

Colinton Courier

Newsletter of the Colinton Rural Fire Brigade * No 158* January 2015



Adelaide Hills: a CFS volunteer surveys the damage (news.com picture)

Committee 2014-2015:

Fire Captain: Graham Povey
Senior Deputy: Nick Goldie
Deputies: Bob Morison, Jeremy Mears, Michael Burton, Barry Woolacott
President: Michael Burton
Secretary: Sandra Lauer
Treasurer: Bob Morison
Training Officer: Jeremy Mears
Equipment Officers: Michael Burton, Karl Higgins
Community Awareness: Nick Goldie
Fundraising: Gill Robinson
Permits: Graham Povey

NSW RFSA Delegate: Jeremy Mears

Call out:

Nil



Captain's Report:

The first week of the year was full of news of the South Australian fires, the worst for three decades. At the beginning of the second week (*6 January*), a call went out from Fire Control for volunteers to join Strike Teams in South Australia. It was planned that the volunteers would fly from Canberra to Adelaide, where they would be allocated to teams.

By the end of the week, it had become clear that the fires were under control, extra crews were not needed, and indeed the next SA threat was extreme weather and flooding.

Captain Graham thanked the eight Colinton members who had volunteered and were on stand-by: Michael B, Karl, Sandra, Rowan, Jeremy, Bob M, Daniel and Kim.

"It's a great credit to the Brigade," said Captain Graham, "that so many of our members are prepared to give their time to help others in their time of need. Thank you."

The Captain also reported that in 2014, the Brigade had recorded sixteen major call-outs, as well as sixteen occasions where the Brigade was present in a supporting role. These included Bells Road and the Murrumbucca fire.



Membership:

Membership: please pay by cash at training, or cheque to The Treasurer, Colinton Rural Fire Brigade, PO Box 4829, Kingston ACT 2604.

Membership fees: \$20.00 for adults, \$5.00 for juniors. Donations are always welcome. Please provide a return address so a receipt can be mailed to you.



**SA fires: wild life at threat
(SkyNews picture)**

Emergency warnings:

ABC Radio takes its role as “your emergency radio station” very seriously.

By now, we should all be familiar with our own *Bush Fire Survival Plan*. One of the recommendations is that we should all have access to a battery-powered radio, so as to be able to stay informed even if mains power has failed. (Your car usually contains a battery-powered radio, but it may not be convenient to have the car in your refuge ...)

The ABC has developed a new policy, recognising that in times of emergency it is not possible to keep a battery-powered radio on, 24 hours a day.

ABC local radio (AM and FM) therefore will broadcast emergency warnings at **fifteen minutes before the hour, and fifteen minutes after the hour**, as well as normal news bulletins and updates.

The ABC also broadcasts news of **Total Fire Bans**. This has been the cause of confusion in the past, where Monaro residents have failed to hear, or newsreaders have failed to mention, the specific region affected by a TOBAN.

When in doubt, check with Cooma Fire Control (6455 0455) or your local Brigade.



Training:

The Colinton Brigade conducts training every month on the second Saturday, at 2.00 pm at the Station at Colinton. Everyone is welcome.

If possible, crews are asked to arrive at 1330 (1.30 pm) to check the trucks before training.



Firefighting isn't what it was:

Abridged from The Guardian (7 January), written by Jim Casey, state secretary of the NSW Fire Brigade Employees Union.

Fire fighting is business that's getting harder and more dangerous.

The fire season has been starting earlier and lasting longer, extending into spring and autumn. This not only means longer periods in which conditions are ripe for bushfire, it also reduces the time in the off-season when firefighters can take preventative measures to minimise exposure in the coming season. All of these changes are expected to increase in the coming decades. What does this mean for those of us on the front line?

Firefighting is a labour intensive exercise. At its most basic it involves dragging hose to a position where you can best attack the fire, or the backbreaking work

of starving a fire of fuel through constructing firebreaks or through backburning.

There have been technological changes that have made aspects of our job easier and more efficient. None of these have led to revolutionary changes in the way we fight fire.

But the world is changing. Our fire prone continent is experiencing more frequent and more intense bushfire activity, so what do our frontline firefighters need to deal with this challenge?

First, a change in how fire services are structured and run, and a change in the how the work of the service is understood. In NSW, there is a wasteful duplication between Fire Rescue NSW (the professional service) and the Rural Fire Service (the volunteer agency). Similar situations exist in most states and territories. There is no good reason for this, apart from the politics of decades past. A single fire service, with a holistic approach to the challenge of bushfire in a changing world, is an absolute no brainer.

Second, we need more of us. Around Australia the numbers of professional firefighters is either decreasing or remaining static. The Climate Council estimates (conservatively, in my opinion) that there will need to be a doubling of the number of firefighters in Australia by 2030 to deal with increased fire behaviour. In 2015, the number of professional firefighters nationally is going backwards, not forwards.

Volunteer labour is an important part of the firefighting industry, but we cannot expect volunteers to fill this enormous gap. There is a long-term decline in volunteering numbers, but even if this is overcome it is unreasonable and unrealistic to expect volunteers to provide the level of protection we will require.

Finally, our weather is changing and we need to change with it. Sensible reform of fire services, a modern understanding of

their role, and increases in resources are needed to give us any hope of being able to deal with the challenges ahead.

It's always preferable to prevent a fire from occurring rather than fight it. Prevention in the 21st century means more than smoke alarms and backburning. It means international action on climate change.



Putting it in context:

The US Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) is advertising a major new documentary called *The Big Burn*, about a truly disastrous fire in 1910, which covered three million acres and led to the deaths of 78 fire-fighters.

This fire was the first major test of the new US Forest Service, and to the controversial policies of forest fire fighting which are still in force today.

The website advertising the documentary has two further links, to a summary of the film, and to a short historical essay on the Forest Service, both worth seeing.

Of particular interest are some of the statistics, especially the population figures for fire-prone areas of the USA.

(In the 1980s, the estimated population of 'fire-prone' areas of the US was 60million people, in the 1990s, it was 97 million, and by the 2000s, it had jumped to 140 million, all busy building houses and conducting businesses exposed to the threat of bigger and fiercer wild fire.)

See:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/burn/#.VKxa0jiRWpU.facebook>





**Essential numbers
Emergency 000**

**Fire:
Cooma Monaro Fire Control
(24 hrs)
1 300 722 164
02-6455 0455**

**Fire:
Captain and Permit Officer:
Graham Povey
02-6454 4150
0419 406 908**



**We wish all our
members and friends
a safe and
prosperous 2015**



Items for **The Colinton Courier** to Nick Goldie at
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02 6235 9190
by the first Saturday each month, or to any
Committee member. For production assistance we
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The Colinton Courier is also available at
www.michelagoregion.org.au
Views expressed in *The Colinton Courier* are not
necessarily those of the editor, the Brigade, or the
RFS.



*Stock at risk: goats and geese in the
Adelaide Hills (SMH picture)*