

NSW Rural Fire Service
Blue Mountains Group Support Brigade
September Newsletter 2026

From the President

Ahoj everyone. September is here and the warm, dry weather is something to keep an eye on as we move into 2026 - 2027 fire season.

For those interested in Comms. or Catering shifts there are spaces available on the roster for the final weeks of September and October. Please put your name down for these shifts as they continue to be invaluable opportunities to prepare for Comms. readiness for the upcoming fire season, as well as providing the ongoing and essential Catering work our brigade gives to the Blue Mountains District.

Spaces are also filling quickly for Deputy Group 6 - Peter Bennett's Basic Fire Behaviour workshop on Saturday 3 October. He has much data and experiential knowledge to give us, plus several 'hairy' bushfire anecdotes to curl your toes, so don't miss out!

As many dual members are aware, Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 September is **Get Ready Weekend**. It's an important reminder to reconsider our Bush Fire Survival Plans, our property preparedness and to monitor Hazards Near Me for any local updates.

Our next General Meeting is 10am, Sunday 18 October 2026.

Libby Gahl – President

Captain's News

As we draw near to the next fire season we are preparing with a number of essential meetings to make sure we are all aware of the level of readiness that is required. This is both for our communities and for our brigade members.

Prior to the District Pre-Season Briefing for Captains and SDCs on August 28th, we have held a Communication Supervisors meeting

General Meetings of 2026:

October 18
December 13

General Meetings of 2027:

February 21
April 18
June AGM 20
August 15
October 17
December 12

Executive Committee Meetings of 2026 – 2027

November 4
January 20
March 3
May 5

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and well as a Brigade Field Officers meeting. In both these sessions we focussed on equipment needs, crewing structures and cross function support of each other if the season is a busy one.

Members may be asked to look at working in other function areas if the need arises. For example, our Transport & Logistics members can be of great assistance to the Catering team when it comes to packing and delivering welfare to staging areas. The advantages on a multi-function support brigade are that we know each other and are willing to pitch in wherever we can help.

Members are reminded that we now task across all four function areas using RFSActiv. If you have any trouble with Activ let Ian or I know and we can add the additional option of you receiving a sms message as well as the Activ alert.

Dianne Knight – Captain

Vale Jim Rathmell

James (Jim) Rathmell passed away peacefully at home on Friday 14th August. Jim was a dual member with Group Support over the past 12months. He worked with us in the areas of Transport & Logistics as well as Catering. A lovely gentleman who fitted in so easily with our brigade.

Our thanks go to his other brigade of Wentworth Falls and his family for sharing him with us.

Welcome to our Newest Probationary Members

Probationary	**Dual or New to Service**	**Probationary**	**Dual or New to Service**
Ben Greenhaigh	Megalong Valley	Ben Lambert	New to the Service

Training Update

CAD Proficiency Assessment: Our Brigade has 14 members with various levels of experience in using the CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) system. As part of the adjustments and additions happening with the new RFS Training Pathways, a CAD Operator must go through a District Proficiency Assessment. Following some training refresher sessions with Chook, our Operators have been working through the 60minute individual assessment with DC Peter Horn and myself.

Basic Aviation Communication Workshop: Our DC Aviation, John Brell, presented a workshop on communication to one aircraft as a Responsible Person on Tuesday night Sept 8. If the incident takes on further aircraft, we must call in a trained Aviation Radio Operator (ARO) to manage their flights and wellbeing. We have seven qualified AROs in our Brigade and would be keen to get more. If interested in working in aviation, talk to John about courses for 2027.

Fire Behaviour Basics October 3: Peter Bennett (DG6) will be presenting a 3-hour workshop on basic fire behavior experienced in the Blue Mountains. All members are welcome to attend. Check the brigade website and add your name to the roster.

CAD Introduction Workshops:
Chook will be offering some introductory workshops for CAD which will suit our newly qualified CCA members if they are interested in working the dispatch system. Keep an eye on the roster.

Preparing the OCV for the fire season

The current Operational Command Vehicle (OCV) has been checked to make it ready for use in the coming fire season. We will be hoping to make it available for training with comms and aviation members soon.









Shirts on Fire

All ordinary operational members should have emailed the SDC to order one item of apparel from Shirts on Fire by now. Ian needs your choice and size. The funding will be from our RFSA bequeathment. The items will come in a bulk order to us at District Office and we will distribute them.

Anyone who has not yet ordered please do so by Sunday 27th September.

To see the selection of clothing available you need to go to the link below:
https://www.shirtsonfire.com.au/collections/blue-mountains-group-support
The password is BMGS526.

District Incident Management Exercise

The annual IMX was held on Friday 4th September for the District staff and interagency workers and then again on Saturday 5th for Group Officers and senior brigade personnel interested in working on a Level 2 incident as part of the IMT (Incident Management Team).









Well done to our Comms members who had the opportunity to practice their skills with CAD, logging, radios and setting up the disposition board. It was a very busy two days but extremely beneficial for all those in attendance.

The level 2 incident focused on the Blackheath area and was very challenging as it threatened to drop over the escarpment. Our local brigade buddies thoroughly enjoyed their tasking roles in the IMT, and my guess would be that the Activation team were also having fun ramping up the problems for us all. The siren and chopper noises coming across the radio were very creative.

Our thanks go to the Capabilities Team at District Office and Group Captain Peter Bennett, who loves FireMapper. for all the hard work they put into making the training a success.

RFSActiv – Check in and record your volunteer hours.

Check out when you finish your training / meeting / shift.

Eat Street Challenge - 2026 State Championships



The NSW RFS State Championships bring firefighting teams together from across the state to compete in a range of firefighting and other activities.

Catering teams compete in the EAT Street Challenge, demonstrating teamwork, planning and food service skills.

Four members of the Blue Mountains Group Support Brigade were one of six teams participating in the EAT Street Challenge at the RFS 2026 State Championships held at Dubbo Showground over two days.

The Blue Mountains team, nicknamed the Blue Suede Chews, included Regina McDonald, Rabi Higgs, Veronica Gilmer and John Williams.

The other five teams competing were Hawkesbury, The Hills, Northern Tablelands and two teams from the Southern Highlands. All competing EAT Street Teams were accommodated at the RFS State Training Academy in Dubbo, which was perfect.

The theme for the 2026 EAT Street Challenge was Dub Vegas and each of the six EAT Street food stands were decorated with casino themed items – playing cards, poker chips, dice and even a (very small) roulette wheel.

Day One saw us all washing up and drying a kitchen full of mixing bowls, pots, pans, oven trays and a plethora of utensils in preparation for the following day's events.

The Opening Ceremony and Welcome Reception were held on Friday night at the Dubbo Showground. The Saturday night 'RFS Academy Awards Dinner' was held at the Dubbo Regional Theatre & Convention Centre where the Dub Vegas theme continued along with various Academy Awards themed costumes.



Our menu for the challenge consisted of Bacon and Egg Wraps for breakfast and "Brisky Business Taco's" (Beef Brisket) served with fresh coleslaw for lunch, along with a delicious Elvis Presley Deluxe Potato Salad, which was our contribution to the fantastic "salad bar". These were all prepared and served by our Team. With this Team having no previous experience competing in the EAT Street Challenge, it was a huge learning curve determining recipes and the quantities of ingredients needed to feed all the competitors.

Veronica was called upon to participate in the "Mystery Box" ala MasterChef challenge – a fun event. In her absence the rest of the group continued preparing ingredients and completing other errands. Congratulations to Veronica on a task well done! Congratulations to the Northern Tablelands Team who took out first place and although the Blue Suede Chews Blue Mountains team did not win the competition, the food served was a big hit with many RFS Firefighters /competitors – seniors, cadets and marshals, who had both our breakfast wraps and lunchtime tacos on Saturday, returned for the same menu on Sunday.

Our claim to fame, or bragging rights, was the fact that the RFS Commissioner, Trent Curtin, dined on our Tacos for lunch on Sunday!!

Although it was a challenge, the Blue Suede Chews Team enjoyed working alongside the other teams, sharing bench space, utensils, ovens, ideas and knowledge and all enjoyed taking part in the EAT Street Challenge, even though the working days were long. Some advice for any team wishing to be part of this event in the future, would be to be very clear about exactly you are going to prepare AND be ready to change it up at the last minute.

A big thank you to all the sponsors, including the RFSA, who supported the event and we look forward to a new team competing in the 2028 State Championships to be held in Coffs Harbour.

Great fun was had by all including the journey to and from Dubbo!!!
Many thanks to all the TEAM!! WE MADE IT!

by Eat Street Team





Amenities in the Field



Every District will receive a trailer equipped with two portable toilets.

Reason: evidence showed that firefighters were not drinking enough water throughout the day due to there being a lack of such facilities available. Heat stroke and dehydration problems were needing to be addressed.

A portable shower is also being provided as part of a program to improve conditions for those on the fireground.

Reason: again, it is based on member welfare so further explanations will come out soon.

The policy and systems for their use are still being prepared and distributed to Districts.