteers from the Metro Zone.

A special thanks to Ashfield/Leichhardt, Auburn, Bankstown, Canada Bay, Campbelltown, Fairfield and Hurstville units for their kind donations and support.

**Thankyou to all of the Volunteers & Units that have assisted in the process. The NSW SESVA would also like to make a special mention to Pat Johnson for all her hard work in organizing the donations & welfare packs and her support to the NSW SES Volunteers Association**



# Thankyou from the VA

Proceeds from The Woolgoolga to Ballina Workforce Charity Raffle were kindly donated to the NSW SES Volunteers Association and the NSW SES earlier this year.

A big thankyou to Matthew Ross who was the original instigator behind the charity raffle and is pictured here with Sue Chapple from the NSW SES Clarence Valley Cluster.





# Yass Unit Deployment

I recently joined the SES with the thought that it would be a good avenue to learn some helpful life skills and to be able to help others at their time of need. I never expected what I have experienced, here's my story...

I called the SES to enquire about joining – my conversation was not meaning to be rude, but I said I just wanted to check if I'm joining just to make sandwiches? Because if that's the case I'm not interested. I was assured that was not the case and I can get involved in as much as I felt comfortable with, so I did...

I started off going to my first meeting with the SES after joining the Yass unit which is the town I live in. Everyone seemed happy and friendly – a good team to be with. This was certainly put to the test time and time again on my deployments where our team held together and were amazing.

My SES experience started off relatively quiet going to our normal training nights learning about flood rescue and I started a course on Comms (which I am still completing). Then we were called in to help with the fires. I put my hand up not really understanding what we would experience but I wanted to help.

I started off helping on phones at the Queanbeyan Command Centre. I was nervous - can I do this? Was my first thought. I guess you can say I jumped straight in boots and all. I got through my first day of phones and then started as a scribe on the radios which in my opinion is a good way to learn the ropes in regards to radios. The Communication Logistics Officer asked if I wanted to try radios and I quickly said NO. I hadn't finished my Comms training so how on earth could I manage. I turned up another day ready to scribe and built up the confidence to operate the radios and apparently I did ok because I put my hand up to do radios again. Once I got the hang of it I really enjoyed the role. To the point where I felt confident to throw in a few pleasantries to our awesome teams on the field. I would wish them a good rest when they were shutting down for the night and glad they were heading home safe.

On one occasion after being on radios for numerous shifts I was required to monitor Air Support (this requires our air support to check in every half hour or you have to make contact to ensure they are safe), Black Range Control, chatter between the fires and relay messages for

the 000 calls - I did my first Red Message. Yes, this was full on but we were down volunteers and it just needed to be done. We did request extra support later on which was organised.

Over my time assisting, I helped with Planning, Accommodation and Logistics. I enjoyed learning all the different aspects and being able to help where I could.

A message was sent - we needed a team for Batemans Bay for a 3 day deployment in which I responded with Yes. Never really understanding what we might face.

We managed to organise a team of 5. I was the only female which didn't worry me as I work in an industry - Defence, where



it is very male dominated and I'm used to turning up to meetings where it's literally maybe 5 women and 80 or so men. But even if I wasn't used to this, they needed help and I was going and ready to face it with whatever team we were able to send.

We drove in a little vehicle to Goulburn NSW, we were a little squished and friendly arguments were had as to who had to sit in the middle seat. We stocked up on supplies P2 masks, water, snack stuff before we headed to Batemans Bay. We were told we had to be self sufficient and we all said that's fine, I don't think we fathomed what that would actually mean. You get used to having power and easy access to food, supplies etc so I guess we went in a bit blasé. We towed a trailer so that we could carry as much supplies to give as we could.

We tested our red and blue lights to make sure they were working because of what we might drive through.

Our Red and Blues failed us when we needed to turn them on so we had to turn our hazard lights on. We drove through fires on the side of the road and smoke where we found it hard to see the road and road blocks where the Police told us you are entering at your own risk. We all agreed to keep going as our help was needed but we also agreed if it got too risky we would have to make a call to turn around. I'm glad we didn't have to make that call. It took us 9 hours but we made it to Batemans Bay - now to find the SES unit.



We called the Duty Officer's number and found out that the Batemans Bay SES unit had burnt down in the fires and that they had a temporary base set up at the Batemans Bay High School. The Batemans Bay unit still remained operational and took the loss of their unit premise all in their stride. We headed there, had a quick debrief and headed out to our first job which was a burnt tree that may need to be removed.

We got up every morning 7am and headed out to face whatever was needed till late at night. We would joke and say we are on double time now - of nothing. It wasn't long before we lost comms - no phones, no internet and no power. This meant it made it hard to task jobs to us. We did our normal meet and briefing at Batemans Bay temporary SES unit and



headed out. We headed to Surf Beach and started doing welfare checks and I was overwhelmed with the response. Most said I'm sure there's others that need this more than me. I literally had to convince people to take water, P2 masks etc. Australian's are amazing. Others offered their homes to anyone that needed accommodation and use of their toilet if we needed - Thank you.

I did find I had to plan my toilet requirements more so than my male team members. All part of the challenge.

We found just walking down the street to do a job residents came to ask for help or share their story often this included a shoulder to cry on which we gave at this time of need.

I won't say it was easy because it wasn't. I did shed many a tear but the awesome team we had helped keep us all together.

We debriefed every night and morning to make sure we were all coping ok with what

There were a few jobs that have stuck in my memory one in particular was a job we were called to remove a tree that was at risk of falling on a house. Our normal day was turning up for one job that turned into, well numerous and this one was the same. We arrived at the address of the tree in question and we were conducting a Sitrep when the neighbour came out concerned about a tree near their house. I promised that we would look at this whilst we were there. She then told me that they had no P2 masks and had chosen to stay at their house because of looters. This made my blood boil, who would even think of looting and especially at a time like this!! We assessed the tree for the lady and I gave them P2 masks, water and any food that we had. Then a vehicle arrived in the street and I was ready to give them what for in case they were looters!!

found out that some funding had been released and this was the only thing I could hold on to and offer. I told her we have no phone / internet service but to give me her number and when I have service I will send her all the information including Emergency Housing. The only other thing I could offer as comfort was that they were all alive. Honestly what else can you say, it was breaking my heart.

No power meant nothing was open so to find somewhere to eat was, well it was a challenge. We saw a sign on the side of the road free lunch - thank you JJ's on the Marina. So we thought we'd see if we could quickly grab something before our next job. We went to the end of the line and then one of the staff said 'no no you guys go to the front of the line'. I was speechless we were here to help and I'm sure most of the people in line had lost so much but yet they wanted to move us to the front of the line. I couldn't believe it and not only did they ensure and insist that we moved to the front of the line they clapped and cheered when we did. I choked up and lucky I was wearing sunglasses because the tears welled up and poured down. I couldn't even say thank you because I was so choked up. So if you were there and now reading this, please let me say thank you from the bottom of my heart. The food was amazing and I was so humbled with that experience and again so proud of Australians.

I carried a packet of tissues in my pocket so that I was prepared when other's shared their stories, they needed to be heard. I gave them a shoulder to cry on and gave out all the numbers I had for support which offered some comfort.

We are a strong nation and we will get through this but it will take a long time. I think it's been amazing to see so much support organised by so many amazing Australian's. From convoys of trucks filled with supplies to food for our animals. So many have suffered but I for one think we can hold our heads proud for we have banded together, supported each other and faced this disaster head on. I know we will continue to do so.

I will remain a member of the SES and help where I can even as I go back to my real job, this is what we say in the SES, another way to joke as we don't get paid for the hours we do for the SES.

Is being in the SES rewarding? Absolutely. Is it sometimes tough? Absolutely. Should you join? Absolutely.

**Carissa**  
Yass Unit



we had faced. We also used humour to keep us going and tried to crack a joke whenever we could. This included a picture in a burnt out Polaris where we'd had a particularly tough day and needed a laugh. This particular picture went viral and some awesome ones that have been edited have made the rounds. People are so clever and I'm glad that it gave so many Australians a laugh as well, go the Aussie sense of humour. I think I would have found it harder if I hadn't helped as much as I did, I guess it was my way of coping with what most of Australia was facing. In saying this I think what helped was the amazing resilience of the awesome team we had, able to face head on what we faced each day.

Our 3 days turned into 8 days as we were approach to stay on longer, which we all said yes.

I walked towards the vehicle that had now stopped ready to give them a piece of my mind only to find the lady burst into tears, this was not a looter. Thoughts raced through my head do I turn around or keep going. I kept walking towards her and through tears she told me her story. I gave her a big hug and she sobbed and sobbed it broke my heart and I had to use all of my strength to not sob with her. Turns out her friend had escaped the fires with her husband and 2 kids but wasn't sure if their house had survived the fires. They had asked her to go look and take photos to for them. It hadn't. It was a burnt wreck and it turned out this was their house and business all in one. I struggled not to break down as they'd lost everything, I mean what do you say. My only solace, I had just



# Poem

Today I sat eating my lunch, 2 sandwiches, made with love.  
A popper a pear, a packet of chips. I sat with my new yellow friends.

I'm on a bench, made by hand and off cuts.  
It's in a valley that is filled with trees, that homes 1000's,  
Near by is the home, who placed that bench here,

A home who held a family,  
but that home is gone now, it's only bones and ash, that's  
what I'm here to inspect.  
And those trees I spoke about are frail now and tinged all  
black,

My ears hear the clapping of army helicopters through  
the hills,  
My nostril complain about death in the air, which seems  
to get stronger as the breeze moves around,  
That breeze moves no trees and makes no sound, for there  
are no leafs to rustle, it's surreal here.

The flies have exploded, they seem to be the only thing  
that survived, they pick on me and laugh at me,  
They thrive on the rotten smell of death.  
I allow the horror of this place in, so I may feel what  
happened here,

But not for too long, I have a job to do.  
It's not a hard job, but it uses all of my skill, and it's a long job,  
early up/down late.  
In a team I don't know, we joke and laugh, ask questions  
and become friends. But task focused always.

Nearby to this bench, I notice the family car, it's no longer  
shiny and new, it's completely white with only the metal  
frame left to show.  
I'm unsure of what happened here, or the outcome for  
this place.

A mud brick paradise, I think of how lovely it must have been.  
A large deck and 2 floors.  
My sandwich tastes great in my moment alone.  
But who made this for me, who packed it for me,  
They did it with care and love and I can tell, I feel them  
supporting us out there in the field, it really helps get  
though the day.

I decide to look for the good around me,  
So my ears perk up and sense the chirping very faintly  
from afar,  
Maybe birds.

An interruption, the radio blasts, DivCon this, dozer move  
to here, Fire Con out. It yells out with such a calming tone.

The scorned earth shows hope if you look real close, blades  
of grass peaking up through the ash, just visible by eye.

As we move on with our role in this nasty big mess, the dirt  
road home for the night is long and winding.

Today we crossed many dry creeks with no life to be shown,  
but on this trip home a wet valley we cross, the whole team  
comments about the tiny river we crossed.

I think back on my day and happy to say, I was lucky. I woke  
a roo today, it was a very cute thing. He was having a rest  
lying in the shade, I startled him, he slowly stood up and  
quickly hopped away.

But he was alone, sadly. I watched where went, alone he'll  
be tonight.

But life was around, I saw a LyreBird, a huge Goanna who  
made me jump high, an echidna I missed and the whole  
forest is starting to re-grow.

I feel happy I'm here, I feel useful.



Written by one of our NSW SES Volunteers





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# Not all heroes wear capes!

They wear jumpsuits, boots, protective gear, helmets and their hearts on their sleeves.

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