

SOUTH WEST SLOPES ZONE E-NEWSLETTER

District Mangers Report

BY ANDREW DILLON

Welcome to the latest SWSZ newsletter.

On 10 February 2025 the township of Harden experienced an early morning hail event that resulted in over 200 calls for assistance from community members. Several RFS members in and around Harden were directly impacted, with damage to their own homes and farms.

Ten brigade tankers worked tirelessly alongside the State Emergency Service (SES) and other emergency services to assist Harden residents in the aftermath of the damaging storm, the event resulting in a natural disaster declaration. The SWSZ Fire Control Centre (FCC) was used as the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) for the incident, facilitating coordination among all of the key agencies involved.

We would like to thank the following brigades for their dedicated efforts helping the residents of Harden: Demondrille, Cootamundra, Wallendbeen, Wombat, Boara, Monteagle, Murringo. Other RFS members from surrounding brigades, attended in private vehicles and also need to be acknowledged for their assistance on the day. Additionally, we had over 20 members from the Southern Tablelands District travel to Harden to conduct critical Building Impact Assessments.

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The fire season was relatively mild with all fires kept small thanks to the quick response by brigades. We had a few fires in steep timbered country - of note the fire at Reids Flat on New Years Eve and the fire at Burra Creek on the 18th of January, both requiring the hard work of crews in tankers, bucketing helicopters and dozers to achieve containment.

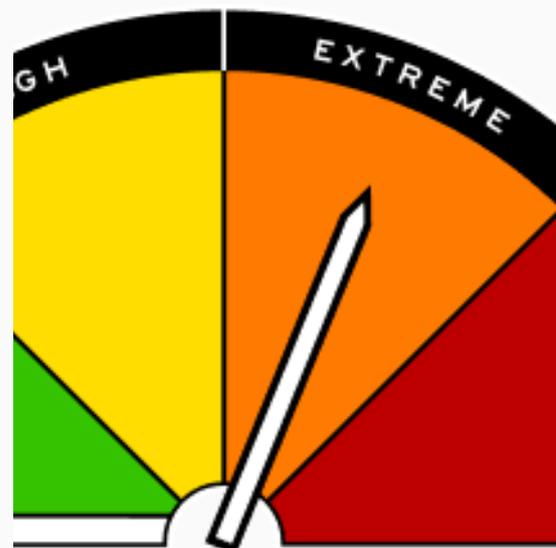
The South West Slopes Pre-Incident Plan (PIP) was activated in response to the forecasted Extreme Fire Danger Rating, on Sunday 16 March. Thankfully no fires of significance occurred on this day despite the district experiencing 40 to 60 kph NW winds and temperatures of 35 degrees plus. Undertaking each of step in the plan ensures we can respond with a strong weight of attack to all fires. Thanks to all our brigades that ensured they were able to crew each of their tankers.



The Taylors Flat station is now complete with an opening ceremony planned for June. This 2 bay station with meeting room, kitchenette and toilet will be an important asset for the brigade and the Taylors Flat community. The brigade have waited patiently for a number of years for the station to be completed.

Stay safe everyone.

“...40 to 60 kph NW winds and temperatures of 35 degrees plus...”

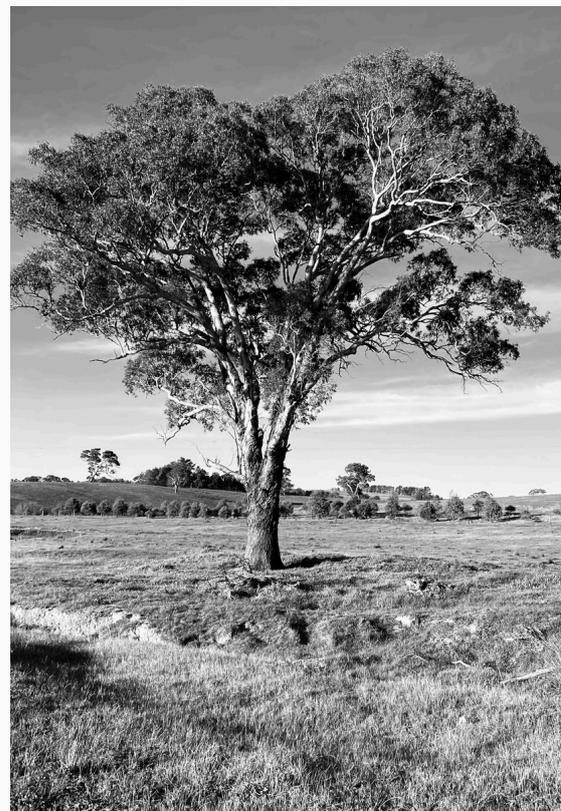


GUMTREE MEETING OUTCOMES

After a two year hiatus, the SWSZ Gumtree meetings have made a welcome return. It has been great to catch up with members to enjoy a breakfast BBQ and discuss RFS matters.

In March 2025, five Gumtree meetings were held, with a total attendance of 52 individuals, including both members and non-members. For the first time, Captains were encouraged to extend invitations to local farmers who, whilst not being brigade members, play a crucial role in firefighting efforts by providing their private equipment. Meetings were held at road side reserves and or parks.

Three meetings were held in the Young area (Milvale, Monteagle and Murringo) and two in the Cootamundra area (Wallendbeen and Cootamundra). Attendees are always encouraged to raise matters that are important to them no matter how big or small these items may seem. Another round of meetings will likely take place in early spring in other parts of the district.



“...Local farmers... Play a crucial role in firefighting efforts by providing their private equipment”

Gumtree Meetings continues next page...

Gumtree Meetings Common Themes...

Common themes raised at all or most meetings, which attract the most discussion, are listed below:

1. PERMITS - (Raised at all meetings)

- Discussion on the new online system
- Entering permit approver info is clunky using a phone – better on a computer.
- Ideally the brigade Permit Officer approves permits electronically.
- The FCC can approve online permits on behalf of the Permit Officer if they agree.
- Paper permits can still be issued if needed and must be forwarded to the FCC to be entered into the online system.
- As at 27 March, there have been 346 permits applied for and issued on line and 53 pad permits received and entered by the FCC and issued as an electronic permit.

Actions - A review of the first on-line permit season to be undertaken involving the SWSZ Senior Leadership Team to determine if any improvements can be made locally at SWSZ.

2. COMPUTER AIDED DISPATCH CAD - (Raised at 4 of the 5 meetings)

- Members are used to the system now but appreciate when the FCC takes the radios back locally during an escalating incident.
- When the SWSZ Pre Incident Plan is in place, the radios are automatically back with Harden FCC.
- Field officers can request additional appliances, if required, directly to the central dispatch operator.
- A SWSZ staff member is always listening in and is ready to attach additional units, an aircraft or heavy plant as needed.

Actions -The FCC continue taking the radio coms back when appropriate.

3. MOBILE PHONE RECEPTION - (Raised at 3 of the 5 meetings)

- Members suggesting that mobile phone reception has deteriorated with the introduction of 4G and the switching off of 3G.
- NSW RFS headquarters do regularly approach Telcos regarding phone reception for incident management situations
- Introduction of Starlink technology in all RFS appliances within the next 12 months would assist with phone coms for firefighters.

Actions - the SWSZ RFS to invite the RFS Manager of Operational Communications to the October 2025 Captains forum to provide an update on discussions with Telcos and to provide an update on other communications matters.

4. OTHER ITEMS RAISED AS GENERAL DISCUSSION

- Fire trail questions - The SWSZ will be developing a new Fire Trail register in the near future and trail priorities will be set in this document. Group Captains will be involved in this process.
- Aircraft communications - Ensuring appropriate communication channels are set up early for ground to air coms. FG 1 is the channel for the pre-determined bombers.
- Mobile Data Terminals - Will begin to be installed in Tankers in the next 6 to 12 months. A simple user guide will be needed for trucks.
- Private tankers - Still needed and appreciated at fires.



Gumtree Meetings 2025

Photo - Monteagle Gumtree meeting



WHATS NEW...

Fire Observation Cameras

Many of our members would now be aware that the South West Slopes RFS has network of fire observation cameras strategically located across the district. The network of 10 cameras have proven beneficial for the early assessment of bush and grass fires.

The cameras have directly assisted field officers to accurately locate fires in hilly terrain. On numerous occasions staff at the FCC have been able to assist brigades to find fires from the live video images relayed into the FCC Operations room. The cameras have also assisted to view the progression of a weather change or significant storm front that is entering our district.

The cameras are mounted on existing Wi Sky aerials/towers on high vantage points around Monteagle, Muttama, Tubbul, Wallendbeen, Frogmore, Galong, Godfreys Creek, Rugby, Rye Park and Wyangala.

There are plans to install two further cameras in the Gundagai area which will then give us comprehensive coverage across the district.

The photos below show the quality of the images that the cameras produce.



“The NSW RFS & RFSA are hosting a ‘Leadership and Decision Making’ workshop for women in the Western Zone at West Wyalong on May 23-24, 2025. This workshop aims to encourage women of all ages and levels (paid or volunteer) to develop leadership and problem-solving skills.

Leadership isn’t just about being at the front; it can come from any level, often in unassuming ways. With this in mind, this program was designed to discuss leadership in a different light and encourage a broader understanding – especially when it comes to making decisions under pressure” - organiser Vivien Thomson said.

The workshop kicks off on Friday night with a Q&A session featuring women from four emergency service branches, offering participants the chance to ask tough questions and receive candid insights from experienced leaders.

Day two focuses on team building, leadership perceptions, brain science, emotional intelligence, resilience, stress management, and decision-making under pressure, followed by practical activities.

Feedback from the Riverina workshop was fantastic, with participants across all age ranges (teens to seniors) noting moments of clarity about how to apply these skills in everyday life and leadership roles. One attendee summed it up:

“Absolutely incredible forum. I’ve learned so much I can apply daily. I feel empowered to take on a leadership role and more confident. Would love to attend again and encourage my station to hold leadership forums.”

To attend, simply nominate and commit the time—all expenses are covered by the generous sponsorship of the RFSA. Nominations are due by May 9th.

A big thankyou to Muttama Brigade Member -Vivien Thomson, for organising this amazing event.

LEADERSHIP & DECISION MAKING WORKSHOP FOR WOMEN IN THE WESTERN ZONE

CONTACT:
VIVIEN.THOMSON@MUTTAMA.COM.AU

Photo - Deputy Group Officer
Danielle Leseberg





RFSA



Leadership & Decision Making Workshop for Women in the Western Zone

“You can’t be what you can’t see”

This program will harness the vast experience and knowledge of women, building upon their strengths and contributions. We will engage in team-building activities and deepen our understanding of how we make decisions.

✓ Latest in Brain Science

✓ Team Building

✓ Thinking & EQ

✓ Decision Making

Nominations
Close 9th May

The program kicks off with a Q&A session featuring Senior Women in Leadership on Friday night, May 23rd, at 1730hrs. It continues on Saturday, May 24th, running all day until 1600hrs.

Held at ‘The Club Inn Motel’ Tallimba Rd, West Wyalong.
All meals and accommodation are included.



CONTACT - Vivien Thomson AFSM 0408 282 899

NOMINATIONS TO - vivien.thomson@muttama.com.au

FOCUS ON...

Self Contained Breathing Apparatus

Three additional brigades are currently working towards meeting the qualifications and requirements to use self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) at incidents. At present, the South West Slopes Zone (SWSZ) has two brigades with this capability: Boara and Wambanumba.

Murringo, Demondrille, and Boorowa Support brigades have all expressed interest in adopting SCBA to enhance their preparedness when working in areas with thick or toxic smoke. Once the necessary training and requirements for using breathing apparatus are completed, members will be issued with the appropriate equipment. To ensure safe transport of the SCBA, each of these brigades' heavy tankers will be fitted with storage racks for the apparatus.

The Breathing Apparatus Operator (BAO) course is a key RFS training program for members who may need to use SCBA during incidents in a defensive firefighting capacity. This course provides participants with the knowledge and skills required to safely wear and operate SCBA for respiratory protection.

Local training for the Breathing Apparatus Operator qualification will be conducted at the Fire Control Centre (FCC). Additionally, the FCC has recently installed a CABA compressor, enabling cylinders to be refilled on-site at Harden.

While SCBA is not necessary for all brigades, it provides an essential level of protection against harmful smoke, especially for brigades serving communities or areas near major roads.

For more information please give Krystaal a call at the Fire Control Centre 6386 1700.



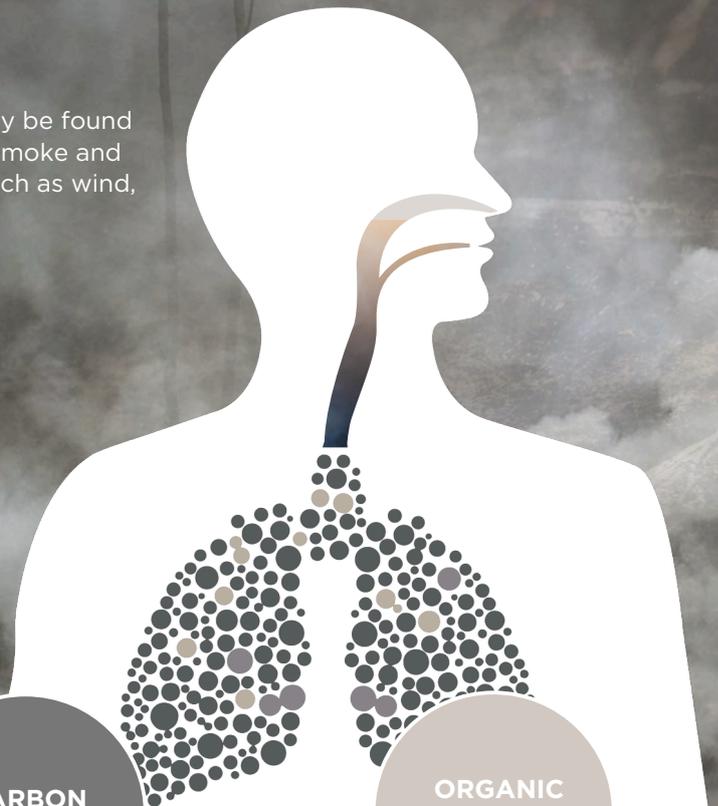
RESPIRATORY HAZARDS

BUSH FIRE SMOKE

This guide provides an overview of what hazards may be found in bush fire smoke. It's important to remember that smoke and hazards are relative to the fire conditions at hand, such as wind, temperature, humidity, bush fire fuel type and loads.



The best protection from any respiratory hazard is avoidance. Stay out of smoke as much as practicable.



RESPIRABLE PARTICULATES

- › Fine and ultra fine (<2.5µm) particles of carbon material
- › Produced as material undergoes thermal degradation
- › The largest component of smoke and the visible grey/black material
- › Particulates are fine enough to penetrate the lung walls
- › Protection from respirable particles is provided by particulate filters such as P2 or P3

CARBON MONOXIDE

- › A colourless, odourless gas produced by the incomplete combustion of material
- › Can cause nausea, headaches and dizziness
- › The second-largest component of smoke
- › Fresh air is the only protection, and will assist in removing any carbon monoxide in the body over time

ORGANIC GASES AND VAPOURS

- › A range of gases produced from burning material, including:
 - › Formaldehyde
 - › Acrolein
 - › Volatile Organic Compounds
- › Most of these gases produce a taste or burning sensation in the throat and eyes
- › The smallest component of smoke
- › Can be protected by ABEK gas canisters on reusable respirators



Incomplete Combustion

- › Finer particulates
- › More carbon monoxide
- › More gases and vapours
- › Hazards stay closer to ground level



Complete Combustion

- › Larger particulates
- › More carbon dioxide instead of carbon monoxide
- › Less gases and vapours
- › Hazards get carried higher into atmosphere

Workplace Healthy and Safety

Your Health and Safety Representative

Following the recent Health and Safety Representative elections Gary Slater is the SWSZ HSR for the next three years. Congratulations to Gary on his appointment to this vital position.

Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) play an important role in raising awareness of safety matters and encouraging a strong safety culture within the NSW RFS.

Your HSR can assist you and the NSW RFS to achieve a safer workplace by:

- Regularly discussing safety matters with members, managers and other workers;
- Assisting members to follow NSW RFS work health and safety procedures;
- Encouraging members to work safely, and to look out for the safety of others;
- Encouraging the timely reporting of injuries, safety incidents and hazards; and
- Supporting and assisting staff and members; for example, with joint site inspections, safety presentations at brigade, district and area command meetings, etc.

Gary and the District Manager/FCC staff meet monthly to discuss WHS matters and review any accident and near miss reports submitted for the prior month. The review of these reports is important to ensure that actions can be put in place to avoid future accidents from occurring. Any trends in local accidents or injuries are also discussed resulting in solutions and education tailored to the SWSZ membership.

As always, it's critical that accident, injury and near miss reports are completed for any and all WHS incidents. You can find these electronic report templates on the SWSZ website

HSR - Group Captain Gary Slater



DID YOU KNOW...

Health and safety representatives (HSRs) are workers elected to represent workers on health and safety issues in the workplace.

Australasian Police and Emergency Services Games

GIL & ANNETTE KELLY -
COOTAMUNDRA HQ BRIGADE



Recently the NSW RFS were invited to participate in the 19th Australasian Police and Emergency Services Games, which was held on Saturday 15 March to Saturday 22 March 2025 in Hobart, Tasmania.

Cootamundra HQ RFS members Gil and Annette Kelly, along with Paul and Amanda Harding competed in the event held in Hobart in the lawn bowls competition.

They faced off against competitors from other emergency service agencies across Australasia and New Zealand.

Although not winning any medals, they were competitive in their events and had a great time.

“We had a great 8 days in Tasmania and met some great people many of who will become lifelong friends. I recommend other members consider participating in next year’s games which will be held on the Gold Coast” Deputy Captain Gil Kelly said.



Bribbaree Community Engagement

By Joy Cox

Recently Bribbaree Brigade held a series of workshops for the residents of the village and surrounding areas. The workshops focused on increasing knowledge about fire risk, preparing personal Fire Safety plans and supporting participants to use and gain confidence in using fire extinguishers, fire blankets and setting up portable pumps. The workshops also provided an opportunity for members to pass on their knowledge and experience in helping the participants through the various activities and we were all treated to some wonderful food provided by two of our newest members: our “catering crew” Wendy and Peggy.



The feedback we received was very positive with all participants indicating that they felt much more confident in using the equipment they may have at home or on their farms should a fire start. They also felt that they would be very interested in more workshops and a refresher closer to the next fire season. Many commented that the workshops also provided an occasion for both residents and members to socialise together.



“...The workshops also provided an occasion for both residents and members to socialise together”.



RFS

AREA COMMAND WESTERN

WESTEX 2025



1 Weekend
5 Scenarios
Unlimited Memories



RFS.WESTEX



MAY 16-18

Lake Burrendong
Sport and Recreation
Centre

Expression of Interest
NOW OPEN

