

# SOUTH WEST SLOPES ZONE E-NEWSLETTER

## District Mangers Report

BY ANDREW DILLON

On the night of the 5th of September, a number of brigades from the Coolac – Gundagai area were alerted to a large structure fire involving the Service Station at Coolac. This was the largest and most complex structure fire in the SWSZ for a long time.

RFS crews arrived on scene at approximately 10.30 pm to find the service station well alight and immediately begun a defensive attack, relaying water from nearby water sources. At the peak of the incident, there was 14 RFS tankers in attendance, with a number of FRNSW appliances and other emergency services also on scene to assist. Excellent teamwork between all agencies ensured that the fire did not spread beyond the main service station structure. Well done to our crews, a great job by all.

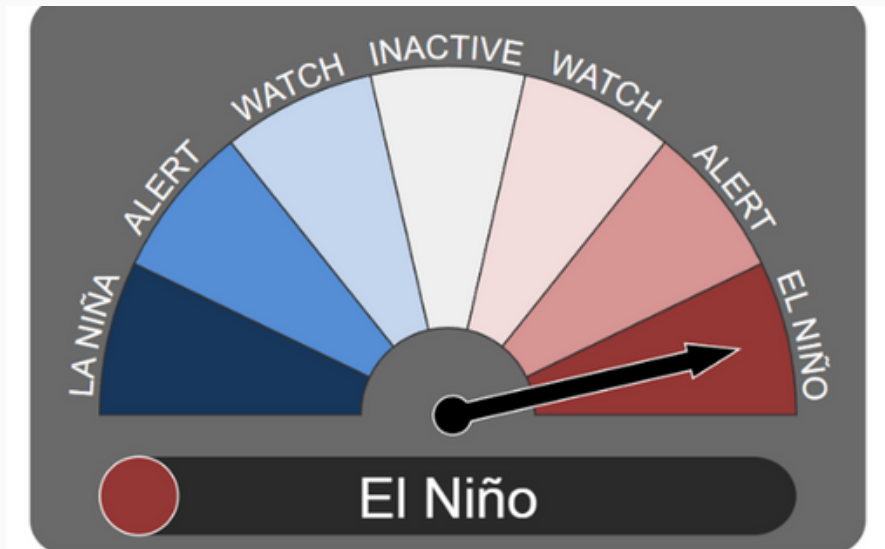


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The Bureau of Meteorology has confirmed that we are now in El Nino, which is likely to stay in place until at least the end of February. We will see hotter and dryer conditions this summer within our district.

These forecast conditions, coupled with average grass fuel loads, are likely to result in fires that move quickly with the potential to threaten life and property. On days of heightened fire danger, the SWSZ will continue our approach of dispatching multiple brigades supported by aircraft and heavy plant with the goal of containing fires quickly.



Many parts of the state are currently experiencing large bushfires and SWSZ staff have been deployed to assist in incident management teams in North Eastern NSW. It is likely that SWSZ volunteers will be asked to assist at some of these fires in the not too distant future.

Thanks to the Captains and Group Captains who recently attended the SWSZ Captains Conference. Around 80 members attended this pre-season get-together, which focused on a number of important topics such as emergency alerts and warnings, fire ground management, technology at fires and a session on managing stress

Stay Safe, Andrew.

**"Fires that move quickly with the potential to threaten life and property."**



## Gum Tree Meetings

Throughout June, we held three Gum Tree Meetings at Nangus, Coolac and Berremangra, with over 40 members attending.

Several productive discussions were held on various topics, and below are the common themes and actions raised:

- RFS ACTIV - General support for the app and the need to get more members onboard. FCC Staff to continue promoting the App and provide direct assistance to get members onto the App.
- PERMITS - Some concerns were raised regarding permit restrictions, particularly in locations adjoining our western neighbouring fire districts. Concerns that the SWSZ was suspending permits when neighbouring districts were allowing permits to progress. Some participants felt that the SWSZ was too restrictive with permits. Some participants also thought sending out a list of all active district permits to brigades would be beneficial.
- HEAVY VEHICLE LICENCE - Members in attendance were supportive of the RFS assisting members to obtain a truck licence. A subsidy for driver training or the RFS delivering driver licence training was raised and discussed.
- HIGHWAY FIRES - Concerns were raised regarding motor vehicles starting fires on the Hume Highway. members in attendance requested road sign education to avoid accidental ignitions by vehicles travelling on the Hume Hwy.

Single items that were only raised at one meeting included:

- WINTER JACKETS - How to obtain a winter weight jacket? (Heavy RFS Jackets will be available within the next 6 months)
- DEFIBRILATORS - When are defibrillators due for new batteries? (In 2024, all RFS defibrillators will have the batteries changed)
- WIFI CONNECTIVITY To discuss WIFI connectivity for your station, please ring the Harden FCC, and we will assist you.

It was great to see members contribute at these Gum Tree Meeting and provide feedback that will be used to improve how we do business.

We plan on holding another round of Gum Tree Meetings later in the year. Breakfast meetings seem to be the most popular, hopefully, everyone enjoys the cooked breakfast!

Advice of dates/times for the next meets will be circulated.



## 2023 GUMTREE MEETINGS

Nangus  
Coolac  
Berremangra



## BIODIVERSITY TRUST & RFS FIELD DAY

On September 6th, the South West Slopes Rural Fire Service (SWSZ RFS) and the Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) held a joint field day at Nangus to explore the topic of "Fire as a tool, Fire as a risk". The event brought together several landholders who currently have a Biodiversity Conservation Trust agreement on their land and senior RFS members.

The primary objective of the day was to help the RFS team better understand BCT agreements and how they relate to firefighting. The day was organized by the Group Captains and the South West Slopes Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

The officers from the Biodiversity Conservation Trust presented their organization and discussed the types of agreements they have with landholders. Participants engaged in a comprehensive Q&A session, which allowed them to better understand the process and raise any issues or concerns.

Several presentations on fire ecology and managing natural and cultural conservation values were also given, and all attendees found them informative. RFS facilitated discussions on the importance of maintaining access trails to enable brigades to reach fires quickly and prevent them from becoming disasters. They also emphasized the importance of landholders owning and maintaining suitable private firefighting equipment.

Attendees left with the understanding that regardless of who owns the land or what type of agreement the land may be under, the RFS has the authority to take such measures during a bushfire to bring that fire under control.

The day was a success on many levels, and It is likely that a similar day will be held in the Northern part of the SWSZ sometime in 2024.







## 2023 SWSZ CADETS

Congratulations to the SWSZ Cadet Team who recently travelled to Holbrook to compete in the Sam McPaul Cadet Championships. The team won two events outright and placed 3rd overall out of a total of 14 teams

PICTURED: 2023 GREG DUNN, JACK APPS, AIDAN BLACKNEY, PHOEBE MURPHY, ADDISON DOVERN, CHARLOTTE KLINGNER, PETER BULLIMAN, ALICIA GRADY AND LACHLAN HICKS

Thank you to Greg Dunn, Alicia Grady, Lachlan Hicks, Peter Bulliman and Joy Cox for transporting and supporting the Cadet team.

## MEDAL PRESENTATIONS AND SHED OPENING

This year across the zone, we held four medal presentations, one shed opening and one truck handover. Medal presentations are a great opportunity to acknowledge the many years of dedication by our volunteers to their communities. This year we were privileged to present a Humanitarian Overseas Service Medal, 5 National Medals and 9 National Emergency Medals, along with the presentation of 55 NSW RFS Long Service Medals representing a staggering 2164 years of service from the recipients to the community.

The Boorowa RFS Combined Station was officially opened on the 7th of October. The large 5-bay shed complete with a well-equipped multipurpose room, is now home to the Boorowa Support, Boorowa North, Boorowa – Hughstonia and Gunnary Brigades. During the shed opening to Gunnary Brigade was presented with the new Gunnary Cat 1 tanker.



GUNNARY BRIGADE RECIEVED A CATEGORY 1 GRASSLAND TRUCK, THAT WILL BE STATIONED AT THE BOOROWA RFS COMBINED STATION

CHECKOUT MORE PHOTOS FROM THE CEREMONIES ON PAGES 11 -12



# WHATS NEW...

## PPE Trailer

The Fire Control Centre has recently converted an existing trailer into a mobile Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) store. Members from the SWSZ Support Brigade took the trailer to Gundagai and set it up at several central locations. This enabled over 70 members to obtain, update or replace their Rural Fire Service (RFS) PPE. It was great to see many members come along to pick up a second set of PPE, which is strongly encouraged.

The trailer was also taken to the recent Gum Tree meetings, allowing attendees to stock up on equipment.

The trailer is stocked with all PPE items, in both male and female sizes, and is available to be brought out to brigades. If you wish to have the trailer brought to a location near you, simply contact the FCC to arrange it.

We would like to express our gratitude to the SWSZ Support Brigade for their assistance in getting the trailer out to the brigades



Personal Protective  
Equipment and  
Clothing



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## Get Ready Weekend

In September every year, RFS members are out in the community hosting Get Ready Weekend events with the aim of encouraging residents and landowners to plan and prepare for the upcoming bush fire season.

Several SWSZ brigades took advantage of the state-wide campaign and held events in their local area. Both Bribbaree and Young brigades were happy with the success of these great community engagement opportunities. This type of event serves as a great platform to engage with local communities about preparedness for the upcoming fire season.



The brigades answered plenty of questions about fire prevention and permits, and were also able to emphasise the significance of evacuation plans and how to stay well-informed during the fire season.

Well done to all brigades for taking a proactive approach to community engagement.



**“This is the first time Bribbaree has participated in the Get Ready Weekend. The kids came along and had a play with the activities we set up. It was a good day”**

**Bribbaree Captain Greg Sales**



# INAUGURAL SUPPORT BRIGADE FORUM

Mike Bickford and I had the opportunity to attend the inaugural Support Brigade Forum which was recently held at the RFS Training Academy in Dubbo. There were 93 attending, representing 32 of the 43 districts in NSW. The forum was officially opened by Deputy Commissioner Peter McKechnie and attended by a number of his Assistant Commissioners.

The Deputy Commissioner and his Assistant Commissioners are keen and committed to improving the viability and visibility of the Support Brigades within their districts. The Assistant Commissioners spoke about various aspects of the functionality of support brigades and how these brigades could be better utilised within the districts.

The weekend provided an opportunity for us to discuss numerous issues and opportunities for our brigades. There was lots of fairly robust discussion about a number of issues facing some brigades but we also received very valuable information from other brigades. Some of these brigades are much larger and have a very strong structure in place with clearly defined operational roles within their districts. There was also a clear intention that the support brigades be involved with other agencies to assist in times of emergencies.

A clear definition of a support brigade was formulated and this may well become a mission statement for the RFS' support brigades – “a Support Brigade provides multi-skilled and specialised non fire-fighting skills and capabilities to support the RFS, other agencies and communities”.

The South West Slopes Support Brigade is looking to recruit new members and would welcome dual members from other brigades who might like to assist during non-fire season periods.

As the South West Slopes' Support Brigade, our members are here to help the operational brigades within the District. Why not find out how we can help you? Just ask us.

Ros Bickford  
Senior Deputy Captain  
SWS Support Brigade





# FOCUS ON...

## Work Health & Safety

### WORKPLACE COMPLACENCY A CAUSE FOR SAFETY CONCERN

Workplace complacency a cause for safety concern

The September edition of OHS Professional eNews, published by the Australian Institute of Health & Safety, had as its feature article the role of complacency in workplace incidents and fatalities. Julia Whitford, CEO of the Institute, in introducing the article, stated;

*“This edition’s feature article discusses how addressing workplace complacency is paramount in reducing incidents and fatalities, as emphasised by safety director Patrizia Cassaniti. Despite having safety protocols, organisations often struggle to enforce them during tasks due to complacency. This article highlights the need for a cultural shift, open communication, personal responsibility, and mutual respect between workers and management in the health and safety industry.”*

Some of the points raised in the article included –

- *Complacency will always override what we know is safe to do.*
- *“She’ll be right, I’ve done this a thousand times before, and it not going to happen to me.”*
- *The potential risk of complacency at work is always injury or death.*
- ***Make your family the reason why you work safely every day.***

#### Falls from Trucks

Health and Safety have reported an increased incidence of falls from trucks across the NSW RFS. The South West Slopes Zone has, unfortunately also experienced this increase in complacency.

Health and Safety have issued the following in regard to entering and leaving trucks.

**"Make your family the reason why you work safely every day."**



# FOCUS ON...

## WORKPLACE COMPLACENCY

### THREE POINTS OF CONTACT WHEN ACCESSING TRUCKS AND OTHER EQUIPMENT:

Getting on and off equipment is not as easy as it sounds. Over 25% of equipment operator and truck driver injuries occur during mounting and dismounting.

Always maintain three points of contact when climbing on and off equipment safely. That always means two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand on the equipment.

Three-point contact forms a triangle of anchor points that changes in form while you mount or dismount. You have the most stability when the centre of this triangle is close to your centre of gravity.

Your weight should be evenly distributed among the three contact points. This means that you should avoid sideways movement because it can put you off balance.

- Take time and always face the vehicle or equipment when mounting and dismounting.
- Climb on and off only when the equipment is standing still.
- Break 3-point contact only when you reach the ground, the cab, or a stable platform.
- Use the parts designed by the manufacturer for mounting and dismounting—steps, footholds, running boards, traction strips, handgrips, etc.
- Keep these parts clear of mud, snow, grease, and other hazards that can cause slips, trips, or falls.
- Take extra care in wet, snowy, icy, or other dangerous weather conditions.
- Don't use wheel hubs, machine tracks, or door handles for mounting and dismounting.
- Avoid wearing loose or torn clothing that can catch on something.
- Don't jump down when exiting the vehicle.



The same principle to accessing our vehicles and equipment must be applied when using portable ladders, crew refuges and similar access points. In addition, we must not rush when accessing and exiting equipment or vehicles or mounting or dismounting from ladders.

**'Slow is smooth, smooth is fast'.**



# FOCUS ON...

## Work Health & Safety

### Key Work Health and Safety Statistics 2023

(Extracted from SafeWork Australia Key Work Health and Safety Statistics Australia 2023 published 28 September 2023)

The findings from the latest Key Work Health and Safety Statistics 2023 show that:

- Body stressing, falls, slips and trips, and being hit by moving objects are the cause of most work-related injuries in Australia;
- Vehicle incidents and being hit by moving objects continue to account for most fatalities, and
- Work-related mental health conditions are rising, with time off work in these cases more than four times longer than for other injuries.

For 2022 –

- 51 worker fatalities were recorded in NSW.
- The Australian fatality total being 195.
- Nationally this represented 1.4 per 100,000 workers.
- Machinery Operators and Drivers represented 8.4 fatalities per 100,000 workers.
- Agriculture, forestry and fishing represented 14.7 fatalities per 100,000 workers.
- Transport, postal and warehousing represented 9.5 fatalities per 100,000 workers.
- 181 Males (93%) (Fatality rate 2.5 per 100,000 workers) died.
- 14 (7%) (0.2% per 100,000 workers) females.
- 127,800 serious claims recorded with an incidence rate of 10.3 per 1,000 workers and a frequency rate of 6.5 claims per 1,000,000 hours worked.
- Age group with the highest claim rate 55-64 (8.6 serious claims per 1,000,000 hours worked).
- Age group with the lowest claim rate 35-44 (5.4 claims per 1,000,000 hours worked).

**Give complacency the boot by always making safe decisions.**



**SWSZ Health and  
Safety Representative  
Phillip Baer**

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# PHOTO GALLERY





# PHOTO GALLERY

