

The Value of Volunteering

Wild weather events continue to remind us that La Niña isn't going anywhere soon, and this weather pattern is delivering everything with extra force: more rain, extreme storms, major flooding, and cooler and in some places, much colder days. weather pattern is delivering everything with extra force: more rain, extreme storms, major flooding, and cooler and in some places, much colder days.

Compound disasters are here to stay, and no government, organisation or community can afford to ignore the obvious—preparedness is everything, as is the invaluable contribution of our dedicated emergency services volunteers who have worked tirelessly assisting the flood devastated communities in New South Wales and Victoria. The images below were contributed by a Mundaring SES volunteer.



Flooded picnic area

Sandbag filling

Road protected by sandbags

Sandbags stacked in store

Eastern States Deployments 2022

There are 64 SES Units in Western Australia. Since mid October, SES Volunteers from more than half of the WA SES Units were deployed to assist with the response to the Eastern States floods.

SES Team Foxtrot 8-16 Nov 2022

Fourteen SES members from Bassendean, Canning-South Peth, Mundaring, Northshore, Swan and SWORD plus DO Kinsella, Albany were deployed to New South Wales

The team served in the towns of Balranald, Euson/Robinvale and Tooleybuc/Goodnight. They were based in Swan Hill and Murray Downs.

Tasking included:

- ◆ Community Public Information Meeting—Balranald
- ◆ Sandbagging to protect homes and sheds, as well as road access at Goodnight
- ◆ Filling sandbags for the community to access when required
- ◆ Monitoring river egress

These images were taken during the Team Foxtrot deployment



Eastern States Deployments 2022

A Volunteer recalls their experience

Several members of Armadale SES were deployed to the NSW floods, three were sent to Moree and five to Brewarrina. Three of the Armadale volunteers stayed for two weeks.

Connie Eikelboom recalled her deployment to Brewarrina. 'This small community is 774 kms from Sydney, so it was a long haul to get there. As we flew over the region we were looking out for the flood damage from the plane. There was of water everywhere.'



First Impressions

'On arrival in Brewarrina, we were struck at how totally exhausted the local crews were. They were shattered from going at it for four to five weeks. Brewarrina SES only has three active members. There are five in total but two of them live 130 kilometres out of town, the other side of the flooding. Needless to say, they were very happy to see us.'

'Given the town's isolation, there are no chainsaw shops around the corner, everything is 400 – 600 km away.

We just had to get on with the job. There weren't enough people, or the time for writing up pages of risk assessments, we just had to get on with it. But, we loved knowing how much our being there was making a difference helping the local community.'

'We wished more WA volunteers could have come across, but the prerequisite for qualifications and experience in storm damage, RFS and chainsaw excluded many from being selected. However, we found that none of that was needed. We didn't need to do trees, use a chainsaw or fix a roof. What was needed more than anything was more people to fill sand bags and start a pump.'

'There was no Incident Management Team in Brewarrina or Moree and we had no sector commander until day 10. But this wasn't a problem.'

The community really appreciated that we were joining in with them, talking to them, and letting them know we were there to help. Getting food to people and helping get them to and from hospital was also a high priority for us.'

'The local unit were very grateful for our help in cleaning up their unit and equipment. Whether we had certificates or not was irrelevant to them.'

Camp comfort, or not?

'We were wet and soggy for a lot of the time. In Moree, there was a bad smell of sewage around the camp, but that was to be expected. And, we had to watch where we walked!'

'The base camp at Moree was on a sports oval, where the RFS had set up tents, with 12 people allocated to each tent. At first everyone pitched in together, but the army sergeant who ran the

camp was having none of that and males and females were segregated to tents at opposite ends of the oval!

Lasting impressions

'It was a pleasure working with Glen Hall, Steve Summerton and Josh Gardiner. They treated us (volunteers) with respect and remembered we are not paid staff who don't know everything. They also appreciated that people need to have a laugh during these stressful, demanding situations.'

'It doesn't take much to help people, so keep it simple. The most important thing is attitude. Always speak to people with respect. Use initiative and common sense and be mindful not to take over the local unit, just help in a background way.'

'When we left Brewarrina, all members of the local unit came to airport to send us off. We were all very touched by this.'

It seems apparent there are not enough volunteers in Australia, in the event we had to deal with simultaneous natural disasters. There is too much in the way of politics in relation to volunteers now. Everything is difficult and people are leaving volunteering. If that sort of flood happened in WA we would be out of volunteers in a matter of days, and that's a concern'.



Armadale SES Crew on the sandbag ramp they built



The SES Flood Rescue Boat Crew from Bourke

Strike Team Alpha Report—24-30 October 2022

Instalment 1— Days 1-3

Strike Team Alpha, comprising 20 SES volunteers (organised into 5 teams of 4) and one DO-Natural Hazards, departed Peth Airport for Sydney on Monday morning, 24 October 2022. With daylight saving in NSW, and a headwind, they arrived late Monday and stayed overnight in Sydney. It was early Tuesday morning (Day 2) that they boarded three chartered Beechcraft King Air type aircraft for the trip to Moree in north central NSW.

By this time, much of NSW was subject to either flood or flood warnings as shown in the map below.

After landing in Moree, we were bussed to our accommodation, which was a tent 'city' being established on the town sports grounds which wasn't quite ready for us, so it was a work-in-progress. After our bedding was issued, compliments of a local evacuation centre, we were off to the local Moree SES unit for briefing and tasking.

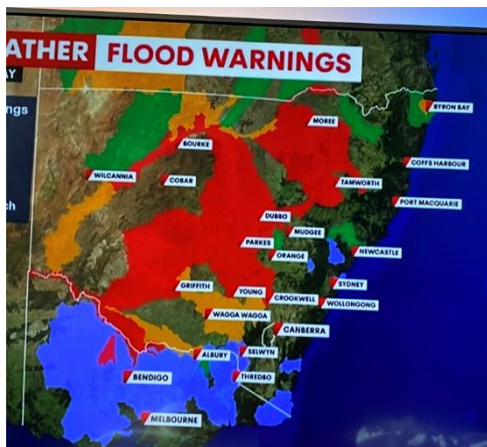
The Moree SES Unit comprised a large shed with a kitchen and office, and a new Incident Control Centre (ICC).

The ICC was very new and systems such as telephones and radio communications were untested, so we resorted to personal mobile telephones for reliable comms.

Our first task was working through outstanding requests for assistance (RFA) for urgent food drops to people who were unable to get to the shops. After making follow up phone calls to callers and assessing the situation (Note -we did not have any local knowledge or where anything is located), we were on the road in our 2 busses to pick up orders from Coles or Woolworths, then drop off to stranded residents. Needless to say, not all 20 of us were able to do drops at the one time. This was immediately problematic. Our first drop was on the other side of a creek. A 4x2 HiAce bus wasn't suitable for the task, and we had no suitable clothing or safety equipment either.

Fortunately, Fire and Rescue NSW happened to come by and kindly forded the creek for us. There is a lesson to learn in having high clearance vehicles in times of flood.

Day 3 was a significant improvement with the provision of locally hired 4x4 dual cab utilities for each of the 5 teams. Three of the SES teams were deployed for Rapid Damage Assessment (RDA). The aim was to find out as quickly as possible the extent of damage to buildings. This was facilitated with the use of the ArcGIS Collector application we downloaded to our phones. The app also had the ability to upload photos. SES teams also got to see more of the flood effects in the town.



Extent of Flood warning in NSW morning of 25 October

The remaining two teams continued with the delivery of essential food and medical supplies. The public that were isolated due to flooding and could not collect food and medical supplies were advised to order goods on line (Click and Collect) or by telephone. The SES were then requested to drop off the orders. These drop offs were either by road, boat, high clearance vehicles or helicopter. This system was challenging and occupied some of the SES teams for the duration of the deployment. Flood affected residents were becoming desperate for supplies. We soon learned that the Click and Collect system was limited to five orders per half hour.



Fire fighting vehicles (below) provided high clearance capability for flooded roads.

Food distribution

