



August 2019

HOT TOPICS

Celebrating our network

NEW RURAL PROPERTY BUSHFIRE PLANNING GUIDE

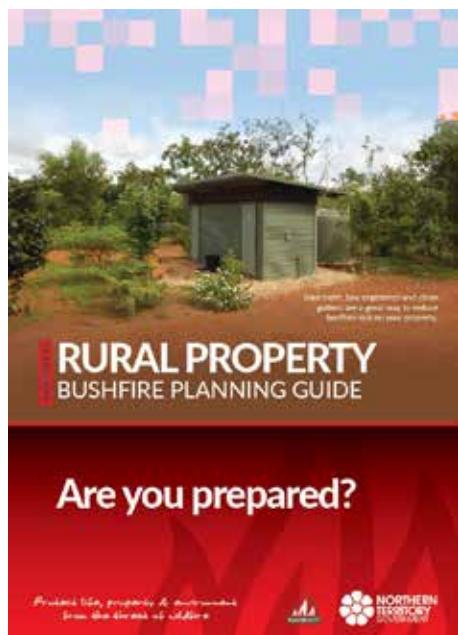
Are you and your property prepared for bushfire?

Bushfires NT has developed an easy to use, rural property bushfire planning guide for blocks less than 100 hectares. Having a bushfire plan can help you understand and manage the risk of bushfire. It also offers a structured way to have a conversation with your family and neighbours.

The guide explains: your responsibilities how to prepare your property, creating your own bushfire plan and what to do when a wildfire comes.

The guide can be found [here](#)

Mark Gardener, Senior Risk Planner



CRACKER OF A NIGHT

Thank you to all who did the right thing on Territory Day and thank you to the volunteers and staff who worked through the evening and night.

Overall Bushfires NT and Northern Territory Fire & Rescue Service received 180 fire-related calls with most of them being grass fires that were extinguished quickly thanks to the prompt response of those on the ground and those working in the joint Incident Management Teams (IMT) in Batchelor and Darwin.

A special thank you to Samantha Trott of the Dundee brigade who assisted the Batchelor IMT as 'scribe' for the night and following day. Sam provided an abundance of support and was a delight to have part of the team. Thank you Sam.



Joshua Fischer, Assistant Director Operations BFNT and Mark Spain, Executive Director NTFRS



Northern Australia Seasonal Bushfire Outlook 2019

HAZARD NOTES 27 JUN 2019

NORTHERN AUSTRALIA SEASONAL BUSHFIRE OUTLOOK 2019



Above normal fire potential
Normal fire potential



What is the fire outlook across northern Australia for the bushfire season? The Northern Australia Seasonal Bushfire Outlook 2019 has all the details for Queensland, the Northern Territory, northern Western Australia and northern South Australia.

Record warmth and significant rainfall deficiencies have shaped the fire outlook potential across most of northern Australia this season. Dry and warm conditions have now been persistent for the last 2 years, except for inland Queensland near Mount Isa and the tropical Queensland coast from Townsville to Cape York, which received record rainfall and flooding from December 2018 to February 2019. Vegetation growth, which provides the fuel for bushfires, matches the overall pattern of rainfall and temperature, with poor growth affecting most of Australia, including the tropics.

The Northern Territory is expecting normal fire potential, despite the Top End experiencing its driest wet season since 1992. Combined with the hottest wet season on record, this resulted in Top End rainfall being 34% below the long-term rainfall average. Download the [Northern Australia Seasonal Bushfire Outlook 2019](#) for the full details.



A LITTLE THANKS GOES A LONG WAY

On a recent Lake Bennett fire, I came across a sandwich board at the back of a property with a big 'Thank You' written on it.

I spoke to the landholder who was extremely grateful with the work the bushfires volunteers do. I promised her I would endeavour to pass her thanks along to the team and was very humbled by the gesture, as it's not very often you hear those words.

This particular property and neighbouring blocks are faced with threat by fires coming up from the flood plains and across the hills every year.

For years these properties have been protected (and sometimes only just barely) by the back burning efforts by the Bushfires NT volunteers and staff and their efforts have not been overlooked.

Little things like this 'thankyou' sign go a long way to show those involved that their efforts have been greatly appreciated.

As sometimes the job feels a little thankless, I would like to take this opportunity to pass along this thank you and echo the sentiment to all our volunteers across all our regions!

I'd also like to add my personal thanks along with the appreciation of the entire BFNT staff and the hardworking vannies we have!

Keep up the good work, stay safe.... And see you in the smoke!

Conan Williams, Fire Management Officer

ALL ABOUT GRASS

Fire Danger Rating (FDR)		Grassland Fire Danger Index (GFDI)
Low-Moderate	L-M	0-11
High	H	12-24
Very High	VH	25-49
Severe	SEV	50-99
Extreme	EXT	100-149
Catastrophic	CAT	150+

Table 1. Fire Danger Ratings used in the Northern Territory

Ever wondered what all those numbers mean on the morning roll call or how they calculate the Fire Danger Ratings for the roadside signs?

Grassland Fire Danger Index (GFDI) is a measure of bushfire risk based on grass and fire weather.

A mathematical equation has been developed that combines grass quantity (tonnes/hectare), dryness of grass or curing (%), temperature (°C), wind speed (kilometres/hour) and relative humidity (%).

This equation produces a number from zero to over 150 which can help us make decisions (see Table 1). For example, when the GFDI is around 50, a Fire Ban is called.

The quantity and dryness of grass is estimated by Bushfires NT staff with the help of a new tool and NAFL and the fire weather comes from the Bureau of Meteorology's automated weather stations.

A Fire Weather Forecast Summary for all Fire Areas in the Northern Territory including maximum predicted GFDI is available at [here](#).

Mark Gardener, Senior Risk Planner

NEW DARWIN RIVER COMMUNITY ROOM

Darwin River Volunteer Bushfire Brigade wish to advise our wider community that the brigade was successful in winning a major grant through the Northern Territory Government Community Grant Scheme to build a new multipurpose building on the old scout camp site of Curragundi.

The building is now complete and already being used for our meetings and safe record storage. We have received expressions of interest to use/hire the room from outside the brigade and a booking for a wedding in September this year.

The new build is greatly appreciated and will enable the brigade to hold future community events. For bookings please call our Secretary Dave Mullavey on 0428 293 618 or email: drvbf@bigpond.com

We openly thank the Northern Territory Government for this funding and our sponsors and supporters.

Thanking you,

Bev Shuker
Treasurer



New community room



Volunteers Bev and Hek Shuker doing the honours

40 YEARS AND STILL FIGHTING



Bev and Hek Shuker

Hek and Bev Shuker from the Darwin River Volunteer Bushfire Brigade have been instrumental in shaping the brigade to what it is today.

For over 40 years they have selflessly dedicated their time toward fire management for the benefit of their community.

They have become very well respected members of their community and as a couple Darwin River could always count on when the smokes starts.

Their commitment is somewhat a triumph given the challenges of raising a family, running a business and looking out for a community.

To this we say THANK YOU.

MERITORIOUS SERVICE



Proud recipients Sue and Dave Mullavy

Thank you to Dave and Sue Mullavy, another instrumental couple of the Darwin River Volunteer Bushfire Brigade who have always been willing to get in and get the job done.

Thank you for the 10 years of service and care you have for your community. Such generosity and commitment is what keeps a brigade going.

Thank you



William (Bill) Gear front and centre

Thank you to William (Bill) Gear for the many years of devoted service to Bushfires NT.

Bill has worn many hats including brigade Secretary, Treasurer, Public Officer and Committee member across both the Marrakai and volunteer training brigades and involvement with the Bushfires Volunteer Association.

Thank you for the countless hours and support to the bushfires community.

THUMBS UP FOR CDU'S SIDE BY SIDE TRAINING

Members from Elizabeth Valley, Marrakai and Dundee were lucky enough to join the Lambells Lagoon brigade in undertaking side by side training delivered through Charles Darwin University.

It's great to see members getting on board with the shift from quad bikes to ATV vehicles. Well done guys!



Dianne Tynan (front), Roy Christensen (back left) and Robert Holmes (back right)

DUNDEE CHAINSAW TRAINING

Several members of the Dundee Volunteer Bushfire Brigade recently undertook chainsaw training to upskill members and provide life skills beyond the brigade setting. A well received and no doubt useful training into the future.

Well done to those who participated.



HELPING HAND FOR LAMBELLS

At a recent fire in the Lambells Lagoon area a local water truck was going past and the driver stopped and asked if we needed any help.

With a yes response from the Captain the driver went out of his way along the opposite side of the fire line and kindly ran a wet line twice.

This is why I love living up here and what makes us Territorians!

Scott Gibson, Authorised Bushfire Volunteer

FIRE FIGHTER 1 TRAINING

In the past month Bushfires NT has delivered Fire Fighter 1 NT courses in Douglas Daly, Berry Springs and Katherine.

We had 26 participants 18 of them were volunteer brigade members. We hope to see our brigades mentoring these new members on the fire ground as soon as their Authorised Bushfire Volunteer applications come through and are approved.

This training would not have been possible without the assistance of volunteer trainers Raymond Nicholls, Kevin Natt, our staff members Christine Platell and Conan Williams who yet again did a magnificent job.

The Katherine brigade is very close to completion of their training/meeting room which has been a terrific venue in which to hold training in the region.

Wendy Coghlan, Training and Extensions Officer



Douglas Daly region



Berry Springs region

ANOTHER LEVEL IN KATHERINE!



It was about 10 years ago when, I started sending text messages to communicate with our Katherine Volunteer Bushfire Brigade (KVBB) fire fighters. Prior to that I would ring around on the landline. What wonderful efficiency is gained with a group SMS. Following up with radio comms, wildfire mitigation can be underway in minutes, even if I also, was turning out.

These days I tend to do much the same stuff from home but with closer collaboration with BFNT staff and Bushfires Emergency Management System (BEMS) reporting. However, the 14 May 2019 took me to another level and gave me an insight which I believe, would be good for lots of you to experience. As I needed to go to our brigade HQ, for some reason I ended up at the regional BFNT office and witnessed, (and apparently became a part of), the Incident Management Team, for a half hour or so.

The wildfire was threatening Tindal RAAF residential area. The Incident Controller, Troy, was negotiating on many fronts to the RAAF furies, aerial controller in the event of helicopter/bambi bucket, NAH, water source, NTFRS (the Townies) for asset protection possibilities and I'm sure, other areas I was not across.

Meanwhile, Nathaniel had 'flying fingers' entering data into BEMS as the phones and radio comms went on relentlessly from KVBB volunteers along with BFNT Adam and Lachy as they strategised on the ground to bring the fire under control.

The Incident Control Room sounded like utter confusion initially but progressively, the issues were moved on and reached resolution. (It didn't help that the military fighter planes were in the sky for an exercise.)

On reflection, my presence prevented extra phone and radio calls concerning volunteer logistics and capacity during that time. I believe my parting remark to Troy and Nathaniel was, "I get a bit frenzied and phrenetic at home at times but it's nothing like this!"

After 3½ hours the boys called the fire a blackout and I met them at Tindal turn off with lunch and drinks. It was then back to HQ for a debrief. Well done blokes!

Jan Murphy (Murph) - Katherine VBB Volunteer

NEW REPEATER FOR ALICE SPRINGS

A new VHF Radio Repeater has been established west of Alice Springs to improve radio communications within the West MacDonnell National Park.

Post fire debriefs from the past few years identified poor radio communications west of Alice Springs due to the topography and location of the main Fire Protection Zone repeater to the east of Alice Springs on Mt Undoolya. The new repeater located at a site called 8 Mile Gap, will now reduce radio black spots significantly improving fire fighter safety. This project was funded by the departments Minor New Works Program bringing the total to 8 repeaters that are maintained by BFNT for use by BFNT and fire management partners around Alice Springs.

Joshua Fischer, BFNT Assistant Director Operations



Upgraded mast has been erected and BFNT link aerial installed at Gypsy Spring



ITS SHOW TIME!

Community engagement at its best from both the Alice Springs and Tennant Creek Brigades who were busy during the show circuit promoting the great work they do. Well done guys!



Alice Springs Brigade showing their flair



Alice Springs volunteer members drawing their generous community prizes



Patricia and Keven Stout, Tennant Creek Volunteer Bushfire Brigade

QUICK UPDATE FROM THE TOP END

So far over 170 wildfires have been attended since the beginning of the year with the busiest weeks being 27 May to 2 June with 37 fire incidents, and 3 June to 9 June with 46 fire incidents. have been issued and 150 mitigation burns have been completed with a further 116 scheduled around 1,000 permits to burn issued.

The Aerial Prescribed Burning Program is complete totalling 2,826km. Not all planned burns were completed due to ground conditions. However strategic lines are in place and have already stopped the spread of wildfires into neighbouring properties.

Mitigation on roadsides has been intermittent due to wildfire interruptions. Brigades continue to work hard to complete when conditions permit. Thank you to all those working to complete.

50% of vacant Crown land (27 tenures) have had fuel reduction burns completed with approximately 40% (32 tenures) with bare earth fire break maintenance completed.

Fire Break inspections have commenced with over 4,000 tenures inspected with varying results, from 44% non-compliant to 20% compliant. Fire break inspections are continuing.

Finally a big thank you to Dundee volunteer, Samantha Trott who through her interest in Emergency Management spent two days in the office assisting with entering information into our Bushfire Emergency Management System (BEMS). Thankyou Sam.

Lee Humphris, Senior Fire Management Officer

WOMEN TAKING THE LEAD

The first female captain for 40 years has been appointed to the Darwin River Volunteer Bushfire Brigade, Karen Percival.

That makes 5 female Captains in the Vernon Arafura Region; Sue Jones (Milne), Michelle Rawes (Cox Peninsula), Dianne Tynan (Elizabeth Valley), Katrina Taylor (BART) & Karen Percival (Darwin River) equating to 31.25% compared to 12.5% about 5 years ago.

And best wishes to recently departed Captain Ngaire Donald of our Tennant Creek brigade who is beginning new adventures on the east coast.

You have left big shoes to fill!

QUAD BIKES ARE PROVEN TO BE DANGEROUS



Bushfires NT in conjunction with the Department of Environment of Natural Resources are phasing out the use of quad bikes. Quad bikes are proven to be dangerous and will be substituted with All Terrain Vehicles (ATV).

Bushfires NT recognise that some volunteer bushfire brigades own quad bikes and support their use in non-fire ground operations such as land management activities including weed spraying providing that suitable protective clothing and equipment is worn and are operated in a safe manner. However, Bushfires NT strongly encourages the use of ATVs over quad bikes due to ATVs increased safety features such as Roll Over Protection System and seatbelts.

Things to remember when operating an ATV:

- You must be trained and assessed as competent in safe operation.
- You must wear a seatbelt, face and hand sun protection, an approved helmet, protective eyewear, protective clothing and protective footwear.
- Loads to be carried on or towed are not to exceed the manufacturer's specified load limit which includes the operator, the load being carried plus any attachments.
- The distribution of weight must be considered. Overloading one side of an ATV can significantly change the centre of gravity and can increase the likelihood of an incident occurring.
- The number of passengers carried on an ATV must not exceed the number of seatbelts installed on the vehicle. The operator and passengers must wear a seatbelt.

It is also highly recommended the following safety equipment is carried on board:

- 5L water
- satellite phone if mobile coverage is not available or limited
- small first aid kit
- EPIRB or equivalent

Safety is our priority. Please be responsible, drive to the conditions and stay safe.



BUSHFIRES NT HEADQUARTERS CONSTRUCTION TENDER AWARDED

The Northern Territory Government has awarded the contract to local construction company C&R Constructions Pty Ltd, which is expected to support more than 30 local jobs.

The new Headquarters will align staff located at Winnellie and Batchelor to the one location – a move which aims to better coordinate fire season planning and response.

The facility will support Bushfires NT respond to and manage bushfire emergencies through an improved and integrated Incident Control Room and will provide a combination of incident control, training, volunteer information and support, and community and information.

The new Headquarters is also set to feature:

- modern office accommodation
- an appliance bay
- operational and support areas
- infrastructure and service connections for future expansion
- solar panels and sectioned air-conditioning to reduce operational costs and greenhouse gas emissions

Works on the development are expected to commence in the coming months and will run over a 12 month period.

Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, Eva Lawler, commented that Bushfires NT staff and volunteers are well known for the great job they do for their community and keeping people safe.

"This will become so much easier with the construction of a new HQ here in Acacia Hills," she said.

"Our investment in this new facility to support Bushfires NT keep our community safe, brings vital services together and closer to one of the largest communities it serves."

C & R Constructions Managing Director, Caleb Gotts, also commented that they are proud to have been awarded this contract and look forward to breaking ground in the coming weeks.

"This project will sustain our business, maintaining employment and opportunities for not only our 36 staff but also a range of local sub-contractors and suppliers."

"Having 12 months of work ahead of us is fantastic and we look forward to the opportunities that lay ahead," Mr Gotts added.

Build Australia article [here](#).

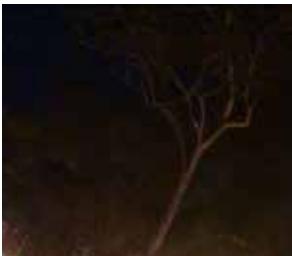
A LOW-INTENSITY PLANNED BURN

In the first week of July, Bushfires NT and Livingstone Volunteer Bushfires Brigade (LIVBB) teamed up to burn the site of the new Bushfires NT head office, on the corner of Townend Road and the Stuart Highway.

The site is located within the LIVBB brigade area. The aim of the operation was to conduct a low-intensity or 'cool' burn, in order to reduce the fuel load to mitigate wildfire and to retain the ecological value of the site.

One of the benefits of retaining native vegetation is to prevent the spread of weeds, who capitalise on open spaces. The burn commenced at nightfall to ensure that fire moved gently through the bush. To achieve low-intensity burns, it can take a little more time and a little more work with the drip torch. This burn was no exception. Crews patiently waited while the depth of the burn slowly widened.

The operation was successful and staff that attended would like to thank the LIVBB for their help.



Photos courtesy of Maggie Towers, BEMS Information Manager

AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF BEMS VERSION 1.0

The Bushfires Emergency Management System (BEMS) has quickly become a one-stop digital shop for fire management within our agency. The platform has been live for over 12 months.

Since its inception over 1,000 permits have been issued and more than 600 fire incidents have been captured across the Territory. After its official launch in March 2019, BEMS has been used by other Territory agencies during emergency response incidents, including Cyclone Trevor and Territory Day 2019.

Since going live, BEMS has provided some great results but as expected. The current version 1.0 has room to improve. An independent review is taking place to understand what improvements need to be made.

The review is being conducted by an independent officer, from the Department of Corporate and Information Services (DCIS). The aim of the review is to identify issues and possible solutions to enhance overall functionality and improve the user experience, to ensure BEMS is as efficient as possible.

Interviews have commenced with a number of staff and volunteers from across the Territory providing their feedback. The end results will provide detailed information and a clear roadmap for the future of improvement of the platform.

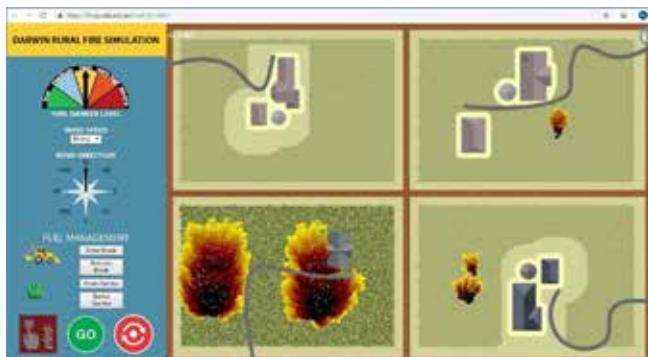


L – R Nick Bell, Steele Davies, former Information Manager BFNT and Ilka Novak, Director of Communications & Media DENR part of a joint Incident Management Team at PFES Emergency Operations Centre held on Territory Day

FIRE LESSONS IN DUNDEE

Kids from the Dundee Beach Primary School were lucky enough to learn the ins and outs of fire including learning of the new fire tool (game) for rural residents thanks to their local Dundee volunteer brigade.

If you're keen to give the game a go and learn more about the nature of wildfires [here](#).



LEADING THE WAY

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) held their annual Volunteer Leadership Program in Darwin in May. A total of 8 Bushfires NT volunteers across 7 brigades took up the opportunity to build knowledge and share experiences, and learn tools of the trade to grow as a leader.

The program was designed to equip emergency sector volunteers with the skills and confidence to develop as leaders and designed as a collaborative platform bringing together volunteers from different organisations across the Northern Territory. It explored practical leadership frameworks through interactive learning by looking at leadership and management strategies in the context of volunteering which included:

- leading change in an organisation
- building and maintaining motivation
- identifying and working with different personality types
- resolving conflict, addressing performance issues and giving constructive critical feedback
- stress and self-care strategies
- contemporary issues facing the emergency management sector

The program was delivered by experienced Australian Red Cross facilitators, on behalf of the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience. Thank you to AIDR for the opportunity and thank you to the following volunteers for the inspiration to develop as volunteer leaders amongst our network.

Barrie Diggins, Manton

Doug Barden, Berry Springs

Keven Stout, Tennant Creek (absent from photo)

Ngaire Donald, Tennant Creek

Maureen Kohlman,
Acacia Hills

Natalie Higgins,
Livingstone

Paul Johnston,
Lambells Lagoon

Ralph Dein,
Marrakai



NEW BUSHFIRES NT VOLUNTEER JACKETS



New turn out jackets with volunteer clearly marked across the back will now be supplied to new recruits. The community may get a surprise at how many volunteers are out there day in day out!

The new printing brings with it slightly altered wash and care instructions so pay attention to the instructions provided. Basic changes include do not:

- tumble dry
- dry-clean
- iron the printing
- soak
- bleach

VOLUNTEER STRATEGY ALMOST READY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

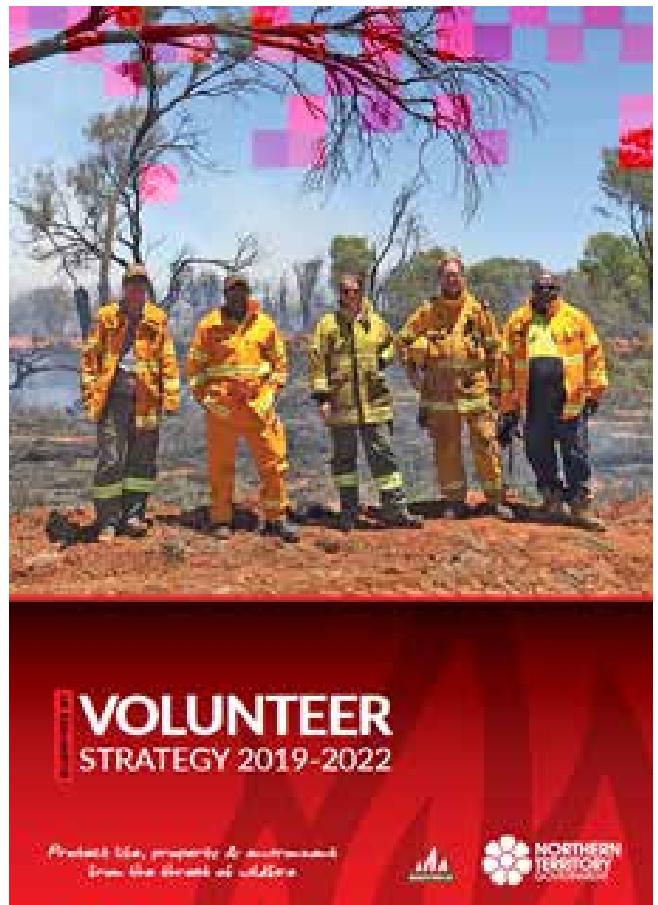
As you are all aware there has been a lot of effort put into the development of a volunteer strategy for Bushfires NT over the past 12 months. A volunteer strategy will assist us in developing and enhancing volunteer programs, and provide future direction and alignment of goals for both Bushfires NT and volunteer bushfire brigades, in turn, ensuring a better protected and more resilient community.

A draft strategy was recently released to staff, volunteers, Volunteering NT, NT Fire and Rescue and other key stakeholders for comment. The feedback received has allowed us to improve the final version of the document, so thank you to everyone that took the time to provide some comments.

The Bushfires NT Volunteer Strategy 2019 to 2022 is scheduled to be released in early August with some work to deliver our commitments already underway.

The strategy will be available for download on the internet, but brigades will also receive copies in the mail for volunteers to have a read.

If you have any questions regarding the volunteer strategy, please don't hesitate to contact lucas.fiddaman@nt.gov.au



FAREWELL FROM STEELE



As some of you may be aware I have taken up an opportunity in Queensland with Queensland Fire and Emergency Services with my last day at Bushfires NT Friday 18 July.

Since starting with Bushfires NT as an apprentice in 2007, I have experienced the good, the bad and the challenging (ugly). I have worked in many roles from being involved in operations in Batchelor and Katherine to undertaking the role of volunteer support (Kevvy Natt's PA) and Training Officer to my current job as BEMS Manager. This variety of roles has given me a great appreciation for the service Bushfires NT delivers, especially volunteers brigades.

This diverse range of roles has given me a great opportunity to develop both professionally and personally, and given me a chance to work with volunteer brigades from across Northern Territory. I would just like to thank all the volunteers who I have either worked directly or indirectly with. Your assistance and experience have certainly helped me.

Stepping into the role as Bushfires Information Manager/BEMS coordinator will be Maggie Towers. Maggie will continue to work towards improving BEMS especially in conjunction with the recent review. Please welcome Maggie to the role, her skills and knowledge will certainly be an asset while BEMS continues to evolve.

Thanks again for all the support and farewell for now. Steele Davies



Much needed welfare, 4 June 2019



Showing a fires beautiful side! Photo shared by Therese Balanzategui, Deputy Captain Labasheeda Park VBB