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Current National Security Alert Level: **High**

GENERAL

This issue of Commish's Corner comes from Jim Hamilton who is Acting Commissioner while Commissioner Mullins is on leave.

New equipment and additional firefighters

On Monday I joined the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Stuart Ayres, the Commissioner and several local Government Members of Parliament, for the important announcement about additional front line resources for Fire & Rescue NSW.

The Commissioner has sent an email to all staff outlining what the announcement means for FRNSW and can be summarised as follows:

Recruitment of an additional 40 permanent firefighters who will act as a relief pool in Sydney, specifically to reduce the need for TOLing, commenced today. Initial recruitment will be for 22 suitably qualified retained firefighters, who will undertake a training program at the State Training College.

The placement of five new Class 1 water tankers in the Sydney Fire District based at 61 Lane Cove, 45 Miranda, 94 Kellyville, 93 Narellan and 98 Cranebrook. These will be staffed by the 40 additional relievers on Total Fire Ban days and sometimes also on days of severe weather alerts (high winds and storms).

Sick leave needs to continue to reduce to levels committed to by FRNSW and FBEU as part of the 2008 Award (an average of 87 hours per year per firefighter); this will enable these firefighters to be available to staff the tankers most of the time, not just during severe weather and fire events.

The tankers were delivered to the stations on Monday, with training already commencing.

Provision of an additional \$1.375 million to the Community Fire Unit program to enable equipment enhancements recommended in a report by the Bushfire Natural Hazards CRC following the Blue Mountains bushfires and development of a new phone app for alerting and updates.

The significance of this announcement and the support from Government should not be underestimated and I need your continued assistance to sustain the trend toward meeting the agreed sick leave target of 87 hours per year.

New Permanent Firefighter Award commences

FRNSW and the Fire Brigade Employees' Union have jointly announced that a new Permanent Award has been agreed taking effect from Friday 14 November. See [Crown Employees \(Fire and Rescue NSW Permanent Firefighting Staff\) Award 2014](#) (marked up) under Toolkits on the intranet to review the detailed changes.

As the new Permanent Firefighter Award is now in effect, there are some key points and changes you should all be aware of:

The new rates of pay under the new Award come into effect from this pay.

The criteria for the 60 Leading Firefighter (LFF) positions, which come into effect as a result of the new Award, are currently being developed. These new LFF positions will be filled in the Greater Sydney Area (GSA), Central Coast, Newcastle, Illawarra and regional NSW. With significant work being done to establish the final criteria, we are aiming to advertise these new roles by the end of January 2015.

Work on another significant feature of the new Award – flexible rostering – will be developed and refined in close consultation with the FBEU. These new arrangements, including the possibility of the 24-hour roster are yet to be finalised and may include a unique – and valuable – opportunity to trial this significant change to the working arrangements.

Feedback will be sought from stations ahead of any full implementation of a 24-hour roster.

Further communications, including frequently asked questions, will follow as changes in the new Award take effect over the coming weeks and months.

The new Award benefits firefighters, supports a culture of reward for individual effort and merit, modernises systems and processes, and ensures more flexible deployment of resources to the benefit of the community. It also delivers significant wage rises in the current environment and the highest in the public sector.

A Commissioner's Orders was published today implementing changes to Annual Leave Period dates, changes to Redevelopment payments and inclusion of working 24 hour shifts when undertaking Part Change of Shifts.

Private mobile radio upgrade

25% of FRNSW's State-wide private mobile radio (PMR) network has now migrated from analog to digital in a program of work spanning six years. The upgrade is on track to implement the Australian Communications and Media Authority's mandate to move all emergency services to a unified government frequency band by the end of 2018. Work completed to date has already increased signal quality and coverage, either reducing or entirely eliminating previous known black spots. The new digital standard is enabling additional digital radio functionality, and bringing critical functionality such as emergency call to areas where this was previously unavailable.

The equipment replaced by the upgrade is being re-used by the Ambulance Service of NSW and St John's Ambulance to eliminate waste and minimise the program's environmental footprint. FRNSW is also expanding existing infrastructure sharing partnerships with the NSW RFS, NSW Police Force and Ambulance Service of NSW in line with the NSW Telco Authority's radio site consolidation and rationalisation initiative.

Station openings at Albion Park and Gordon

On Monday this week I joined the Minister for Police and Emergency Services Stuart Ayres MP to celebrate the completion of the new \$2.5 million Albion Park Fire Station. The new station accommodates 16 permanent firefighters and 14 retained firefighters and includes a larger double engine bay to house two fire appliances; better staff accommodation, including locker rooms, training and office facilities; and improved equipment storage for uniforms and breathing apparatus.

Closer to home, today I joined the Member for Ku-ring-gai, Barry O'Farrell MP in celebrating the completion of a major \$1.4 million upgrade of Gordon Fire Station in Sydney's north. The renovation brings Gordon Station, originally built in 1935, up to modern standards. The upgrade includes a new kitchen, office and watchroom facilities, a renovated training room with kitchen facilities, fitness room, disabled access and new unisex change rooms and bathrooms.

SWS program relaunched

During the 1994 bushfires SO Bruce Covey, then a Senior Firefighter, experienced problems with reticulated water supplies and came up with the idea of identifying static water supplies, such as swimming pools, on

residents' properties. He conducted a pilot study in the Berowra area which identified 2 million litres of water on a ridge with poor reticulated supply. Residents concerned about the threat of bushfires also responded positively to the idea. Thus the Static Water Supply Program was born and has been operating successfully ever since. More recently, Community Fire Units (CFUs) have also been identifying static water supplies in their areas.

Information about static water supplies can now be entered in CARS and through the CFU Portal and uploaded to our geographic information systems. These improvements have led to a review of the program and the publication of updated information, videos and checklists on the [Static Water Supply Program toolkit](#). I urge all crews and CFUs in bushland/urban interface areas to review identified static water supplies in their area and to work with the community to update their SWS information and fill in the gaps.

Be bushfire ready

There are a number of resources available to ensure you are fully prepared for the bushfire season. [Bushfire Information Cards](#) have been updated for the current season and are available through ESCAT. These cards are an easy reference to bushfire-related firefighting operations, including radio ops, fire danger ratings, SitRep message formatting and relevant SOGs and Operational Bulletins. Recent RFS operational briefing videos (covering topics such as weather, resources and logistics, public information and warnings and seasonal briefings) can also be found on the intranet under the Bushfire Toolkit > Current Bushfire Campaign. In addition, the recently published [intranet news story](#) on tips for talking to the media provides a template media release and talking points to help during interviews.

Promotions and Station Officer's Promotional Program graduation

Friday 21 November was a significant day for a number of our firefighters, with the promotion of three Station Officers to Inspectors; 20 Leading Firefighters to Station Officers and the graduation of 14 Leading Firefighters from the Station Officer's Promotional Program (SOPP). I was delighted to meet with our three new Inspectors, as well as attending and addressing the SOPP graduates, their families and friends. All participants performed well in the training, with Scott Hanley receiving the Commissioner's Merit Award.

Congratulations to all and I wish them all the best as they take on their new responsibility.

Applications open for 2015 APAC/AIPM leadership programs

Now is the time to think about your professional development in 2015. Applications are now being invited from members of FRNSW to participate in the 2015 AFAC/AIPM Public Safety Leadership Development Programs. The five programs cover leadership at every level with targeted courses for executive management, those responsible for cross-agency collaboration, operational and non-operational team leaders and female leaders. Applications close Wednesday 17 December. See the [intranet story](#) for more details on each of the five programs.

Improving business practices

The New Ways of Working group representing Head Office business units has continued to meet regularly to plan, develop and monitor progress on implementation of improved business practices. A consultant Movelink held sessions with the Project Management Office and the Governance and Legal Office to assist them in planning to reduce paper. Other sections have also implemented plans to greatly eliminate paper by changing processes from paper-based to online. Plans are currently being developed to refit part of level 10 in Head Office in line with the layout that will be in used the new Greenacre building. The Working Group is also discussing and trialling how technology can be used as an enabler to facilitate these new business practices.

Finance staff win award

The Thomson Reuters Tax and Accounting Excellence Awards 2014 recognise excellence across organisations and individuals in the expertise of tax and accounting across Australia. These were presented last Thursday at an industry awards ceremony which I attended along with Deputy Chief Executive Rosemary Milkins and our finance management team.

FRNSW was awarded the Finance Team of the Year Award and this was accepted by Assistant Director Claydon Georges on behalf of finance staff. Our Director Finance Adam Summons was awarded the CFO of the Year 2014 award after being a finalist in the 2013 awards. I congratulate Adam and all our finance staff for this recognition of their efforts and professionalism.

Burns Unit cheque

On Wednesday 19 November I had the pleasure of attending the Westmead Radiothon along with Supt Ian Krimmer and local firefighters from Parramatta Station who were there with their truck.

In 2013 the first ever 2UE Christmas Appeal for The Children's Hospital at Westmead was held, raising \$837,000 through generous on and off air donations from listeners, community and corporate supporters. Money raised was used for equipment upgrades, research and extra programs and services.

This year, the event raised \$655,660 including \$80,000 from your weekly pay donations to the Burns Unit over the past year. The donations are critical to the running of the unit and allow it to provide the best possible care to its young patients. Dr Harvey asked me to convey that they cannot thank FRNSW enough for our support.

Relief and Welfare Fund AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Relief and Welfare Fund will be held at 1100 hours on Thursday 18 December in the Sweatman Room, Level 3, No. 1 City of Sydney. All fund members are entitled to attend. Office bearers will present their reports and a new Committee will be elected for 2014-16. Light refreshments will be provided after the meeting; to assist with catering, please email the Secretary SO Mark Black by Monday 15 December., advising that you plan to attend.

FRNSW wins a NSW Public Sector Award for Excellence

On 12 November, FRNSW was awarded winner of the 2014 TMF Awards for Excellence in the Work Health & Safety Framework & Systems category, for our [Safety Strategy 2013-17](#). The award was announced at a celebration event, held at the Four Seasons Hotel. The event was combined with the TMF Risk Management Conference.

The annual awards program (facilitated by Suncorp Risk Services on behalf of the NSW Self Insurance Corporation) aims to identify, recognise and celebrate leading risk management practice within NSW public sector agencies. The event was well supported with more than 340 delegates in attendance, from NSW Public Sector agencies and TMF partners, to acknowledge the work of the finalists and share in the celebration.

Whilst the strategy is only in its second year, this recognition is well deserved in highlighting the efforts being made in health and safety across the organisation.

INCIDENTS

Homes threatened at Warrimoo bushfire

Friday 14 November was a day of very high to severe fire danger across the State and in anticipation of a busy day FRNSW crews were deployed to urban interface areas. At around 1330hrs, triple zero calls came in from the vicinity of Florabella Street in Warrimoo where several "explosions" were reported below high voltage powerlines in the valley directly behind a number of Warrimoo streets.

445 Springwood quickly responded and reported that a fire was burning in inaccessible bushland in the gully. Aerial water bombing was requested as there were concerns the fire could burn up the gully to numerous residential properties at the top of the ridge.

A 3rd Alarm response together with NSWRFs crews were deployed to stage at Greens Parade in preparation for possible ember and fire attack. At around 1400hrs 445 Springwood advised that winds in the area were picking up and that the fire was expanding rapidly and it was highly likely that numerous houses would come under direct threat.

A further strike team was quickly deployed to Florabella Street as the fire began to crown and numerous spot fires were reported in and around the surrounding streets. At around 1415hrs Warrimoo Public School, and shortly after, Blaxland Primary School were both placed in lockdown as FRNSW crews were deployed to both schools to set up for structure protection and rescue if required. At around 1430hrs the rail line and Great Western Highway were closed as more spot fires were reported in the vicinity. Two FRNSW pumps were also deployed to the large Warrimoo electrical substation as a fire front threatened to approach the critical infrastructure.

Throughout the afternoon crews set up numerous protection lines in various locations including Florabella Street, Railway Parade, Bridge Street and Greens parade as the Class 2 fire continued to cause concerns for firefighters. Local CFU teams were activated throughout the afternoon and greatly assisted in providing protection from possible ember attack to properties.

The major concern for the Incident Management Team was a southerly wind change predicted in the evening with reports of possible wind gusts up to 90 kilometres per hour. It was an anxious wait throughout the late afternoon and into the evening as reports of the southerly change moving up the south coast came through. The change finally impacted the fire grounds at around 2115hrs with strong gusting winds driving the fire and embers from the gully up to the rear of numerous properties in the Warrimoo area. Together with NSWRFs crews, firefighters spent an anxious hour or so successfully providing direct property protection across the area.

Well done to all crews and CFUs teams who worked throughout the night and into the next day to successfully defend hundreds of households, two major schools and other critical infrastructure sites with no reports of any property loss or injury. Two strike teams worked throughout Saturday with the NSWRFs to extinguish large areas of bush, however several pockets of fire continued to burn in accessible areas for several more days before Remote Access Firefighting Teams could bring about final extinguishment.

The Warrimoo fire was certainly a timely reminder to everyone of what could lie ahead in the oncoming summer months. It also highlighted the importance of fire services working together with local residents to ensure they have an up-to-date bushfire survival plan.

10th Alarm factory fire at Lansvale

At 1528hrs Sydney Communications received the first of many triple zero calls reporting what appeared to be a factory fire in Day Street, Lansvale. The Station Officer from 73 Fairfield sent a Red Message en route advising that he could see large volumes of black smoke in the direction they were travelling and a 2nd Alarm response was immediately dispatched.

Shortly after, 49 Cabramatta were first on scene and advised that numerous structures were under threat and called for a 4th Alarm response. As 73 Fairfield arrived less than a minute later it was confirmed that there was a large area of plastics, stacked timber and scaffolding materials alight. It quickly became obvious that the yard was surrounded by multiple large factory complexes and that a 6th Alarm response was required to provide exposure protection in three sectors. Several fixed monitors and two aerial appliances were deployed successfully to provide the necessary exposure protection.

It also quickly became obvious that water supplies were becoming exhausted and that relay pumping would be required from two adjoining streets. An 8th Alarm response was required to provide the extra relay pumping crews. High temperatures of over 40 degrees in the area hampered firefighting operations and responding crews were required to be rotated rapidly to avoid heat stress. Due to this need to quickly rotate firefighting staff, the response to the incident was finally raised to a 10th Alarm.

The smoke plume from the incident was visible right across Sydney and a number of residents in surrounding streets were evacuated by Police to safer areas. Traffic on the nearby Hume Highway was brought to a standstill as black smoke billowed across the busy roadway. Hazmat monitored the atmosphere and water run off throughout the incident. Compressed air foam was deployed and assisted greatly in knocking down the huge fire as a backhoe was also deployed to pull down numerous pallets of timber stacked up to three metres in height. The fire was brought under control within two hours and efforts to protect the numerous surrounding factory complexes were successful.

An area of 60 metres by 60 metres of plastic containers, stacked timber and scaffolding equipment was totally destroyed. The final stop message wasn't transmitted by Duty Commander Parramatta until 2011hrs the following night, well over 24 hours after the fire started. Investigations into the cause of the fire are still ongoing.

I attended the incident and was able to see firsthand the great job done by the 120-plus firefighters and officers who responded to this incident. Despite the enormous heat of the day, their efforts successfully saved many larger factory complexes around the incident. It's also important to note that this was a day of Total Fire Ban which meant that 20 GSA crews were pre-deployed to urban bushland interface areas in anticipation of major bushfire activity. Despite this pre-deployment, FRNSW still maintained the capability to respond a massive weight of attack quickly and effectively to bring this fire quickly under control.

ASK THE COMMISSIONER

Q. The new Award states that Health Services is to ensure that employees' medical information is only to be accessed by Health Services; how will this be achieved? Does this mean that zone staff will not be reviewing our MCs as previously explained?

A. The current ESS process automatically brings the attached medical certificate into the Health and Safety Branch where it is reviewed by Health and Safety staff only. The security settings within SAP restrict who can access and view medical certificates in the system. Medical certificates lodged through ESS are not be reviewed by zone staff.

If an issue is identified with the submitted medical certificate, such as the medical certificate dates not aligning with the dates entered into ESS, Health and Safety will make contact directly with zone staff to have the issue addressed.

The above arrangements ensure that privacy of medical certificates can be maintained.

Commissioner's email: Commissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au

Sandra Garcia, EA to Commissioner: 9265 2930

Ask the Commissioner: OfficeOfTheCommissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au