

THE OFFICIAL YEARBOOK OF THE NATIONAL STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE VOLUNTEERS ASSOCIATION

NSESVA

Yearbook 2022





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Cover photo by:
Rose-Anne Emmerton, Tas SES Central Coast

The NSESVA Yearbook 2022

"To Lead and Influence Change"

About the NSESVA

The National State Emergency Service Volunteers Association Ltd (NSESVA) was formed in 2015. NSESVA is an incorporated association established as a not for profit entity and is registered with the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission.

The National State Emergency Service Volunteers Association Ltd has been established to represent the thousands of State and Territory Emergency Service volunteers. The Association works to achieve nationally consistent goals that represent the interests of its volunteer members, advocating for them when appropriate.

With over 43,000 State and Territory Emergency Service volunteers the Association provides a forum for national cross jurisdiction communication, collaboration and coordination on common issues in the emergency management arena that affect volunteers.

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From the Chair

❖ Gordon Hall ESM

NSESVA Chair

SES Volunteer Mandurah WA

Welcome to the First National SES Volunteers Association Yearbook

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN BY

acknowledging the catastrophic floods we have seen this year in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and now South Australia.

The human loss and suffering have been colossal and included one SES volunteer paying the ultimate price during an operation in Queensland.

The amount of work and hours the State Emergency Services volunteers have done performing rescues and assisting people in their communities during these disasters has been enormous.

The deployment of volunteers and staff from other Australian jurisdictions, New Zealand, and Singapore to assist during these flood disasters has been very welcome and it is great to see them come together to help those in need.

It is in times like these that we see the resilience of people and their communities come together to work through the tough times. I always feel it is a privilege to be an SES Volunteer and work in preparing and responding to disasters in my local community or elsewhere in our nation. It is the SES Volunteers who are making such a difference by ensuring they are trained and keeping their skills up to date,

so they can respond in a timely and effective manner no matter what the emergency is in their and other areas.

In 2022, the number of disasters across the country, especially floods, have been devastating to many people and their communities. The BoM has declared a third La Niña in a row. These disasters are costing Australia around \$38 billion dollars a year and it is projected to double by the year 2060. The floods in the first half of 2022 are estimated to have cost at least \$3.5 billion (data from Insurance Council of Australia) and these events have been the costliest flood events in Australia.

It is a very welcome initiative that we now have a new National Disaster Management Agency (NEMA), created to help Australians get through their toughest times. This is very necessary as we need a national focus as we face a third La Niña season which has the potential for more severe flooding as the nation approaches a heightened risk weather season. This includes the possibility of an early tropical cyclone season.

The National SESVA is working to assist where required in promoting the State Emergency Services volunteers in all states and territories. This includes meeting with Federal Ministers or their

staff, working closely with AFAC and attending the National Memorial Service in Canberra and the annual AFAC conference.

The National SESVA is also working on several other initiatives. Now that Covid restrictions have eased, we will be able to continue our Young Emerging Leaders program. This program is where we sponsor young SES Volunteers, nominated by the state/territory SESVA, to attend the National Memorial Service in Canberra. During their visit to Canberra, they will visit Parliament House, visit GeoScience Australia and see what developments they are working on, as well as the ACT Emergency Service establishments. During the Memorial Service they will have the opportunity to meet Chiefs, Commissioners, and other leaders from around the country.

In closing I acknowledge the role and support by the Volunteer Emergency Service responders' families, friends, employers, and many supporters that make it all possible throughout the tough times of emergency events.

On behalf of all the Directors and Councillors I wish you a good festive season.

Stay safe. ❖

Editor's Note

✖ Dr Faye Bendrups OAM

NSESVA Vice Chair

Editor, The NSESVA Yearbook 2022

Volunteer, VICSES Footscray, Victoria

It is with great pleasure that this inaugural edition of the NSESVA yearbook is going to print in 2022.

SINCE COMING TOGETHER IN 2015

to form a national perspective and a national voice, the National SESVA Board of Directors decided last year to produce a Yearbook capturing stories from all eight jurisdictions and this edition is the first of many to come. While some jurisdictions produce their own local journals, this Yearbook is an opportunity to take a national overview and realise what a significant contribution SES volunteers make to national emergency response, community safety and development of social cohesion.

SES volunteers have been part of local, national and international

response to emergencies since taking over from the Civil Defence in the 1970s. Now this Yearbook is a resource which educates, informs, and celebrates their work, and as a digital publication, it can be shared widely.

2022 has been an historical year for SES operations, with massive flood events across the country. Stories in this journal play a small part in recognising and applauding the work of thousands of volunteers nationwide who have worked tirelessly throughout 2022 to keep their communities safe. The Yearbook will include a regular feature article 'From the Archive' – looking

back at previous generations, and will also include current obituaries from various jurisdictions, acknowledging the sacrifices made by ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Submissions can be made to future editions of the Yearbook by contacting NSESVA at office@nsesva.org.au or by contacting the member association in your jurisdiction.

What's in a name? In 2023 the NSESVA will be running a competition to select a new name for the Yearbook. Information on this will be disseminated by all member associations in 2023. ✖

Epic Floods in NSW and Queensland

The February-March 2022 Eastern Australia floods were one of the nation's worst recorded flood disasters in history.

A SERIES OF FLOODS OCCURRED

in South East Queensland and parts of coastal New South Wales. Brisbane suffered major flooding, along with the cities of Maryborough, Gympie, the Sunshine Coast, Caboolture, Toowoomba, Ipswich, Logan City, the Gold Coast, Murwillumbah, Grafton, Byron Bay, Ballina, Lismore, the Central Coast and parts of Sydney.

Twenty-two people were known to have died during the disaster. Throughout South East Queensland, almost one thousand schools were closed in response to the flooding. Evacuations took place and the public were advised to avoid non-essential travel. Food shortages were reported across the region, due to the ensuing supply chain crisis. Properties were left uninhabitable; after around 1,400 rapid property damage assessments taken in Lismore, 900 of them were considered uninhabitable.

The Insurance Council of Australia figures calculated the cost of claims from the disaster to be \$1.45 billion, but that figure is expected to rise. 5000 ADF personnel were deployed across the flood disaster areas by March 5. Only a few weeks later, at the end of March, the floods returned and an evacuation order was given for parts of Northern New South Wales due to the 'life-threatening' floods.

NSW FLOODS UPDATE - 6 MARCH 2022

Requests for
SES assistance

1,023

Total requests for
SES assistance
since 21 February 2022

16,219

Flood Rescues

42

Evacuation Orders

56

Evacuation Warnings

7

Safe to Return

35

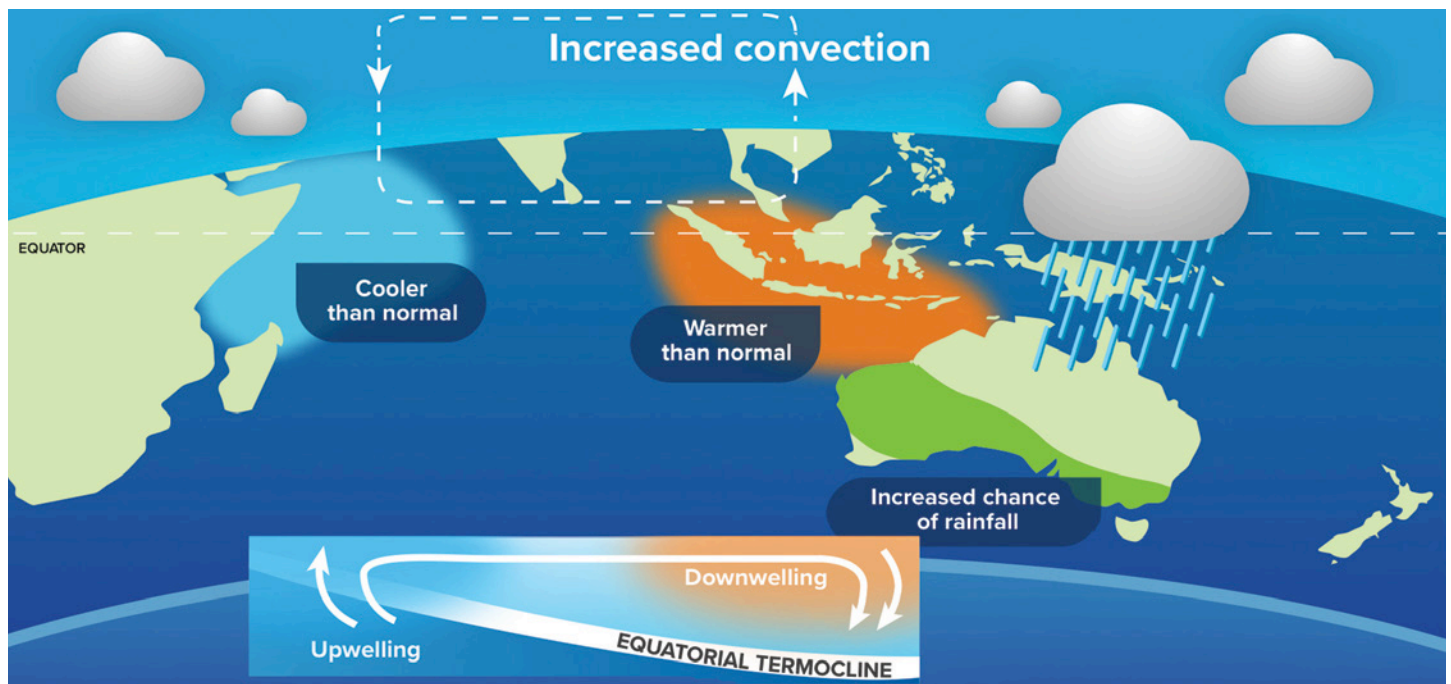


ses.nsw.gov.au

Along with other EM agencies, Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) volunteers were deployed to support flood affected communities in the northern rivers region of NSW. On 1 April a taskforce was sent to Coffs Harbour, made up of 45 personnel from both VICSES and Country Fire Authority (CFA) along with 12 vehicles which departed en route to affected areas.

The VICSES volunteer teams were sent to relieve local NSWSES crews, and respond to new RFAs as they come in, including the types of jobs that are the 'bread and butter' of SES: removal of fallen trees, temporary roof repairs, sandbagging and water diversion, community information etc. The VICSES volunteers came from across Metropolitan Melbourne, the South West, Mid West, and North East Regions of Victoria. ❖





Negative Indian Ocean Dipole

What is causing all this wet weather?

THE BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY IN 2022 declared a negative Indian Ocean Dipole event is underway. The negative Indian Ocean Dipole, or IOD, has been declared because ocean temperatures are warmer in the tropical east Indian Ocean than in the west Indian Ocean.

The Indian Ocean Dipole is a type of year-to-year climate variability, a bit like the El Niño-Southern Oscillation, but in the Indian Ocean rather than the Pacific.

But what does that mean and how does it affect Australia's weather?

Andrew King, Senior Lecturer in Climate Science from the University of Melbourne explains:

"When we have negative Indian Ocean Dipole conditions we tend to see more rain over southern and eastern Australia. Will we get a reprieve from the flooding rains of recent months? No. Spring won't bring a clean break from this year's very wet winter.

The Indian Ocean Dipole relationship with Australian rainfall is strongest in

September and October, so we're likely to see wet conditions over the next few months at least. Warm waters in the east Indian Ocean, like we're seeing at the moment, increase the occurrence of low pressure systems over the southeast of Australia as well as the amount of moisture in the air. This means there's a higher likelihood of rain generally and an increased chance of extreme rain events too".

It is believed to be the first time since reliable records began in 1960 that negative Indian Ocean dipole events have occurred two years in a row. The last negative Indian Ocean dipole began in July 2021, the first in five years.

Meteorologist Ben Domensino said "When we have a negative Indian Ocean dipole in place, typically southern and south-eastern inland Australia have a high chance of seeing above-average rain, and most other areas of central, eastern and southern Australia are also more likely to be wet. One thing that a lot of people are concerned about with

this IOD declared is that Sydney just had a record wet year to date".

It is also looking possible we'll see another La Niña form later this year, for the third year in a row. This is not unprecedented but it is unusual. This raises the odds of wetter conditions persisting for a few more months at least.

Andrew King says "for parts of New South Wales, the news of wet conditions being on the cards could not come at a worse time. Sydney and other areas of the eastern seaboard have already received record-breaking rain totals so far this year, including in July. Catchments remain saturated so further rainfall may well lead to more flooding. Australia has highly variable rainfall and we have seen multi-year spells of persistent wet conditions before – notably in the mid-1970s and 2010-2012.

It is vital we build a better understanding of rainfall changes under global warming so we can plan better for our future climate".

ACTSES: Who We Are

Our mission: Volunteering to support our community in good times and emergencies.

WE OFTEN HEAR THE COMMUNITY

ask, what exactly does the SES do? Are we full time paid employees? Many are surprised to learn we are volunteers, responding to emergencies in our spare time or leaving our work and family to help the community in times of need.

Our 380 plus volunteers, based at seven Units across the ACT, are able to provide community response to flood, storm, searches and other emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The ACTSES is part of a national network of similar services in each state and territory around Australia.

The main function of the ACTSES, under the Act Emergencies Act, is to undertake planning and response operations for storms and floods.

The ACTSES cooperates closely with other emergency agencies including:

- ACT Ambulance Service (ACTAS)
- ACT Fire & Rescue (ACT F&R)
- ACT Rural Fire Service (ACT RFS)
- Australian Federal Police (AFP)

The ACTSES also deploys volunteers to assist with national relief efforts including the Victorian Bushfires 2009, Flooding Taskforce in Hay NSW 2012, Cyclone Yasi in Queensland 2011, the NSW Hunter Region Storms in 2015 and Tropical Cyclone Debbie in 2017. ACTSES participates in national forums, conferences, and workshops to ensure effective key messages are consistent across the community.

On average, the ACTSES responds to 2000 requests for assistance per financial year over the last 10 years.

During Covid the ACTSES was operational daily for approximately 9 months assisting in many areas, including:

- Packing and delivery essential food to vulnerable people
- Assisting at testing areas – welfare, parking etc
- Checking physically on members of the community in isolation.
- Phoning members of the community in isolation
- Delivery of computers to schools and school children
- Assisting in Dept Health Operations area
- Packing of Rat Packs

Storm Preparation and Response

Preparing for and responding to storm damage is one of the most frequent operational tasks undertaken by the ACTSES. This includes:

- educating the community about the danger of storms including how to prepare for, respond to and recover from them
- warning the community of impending storms
- ensuring the safety of residents who are impacted by storms
- making residences and businesses safe
- preventing further damage by erecting tarpaulins, and undertaking temporary repairs
- providing residents with access to their doors and driveways by clearing fallen trees and other debris

Flood Preparation and Response

ACTSES is the lead emergency service in preparing for and responding to floods. This includes:

- educating the community about the danger of floods including how to prepare for, respond to and recover from them
- controlling and contributing to the ACT flood response, including:
 - warning the community of impending flooding
 - leading a multi-agency response
 - evacuating residents where necessary
 - pumping out basements and other flooded structures
 - assisting with rescue

ACTSES operates two flood boats.

While their function is primarily flood rescue, they may be used for virtually any water-based support as required.

If large-scale flooding occurs, it is likely to extend across the border into surrounding NSW, and for this reason their use in this type of operation is most likely to be in support of the NSW SES.

Other ACTSES Tasks

- Ambulance Support Volunteers and Mass Casualty Support Volunteers
- Land-based missing person and evidence searches in support of the Australian Federal Police (AFP)
- Urban search and rescue in support of ACT Fire and Rescue (ACT F&R)
- The provision of portable lighting towers during emergencies
- A range of support at community and other events. ✖



ACT Awards

The National Medal, the ACT Emergency Medal and the Canberra Gold Award.

ACT Government – ACT SES Canberra Gold Award recipient

The Canberra Gold Award is given by the ACT government in recognition and celebration of the unique contribution made by groups and individuals who have chosen to make Canberra their home for fifty years or more, helping shape the city we all love. In 2022 the ACT State Emergency Service received the Canberra Gold Award.

The submission for this award advised:

The ACT State Emergency Service was originally Civil Defence. Civil Defence started in 1939 then in 1974 the State Emergency Service was formed in each state & territory. In the ACT we were called the ACT Emergency Service. In 2004 when the Emergency Act was passed we became the ACT State Emergency Service (ACTSES). The ACTSES helps the community in time of disasters especially with flood & storm damage and assist the police with missing person searches. The ACTSES also assists other services with disasters like bush fires, pandemics etc.

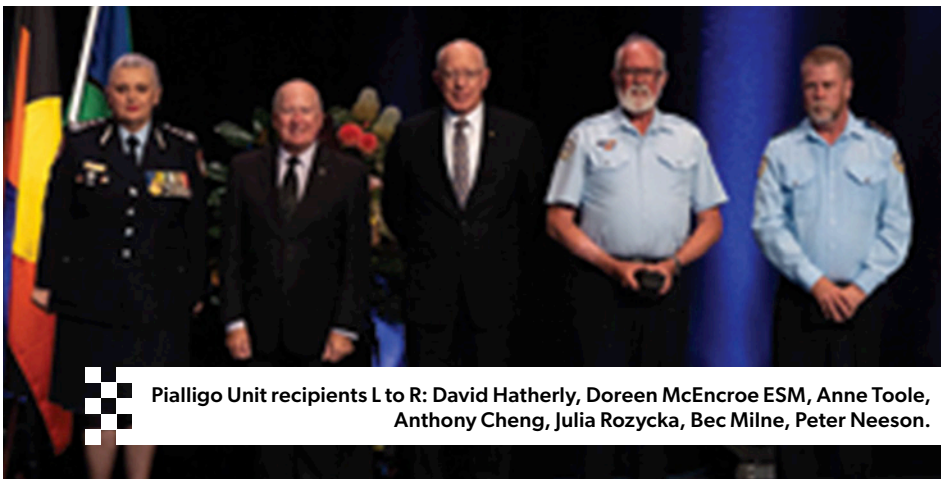
Over the years the ACTSES has helped the community with many storm/flood events, the 2001, 2003 and 2019/20 bushfires. We have also helped interstate with deployments like 2008 and 2009 Victorian bushfires, 2011 Brisbane floods, missing person search in Grantham, Cyclone Yasi, 2011 Hay floods, 2019/20 NSW/QLD bushfires to name just a few. Over the last two years the ACTSES has been helping with the COVID 19 pandemic with food deliveries and packing, welfare at testing Centre and vaccination Centre, assistance in the Dept. Health Operation Centre and tracing area. ❏



Tuggeranong recipients, L to R: ESA Commissioner Georgeina Whelan, ACT Minister for Emergency Service Mick Gentleman, Governor General, Commander Tuggeranong Unit Phil Nolen, Bob Fryer.



The Governor General David Hurley presenting the medals.



Pialligo Unit recipients L to R: David Hatherly, Doreen McEncroe ESM, Anne Toole, Anthony Cheng, Julia Rozycka, Bec Milne, Peter Neeson.



ESA Commissioner Georgeina Whelan.

The National Emergency Medal and ACT Emergency Medal Ceremony

On Monday 28 March 2022, representatives from each ACTSES Unit and HQ were presented with the National Emergency Medal and ACT Emergency Medals by the Governor-General General David Hurley AC, DSC, FTSE and Minister for Police and Emergency Services Mr Mick Gentleman MLA. They were presented medals on behalf of the 236 ACTSES members who were recognised for their efforts in response to the catastrophic bushfires and storms experienced during the 2019-2020 season. ACTSES members were part of the more than 900 recipients across ACT Government were recognised with one or both medals.



ACTSES Chief Officer Anthony Draheim, Duck Tonge ESM NSESVA Councillor.

Bill To Fine Those Who Drive Through Flood Waters

❖ Gareth Ward, Member for Kiama

It was only a few years ago that I stood at a funeral of a life cut tragically short.

A FRIEND OF MINE HAD TAKEN

a chance. It was a dark night and rain was coming down in buckets. She drove across a causeway which was underwater due to flooding.

Her car was swept off the causeway and the driver drowned.

I remember standing at her funeral wishing she hadn't taken the risk and had stopped and thought about the potential dangers for just a little longer.

Whenever there is heavy rain and flooding, the message is repeated and repeated. If it's flooded – forget it. Don't drive through flood waters.

I represent the electorate of Kiama on the State's south coast. Whilst this is the most beautiful part of Australia, its beauty can also cause tumult and terror. Bushfires and floods are all too common and sadly so too are the mistakes that people make, often unwittingly, during these events.

The story of the loss of my friend is sadly one of too many.

People wouldn't drive into a bushfire. Why don't people apply the same logic to floods? Both have deadly consequences but it seems the consequences of driving into flood waters just doesn't register.

What also doesn't register is the possibility that volunteer emergency service personnel may well have to put their lives at risk to help someone who has made a poor decision.

Interestingly, some countries will change a person for the cost of their rescue. For example, hikers in Japan will pay for the cost of their rescue if they get stranded in the great outdoors.



Moral hazard does play a part in decision-making. If people perceive there are no consequences for making a decision, this does unburden your approach to the options you may have.

To help people think twice, I will be introducing a Private Members Bill into the NSW Parliament to provide for a fine for deliberately and recklessly driving through flood waters. By requiring that an action be both 'deliberate' and 'reckless' gives the police maximum discretion when considering the issue of a fine. The Bill proposes that all fine revenue would be returned to the State Emergency Service.

Presently, a person can be fined if they ignore a 'road closed' sign. However, it is impractical in regional communities to have police darting all over the place erecting signs for people who should know better. Common sense is sadly not very common.

What my Bill seeks to do is provide a deterrent to make people think twice.

And if you do get caught unintentionally, the police won't have to fine you. This bill will be the opportunity to send a message to those who simply take no notice or just don't seem to care.

This bill is also about recognising the incredible value of our State Emergency Service personnel. Each SES member gives freely of their time and trains hard so they can provide assistance when necessary. But rescue comes with risks and if this bill saves just one life because someone decided to turn around and not take a risk, it will be all worth it.

This bill isn't a revenue raising measure. It is an acknowledgment of the importance of our SES and it's a powerful statement about the degree of risk that comes with driving through flood waters. Fines are imposed to deter behaviour and I sincerely hope that no one is ever fined, but I also hope that no one suffers injury or loss of life for making a mistake that has touched me both personally and professionally. ❖

Get Ready Ulladulla

 Joanne King, Public Information Officer, Ulladulla Unit

Ulladulla SES Unit recently held two successful Get Ready programs for the local community.

OUR FIRST EVENT HELD IN MARCH

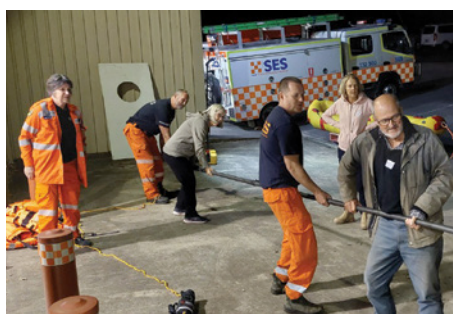
saw 21 community members attend, including members of the Local Men's Shed and family members of our volunteers.

Our SES volunteers established seven Get Ready stations

- Ladder Safety – raising, lowering and importance of three points of contact when gutter cleaning
- First Aid – how to use an AED alongside CPR
- Emergency Kits – what three things? Are you ready?
- Water Diversion & Sand Bagging – self help for flooding
- Land Based Flood Rescue – using throw bags and other floating items to assist
- Lashings & Tiedowns – 3 picket lashings – to tie down trampolines, verandahs and protect against high winds
- Damaged Window Repair – using corflute, plastic covered cardboard to make temporary repairs, timber and tape

These were organised around headquarters where groups attended 4 individual stations to get a hands on experience. Some of the skills gained could be used to help themselves or to prepare prior to an emergency. Other activities gave participants time to consider what was important to them in the case of evacuation.

Our second event had a couple of false starts with storm events taking precedent. We finally got it underway in May with community members, members from Ulladulla Bushwalkers who at times have been called on as



Feedback from the night included:


"It was a good program, showing lots of simple things you can do at home to help yourself. I'd recommend for everyone, including women. Lots they can do too." – Peter

"It was an enjoyable evening, while learning skills for myself it also showed the competence in the skills of the SES volunteers" – Nick

spontaneous volunteers, staff from Mullala Nursery and NRMA. The same stations were used with each group rotating around to allow them to attend 4 individual stations.

Yousif gave feedback "I thought it was really informative and applicable/ relevant to me. It gave me skills that I can use in emergencies, allowed me to think about things I hadn't considered before and gave me an idea as to the services SES provide (like sand bag filling stations). I also loved the community

atmosphere and the effort volunteers went to, to set that atmosphere."

Each evening concluded with a meal shared with SES volunteers and community members. With the community members going home with goodies they could use to help prepare their homes or in an emergency including Gardening Gloves, Rain poncho, Waterproof bag, Flat Water bottle and what to pack in an emergency list, provide through the NRMA sponsorship of Get Ready. 



Another Twenty Four Hours

 Michael Ward, Flood Rescue Technician and Unit Commander, Port Macquarie SES

I have debated writing an account of the March Floods from my perspective for a while however didn't want to write something that seemed too self-promoting. Following the release of the enquiries I felt it important to share what it was like on the ground in the initial phases of the devastating flooding earlier this year.

MARK AND MYSELF ENDED UP AT

the right location at the right time through no planning of our own and owe a debt of gratitude to the Mullumbimby community and members that welcomed us and looked after us during our stay.

It was a mid-Sunday afternoon (27th February) and I was quietly working in the yard trying to tidy up before the working week when, as Unit Commander, I received a call from Paula Kircher who was chasing a Flood Rescue Crew (2xL3 Techs with vehicle and Arc

Angle) to be deployed immediately to Macksville to cover the area for the high tide and expected flooding on the Monday morning.

Whilst Port Macquarie has a number of Flood Technicians we all work full time Monday to Friday and it is often problematic having people commit to the typical 1-3-1 deployment requirements. Knowing that this was a significant gap in coverage that needed to be filled I send messages to all of our technicians to see if anyone

was available. Mark Anderson was on paternity leave and able to be available for 24 hours, and at the time I was undertaking project work remotely and (knowing that we had coverage in town) also agreed to cover this immediate need for 24 hours. Both Mark and myself have young children and our wives agreed that they could survive without us till Monday evening.

We grabbed a change of clothes, packed up our rescue equipment and left town – next stop Macksville where we



introduced ourselves to the unit, took a drive around town to familiarise ourselves with the town and the river, then settled in for an early night in preparation for the potential flooding on Monday morning.

Monday morning came and went and the high tide came and went. Fortunately for Macksville and Nambucca the rain had eased enough to avoid (just) flooding of the lower parts of the township. Whilst out on our final resonance run prior to returning to Port Macquarie we started to hear on the radio the number of flood rescues that were occurring further north around the Lismore area and flood technicians requesting urgent additional resources. Knowing that a plan would be in place to move resources to the area (however recognising that this takes time to arrange) we looked at each other, called our families, and agreed that if required we would head north for another 24 hours to cover the immediate need – at that stage we were only a couple of

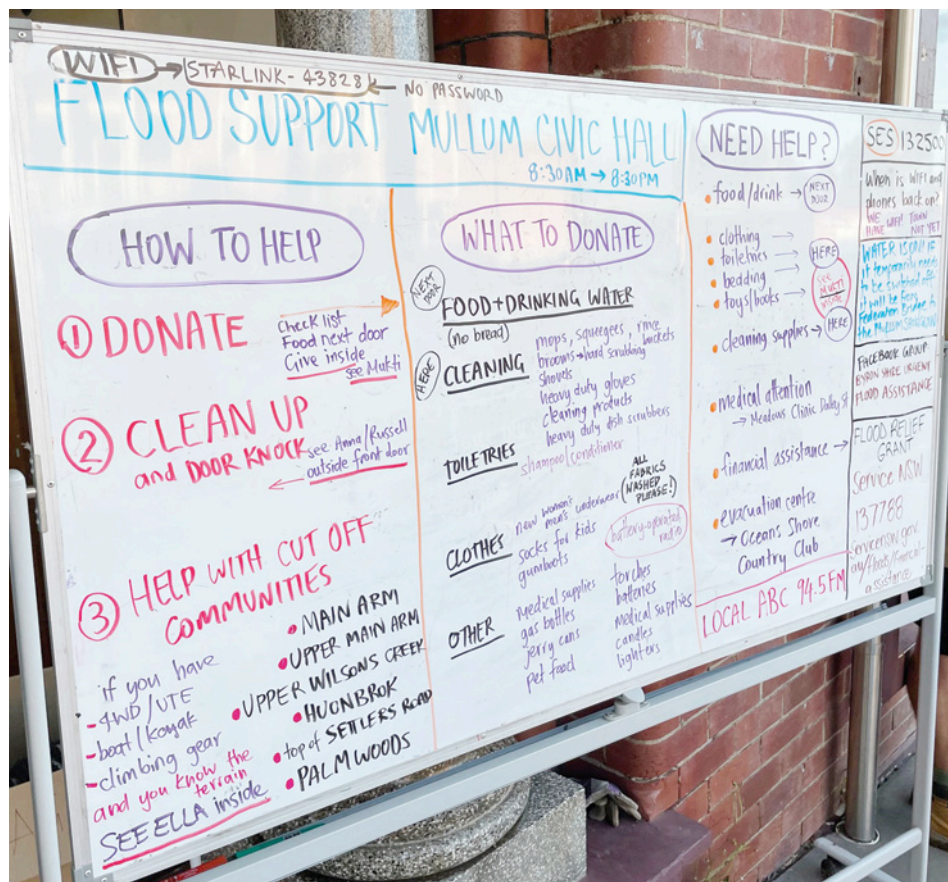
hours away. We spoke to Paula who tasked us to head north to Ballina to the staging area with further details to follow. We turned north little knowing what the future held for us.

Upon getting close to Ballina I followed up where we were to be staged from and after a few conversations we were sent to Mullumbimby. There are multiple routes into Mullumbimby and we obviously tried the closest one – flooded. Tried the next one north – also flooded. Continued north – flooded before finally trying the northern most access and actually getting through. We arrived at Mullumbimby HQ to be met by a relieved Unit Commander Tracey and her crew who had been working tirelessly saving lives and protecting their community.

The next 12 hours are a blur as we went from flood rescue to flood rescue. We commandeered what I can only assume was an ex-army truck with high clearance and the truck owners were fantastic being able to take us through

the floodwaters in town and out to the hinterland to evacuate several people and determine if/how we could get further up the catchment where there were known land slips and houses destroyed. On dusk we travelled as far along Wilson Creek Road as we could – stopped by a downed tree, an abandoned ambulance, and half the road washed away. We cleared the tree, took note of the ambulance details and returned to town with a load of relieved residents on the back.

Upon returning to the unit we hitched up an IRB and travelled to Ocean Shores and started rescuing people from flooded houses. It was a surreal experience driving around in the dark on a public road in an IRB following the marker posts to ensure we stayed on the road and not in the surrounding drainage swales and creeks. We finished the night with a full boat load of people to be taken to the evacuation centre. Little did we know that on our return trip



we would be flagged down by a couple of extra passengers seeking evacuation. Mark and myself promptly gave up our seats and proceeded to wade the boat the rest of the way back to the vehicle before loading up and transferring the residents to the evacuation centre.

We packed up for the evening at around 4am which was hard for us to do as we knew there were many more people isolated, however it was unsafe for us to continue due to exhaustion. Luckily for us Kath from the unit had a couple of spare beds and agreed to accommodate Mark and myself and thus avoiding the need to travel out of town. That said, we would have both probably fallen asleep at Mullumbimby HQ if required.

On Tuesday morning after probably not enough hours sleep we got up and were excited to see that there was some sunshine and we headed into HQ to see what had happened during the night. At this stage there was no mobile communication and very sporadic

internet and no way to contact the outside world to let people know we were OK. We figured we could work till after lunch enabling us to return home that evening. We returned to Upper Wilsons Creek to check on the Ambulance and determine if we could proceed further in the daylight.

We eventually tracked the Ambulance Crew down – they had stayed with a resident that had been caught in a land slide through their house and were waiting for Westpac to land and transport the resident to hospital. Westpac Helicopter took the injured party to hospital and we transported their partner back to town. We returned to bid farewell to the SES crew and headed for home, or so we thought.

Our travels were going well and we were looking forward to getting home and having a shower and seeing our family. We made it as far as Broadwater and realised we needed a bigger boat! The Highway was now a waterway

and we were on the other side to Port Macquarie. We looked at each other and figured we were stuck here so we might as well make the most of it and returned to Mullumbimby, rolled up our sleeves, went to Woolworths to buy some fresh jocks and socks and got back to work.

We returned to town, let Tracey know what happened, and got back to work. At this stage there was no phone coverage, no internet, and no connection to the outside world. Listening into the rescue channel on the GRN I heard Port Macquarie had been activated on a rescue and obtained permission to talk to PMH43 directly. After letting them know we were still alive and requested they pass on this information to our wives I had them deliver a portable radio to Roger (one of our members) and requested a back channel from SOC. This then gave us limited access to the outside world and the opportunity to confirm Beacon tasking and details.



I stayed at HQ to assist Tracey and Mark continued to work in the field with the Mullumbimby members. Everyone got on with what needed to be done with the equipment and resources that we had. Fortunately I had the benefit of experiencing something similar the year before that impacted Port Macquarie and was able to share what I had learnt during that time. The community banded together and the Civic Centre became a hive of activity as people donated supplies and equipment, people sorted donated supplies into categories and coordinated how to get it to isolated community members. We were able to utilise this community resource to deliver (via SES and Marine Rescue members) the first round of ration packs to the isolated communities before handing this responsibility over to the community to manage moving forward.

A member of the public setup a Starlink at the Civic Centre and this finally gave people the chance to get in contact

with the outside world. Tracey was able to download the outstanding Beacon jobs and as they were completed we were able to radio through the details to Roger who could then close the jobs in Beacon remotely.

I still remember heading down after another long day to call home and let them know we were still flooded in and didn't know when we would be home. I watched Mark find a children's book (that had been donated) that he also had at home and saw him sit down on a video call with his son and read the book along together. After a brief moment of connection with our families, we then rushed to an urgent job to respond to a member of the public who had activated a personal medi-alert device, with the knowledge that the local ambulance had been sent out of town to support Ballina.

The days continued, the highway remained closed, and the Mullumbimby members relentlessly continued to get on with the job. Finally on Thursday

afternoon we received word that we could return home via a series of back roads to Grafton and then back down the highway. Twenty four hours had turned into five days and we and our families were grateful that we could return safely back to Port Macquarie.

Throughout the time we spent there I was impressed by the professionalism shown by the Mullumbimby members from Tracey down. Their headquarters lost power (was running on a generator for most of the time), lost mobile phone coverage, lost internet connection and was shut off from town water. The team just kept on with the mission of Saving Lives and Creating Safer Communities. They are a credit to their community and were welcoming of a couple of random blokes from Port Macquarie who happened to end up where we needed to be when we needed to be, and we had the longest "twenty four hour deployment" either of us have ever experienced. ❏



National Disaster Rescue Competition – A Northern Territory Perspective

By Marie Cunningham

NT Emergency Service sent a team to Perth, WA, to be a part of the National Disaster Rescue Challenge.

AFTER MONTHS OF TRAINING, the team was able to showcase their storm damage, flood, search and rescue abilities, along with their casualty care and extraction operations skills. It was also a chance for the team to learn about

what other State Emergency Services can do and provide to their community. Everyone benefited through the exchange of ideas with fellow challenge teams, and all were able to bring new skills home.

Within the challenge, it was great to see individuals develop new ways to do things and teams adapting to what was provided as they progressed through the scenarios. According to the judges, the NT Emergency Service



group demonstrated good teamwork, communication, and planning skills.

Many of the team considered the best stand to be Stand 4. With the combination of search operations, casualty care, and extraction with low angle rope rescue, it really shone a

light on the teamwork and knowledge of our team. It was definitely a great learning experience as it introduced new items that the participants have not used before.

All NT Emergency Service volunteers who participated in the challenge

really benefited from this great learning experience. Events like the National Disaster Rescue Challenge are an important part of building confidence, learning new ideas and building national camaraderie between the SES teams. 🏠



Northern Territory Emergency Service Deploy to New South Wales

 By Ron Green, photos by Felix Ho

The Northern Territory Emergency Service (NTES) deployed eight members to NSW to assist with the ongoing flood emergency in March 2022.

NSW HAD BEEN IMPACTED BY extreme rainfall since late February, resulting in devastating floods from the Queensland border to the South NSW Coast. NSW SES requested support from the Northern Territory to relieve teams in affected areas.

NSW SES units had been working tirelessly throughout this period. The Northern Territory Emergency Service was happy to answer the call

to help our NSW counterparts, and over two days eight members were flown down to assist with relief efforts.

The volunteer members deployed came from across the Northern Territory, including Darwin and Palmerston, with a team on standby from Alice Springs.

With the two previous interstate deployments for NTES volunteers occurring way back during the 2011 Brisbane Flood and Cyclone Yasi clean up, NTES volunteers

considered this deployment to be an absolute privilege. After flying into Brisbane from Darwin, the team members were split into two groups – one going to Lismore and the other to Casino.

After a late evening of travelling, both teams had an early start the next morning to undergo induction and become familiar with the new area.

Throughout the day the Lismore team was called to chainsaw jobs, and although




there were no floods in the town at the time, the destruction was very evident. The following day the NTES team got to work cleaning operational vehicles and the Lismore SES shed before being joined by 7RAR who helped out. A call came through during the morning for a roofing job – two stories on a slope. The volunteers learned a lot and completed the task successfully before visiting the Lismore Recovery Centre for lunch.

On the second day the team attended another roofing job where the house was gutted and a big hole was in the roof where the occupant climbed out of the ceiling to escape flood waters. This job was a little more challenging as it was an elevated, asbestos lined house, and the ropes became quite stuck on the solar panels during set up.

The final day commenced with a 5am bus pick up for a 9am flight

where both teams were reunited and travelled from Brisbane back to Darwin together.

Following this deployment, many volunteers across the Northern Territory have expressed a hope that NTES will now be seen as a professional and viable option when additional assistance is needed to relieve exhausted interstate crews in disaster affected areas of Australia. 



QLD Operation Flood Assist 2022

The Department of Defence supported Queensland and New South Wales governments under Operation Flood Assist 2022 from February 25 till March 25. Here is a chronicle of the first week of Defence Operation Flood Assist 2022 in Queensland, from defence.gov.au:

Friday, February 25:

- Following a request by Queensland Police, Defence commenced support to rescue efforts of civilians affected by the Queensland floods.
- Australian Army MRH-90 Taipan helicopters assisted the rescue of community members trapped in flood-affected areas in south-east Queensland.
- Helicopter crews conducted two missions resulting in two separate rescues resulting in four people being rescued. The rescues took place in vicinity of Gatton and Jimboomba (Boonah).

Saturday, February 26:

- Defence received a request from the Queensland Government, through Emergency Management Australia, to increase its support.
 - Helicopter crews conducted eight rescue missions resulting in 28 people being rescued.
 - The rescues took place in vicinity of Regency Downs, Woolshed Creek, Clarendon, Rifle Range and Mount Tarampa in Queensland.
 - Rescue details include:
 - Aircrew responded to a property at Regency Downs, where a mother and infant along with four children, who

were surrounded by water in their home, were rescued.

- Aircrew also successfully searched for and located three missing men in a dinghy who were in difficulty after setting off to help neighbours. They were winched into the helicopter and transported safely at RAAF Base Amberley.
- At approximately 2:45pm Queensland local time, an MRH-90 Taipan helicopter was tasked to a rescue at Lake Clarendon where a community member was stranded on the roof of a vehicle.



Sunday, February 27:

- Defence provided an Air Force P-8A Poseidon aircraft from South Australia to provide aerial surveillance support to the Queensland Government about flood and damage assessments.
- Two MRH-90 Taipan helicopters continued search and rescue operations, including winch recovery.
- Two commercial contracted rescue helicopters in Brisbane continued to be on standby to supplement Defence capability.
- ADF helicopter crews conducted 10 rescue missions in Queensland resulting in 19 people rescued across a wide variety of locations, including Regency Downs, Woolshed Creek and Lake Clarendon among others.
 - Aircrews responded to a property at Mount Tarampa where a family who were surrounded by water in their home was rescued.
 - Aircrew conducted a rescue winch recovery of a man in flood waters at Prenzlau, who was subsequently evacuated to RAAF Base Amberley.

- ADF provided emergency support to the NSW State Emergency Service in flood affected areas in the Northern NSW region with help from the Army's 5th Brigade.
 - As part of this support, approximately 70 Army Reserve soldiers from the 41st Battalion the Royal New South Wales Regiment were undertaking a range of tasks including sandbagging, door knocking and transportation.

Monday, February 28:

- Ready additional ADF personnel so that they can move within 24 hours' notice to augment support efforts.
- In accordance with Emergency Management Australia priorities, Defence was focusing delivery of ADF rotary-wing support into northern NSW region.

In Queensland:

- Defence continued to make preparations to support the Queensland Government requirements for evacuation handling centres if needed.

- ADF personnel deployed to aged-care facilities in the Brisbane area assisted with flood preparation including sandbagging and subsequent clean-up after flood waters had receded.
- Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Minister for Defence visited 7th Brigade in Brisbane to receive a brief on the brigade's capabilities, and also an update on the ADF efforts in assisting with flood relief.
- A helicopter crew provided urgent search and rescue support in looking for a car that had been reportedly swept away down Albert River in the vicinity of Logan. The search was called off when it was confirmed that the car was unoccupied.
- One AW139 helicopter deployed from Townsville to south-east Queensland to reinforce ADF rotary-wing effects in Queensland and northern NSW.
- One Air Force P-8A Poseidon aircraft provided aerial surveillance and imagery of the Mary River in the Gympie and Maryborough regions, flood-affected areas of the Brisbane River, and conducted two ad-hoc surveys of catchment areas in the Sunshine Coast Airport and Caloundra Airport regions.

Wednesday, March 2:

- An additional 550 personnel (approximate) were conducting preparation for tasking.
- Defence adjusted its posture in response to the situation in northern NSW, and Bell 412 commercially-contracted helicopters from Oakey are now supporting the Brisbane basin.

Thursday, March 3:

- 230 personnel commenced movements into Brisbane, Ipswich, Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley region today to support local authorities. ❖



Coober Pedy SES Unit and Mine Rescue

Coober Pedy SES is busy on many fronts due to its outback location and responses varying from Road Crash Rescue, storm, support, confined space (being mine rescue) and setting up the airstrip.

IN RECENT YEARS THE MINES

Rescue assisted police with the search for the remains of missing teenager Karen Williams who was last seen alive in August 1990. Photos reflect the first major search in 2013, then November 2013 (with temperatures of 40 degrees plus) and again in September 2014

after police received fresh information. Both searches involved many volunteers over several days.

The renewed search in November 2013 saw our Mine Rescue volunteers liaise with the local council to enable them to have the use of council heavy equipment in the search, as over time

opal field diggings had altered, with new mines added and old ones filled in.

In November 2013 police charged Nicola Novakovich with her murder, having last been seen in his vehicle. Karen was allegedly raped and murdered with her body then thrown down a disused mine shaft. Novakovich



was found not guilty of murdering Karen in August 2016 whilst the judge was satisfied that he and an associate “had some involvement in the death of Karen Williams and the disposal of her body”, but took issue with the evidence. The case still remains open.


During the year, the unit continued to develop its new mine specific truck by refining the storage for equipment and updating both tools and the equipment, and also increased its membership by 7. The effort by members with the vehicle has proven worthwhile with a mine rescue earlier in the year and then more recently in June 2018, when a man plunged

down a 15metre mine shaft. Two people had been scouring for opal when one slipped and fell down the vertical mineshaft late at night. The rescue operation took just under two hours.

Coober Pedy SES volunteers also assist Emergency Aircraft that need to land on the Traeger Road Airstrip in between Coober Pedy and Glendambo. SES store and manage the emergency lighting for this strip to allow Emergency Aircraft to land at night on the main highway between South Australia and the Northern Territory . Setting up these airstrip is a complex operation and must also comply with very strict standards

to meet CASA and Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure requirements. Again our volunteers just see it as another way to support their local community.

Besides its core role, Coober Pedy unit has also increased its visibility and presence within its local community through participating in events such as the Breakaway Marathon and Opal Festival.

Additionally the unit had several training courses delivered in the region, so that volunteer members can continue to support their community in the best way they can by maintaining or enhancing their skills levels. 



Tasmania 2022 Storm Events

As large parts of Queensland and New South Wales experienced extensive, prolonged flooding and severe weather earlier this year, Tasmanian SES comrades looked on anxiously waiting for the ‘call up’ to assist our brothers and sisters in orange.

THE IMAGES THAT STREAMED

across the nation and the world, highlight the reason why we volunteer, as we assist our own communities, and those across the country, when our neighbours are at their lowest, most vulnerable, somewhat hopeless. Only an SES volunteer can explain what it means to monitor the weather, waiting in anticipation to help, sleeping with one eye open at night, as the rain bounces off the roof and windows, with the wind whistling through the trees. And then ... the pager comes to life, a short description, but an important call for help.

While Tasmania doesn't have the long floodplains as mainland

Australia does, we are not immune to severe weather events, flash flooding, and other emergencies like those experienced across the rest of the country. One such storm event occurred in early May, affecting parts of southern Tasmania. Areas across Hobart, and down to Huonville, were impacted by damaging winds, resulting in fallen trees, damaged structures, and flash flooding. 144 requests for assistance were attended to by approximately 75 volunteers, including the Tasmanian Fire Service.

More recently, Northern and particularly North-Western Tasmania, was ‘smashed’ by a large-scale severe

weather event in early June. Over 220 requests for assistance were received in a 24-hour period, with all units from the affected areas activated. Hundreds of trees were brought down, many across powerlines that resulted in thousands of homes losing power, while numerous houses and structures had their roofs removed in the damaging winds. Crews worked tirelessly for several days, many in other jurisdictions, to assist other units clear the backload of jobs. The severity of this event, sadly, resulted in a member of the public losing their life as a result of being hit by a falling tree.

The increased frequency and severity of weather events across the country




has emphasised the dedication and commitment of our SES volunteers. With only 575 volunteers in the Tasmanian SES, units are continually recruiting new members.

One unit, TAS SES Central Coast, located at Ulverstone, are at the forefront of publicising the achievements of the SES, and actively showcasing what it means to be a volunteer. Through effective use of social media and talented photography, they have become great ambassadors for our agency, promoting WOW Day, R U Ok Day, Thank a First Responder Day, Mental Health, and the SES as a whole. More importantly, Central Coast has

created a close, professional team, who always have the best interests of their community and mates in mind. Central Coast's unit manager, Rose-Anne Emmerton, was this year presented with the Emergency Services Medal. This is a huge achievement for Rosie, at a youthful age of 30 years old. Rosie, her husband Brodie, who is also a crew leader within the unit, and her team's continued achievements are a refreshing change to the pressures our volunteers face on a day to day basis.

The public expects our agency to be available 24/7/365, therefore our volunteers deserve to have the best resources available, and assistance

to boost the numbers amongst our ranks. Our volunteer leaders are an integral part of our future and need to be a part of the collaboration process. These ongoing storm events, along with our Road Crash Rescue responsibilities, demonstrate why SES vehicles need to be fit for purpose, and routinely replaced, as is the expectation of equipment like chainsaws. Our volunteers don't need to justify why we require additional funding, this simply needs to be committed to by our local, State and Federal governments, so we can focus on assisting our communities, as we are trained and passionate to do. 

Severe Thunderstorms and Heavy Rain

Source: Channel 9 News Facebook

2100hrs Wednesday 26th to 1100hrs Saturday 29th January 2022

Situation

Severe thunderstorms were forecast for much of the state from Wednesday 26th January throughout the rest of the week and into the weekend, due to an unstable, humid air mass, and a low-pressure trough slowly moving across the state.

Late Wednesday evening had the Mildura area impacted by severe thunderstorms, with the wettest January day for the region recorded.

In the early hours of Thursday morning, the BOM advised of very dangerous thunderstorms impacting parts of the State. These thunderstorms brought destructive winds and intense rainfall that resulted in flash flooding.

Further storms developed around the state on Thursday afternoon/evening with the South West of the state receiving another round of severe thunderstorms heavily impacting the Geelong and Bellarine Peninsula areas. Friday saw severe thunderstorms continue to impact parts of the South West and Central region as predicted by the BOM, with the slow-moving trough continuing towards the North and East of the state on Friday evening into Saturday.

Overall Activity by Region Central Region

A Regional Operations Control Centre (ROCC) was established early on Thursday morning with an Incident Control Centre (ICC) established on Friday in preparedness for the forecasted weather that impacted the Central part of the state.

814 Requests for Assistance received across Melbourne Thursday 27th - Saturday 29th.



Source: VICSES IMS & CAD.

Minor Flood Warnings issued for Werribee River, Yarra River, Dandenong Creek and Bunyip River as a result of the rainfall. A Watch and Act for Elster Creek Elwood was issued on Friday due to the rising flood water which subsided in the early evening.

In Southern Metro the busiest units were Glen Eira Unit 115, Narre Warren Unit with 60 and Greater Dandenong Unit with 52. 12 Flood Rescues in Southern Metro all successful. 14 properties with slight above floor flooding – 4 in Elwood at Elwood Canal, 7 others across Glen Eira local government area, 3 in Greater Dandenong local government area – none requiring relocation.

In Eastern Metro the busiest unit was Monash Unit with 105. 4 flood rescues in Eastern Metro all successful. 6 properties with slight above floor flooding in Monash local government area none requiring relocation.

One vehicle impacted by a fallen tree in Wheelers Hill with the occupant ok.

North West Metro Whittlesea 18 and Wyndham Unit 14 with further scattered RFAs across the area.

Mid West Region

Storm activity throughout the Grampians Region from the morning of Thursday saw high rainfall activity with an earlier front through Edenhope and later Horsham. This was not a concern for the communities or area.

A severe thunderstorm developed over Buninyong and Sebastopol around 1330hrs on Friday that caused flash flooding and storm damage as it moved through the east of the Region, impacting areas including Ballan and Bacchus Marsh.

The storm was relatively quick, with heavy rainfall that caused local inundation and building damage in these areas but also moved out of the region in the early evening.



Horsham SES.



Chelsea SES.



Glen Eira SES.



Elster Creek, Elwood.



Horsham SES.



Torquay SES.

Incident Control Points (ICPs) were established at Ballarat and Bacchus Marsh with a core Incident Management Team on standby for Ballarat, though but was not required. Support was received from local CFA crews throughout the region also.

South West Region

448 RFAs were recorded in the South West region with the majority of calls to units for building damage and flash flooding throughout Thursday evening.

The VICSES ROCC was operational with EMLOs from VicPol, CFA and AV present and communication with the City of Greater Geelong MEMO. The CFA District 7 DCC was stood up in support of operations during this period. ICPs were operational at South Barwon, Geelong, Corio and Bellarine units. CFA brigades assisted in assessing and treating 68 RFAs across Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula.

The Greater Geelong area was heavily impacted at 2100hrs with close to 300 RFAs up to 0200 hrs.

The Belmont Ten Pin Bowling Centre had the roof collapse near the entry resulting in the evacuation of attendees, thankfully there were nil injuries reported.

On Friday, another front crossed the region which had impacts in the Anglesea and Aireys Inlet areas, with an aged care facility in Anglesea impacted, requiring residents to be relocated to other facilities.

North West Region


Late on Wednesday 26th of January, a storm front heavily impacted the Mildura and Sunraysia area seeing intense rain which lead to flash flooding impacting the area.

The Mildura and Sunraysia area received up to 110mm of rain locally, with the Mildura unit receiving 131 RFAs and Swan Hill with 30 RFAs.

Throughout Thursday and Friday, further impacts were observed within the North West region, impacting Castlemaine, Gisborne, and Woodend units. Command structures were put in place with an ICP at Castlemaine and DIVCOM established at Gisborne to assist within the wider Woodend and Gisborne areas.

State Readiness

The State Control Centre (SCC) was activated in the early hours of Thursday morning and remained at Tier 2 for Friday and Saturday morning in support of the forecast weather. The SCC activation level decreased to Tier 1 at 0915hrs Saturday.

The State Duty Officer and State Agency Commander were active in the SES Command Cell during this period. The State Operational Communications Commander (SOCC) was also active at ESTA Williams Landing. 

VICSES Volunteers Recognised in Australia Day Awards

Congratulations to VICSES volunteers who have received recognition in the 2022 Australia Day Awards, honouring their exceptional achievements and service.

Anthony White ESM

ANTHONY WHITE IS NOT

only a dedicated volunteer, but a leader for his own unit and other units in Central Victoria. Over 12 years Anthony's work at VICSES and meant that VICSES Sunbury Unit volunteers are ready to respond to emergencies any time of the day or night. His tireless efforts supporting his community and providing extensive out-of-area coverage has meant so much to the many Victorians, to whom he has provided timely assistance.

In the many emergency events where Anthony has played an important leadership role, he has exemplified leadership, direction, emotional guidance and support to his colleagues, as he provided operational support to Sunbury and the wider community.

Anthony's commitment to his unit, and to VICSES, has earned him the respect of his peers. His sacrifice and dedication of time has been above and beyond our expectations of him.

Anthony has been the key leader and driver in transforming VICSES Sunbury Unit from having a small volunteer membership, to the thriving community-based organisation it is today. The unit has relationships with other emergency services and local community groups and has increased its operational vehicle fleet. This has ensured VICSES Sunbury Unit is a robust emergency service, capable of providing round-the-clock emergency response.

It is because of Anthony's persistence and dedication, VICSES Sunbury is the outstanding unit it is today. ❖



Raelene Billingsley ESM

RAELENE BILLINGSLEY HAS

been an exceptional volunteer leader in Gippsland and as the leader of VICSES Morwell Unit. Raelene has been instrumental in our response to large-scale emergencies in the Gippsland region, including flood events, from 1993 to 2016.

Raelene is a natural leader and has set a high standard across the volunteer leadership roles in which she has performed. Over 25 years this has included Deputy Controller, Officer of Probationary Members; Trainer and Assessor; Road Rescue Competition Team Leader; and, she is presently heading up the VICSES Morwell Unit as Unit Controller.

Raelene is highly regarded by her peers and VICSES management for her knowledge and her skills, particularly in rescue techniques. Apart from being an exceptional team leader, Raelene is a compassionate mentor to her peers, and new recruits under her command. We commend her willingness to train both new and existing members at a regional and state level.

Raelene's passion and advocacy for her unit was key to VICSES' work with Local Government and other stakeholders, to bringing about a new facility in the heart of Traralgon. This new facility and prime location has enhanced response times to critical incidents, as well as greatly improving the profile of emergency service volunteers; resulting in a growth in volunteer membership.

Raelene's skills, knowledge, management style and passion and dedication to serve her community both as a responder and a mentor to others marks her out as a beacon to others within VICSES. ❖



Ron Fitch, ESM

✘ By Phil Wall, Chelsea Unit

RON FITCH HAS BEEN

named in the 2022 Australia Day Honours List, becoming the recipient of the Emergency Services Medal, from the Governor-General of Australia for distinguished service as a member of an emergency service.



Ron Fitch has been a serving operational member of the Chelsea SES Unit since 1992, and has served as Unit Controller for 26 of those 30 years. In 2017, Ron was made a Life Member of the Victoria State Emergency Service, the highest honour that can be bestowed on any SES Volunteer. He has also received the National Medal from the Federal Government, and was named as one of the Victorian Premiers Volunteer Champions in 2018. Also in 2018, Ron was named Outstanding Citizen of the Year by the City of Kingston in their Australia Day awards.

Over Ron's years at Chelsea, he has been involved in almost every deployment request throughout Victoria and Interstate. Ron was deployed a number of times to assist with logistics following the Black Saturday bushfire tragedy, as well as major storm and flood events throughout the State. He spent many weeks in Mildura acting as Divisional Commander following major flooding in the area. He has also spent time in both NSW and SA after being deployed to assist with a number of major storm events in those States.

After more than 15 years of lobbying and hard work, this year Chelsea SES will be moving into their new Unit Headquarters, thanks to in excess of seven million dollars funding from the State Government. Ron has been the driving force for this project, and it is a fantastic result for the Unit, its members and of course the local community.

As always, Ron continues to lead the Chelsea Unit onto bigger and better times with the new LHQ development yet another path to navigate and conquer. Everyone at Chelsea SES is proud that Ron's years of dedicated service to our community has been recognised through this honour, and that it is both deserved and in some ways overdue, in recognising the sweat, time, energy, commitment, passion and sometimes heartache, that Ron Fitch has given to both the Chelsea members and the community that they serve so proudly.

Congratulations Ron Fitch, ESM. ✘

Dr Faye Bendrups

Medal of the Order of Australia, OAM

FAYE BENDRUPS IS THE

President of VicSESVA, Vice Chair of NSESVA and Chair of the ESF Alumni Network. She is a former Controller and currently a Deputy Controller of VICSES Footscray.



During 16 years volunteering for VICSES Faye Bendrups has contributed to more than 25 strategic working groups, including her work for the AFAC Volunteer Management Technical Group and the EMV Volunteer Consultative Forum. She has been engaged as an expert speaker at various forums and conferences and has been published in major sector publications. Operationally, she has been deployed seven times as a Base Camp Manager to major fire events and four times as a Staging Area Manager. She is committed to better mental health strategies and making the service more equitable.

Dr Bendrups completed a comprehensive report on tsunami and earthquake response after a 6-week secondment to and participation in whole-of-nation evacuation drills and response management exercises at the National Institute for Civil Defence in Lima, Peru. She was then invited to the high altitude region of Macchu Picchu National Park to work with local communities and park rangers on remote area firefighting techniques and community development.

In 2016 Faye Bendrups was recognised for her volunteer leadership as the first SES recipient of the Victorian Premier's Volunteer Champions Leadership Award and in 2019 she was named as one of the Australian Financial Review's '100 Women of Influence'. In 2020 she was the Victorian winner and national finalist in the Telstra Business Women's Awards (For Purpose and Social Enterprise category) for her contribution to establishing the National SES Volunteers Association. In 2022 she was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the Australia Day honours for her professional work in the Arts Industry. ✘



Maribyrnong River Major Flood October 2022

By Brendan Corcoran, VICSES Footscray Unit

Photos by Darren Williams, Section Leader Rescue Boats, and Faye Bendrups

The Maribyrnong River runs over 40 km from the Macedon Ranges to Port Phillip Bay. It has become a drawcard for the inner North West Maribyrnong municipality for its extensive recreation sites, sports fields, bike paths, gardens and wetlands.

IT RUNS DIRECTLY THROUGH THE township of Maribyrnong, only 9km from the centre of the City of Melbourne. Here, more than 400 homes are at risk of over-floor flooding. On 14 October 2022, that risk became real, as flood disaster struck.

Since 1871 there have been 27 recorded floods in the Maribyrnong area, with large floods occurring approximately every 10-20 years. The highest recorded flood affecting the Maribyrnong floodplain was in September 1906, and the next known

highest was in May 1974. The 1974 flood caused the most damage to homes, industries and public utilities in the Maribyrnong area. Impacts included:

- Traffic gridlocked for 18 hours as the flood cut most of the major access roads across the river
- 370 houses and businesses flooded or cut-off
- \$16.5 million in costs (adjusted in 2012)

On Friday 14 October 2022, the Maribyrnong River again flooded. With the river at high tide, days of rainfall and excess water flowing

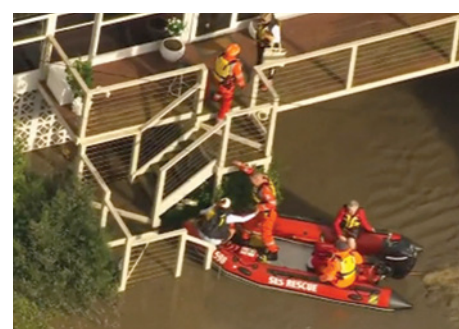
down the Maribyrnong from further upstream, the river height reached over chest high in local residents' houses. With little notification of the looming disaster, some residents were doorknocked around 4am by the SES and advised to evacuate immediately. Some who received no warning or who did not leave in time sought refuge on rooves or were rescued by local workers before the water height became impassable. In other streets, there was no official warning and residents lost everything when the waters rose.



Like in previous flood events, local streets disappeared in the high water, major thoroughfares were cut off, all public transport stopped. Gardens were reduced to toxic quagmires and houses made uninhabitable. The clean up was overwhelming, council still working weeks after the event to clear the muddy destruction. Many residents will not be able to return to their ruined homes.

SES rescue boat crews swung into action Friday morning collecting people from their flooded homes

around Maribyrnong, bringing people and pets to safety, often in dangerous and potentially life-threatening conditions. The waters were flowing at a fast pace, some rescue boat engines could not hold against the surge. Huge dumpster bins were swept along like plastic buckets, narrowly missing SES crews, and even large mooring pontoons from further upriver were dislodged, one crashing into the Raleigh Rd bridge, another washing up on dry land near the Esplanade. ❏



VICSES Footscray Coxswain Brendan Corcoran chronicles the event:

AT 0415 HOURS ON FRIDAY

October 14, 2022 VICSES Footscray Unit was activated to assist Victoria Police to door knock the Raleigh Road pocket of housing abutting the Maribyrnong River in Maribyrnong which was expected to reach dangerous flood levels. Footscray Unit members Pam Angus (DO), Amanda Stevens, Angus Campbell, Darren Williams, Brendan Williams, Anthony Radl, Michael Bakatsoulas, Adam Tangey, Anna Trang and Brendan Corcoran responded. Members from Essendon Unit, Port Phillip Unit, Chelsea Unit, Fawknor Unit, Whitehorse Unit, Whittlesea Unit and Monash Unit also responded to an urgent call for members to assist.

Victoria Police tasked VICSES with giving immediate evacuation advice to all residents in the area. This area is well recognised as at constant risk of riverine flooding during an extreme rain event. Unfortunately it was obvious within the first half hour of the door knock that the river was rising at an incredible speed and that it would be necessary to have VICSES rescue boats on standby for those residents who were uncontactable or unwilling to evacuate at such short notice in the middle of the night.

The door knock continued until after daybreak and then members were placed on standby at the Maribyrnong Community Centre which was being used as a Staging Area and a relief centre for residents to stay while awaiting news on their properties.

Multiple RFAs from residents who had failed to evacuate from their homes began to arrive and over the next 6 hours Inflatable Rescue Boats from Footscray Unit, Essendon Unit and Whittlesea Unit were deployed to assist.

Footscray Rescue Boat (RB) 598 was launched from the end of Plantation



Coxswain Brendan Corcoran (L) and Section Leader Rescue Boats Coxswain Darren Williams (R).



Street, Maribyrnong which by this time was under water 250 metres from the river's edge during its normal flow. A ground crew was on hand to assist with evacuees being transported to the relief centre and volunteer members of Life Saving Victoria were on hand in the role of Land Based Swift Water Rescue at the retrieval point. The boat crew was Footscray RB Section Leader Darren Williams, Port Phillip Unit Controller George Katris and Brendan Corcoran.

The river was still rising at this time and was full of debris of all kinds, making the evacuations challenging. Residents, their pets and a handful of belongings

were recovered in a painstaking process involving reassuring each resident of their wellbeing, securing each house to prevent looting, fitting every evacuee with a life jacket and instructing them where to sit in the boat and to follow all instructions from the crew. A marker was set early in the deployment which indicated that the river level did not peak until approximately 1300 hours. This was relayed back to the Staging Area.

The evacuations continued well into the afternoon with the successful outcome of all evacuees being lifted with no incident and no injuries to any VICSES members. ❏





The Search that Touched the Nation

An unforgettable image released by WA Police of Cleo Smith was a comforting end to a search that touched the hearts of people all over Australia, and the world.

ON 16 OCTOBER 2021, FOUR-YEAR old Cleo went missing from her family tent in the middle of the night at a remote campsite in WA. After a massive search, she was found by police 18 days later in her hometown of Carnarvon. A local man, Terence Darrell Kelly, 36, has been charged with kidnapping offences and flown to a maximum security prison in Perth, 900km south of Carnarvon.

Thousands of people were involved in the initial large-scale search for Cleo at the rugged Blowholes Campsite and

among those first to be mobilised was the local Carnarvon SES Unit.

Many of those volunteers know the Smith family personally, and joined police and military personnel soon after she disappeared.

The crews never gave up hope of finding Cleo alive, and spent day after day in harsh, near impenetrable coastal scrub, under burning sun and in harsh winds. Volunteer Hamish Brown said he was gutted when the search of the area was eventually called off: "That was pretty tough,"

he said. "I remember heading home thinking, this isn't the end. From day one until the end we were out there doing it for Cleo, and Ellie and Jake, and the family."

In these high profile cases, the role of social media has come under scrutiny. In recent decades, the role of mobile phones and social media has been positive in emergencies, whether as being an early alerting system, a first hand reporting mechanism, reuniting families, or transmitting intelligence to response teams.



Hamish Brown and Carnarvon SES celebrate after Cleo was found (Photo: ABC).

But there is a down side. In the case of criminal investigations, managing the volumes of public source material can be daunting; there may be thousands of tip-offs, not all of which will be useful. And police may not want to give information away that may compromise their investigation.

Social media platforms can play both a positive and negative role. Multiple Facebook groups dedicated to Cleo were set up, one with over 60,000 members by the time she was found. But her parents were also subjected

to harassment campaigns on Twitter. Misinformation, rumour and speculation are easily spread.

Elise Thomas, writing in *The Strategist* (8 Nov) commented: "At the heart of this phenomenon are real human tragedies... but it should also spark a deeper ethical conversation about the consumption of tragedy as entertainment".

Throughout the 18 day search, the local Carnarvon community and others across Australia, maintained Cleo front of mind across the Nation, as investigations suggested she may have been taken

interstate and could be anywhere. Thousands of stickers, flyers, posters and T-shirts appealing for information about Cleo were printed and distributed around the country and electronic billboards were installed in shops.

When Cleo was reunited with her family, the whole country breathed a sigh of relief; the best news story after such a prolonged focus on pandemics and lockdowns.

"It's the best news the town could have asked for" said Carnarvon SES volunteer Hamish Brown. ❏

Mt Barker SES Exemplar for Inclusion

By Eleanor Beidatsch

When people think of the SES, a volunteer in a wheelchair isn't the first person who comes to mind.

THE EMERGENCY SERVICES IN

Australia provide essential supports and management to communities in the face of adversity, but they aren't always accessible in terms of their access and inclusion for people with disabilities.

Thousands of people volunteer with the Emergency Services around Australia and many of them are disabled. Finding roles for disabled volunteers where they can participate and contribute fully can be difficult in the Emergency Services, especially when the tasks are often sensitive or even dangerous.

Physical access, including access of equipment, is an issue that can affect a volunteer's sense of worth and contribution to their Unit.

Luckily, that isn't a problem for me as a disabled volunteer with the Western Australian Mount Barker State Emergency Service Unit.

Because Mount Barker SES have made the effort to make our training building accessible, I am able to participate fully in training and administration with my team. But it wasn't always like that.

I started volunteering with Mount Barker SES in 2019 as a non-operational Administration and Community Engagement Officer. I am an experienced journalist and I originally signed up with the SES to help the Manager, who is also my sister, by taking some of the organisational weight and write positive news stories to raise awareness about our Unit.

But when COVID-19 and lockdown hit, I had to take on the role of Deputy Training Manager to keep our team connected in an online world. I successfully



My first drive up the access ramp into the Mt Barker SES training shed.



After the earthworks were done by a local business, the gradient up to the ramp become safer.

transitioned the training to the online platform Microsoft Teams and delivered a few sessions myself. It kept our volunteers connected and their skills well-honed and we were still able to attend emergency incidents during lockdown.

When lockdown eased off in WA, I kept my position as Deputy Training

Manager in addition to my other roles, but I wasn't able to come to training with the other volunteers because there wasn't access.

Our building is from the 1940s and didn't include an access ramp or any inclusive facilities. That changed late last year when the team managed to secure



❏ Access ramp to SES building showing the safe slope.

the funding from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to put a ramp into the shed where the volunteers do all their training.

Now I can join the team for our fortnightly training sessions and perform my duties as an administrator.

The ramp is very safe, with a stable gradient and it doesn't get slippery even in the rain, but I wouldn't expect anything less from an SES access ramp. Putting in a ramp and grading off the approach towards the shed are huge improvements for inclusivity, but we have more ideas for the future.

Our Unit isn't big enough for our needs and we will be relocating to a new site soon. Mount Barker SES houses the substantial supplies for the Regional Storm Cache which is deployed across the region to repair damage caused by severe weather events. We are also getting a second operational vehicle and

need space to park it. We hope to be ready to move to our new headquarters in the next few years, but we can't be sure of when the larger site will be available.

As a disabled volunteer my greatest interest is keeping our new building accessible not just for my needs, but for anyone else with access issues who wants to join in the future. In my experience new buildings are not always accessible especially if it is assumed disabled people wouldn't be using them anyway.

But some of my concerns have been assuaged by our District Officer Jonathan "Jono" Boswell when he said that the volunteers should be involved in the planning of our new building.

"Engaging with able and disabled volunteers in the design of a new facility ensures that important access and functionality requirements are met while

meeting operational requirements," Mr Boswell said. "In fact, I feel that incorporating technology that enables the inclusion of disabled volunteers, may also have improvements in the way able-bodied interact with technology during emergencies."

DFES volunteer and youth programs Manager Jennifer Pidgeon said that they are increasing physical access to buildings: "Improving physical access to buildings will support volunteers with physical disabilities to join the emergency services and work is being undertaken to improve the buildings under DFES management. However, this must be coupled with efforts to develop the roles that allow everyone to safely and meaningfully participate."

Mr Boswell said that increasing diversity makes an organisation stronger and more resilient and he would be happy to see more disabled volunteers in the Emergency Services.

"There are limitations to the work that may be carried out by disabled volunteers, but this is no different to able-bodied volunteers... , it is more about what people can contribute rather than what they can't," he said.

Ms Pidgeon said diversity increases the roles available within the Emergency Services.

"By providing a wider diversity of roles to the community, emergency services volunteering becomes more accessible in general. "Access is an interesting term in that it does not just imply physical access, but also access to meaningful roles that meet the needs of the wide range of people within our community," she said.

I have many ideas for further improving the access to the Mount Barker SES new building and it's good to know there's room for more people like me to volunteer. It's also nice to know that my team has my back and I have the support of the organisation in making the SES a more accessible and inclusive space for everyone. ❏

The Pannikin Plains Rescue, Nullarbor Plain, WA, 1998

❖ By Jim Ridgwell, SES Volunteer, Gosnells SES, Western Australia

In 1988 the State SES Cliff and Cave Rescue Team was called to respond to a rescue on the Nullarbor Plain. Jim Ridgwell was one of those rescuers and 21 years later he revisited the site that posed a challenge so many years before. Below is Jim's recollection of the events of that rescue.

The Rescue

For anyone who has been in the SES for a while they will have one or sometimes several callouts which stand out as being memorable in your career. The rescue at Pannikin Plains is mine.

Back in 1989 I was a member of the state Cliff and Cave Rescue Team. We trained during the weeknights at Leake St, Belmont and on weekends at quarries. We honed our skills, read books on the subject, and continually practiced. We lived and breathed abseiling. Some of us even found time to get involved with private abseiling companies to learn more, pick up different skills and use equipment which wasn't necessarily taught at SES. An example of this would be, I am still a fan of the rappel rack, much to the consternation of my colleagues. Up until then I can't recall us having done a "real" cliff rescue before the Pannikin Plains rescue.

The Callout

On the morning of the 2nd December 1988 we received a call directing us to be at Perth airport at sunup. The information at that time was there were some people trapped in a cave. That was it! Oh, and take enough clothes for a couple of days!

The members called were to my recollection, Bob Coops (team leader) Neil McCauley, Darren Brooks, Rod Ives,



and myself. We went to Belmont and collected the gear we would need and headed off to Perth Airport. When we arrived, we found that we would be flying in a Beechcraft King Air twin turbo prop aircraft which had just been negotiated into a contract some weeks earlier between the SES and the State Government to be available for just this type of emergency. It was a cool plane! The briefing finally came, and we were informed we were going to Cocklebidy to rescue some cavers who had got stuck in a cave. We unloaded our kits and equipment onto the tarmac next to the plane and I can still clearly remember one of the two pilot's face when he saw all our gear. He started laughing but got kind of serious when we told him we needed everything. We had enough rope and hardware to

start our own store. There were anchor systems made from sheet steel, steel pickets, stretchers, first aid kits and on it went. The Landcruiser was grunting just to get us there and as the pilot said, we had to cut back, or we wouldn't even get off the ground. We trimmed and trimmed until eventually the pilot gave his OK. We thought at this stage we may as well not go. Almost everything we thought we needed was in the "reject" pile.

So, we took off. On board was a cameraman from a Current Affairs program and it was his job to document the whole event. He interviewed us and had his camera on us often. Sometimes this was a little disconcerting if you were trying to have a nap and you opened your eyes to find him videoing you. We couldn't sleep though because we were all so hyped up, I think we had adrenalin oozing from our pores. As it turned out the documentary never went to air and to my knowledge none of us ever become a TV star.

Getting There

The trip over there was relatively uneventful. Just sitting back in leather seats being supplied (you couldn't call it served) coffee by one of the pilots. As if we needed coffee! The pilot told us they were clearing a section of white posts from either side of the Eyre Highway so we could land on the

highway near the cave. Police were on site. So far so good but it was about now things started to go pear shaped.

We got word the highway had too much debris on it which would prevent us from landing. What do you mean debris I was thinking? OK so plan B was that we would land a bit further away at Caiguna airstrip at the back of the roadhouse. An hour or so later the pilots told us the cloud cover was very low, (we call it fog at ground level) but we would try and land anyway. The pilots seemed pretty confident. Wrong! After a couple of passes the pilots concluded the cloud cover was too low. So now what? We were getting low on fuel and couldn't land. Now I started to take more of an interest. As it turned out plan C was to divert to the small community of Forrest, a stop for the Indian-Pacific train, which was a few hundred kilometres away. We landed OK and by now we were starting to get hungry. Well, we will just duck up to the shop. Wrong again, there are no shops in Forrest but a guy working at the airstrip offered to race back home and get his wife to make sandwiches. We fuelled up and the sandwiches arrived just as we were ready to go. We had got the word the clouds were thinning out. Things were looking up again. As we flew back over Caiguna the clouds had come back in again and we were back where we had been a few hours ago. The pilots got another plan. We would fly out over the Great Australian Bight and then as we fly back to land, we would look for a break in the clouds. Seemed like a reasonable plan until I realised how the pilots planned to do it. The cliffs there are around 60 metres high, and the plan was to fly out to sea and then turn and come back in below cliff height looking for a clear spot and at the last-minute lift and go under the cloud cover. Let me tell you right now I wasn't a fan of this plan, but I don't remember being asked what I thought of it either. So there we were, flying out at sea at somewhere about

40 metres above the sea and looking out the front window and all I could see was cliffs. Just as planned at the last moment the pilots lifted the plane and we ducked in under the clouds. They landed us at the airstrip at Caiguna and now it was up to us. Thanks guys.

Police were on hand, so we loaded up the highway patrol cars and off we headed.

The Briefing

On route we were briefed by the police.

There had been a storm with an immense amount of rain. As the plains out there are flat much of this water had run into a cave which acted much like a sink in your bathroom. According to the police this water had caused the mouth of the cave to fall in. Talking later to one of the people we rescued "there were rocks as big as caravans falling on us." There were 13 people trapped in the cave. No injuries were known. Our task was to get them out.

The Scene

We arrived to find a camp wrecked by torrential rain. Gear strewn over hundreds of metres, tarps in the top of trees and mud. Deep, slimy red mud, the type that sticks to the bottom of your boots and makes it hard to walk. Here, there were a couple of people who could brief us further. They were part of a documentary team who were diving in the underground rivers. They were using the cave as access and had gone several kilometres along this river so far. Most of it underwater. There were still 13 of their team trapped underground. The good news was they still had communications with them. I had never seen this type of communication set up. They had a huge loop of wire on the surface about 40 meters across and evidently the same underground directly below the top loop. This set up gave them a scratchy but readable signal, so we had communications with the trapped explorers.

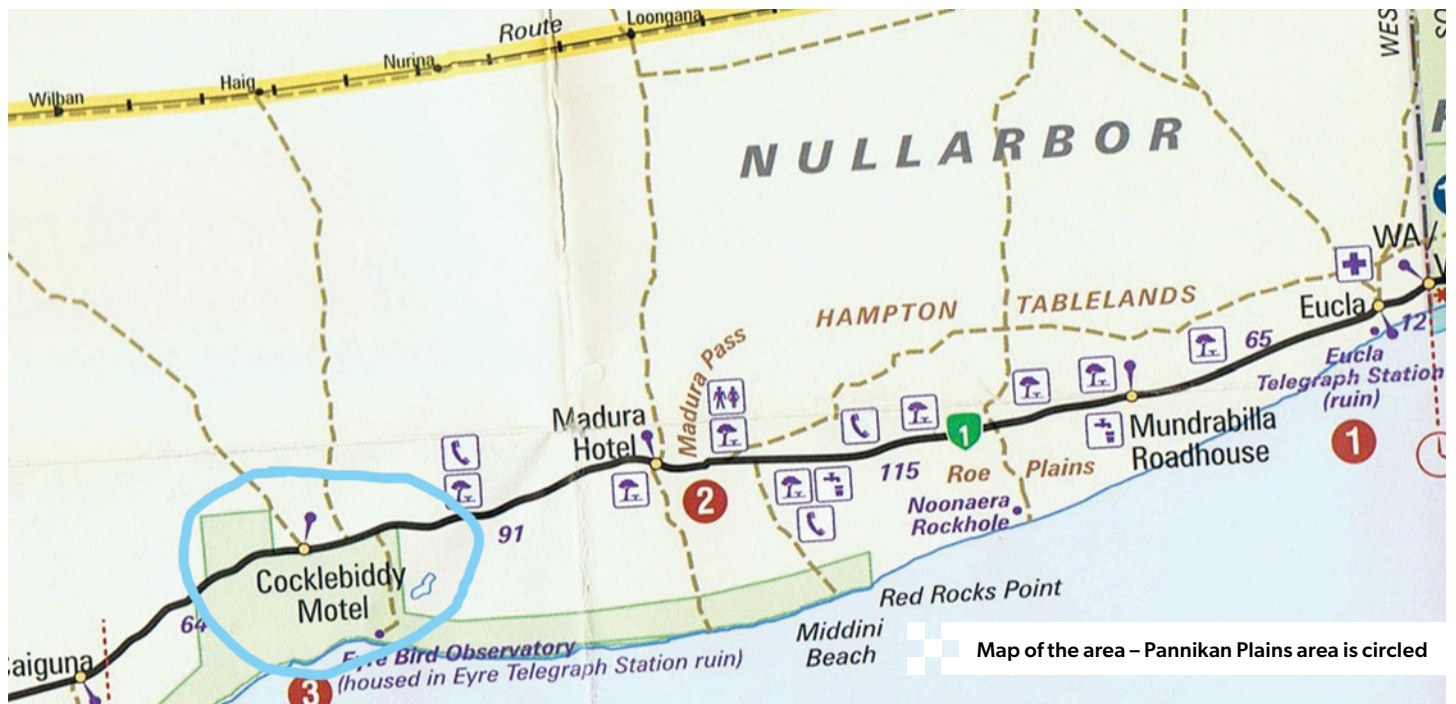
The Rescue

There were a few trains of thought on how to get them out. The most popular for a while was to bring in a drill rig and drill a vertical shaft to the cave. The popularity declined as everyone debated how long it would take to get a rig in, drill the hole and the inherent dangers to those in the cave below. We could potentially cause the roof of the cave to fall in on them. It was decided we would attempt to clear the debris and get them out that way.

We started setting up a safe way to descend into the cave and clear the debris. After some time, it became evident this could take days so some of us were sent back to Cocklebidy to try and get some sleep. Neil McCauley and I ended up in a motel unit that had been flooded by the storm. The floor was red with mud and water and the bedding was wet up to just below the mattress level. I think we managed to get a bit of sleep. Pretty soon we were woken up and told to get back to the cave. It was night-time.

When we got back, we learnt that Darren Brooks had found a way through the debris and would escort each trapped person out individually to the cave opening and we would get them to the surface. Each person appeared one by one over several hours. They were very grateful to be out of what they thought could have been a tomb for them. There were no serious injuries to any of us or the people we rescued. A good result all round.

We all congregated back at the Cocklebidy pub where they put on free, everything for us. We could have drunk all night for free but by now we were all starting to get tired, the adrenalin had worn off and all we wanted was a shower and a sleep. Cocklebidy motel was not suitable to sleep in, so we had to get back to Caiguna (about 120KMs) where there were dry motel units and hot showers.



20 Years Later

I have retired now. In March 2009, Phillip Petersen and I accompanied and directed by our wives were on a caravanning trip to Cape York. As we were crossing the Nullarbor Plain, I said to Phil, "How about we drop into the Pannikin Plains Cave and see what it looks like now."

Finding it was the first challenge.

Fortunately, the Cocklebidy roadhouse has a mud map of some of the caves in the area. The cave didn't look much different, except that the debris has settled now, and it is dry and the sun shining.

It got me thinking though. All about the "what ifs"

What if we couldn't land the plane?

What if they were all deceased when we got there?

What if we couldn't get them out in time and we just had to wait for them to die?

What if we hadn't trained so hard and become such a close knitted team?

There are always lots of "what ifs" but this couldn't have turned out any better. All rescued safe, no injuries and a life experience which I found relatively easy

to recall so I guess it has left a lasting imprint on my life.

When the others involved read this, I hope I have recounted it accurately on their behalf, but if there are discrepancies, I hope you remember I am 20 years older and a lot uglier with a fading memory.

Interesting Information

The movie "Sanctum" is based on the rescue of a group of researchers trapped in a Nullarbor cave at Pannikin Plains, near Cocklebidy.

On that day there were thirteen cavers making a documentary on underwater diving in the cavern when there was a flash flood that rearranged rocks to form a blockage at the entrance.

They were trapped on the wrong side of the entrance however they were able to radio to five members of a ground crew who were outside the cave.

The State Emergency Service Cliff and Cave Rescue Team was activated and responded immediately.

The team consisted of Bob Coops (Team leader), Neil McCauly, Darren Brooks, Rod Ives and Jim Ridgwell.

The team got right into it and eventually a path was found and established by Darren Brooks. After many hours each of the researchers was brought to the surface. They had been trapped for nearly 36 hours.

The survivors, including Liz Wight, Jamie Hurworth and Dirk Spoffels from Sydney, were dragged out the main cave entrance after a huge pile of rubble and boulders had been removed by a team of rescuers, including 10 police and a dozen men from the Main Roads Department and the State Emergency Service.

They had been trapped for nearly 36 hours before being brought safely to the surface.

The Fire and Emergency Service Authority no longer supports the State Emergency Service Volunteers in the cave rescue role. This role is now performed by the Department of Environment and Conservation. ❏

Reprinted, with permission, from: "The WA State Emergency Service History from Civil Defence into the 21st Century" – Book Reality



Vale Phil Mahoney

❖ David Niven, Unit Commander Bankstown

2 June 1937 – 4 April 2022

Phil joined the Bankstown State Emergency Service on the 15th July 1991.

He had been an active member for almost 26 years.

He has completed in excess of 100 training courses covering both field and office-based roles.

Since the day I met Phil, learnt about his job as a Deputy Principal at Condell Park High School and after we conducted our interviews I knew Phil was a force to reckoned with. After his initial training he became deeply involved in training within the unit particularly around flood boats and radio communications

Phil not only helped with training and maintenance of the boats but he was also heavily involved in the Hawkesbury Canoe Classic and the Bridge to Bridge racing events.

Phil was instrumental in assisting me, as a young rescue officer to establish

training calendars, team rosters, member timekeeping and eventually the concept of week and weekend duty officers

We could not go any further without discussing the forward command and the 4wd storm vehicle that he kept at his house in Padstow for so many years. Being a typical school teacher he had everything organised in those trucks with every tub labelled and then positioned in order of most often to least used and then there were the gadgets that he made for securing items or making the "gardening service" more efficient and effective.

Phil was so passionate and involved that in 2007 he won the unit Volunteer of the Year Award. He also received his 5, 10, 15, 20 and 25 year service awards as well as a NSW SES Commissioners Certificate of Appreciation for Service and a State Award for his involvement in the Newcastle Hunter Storms in 2007.

Phil has been involved in multiple operations during his service from the Thredbo Landslide to Cyclone Yasi and many other flood and storm events not only around Bankstown but also the state and nationally. There was a time when the SES was extensively used for Aerial Searches and often my call to Phil and Coralie would start with "is your passport current" as they often ended up in Fiji or New Zealand.

Phil was always known to have a good story to tell and always showed interest in the other members and their wellbeing, he cared for them and they cared and respected him.

For all of us lucky to have known you, you will be greatly missed as a member, a gentleman and a friend.

To quote Eleanor Roosevelt

"Many people will walk in and out of your life, but only true friends will leave footprints on your heart." ❖



Vale Merryl Dray

A Passion for Helping Others.

It was in her own time of desperate need that Merryl Dray devoted herself to helping the community. A nurse from the age of 16, a dedicated mum and grandmother, Merryl brought her selfless generosity and dedication to the State Emergency Service (SES) in 2017, following the sudden death of her son Daniel.

Joined in her volunteering pursuit by several of her family members, including daughter Nicole, Nicole's partner Bernard Bibby and Daniel's best friend Nathan Hurley, it was a decision none would look back from. In the years to come, volunteering developed into a passion – to the extent that Merryl never went anywhere without her kit bag, ready to respond to an emergency call-out at the drop of a hat.

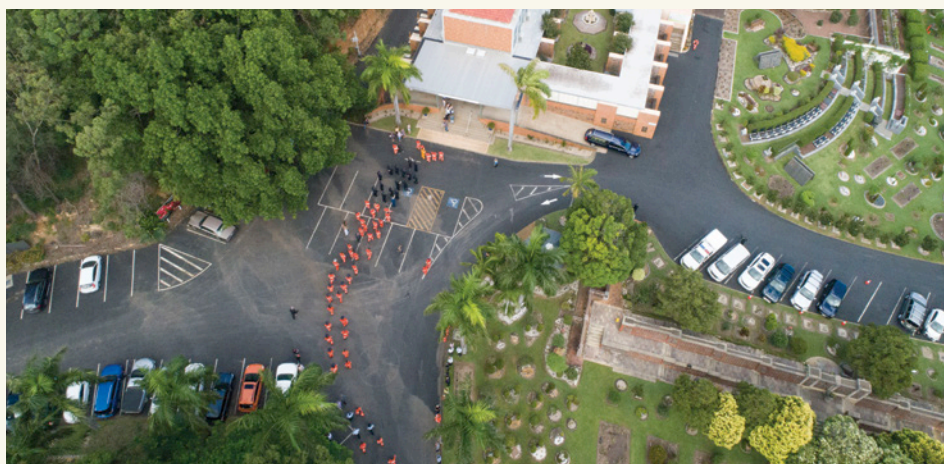
It was during one such call-out, at the height of the 2022 Queensland floods, that she would tragically lose her life.

Her death prompted tributes not only from across the Queensland emergency services community, but from all corners of the nation. "The messages of support have been coming from everywhere, not just within Queensland but the whole of Australia," daughter Nicole said. "Merryl's younger brother is from WA, he has friends over there in the SES and they are all grieving," Bernard said. "It's obviously not just a Queensland family, it's an SES family Australia-wide and we didn't really think of it that way, until this happened."

Merryl, a member of the Lowood SES, was travelling to a call for help with three other volunteers on February 26, when their vehicle became surrounded by fast-moving water at Coolana, north-west of Ipswich. The 62-year-old was swept away. She was one of 14 who died in the Queensland flood disaster.

The effect her loss had on the community was never more apparent than at her memorial service at Mt Thompson Memorial Gardens, Holland Park on 19 March. A convoy of emergency vehicles lined the road leading into the ceremony. There, a sea of bright orange and emergency services personnel in full formal attire was on hand to celebrate the life of a one-of-a-kind personality who touched so many lives.

Having previously served the Kenilworth SES, Merryl had built a broad network of friends within the volunteering ranks. "She was everyone's best friend," Nicole said. "It just goes to show how many people she did have an effect on." "Any activation she could go on, any callout, or any community event she was able to get to, she was there without



question,” Bernard said. “She met a lot of SES people from a lot of different units. There was one comment on the Kenilworth SES pages from a lady saying, ‘I didn’t know her, but I remember her,’ and that’s typical of a lot of people because she really was happy to chat to anyone.”

Family members remain particularly grateful for the support shown by Merryl’s Lowood SES colleagues and their local Kenilworth SES members, including group leader Greg Wilson, in the days following her death. Merryl, Nicole, Bernard and Nathan signed up for the SES in 2017, as they looked to give something back to their community following the death of Merryl’s son Daniel.

Merryl was like a surrogate mum to Daniel’s best mate Nathan, who joined the Jimboomba SES.

“It was really like a second family, a distraction from everything that was happening that helped pull us through,” Nathan said. “One thing we really want to get out to the public is that volunteers don’t just help the community, they also help other volunteers,” Bernard said. “The SES has helped pull some of its volunteers out of some really dark places. I know with Nathan it really saved him, as it did for Merryl.”

Going out on jobs together would become a great new bonding experience for the family, which somehow juggled volunteering with work and parenting responsibilities. The Dray household was something of a mini depot where the SES gear was always kept in a filing cabinet, ready to throw on quickly. One of Nicole’s favourite memories of volunteering alongside mum was a road crash rescue

they were called out to near Maleny a few years ago. The SES helped Fire and Rescue Service technical rescue firefighters winch a badly injured woman up a muddy embankment.

It was a happy ending to what might have been a traumatic situation, but Merryl always taught her children to be resilient in the face of danger and adversity. “With mum being in nursing she brought us up pretty openly,” Nicole said. “She would explain to us how things happen – not so much the gruesome stuff, but the fact that you cannot emotionally involve yourself too much.”


During one point in her nursing career, Merryl worked in the burns unit at a children’s hospital. After seeing so many awful injuries, she decided to disconnect the home stove and oven when her children were in their early years.

Peta recalled a time she and her mother passed a road crash and Merryl didn’t hesitate to pull over and help. “There were people upside down in one of the cars that needed help. Mum ran over and was able to get other people to help. She basically led the situation until emergency services arrived,” Peta said.

As a mum, Merryl will also be remembered as having an almost child-like sense of humour.

“Mum liked to party, she liked to dress up and act like a complete fool,” Peta said. She loved the singer Meat Loaf and the song “Bat out of Hell” was played at her funeral, because she listened to it every time she cleaned her house.

But when it comes to the Merryl Dray people will remember most, it will be the courageous and selfless volunteer, who put herself in harm’s way to help those in need. “Mum will be remembered as someone who helped others. She was big on sustainability and making sure you leave a place in better condition than when you arrived,” Peta said.

Following the tragedy, Merryl’s younger brother David, who lives in WA, has also decided to join his local SES. 



Vale Brian Hunter

29 August 1959 – 23 January 2022

Brian joined the SES in 1981 as a member of the Mitcham Unit (later known as Metro South), however some opposed him joining because of concerns about potential dangers for him and other volunteers due to the fact that he had mild Down Syndrome. The late Keith Lane became Brian's sponsor and a push was made for him to be able to join the SES.

Brian was regarded at Metro South as one of the most reliable and inspiring individuals for the way he always gave anything a go. When nominated for an Emergency Services Medal, Brian outstandingly met all criteria for recognition and using words from the national criteria, he extended tolerance, justice and fairness to all his peers and the community he served.

Alas, sometimes because of his disability, it was not always reciprocated but this never deterred him from his continued persistence to bridge and remove barriers, especially with his peers. It is true fortitude and a beautiful philosophy on life. Brian always made himself available at all times of day and night. His qualities extended to his desire for knowledge and his eagerness to undertake courses to enhance this. His strong work ethic was exceptional. He held all his fellow members in high regard and great respect, and this came to be reciprocated.

The SES for Brian was a true devotion and proud participation in community life, which gave him immense satisfaction each time he contributed to callouts and emergencies with the crew; he was one of the team.

Brian was presented with his Ministerial ESM by the Hon Peter Malinauskas, the then Minister for Emergency Services (now Premier) on Wednesday 23 November 2016.



Brian with Sandra Preston

Other awards Brian was presented with included:

- National medal 1999, first clasp
- National medal 2007
- SES life membership presented October 2016
- SES long service medal 2009
- SES service awards spanning from 10 to 40 years (30 years presented 2011)

He was also a recipient of the SASESVA Keith Lane Award in 2006 in recognition of his exceptional volunteering role.

Away from the SES Brian worked at Bedford Industries and was an

avid 10 pin bowler, winning many trophies, plus an ardent follower of the Adelaide 36ers and the Adelaide Football Club.

Mention must also be made of former Metro South member Sandra Preston, who was a close friend of Brian's and helped him by taking him to appointments and such. Sandra was involved in Brian receiving the ESM, together with Warren Hicks and Stuart McLeod, the retired Chief Officer and a former Mitcham Unit member. ❧



Vale Annette Schueddekopf

✘ By Erin Wallace, DC Community Engagement and Administration, VICSES Greater Dandenong

On Friday 6 May 2022 Greater Dandenong Unit lost an incredibly special member of our family in orange. Annette Schueddekopf passed away after a brave battle with cancer.

Annette embodied the spirit of selfless and benevolent service like no other. She knew the greatest gift she could give was time, of which she gave to everyone around her, to those in need... never ceasing to amaze, never failing to put on an infectious smile with kindness, gentleness and compassion that couldn't be missed, even at the very end.

This incredible woman would give you the shirt off her back, even if it's the last thing she had - without hesitation.

This was illustrated perfectly with her selfless service to the community during the 2019/20 Victorian Fires at Cann River, East Gippsland. As the fire

front approached and the community was sheltering at the local primary school, Annette's concern was for the children of Cann River. Her personality and background as an education aid made her perceptive to the needs of the children and she looked after them during that frightening time as the fire approached and the school came under ember attack. After remaining isolated with the community for a week, Annette helped guide community members and their children to the safety of Orbost. For this extraordinary work, Annette embodied the true spirit of service for the National Emergency Medal.

No words can describe how much you'll be missed. VICSES Greater Dandenong sends our condolences to the Schueddekopf Family at this time. Vale Annette Schueddekopf, rest in eternal peace. ✘

Editor's note: The Board of VicSESVA also acknowledges the significant contribution of Annette as a delegate to VicSESVA. Only weeks before her death, Annette was apologising for not being able to do more. She was a valued and popular member at meetings and she will be greatly missed. Thank you Annette.



Vale Tash Drake

By Phil Wall VICSES Chelsea

Tash Drake began her time with Chelsea SES on 7 July 2016, and how she changed over the next 6 years.

When Tash arrived, she was a very quiet, shy and in some ways, insecure young lady, and when our Unit Controller spoke to her about her thoughts about a role in SES going forward, she told him she was keen to be involved in Community Engagement.

We were a little unsure that she would be suited to the role, and the fact that she would need to present to groups of people, may have been a little confronting for her.

How wrong we all were. Tash worked so hard to overcome being so far out of her comfort zone, and was soon running

incursions into the unit by community groups, presenting to schools and other groups and creating initiatives to interact with the community through various forms of engagement.

In the 6 years that Tash was with us at Chelsea, she found her voice, she grew and blossomed into a vibrant, confident, and self-assured young woman, who was ready and willing to take on any new role that came her way. Her family have told us, that the past 5 years, were some of the happiest of her life. It was the perfect fit. Tash was great for Chelsea SES, and Chelsea SES was great for Tash.

On Monday 21 February, Tash suffered a ruptured brain aneurysm, and was rushed to Monash Medical Centre, and was immediately put on life support, in Intensive Care. Tragically, the decision was made that her life support would be discontinued, and that happened at 8.30am on the morning of Friday 25 of February.

The shock wave of this news was incredible, and made worse by her age, just 27 years old. Her family agreed to us sharing this devastating news with the community that Tash supported so well through our Facebook page,



and the post reached more than 55 thousand people. But I honestly think the saddest part for me, was that the best of her life still lay ahead of her.

On 9 March, Tash was laid to rest with over 200 family and friends in attendance. Following the service, a Guard of Honour, made up of more than 60 members from Chelsea SES, VICSES Chief Officer Tim Wiebusch, VICSES Central Region Manager, Ray Jasper, Edithvale CFA, Victoria Police, City of Kingston Mayor, Councillor Steve Staikos, State

Member for Mordialloc, Tim Richardson, and members from other local SES Units, lined the road, while a Chelsea SES vehicle, with lights shrouded in black, escorted the hearse carrying Tash, to her final resting place.

The day after the funeral, a tribute to Tash was delivered on the floor of State Parliament by Tim Richardson on behalf of the State of Victoria

I was honoured to be asked to conduct the service by Tash's Dad Glenn, and Brother Liam, who flew from London to be with Tash within just 24 hours. It was without a doubt the hardest

day I have had in my 19 years with Chelsea SES, but also the proudest.

A very special thank you to Photographer Gary Sissons, for the wonderful and respectful way he captured the essence of the day, which was truly appreciated by the family.

We often speak about our Orange family, well never was it more evident, than in the days and weeks following Tash's passing. We often use the term We Work As One; on that day, I think it was more appropriate to say, "We Grieve As One". Rest In Peace Tash, and fly high. 🍷



Vale Glenn O'Donnell

Glenn O'Donnell ESM, VICSES Nillumbik Unit Controller and VICSES Life Member, passed away in late March 2022 after a short battle with cancer.

For his funeral service, a guard of honour was formed along Main Road, Eltham as a fitting farewell to a man respected by all who knew him.

Glenn dedicated 34 years to VICSES in his community. He joined in 1988 and has been Unit Controller for the past 18 years. He previously held other leadership positions including Team Leader, Crew Leader, Rescue Officer and Training Officer. He responded and coordinated responses to many emergencies, searches and rescues in his response area, as well as on deployments in regional Victoria and also interstate, including the Black Saturday bushfires

of 2009. He also participated in several task forces and working groups. In 2017 he was awarded the Emergency Services Medal for his exemplary service in his support of his community.

Glenn's service also has resulted in the transformation of the Nillumbik Unit from its basic beginnings to a new modern facility. He built strong relationships with local and state government representatives and was a tireless advocate for SES.

Glenn is remembered by all who knew him as a great leader, a great example and a great friend. He will be deeply missed by all who knew him. ❖



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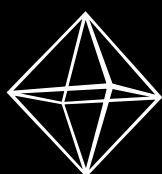
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