Please note: the information below was provided to DFAT by the NSW Rural Fire Service. Enquires about this information should be directed to the NSW Rural Fire Service.

# NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

# Forest Fire Webinar – Latin America Seminar October 2021

## NSW RFS - who we are

* The world’s largest volunteer fire service
* More than **74,000**members across **2,100**brigades
* Providing fire and emergency services to approximately **95%**of the geography of the State
* Also assist with other functions such as road crash rescue and storm/flooding emergencies
* Our vision and mission:
  + *To provide a world standard of excellence in the provision of a community-based fire and emergency service*
  + *To protect the community and our environment we will minimise the impact of fire and other emergencies by providing the highest standards of training, community education, prevention and operational capability*

## 2019/20 Season at a Glance

* Over 200consecutive days of bush fire emergency
* 160days of continuous major operations in State Operations Centre
* Over 11,300bush and grass fires
* 5.5million hectares burnt –approximately 7% of the State
* 3State of Emergency declarations made by the Premier
* 59days of Total Fire Ban including 11days of state wide bans
* Some 7,000interstate and international personnel deployed to assist NSW fire fighters
* Sadly 26fatalities were recorded
* More than 2,400homes destroyed
* Nearly 15,000homes saved in the direct area of fire impact

## Why was this season different?

* Higher than average temperatures were experienced in the lead up to the season: the 2018-19 summer was exceptionally warm and the months from January to July 2019 were much warmer than average.
* Australia had also experienced consecutive above average temperature months going back as far as November 2016.
* As well as being the hottest year on record, 2019 was also the driest year on record for Australia.
* Prior to the start of the season, approximately 98% of NSW was affected by drought –100% of NSW was drought affected by January 2020.
* These extreme environmental conditions led to extreme and unpredictable fire behaviour.
* The size, scale and concurrency of the fires, together with the amount and distance of spotting, was unprecedented.

**Fire fighting in NSW**

## Co-ordinated Fire Fighting arrangements

* One Incident Management Team per incident.
* One Incident Controller.
* NSW RFS is the combat agency for major bush fires.
* Regardless of public or private land.
* Other agencies perform roles within IMT.
* Agencies use the one operational management system (ICON).
* NSW RFS website the ‘single source’ of online information on bush fires.

## Deployment of Resources

* Strategic assessments were conducted to determine fire risk, potential impacts/consequences and resourcing requirements based on containment strategies.
* NSW RFS uses several means to dispatch fire crews to incidents across the State including (but not limited to)
* Computer Aided Dispatch
* RFSActive(Member Availability app)
* Incident Control Online
* Common Operating Picture
* These systems are used by fires agencies to ensure interoperability during heightened fire activity.

## International & Interstate Assistance

* More than 7,000personnel from every Australian jurisdiction were deployed to assist NSW.
* International assistance was also provided from New Zealand (224), Canada (84) and the United States of America (82).
* The NSW RFS Interstate/International Liaison Unit worked with the National Resource Sharing Centre between August 2019 and March 2020 to action 664interstate requests for assistance and 18international requests for assistance.

## Interstate & International Liaison Unit

* An International and Interstate Liaison Unit (IILU) was established and operated throughout the season.
* The IILU is responsible for (but not limited to):
  + *working with the Operations and Planning sections to determine resourcing requirements*
  + *preparing letters of request and working with the National Resource Sharing Centre to action/progress*
  + *facilitating logistical arrangements including transportation, accommodation and equipment requirements*
  + *providing briefings for incoming personnel*
  + *liaising with Jurisdictional Liaison Officers on arrival and throughout the deployment*

## Observations

* The National Resource Sharing Centre arrangements ensure a co-ordinated approach and clear understanding of what resources are available to assist nationally.
* Continual assessment of fire activity and forecast weather needs to be undertaken to allow engagement to occur in a timely manner.
* This assessment should occur in tandem with strategic resourcing planning.
* Ensure sufficient resources are available to support any deployment –don’t underestimate logistical requirements.