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Section 44 Incident Controller's Report

IC Name	Superintendent Allyn Purkiss	Agency	NSW Rural Fire Service												
Fire Name & ICON Reference	Wambelong WNP 13011263523	Dates	13/01/2013 to 28/01/2013												
S44 Reference	S44 - 12/13072 IO - 50000108	Impacts	Yes												
Operational Documentation															
<i>Confirm information/ documentation uploaded onto ICON</i>	<table><tr><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Request</td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IAP(s)</td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resources</td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Impact Assessment</td></tr><tr><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Declaration</td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Map(s)</td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agencies involved</td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Injury/Accident/Near Miss</td></tr><tr><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revocation</td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sitrep(s)</td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Weather</td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Debrief Report</td></tr></table>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Request	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IAP(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Impact Assessment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Declaration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Map(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agencies involved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Injury/Accident/Near Miss	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revocation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sitrep(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Weather	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Debrief Report
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Executive Summary															
<p>According to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, January was the hottest month on record for New South Wales. A build up of very hot air over the centre of Australia, particularly during the middle part of the month facilitated a build up of heat wave conditions in the western districts. Observations from Coonabarabran Airport recorded Forest Fire Danger ratings in the "very high" category for all but two days from the start of January to the commencement of this event. This facilitated a significant drying phase in forest fuels.</p> <p>Total Fire Bans were in force for the North Western fire weather district between Tuesday 8 - Friday 11 January 2013 inclusive.</p> <p>The Wambelong fire started on 12 January 2013 within the Warrumbungle National Park. At this time the fire was classified as a Class 1 fire with National Parks and Wildlife (NPWS) assuming the role as the Class 1 Incident Controller (Mr Wayne Dornbusch) and assisted by NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) personnel.</p>															

In light of numerous fires burning within the National Park and the forecast extreme conditions for Sunday 13 January, a Section 44 declaration (Class 3) was made by the NSW RFS Commissioner at 1100 hours.

The declaration included Warrumbungle and Gilgandra Local Government Areas, and that part of Coonamble Local Government Area that is within the Warrumbungle National Park. It authorised Allyn Clyde Purkiss from the NSW RFS as the Class 3 Incident Controller and Mark Anthony Fosdick, Garry Andrew Wilson and John Alan Whittall as Deputy Incident Controllers. The Deputy Incident Controllers varied a number of times during the incident; however the Incident Controller remained the same. The fire was managed from the Warrumbungle Fire Control Centre referred to as the Incident Control Centre (ICC).

During the late afternoon of the 13 January 2013, extreme fire behaviour was experienced as the fire impacted on Blackmans Camp with NPWS crews undertaking property protection. Situation reports from the fire ground confirmed the fire was spotting more than 4 kilometres ahead and flame heights in excess of 20 meters. High wind gusts were also recorded causing the crews to abandon property protection and fall back to a safe area for their own protection.

A shifting frontal system and strong high pressure system produced an extremely unstable atmosphere with surface weather conditions characterised by hot temperatures, and strong shifting winds. Wind direction shifted a number of times during the day.

Fire prediction analysis was undertaken locally by the Incident Management Team (IMT) and the Fire Behaviour Analyst (FBA) personnel located at the NSW RFS State Operations. In light of the weather conditions, it was identified that the Siding Springs Observatory and properties beyond would be threatened. An evacuation order for the Observatory was issued by the Class 3 Incident Controller at 1445 hours.

An Emergency Warning was issued using the Emergency Alert system for the residents of Timor Road, between the Observatory and the western side of Coonabarabran township. NSW Police Force, NSW Volunteer Rescue Association and other emergency service personnel commenced door knocking along Timor Road who advised residents to leave their residents immediately.

Emergency Service personnel and support agencies were assembled at the Warrumbungle Fire Control Centre to co-ordinate emergency management support.

The fire impacted the Siding Springs Observatory during the afternoon destroying a number of buildings and causing damage to others, however all telescopes were intact. The fire then continued to travel east towards Coonabarabran destroying structures along Timor Road and surrounds.

Emergency Alert was first used at 1559 hours to broadcast a message to residents in the area alerting them to the danger. Additional messages were broadcast to affected residents and communities over coming hours.

A forecast southerly change at 1800 hours resulted in an Emergency Warning to be issued directing all residents to evacuate between Timor Road through to (and including) the village of Bugaldie.

Two evacuation centres at the Coonabarabran Bowling Club and Tattersall's Hotel (Baradine) were opened to process displaced persons. As additional fire fighting resources become available, defensive lines were able to be established around property and

infrastructure.

The southerly change impacted the fire approximately 12 kilometres north west of Coonabarabran township. The northern flank then became the head forcing the fire to turn north away from Coonabarabran towards Bugaldie. This then created a 20 kilometre plus fire front under extreme conditions.

Ahead of the front, winds shifted from north through to west, and then to the south-west as the frontal system moved through. It should be noted that atmospheric instability led to the formation of a significant smoke column and pyro-cumulous cloud formation. This feature probably exacerbated local weather conditions resulting in extreme wind gusts and shifting winds. Resultant fire behaviour was erratic and extreme during the course of the afternoon and evening.

The fire continued in northerly direction until approximately 0400 hours the following day when the wind decreased and the humidity increased. The fire was approximately one kilometre from the village of Bugaldie at this time however failed to reach the village as a result of the change in weather conditions.

Substantial losses occurred as a result of the fire activity during the afternoon and evening of the 13 January 2013. This detail is recorded in the Damages & Losses statistics later in this report.

Fire fighters continued to undertake property protection over the next two days, unable to suppress the fire due to the weather conditions. The communication infrastructure located on Needle Mountain as identified at risk during the 15 January 2013. This tower transmits the majority of broadcasts for telephone, commercial television and radio for western New South Wales.

During the 16 & 17 January 2013, weather conditions allowed fire fighters to establish and consolidate containment lines.

On the morning of 18 January 2013, the fire broke containment lines in the Tooraweenah sector with crews again undertaking property protection. A special fire weather warning was communicated to crews in the field in the early afternoon for severe storms and lightning to impact the fire ground for several hours. Extra heavy plant was requested and placed on standby to build containment lines around Coonabarabran township should the fire cross the Newell Highway. This breach was eventually contained by 0800 hours the following days with the additional plant stood down.

Weather conditions both hindered and assisted fire fighters for the remainder of the declaration. Lightning storms ignited new fires each day which utilised valuable resources in containing them, whilst very high rainfall in other parts of the fire ground, caused damage to the bare burnt ground.

The Wambelong fire was listed as contained on 26 January 2013 and the Section 44 was revoked at 1700 hours on 28 January 2013.

The fire continued to be patrolled until 21 February 2013 when it was formally listed as out. The fire burnt out 56 280.55 hectares, destroyed 53 homes and damaged 131 other structures. 847 sheep and 318 cattle were lost with over 1697 kilometres of fencing requiring replacement.

INCIDENT CONTROLLER'S ANALYSIS

During my first two days as Incident Controller, fire fighting strategies were very much reactive, as result of prevailing conditions and fire activity. In my opinion, no offensive fire fighting tactic could have been utilised during that period. The conditions were well outside normal fire fighting parameters. Having considered the overall response and my time as Incident Controller, the following comments are made:

Warnings:

I believe the warnings issued by the NSW RFS to threatened communities were appropriate and timely. However the use of the 'location based' function to disseminate warnings using the Emergency Alerts system did cause confusion to the general public as areas not affected by the fire received such messages.

Incident Management Teams:

In my opinion I believe a pre-formed IMT made up of members from across the region would have been better suited to deal with this type of incident. To have members not all from one geographic area, that regularly train, and are already bonded and focused on the task, would lessen some of the emotive element in these situations.

I recall that six persons who were initially members of the IMT were affected by the enormity of the situation. All members (with the exception of myself) were local and had friends and family in the fires path, which was understandably upsetting.

Notwithstanding the preformed IMT concept, the local knowledge provided by fire fighters and IMT members was most valuable. I believe all of my Deputy Incident Controllers gave me their honest opinion on the Incident Action Plans (IAP) developed which approved by myself and later subject to change as a result of resourcing issues.

The fire fighting tactics used during the later period changed frequently due to the changing weather conditions with fire ground safety being given the highest priority.

The need was identified for additional Incident Control Online (ICON) operators to work as part of the IMT. The rotation of people tasked to undertake the Situation Officer role occurred frequently and it was this officer that spent a lot of their time entering information into ICON. Whilst more ICON operators were required, the ICC could not have held any more people.

Resource Tracking:

Resource tracking was an area identified requiring additional attention and planning. NPWS, NSW RFS, Forests NSW and Fire & Rescue NSW (FRNSW) were all utilising their own system to manage and track resources. Efforts were made to consolidate this process into a single system however was largely unsuccessful. It is my opinion that a multi agency - multi resource management software system be developed as a matter of priority.

Heavy Plant:

On 18 January 2013, there was a breach to containment lines in the southern part of the fire. At the time, a weather forecast was also received that the fire, under the forecast weather conditions, could again threaten the Coonabarabran township. A request was made during an IMT meeting to secure an additional fifteen graders to provide protection to the township. After careful consideration, I supported this request.

The co-ordination of heavy plant could have been managed better during this incident. There were some 70 pieces of heavy plant on the fire ground which made it very complex. A new heavy plant policy drafted by the NSW RFS was yet to be tested prior to this incident however was used to provide guidance. Despite the issues experienced, the intent of the policy is sound however it does need to incorporate more practical procedures such as those developed for the use of aviation resources.

Incident Control Centre (ICC):

The ICC at Coonabarabran was inadequate to run a large scale incident. Ideally, all ICCs should be built to at least large standard design to meet operational needs. ICC need to allow for the ever increasing people required for information gathering, processing, and delivery.

This incident also showed the importance of having the EOC co-located with the ICC to ensure all response aspects of the incident are being managed in a co-ordinated fashion.

Intelligence:

Intelligence gathering was in my opinion an area for improvement. Situational awareness was sometimes affected by competing priorities, partly due to the size of the fire but also the availability of aviation resources.

Operational use of an aircraft (for fighting duties) took precedence over intelligence gathering and reconnaissance, and in my opinion, this practice needs to be reconsidered.

Section 44 Accounts:

Administrative assistance should be immediately supplied to the affected District upon the revocation of a Section 44 declaration. The follow-up and verification of accounts, in addition to necessary administrative tasks and local impacts, is a significant task that requires greater corporate assistance.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their assistance during my appointment as Incident Controller:

- All fire fighters and IMT personnel from NSW RFS, NPWS, Forests NSW and Fire & Rescue NSW;
- members of the Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC) and Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC);
- Commissioner Fitzsimmons and Deputy Commissioner Rogers for their leadership and guidance;

- Staff within the Region North office for their support, in particular Superintendent Bryan Daly;
- Superintendent Ben Millington and Ms Jane Hollier for their assistance in preparing this report;
- NSW RFS State Operations Centre personnel for their assistance; and
- Mr Peter Carter and the Learning & Development team for providing me the opportunity to enhance my skills as an Incident Controller as part of the Incident Controller Major Incident (ICMI) program undertaken in 2012.

EVENT CHRONOLOGY

This chronology has been drafted referring to records maintained by the Incident Controller and documentation/entries uploaded into the Incident Control Online (ICON) system.

Saturday 12 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was Very High. A Total Fire Ban was in force for the North Western fire weather district between 00:01 hours and 23:59 hours. A total of 2 situation reports were lodged in ICON throughout the day for a fire burning in the Warrumbungle National Park.

At **1605** hours, a fire was reported as 'Going' on the western side of the Wambelong National Park approximately one kilometre west of the Visitors Centre. The incident was a Class 1 fire being managed by Mr Wayne Dornbusch from National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) assisted by fire fighters from the NSW RFS. A Rapid Aerial Response Team (RART) helicopter was responded at approximately **1700** hours with two fixed wing bombers were deployed from Moree and Scone. Flame heights between **1600** and **1800** hours were reported as being less than one metre as it was running upslope north of John Renshaw Parkway.

NSW Police Force (NSWPF) was advised of the fire at approximately **1820** hours given their emergency management responsibilities.

At **2000** hours, the fire was listed as 'Being Controlled' however it had already burnt over 20 hectares. During the afternoon, the fire reportedly reached the ridge top to which fire activity then decreased. Fire activity and associated threats overnight was expected to be low with decreasing temperature, winds generally less than 15 km/hr and humidity increasing to over 70%.

The fire was listed at Advice (A5) status at **2036** hours which was reconfirmed at **0406** hours the following day.

The Incident Controller determined the overall objective was to 'monitor fire overnight and prevent it from crossing the John Renshaw Parkway to the south overnight.' Strategies identified for the following day included direct attack by Remote Area Fire Fighter Team (RAFT), supported by a number of units along John Renshaw Parkway. The Incident Controller noted that if direct attack was unsuccessful the following day, fallback lines to the north (northern fire trail) would see the size of the fire ground increase to 1000 hectares.

During the afternoon, it was identified that the fire threats for Sunday afternoon increased with temperatures predicted to reach 38 degrees, relative humidity less than 25% and winds from the north/north westerly reaching 25 to 30km/hr. Threats identified included National Park Visitor Facilities including the Visitor Centre, camping areas, picnic areas which were located within three to five kilometers of the fire. John Renshaw Parkway was also noted which is a main thoroughfare between Coonabarabran to Coonamble/Gulargambone.

Sunday 13 January 2013 :

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was Extreme. A Total Fire Ban was in force for the North Western fire weather district between 00:01 hours and 23:59 hours. A total of 11 situation reports and 1 Incident Action Plan were lodged in ICON throughout the day.

As at **0830** hours, there were 130 incidents across New South Wales of which 30 fires are not yet contained of all which remained at 'Advice' status. At **1055** hours, there were a total of 18 fire fighters (12 NPWS and 6 NSW RFS) and two aircraft working within the area.

Significant lighting activity was recorded in northern parts of the State overnight which resulted in over 100 ignitions. A reconnaissance flight was launched during morning to detect any additional fire activity.

During the early hours of the morning, crews were concentrating on fire edge adjacent to John Renshaw Parkway to prevent escape to the south. A large number of dead trees in the Wambelong creek line adjacent to the roadway were reportedly causing some localised high fire behaviour.

One NPWS crew and two NSW RFS crews placed small back burns around Camp Wambelong between the creek line and the main road, to limit potential for spot overs across the road.

Whilst threats levels were low over the coming hours, weather conditions later in the day were expected to be challenging from 1200 hours onwards. Temperature and humidity forecasts remained similar, however winds speed was now expected to reach 50km/hr.

At **0345** hours, the strategy was updated from direct attack to indirect attack, based on weather and predicted fire spread. The Class 1 Incident Controller (Wayne Dornbusch) noted that indirect attack was to be used the following day with crews to back burn off John Renshaw Parkway, Canyon Picnic Area access road, Camp Blackman access road and the northern fire trail. It was proposed ground crews would be supported by two helicopters.

At **1021** hours, the fire status was upgraded to Advice (A3).

There was the potential (moderate threat) for impacts less than two hours identified at **1055** hours as crews continued to back burn along the southern boundary, moving east and then north. The strategy to continue back burning ahead of the fire front was being supported using aerial attack to slow progress.

In light of the forecast conditions and fire activity, the NSW RFS Commissioner declared a Section 44 bush fire emergency (Class 3) for this fire at **1100** hours, appointing Superintendent Allyn Purkiss as the Class 3 Incident Controller. Superintendent Purkiss was required to travel from Tamworth to Coonabarabran arriving at 1420 hours where he received a briefing from the Deputy Incident Controller (NPWS Mark Fosdick) who had been working from the Coonabarabran ICC throughout the morning.

Approximately **1400** hours, crews reported the Visitors Centre may come under threat and two fixed wing bombers were redirected to the area with retardant. At **1445** hours, the Incident Controller directed that the Siding Springs Observatory be evacuated. This direction was given to the NSWPF and NSW Volunteer Rescue Association (NSW VRA) to undertake. Concerns were raised for the welfare of the Siding Springs Rural Fire Brigade and Observatory workers at **1515** hours however, confirmation was received that all had been accounted for. It was also identified the Communications Tower at Needle Mountain may come under threat which would have significant impacts across the region.

At **1557** hours, the Incident Controller determined that an Emergency Warning (EW5) be issued for the area along Timor Road from the Observatory to approximately five kilometres west of Coonabarabran. An Emergency Warning is the highest level of bush fire alert that indicates people may be in danger and need to take action immediately. Internally, these are graded by the NSW RFS depending on weather conditions and other factors.

The Incident Controller also requested the NSWPF and NSW VRA to door knock and evacuate residents along Timor Road. An Emergency Alert (SMS and landline) message was broadcast at **1559** hours stating *"This is an emergency bush fire warning from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service. There is a bush fire in the WARRUMBUNGLE NATIONAL PARK area. Leave now if the path is clear. Via TIMOR ROAD EAST TO COONABARABRAN. If you cannot leave, Take shelter when the fire arrives. Protect yourself from the heat of the fire. Follow your Bush Fire Survival Plan and stay up to date. Listen to local radio or check the RFS website at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au."* A second Emergency Alert (SMS and landline) message was broadcast at **1604** hours.

At this time, the Incident Controller revised the objective to include the protection of fire fighters and the protection of major assets and rural properties where possible.

At **1630** hours, an Emergency Alert (SMS and landline) message was broadcast with a Fixed Wing bomber 228 reported from the air at **1644** hours that lightning activity throughout the area had ignited new fires.

Following discussions between the NSW RFS, NSWPF and Welfare Services Functional Area at **1724** hours, it was decided an Evacuation Centre would be established at the Coonabarabran Bowling Club.

An Emergency Alert message (SMS and landline) was broadcast at **1739** hours stating *"This is an emergency bush fire warning from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service. There is a bush fire in the Warrumbungle National Park. A southerly change is expected sending the fire north towards Bugaldie. You are in danger. Do not delay. Act now. Conditions may get worse quickly. Leaving now towards Coonabarabran is the safest option, even if your plan was to stay. Stay up to date. Listen to local radio or check the RFS website at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au "*

An advisory message was also sent to residents in the surrounding areas at **1753** hours stating *"This is an advisory bush fire message from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service. There is a bush fire in the Warrumbungle National Park area. Follow your Bush Fire Survival Plan and stay up to date. Listen to local radio or check the RFS website at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au"*

A request for additional Strike Teams was made to the Orana and Cudgegong Fire Control Centre for immediate response to Coonabarabran to assist with property protection at **1756** hours.

Catastrophic fire weather was recorded at Coonamble Airport (approximately 60 kilometres north west of the fire origin) where a maximum Forest Fire Danger Index of 111 was recorded. Observation stations closer to the fire ground at Coonabarabran Airport and the Siding Springs Observatory (unofficial weather station) recorded Severe Forest Fire Danger Ratings.

At **1820** hours, there were a total of 48 fire fighters (30 NSW RFS, 14 NPWS and 4 FRNSW) deployed and five helicopters.

An astronomer based at the Siding Springs Observatory also posted *"Siding Spring Observatory instruments registered a temperature of 120 degrees this afternoon, Visual confirmation five of 12 Siding Springs Observatory telescopes are intact."*

The southerly change impacted the fire ground between **1800** and **2100** hours with wind strengths in the vicinity of 40-50km/hr, gusting up to 70km/hr. Based on these conditions and the fire activity, the Incident Controller issued an Emergency Warnings for the Bugaldie area at **2115** hours which stated *"This is an emergency bush fire warning from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service. There is a bush fire in the Bugaldie and Goorianwa area. You are in danger leave towards Baradine if path is clear. Do not delay. Act now. Conditions may get worse quickly. Leaving now is the safest option, even if your plan was to stay. Stay up to date. Listen to local radio or check the RFS website at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au "*

NSWPF and NSW VRA personnel were again enlisted to assist directing residents to go to the town of Baradine during which time reports of house losses were received at Bugaldie. An Evacuation Centre was established at the Tattersall's Hotel in Baradine.

Once safe to do so, FRNSW personnel were requested to inspect the Siding Springs Observatory and confirm damage/losses. Approximately **2230** hours, the FRNSW Strike Team Leader advised they had reached the observatory site and confirmed that the lodge and a number of sheds were destroyed. Additionally, there was some other damage to surrounding structures however the telescopes were unaffected.

Concurrently, multiple reports were received from local residents, hospital staff and NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) members that Baradine township was experiencing ember attack and smoke was very thick. It was also reported the township had lost all electricity supply with the hospital operating on generators.

Given the imminent threat to life and property, the NSW RFS Deputy Commissioner (Rob Rogers) authorised use of the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) by media outlets at **2237** hours. SEWS is a siren sound used throughout Australia for various emergencies or events of significance which is used by media outlets to alert and gain attention.

Between **2230** and **2355** hours, crews undertook property protection along Baradine Road during which time reports of property loss were received.

At **2341** hours, Essential Energy staff reported that the electricity line between Coonabarabran to Baradine has been impacted by fire. Numerous power poles destroyed and electricity supply would be disrupted until repairs could be completed.

It was envisaged a prolonged loss of electricity supply would be experienced with Essential Energy personnel arranging generators were emergency services and essential facilities.

The fires continued to burn under the prevailing weather conditions and threaten townships in the area. At **2357** hours, the ICC received reports from fire fighting crews that Bugaldie was being threatened and units were redeployed to the village to assist.

Monday 14 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was Very High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 13 situation reports were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

During the early hours of the morning, the fire was downgraded from Emergency Warning to Watch & Act level at **0353** hours as the fire behaviour and intensity began to decrease. This allowed the Incident Controller to change tactics from active property protection to direct fire suppression.

At 0650 hours, there were a total of 55 fire fighters (45 NSW RFS, 6 NPWS and 4 FRNSW) deployed and three heavy plant. The Air Crane helicopter was deployed to the fire ground and remained assisting in the fire fighting efforts until 16 January 2013.

Crews that worked throughout the night were stood down and replaced with out of area units. Crew returning home began to report large number of homes had been lost. The IMT continued to oversee fire fighting operations overnight and undertake planning for operations during daylight hours, including the potential for fire to impact on the Coonabarabran township over coming days.

As at **0800** hours, there were 170 incidents across New South Wales of which 50 fires are not yet contained. Over 45 fires were caused by lighting in previous days all of which remain uncontained. These fires extended from the Hunter area north to the Queensland border and west to Walgett. The main areas of concerns were Coonabarabran, Collarenebri, Namoi Gwydir and Tamworth areas. A briefing was conducted by the Incident Controller at this time for the Incident Management Team (IMT) with the next briefing scheduled for **1200** hours.

Due to the limited space available at the Incident Control Centre for external agencies (namely members of the Local Emergency Management Committee), a decision was taken by the Local Emergency Operations Controller (LEOCON) to relocate this function to the Volunteer Rescue Association building.

Large power outages continue to be experienced in the north west of the State due to a storm front overnight. The State Emergency Operations Controller (SEOCON) worked with functional areas during the morning to confirm restoration and address any impacts.

During the morning, fire fighting efforts focussed on activity on the north western side of the fire, including asset protection within the Bugaldie village and surrounding rural properties. Crews continued to undertake property protection along Baradine Road and commenced construction of a containment line for fire north of Baradine Road. Aviation resources continue to undertake air attack on the eastern side of the fire between Timor and Baradine Roads using retardant lines.

NSW RFS and NSWPF personnel also commenced damage assessments across the affected areas with early reports indicating up to 12 homes had been destroyed. At **1050 & 1056** hours, a message was sent to affected areas using the Emergency Alert system advising residents the fire was continuing to burn and it was not yet safe for them to return to the area.

At **1151** hours, damage assessments teams indicated up to 28 homes and 40 sheds/outbuildings had been destroyed and an aerial reconnaissance of the affected area commenced at **1212** hours to assist in this process. Given the estimated duration of the fire and the number of out of area personnel/resources involved, it was decided that Base Camp would be established in Coonabarabran by the NSW RFS. A line scan of the fire completed at **1400** hours placed the fire at 31 14 39S 148 55 31E.

Having stood down for a short period, the Incident Controller received a briefing at **1500** hours from the IMT confirming that no deaths or injuries had been reported and a civilian who had been earlier reported as missing was located safe with a minor eye injury.

The number of homes destroyed was revised to 33. Fire Investigators from the NSW RFS and Detectives attached to the State Crime Command (Property Arson Squad) also arrived in Coonabarabran.

Throughout the afternoon, crews continued to implement containment strategies however these were tested by difficult weather conditions. A Strike Team consisting of five Category 1 appliances was deployed from Coonabarabran at **1700** hours to assist with property protection on the western side of the fire. A short time later, information was received from North West crews at **1844** hours that the fire had travelled approximately one kilometre during the proceeding hour in a westerly direction.

An Emergency Alert (SMS and landline) message was broadcast to the community at **1848** hours stating *"This is a bush fire warning from the NSW Rural Fire Service. Residents are advised that there is a fire burning in Warrumbungle National Park. Fire fighters are fighting this fire on the western side of the Warrumbungle National Park. If the fire cannot be contained on this boundary properties to the west of the fire may come under direct threat. Advice for residents to the west of the national park boundary activate your bush fire survival plan. If you are not prepared to actively defend your property you should leave now. An evacuation centre is open at The Tattersall's Hotel in Baradine. For more information visit www.rfs.nsw.gov.au or call the Bush Fire Information Line on one eight hundred 6 7 9 7 3 7'.*

At **2056** hours, Gummin Rural Fire Brigade advised the fire had jumped containment lines and was heading towards Wambelong Creek and at **2133** hours, Willow Down Rural Fire Brigade confirmed the fire had jumped containment lines near 'Top Wolga.'

Crews continued to perform property protection over coming hours with weather conditions on the fire ground reported as at **2300** hours being 21 degrees, wind averaging 22.9 km/hr gusting 40 km/hr and relative humidity 52%.

Two Evacuation Centres were established earlier in the evening at the Coonabarabran Bowling Club (111 people registered) and Tattersall's Hotel (11 people registered) in Baradine. Two Disaster Recovery Chaplains have been deployed to Coonabarabran to support community members.

A number of animals were accommodated within Coonabarabran, including horses, dogs and cats. This support was co-ordinated by the Animal and Agriculture Services Functional Area who has also deployed an Impact Assessment Team and veterinarian to assist

with losses.

Fire had impacted the electricity network across the entire region. Energy & Utilities Services Functional Area advises crews were unable to access infrastructure presently and this could take another 24 - 48 hours. Essential Energy Liaison Officers co-ordinated with NSW RFS at a local level to facilitate access for crews.

Health Services Functional Area advise a number of facilities were without main power however back generators and other options were used to support patients.

Utilities at the Baradine Multi Purpose Health facility remained in service, including power and sewerage. Due to the potential impact, 17 patients were relocated to other facilities within the Health District however the Emergency Department remains staffed.

The Communications Services Functional Area reported a number of telecommunication sites had been damaged. These sites are running on battery power however no major network outages were experienced.

Recovery personnel from the Ministry for Police & Emergency Service (MPES) travelled to Coonabarabran to assist with impact assessments and inform recovery arrangements.

Tuesday 15 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 10 situation reports and 3 Incident Action Plans were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

Based on advice from the Bureau of Meteorology, the wind was expected to moderate overnight, tending to the north east by **0200** hours. This in turn reduced the risk to properties in north however placed pressure (albeit limited) on the southern and south western containment lines.

The IMT continued undertake planning activities overnight with a Special Fire Weather Forecast at **0036** hours predicting winds over the fire ground from the north east for the remainder of the week. However winds on Friday were forecast to increase and change to the north to north west with a late south westerly change.

This information was used to model the fire spread and strategies to ensure alignment with this forecast. At **0037** hours, the fire was downgraded to Advice (A7) status

The Communications Tower at Needle Mountain and communications facility at Bingie Grumble Mountain were reported as under threat at **0042** hours. Crews were dispatched by the IMT to assess options in order to protect this infrastructure. It was later decided to perform retardant drops around the towers on Bingie Grumble and Need Mountains. Additionally, land holders in the Tannabar area were organised to assist NSW RFS crew the following morning to establish a control line along an existing track between Jack Halls Creek and Needle Mountain.

At **0129** hours, the fire was upgraded to Watch & Act (WA7) status.

Revised control strategies were implemented which included major protection issues focused on the north and western side of the fire which subsequently changed to the Southern Division. Asset protection continued within Bugaldie Village and rural properties as did property protection along Baradine Road. Crews were tasked with completing and securing containment lines for the area north of the Baradine Road as aviation resources assisted crew in the control of spot fires near Goanna Track and Turnbuckle Mountain.

During the day, the fire continued to burn in the Bugaldie area, one kilometre south of Bugaldie village, eight kilometres west of Coonabarabran and four kilometres to the south of Siding Spring. The fire was reported to be burning at a lower intensity due to milder weather conditions, however was most active on the southern edge.

The Newell Highway north of Coonabarabran remained closed due to back burning operations as did Timor Road due to fallen power lines and trees. Baradine Road between Coonabarabran and Baradine was open however it was periodically closed during the day due on fire activity.

The first of the daily community meeting was held at Coonabarabran Bowling Club to ensure displaced residents and the wider community were kept informed of the situation and progress. This meeting was attended by over 300 persons including the Coonabarabran Council General Manager. The evacuation centre established in Baradine was also closed at **1200** hours. The NSW RFS Commissioner accompanied by the Deputy Premier were provided with a briefing by the Incident Controller and tour of the fire area during the course of the day.

Approximately **1600** hours, fire fighters were engaged in property protection in the Carrington Lane area on the southern side of the fire with the assistance of aircraft. Crews are also working on a flare up in grass lands to the south western side of the fire which were all contained over the course of the evening. At **1626** hours, the fire was upgraded to Watch & Act (WA5) status and later Watch & Act (WA7) at **2323** hours.

Building Impact Assessment (BIA) teams from the NSW RFS continued to survey property loss and damage throughout the area revising the figure to 40 homes and 110 out buildings as destroyed.

Wednesday 16 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 7 situation reports and 2 Incident Action Plans were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Stuart Watts (NSW RFS).

Despite moderating fire danger overnight and progress made in consolidating control lines, the fire remained at Watch & Level status due to the proximity of the fire edge to assets and properties in some sectors.

Crews reported the fire reached the control lines in the Tannabar sector near Trough Mountain at **0141** hours who in turn were

proceeding to identify the location and back burn from the track to maintain control of the fire as it approaches.

Back burning around the Pinnacle was also reported to be completed at **0144** hours with crews redeployed to complete the back burn behind properties between Baradine and Timor Roads.

Welfare Service Functional Area advised 202 people had registered at Coonabarabran evacuation centre, with 139 meals provided and accommodation sourced for 21 evacuees. The evacuation centre at the Tattersall's Hotel in Baradine had since closed which registered 29 people. Housing NSW was advised of the need for longer term housing options for bush fire affected residents.

The decision to allow affected residents to return to their homes was considered by NSW RFS and NSWPF to ensure both the integrity of the sites and safety of residents.

Two Disaster Recovery Chaplains remained present in the town with an additional two due to arriving today. NSW Health also deployed a second mental health practitioner to the Coonabarabran Community Health Centre as an additional resource.

The Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was relocated back to the ICC having earlier operated by the Volunteer Rescue Association building. A temporary facility was established which allowed for both IMT and LEMC personnel to be co-located.

Energy & Utilities Functional Area advised electricity has been restored to Baradine however some rural properties remained without power which continued to be worked on by Essential Energy.

Communications Services Functional Area advised there were some services outages in the area due to infrastructure damage. Telstra continued to assist with the installation of additional lines for the Fire Control Centre/Emergency Operations Centre.

Health Services Functional Area and Ambulance Service NSW continued to provide assistance and monitor the situation. Patients evacuated Baradine Hospital were expected to return today pending confirmation of utility restoration.

Animal & Agriculture Services Functional Area assessed stock losses throughout the day which with discussions initiated with Engineering Services Functional Area regarding planning for disposal pits.

The Minister for Police & Emergency Services visited the ICC during the day and toured affected area, speaking with fire fighters, emergency service personnel and affected residents. A community meeting was again held attended by over 150 residents.

The fire was listed as Being Controlled at **1250** hours in light strategies being implemented.

Transport Services Functional Area undertook planning to address possible traffic disruptions for persons travelling to the Tamworth Music Festival. The Newell Highway was re-opened at **1722** hours.

A meeting was also held between local farmers/land holders and NPWS resulted in agreement not to proceed with a back burn on the western side of the Wambelong fire. Although conditions for back burning were favourable, land owners expressed they did not want to lose any further grazing pasture.

Earlier in the day, IMT staff conducted reconnaissance and gathered intelligence from the western flank which showed local property

owners had constructed containment lines at the base of the National Park, adjoining grazing country from the vicinity of Salty Gap south to Calerini Creek and across to John Renshaw Parkway.

At **1900** hours, aerial incendiaries which were dropped earlier in the day had burnt ground around the communication towers and the burn was progressing according to plan. Back burning continued into the night from Needle Mountain down the access road to the National Park gate in order to establish an initial control boundary for aerial incendiary drops the following day. This was being undertaken in order to reduce fuel in south west corner of the Tooraweenah Sector.

Furthermore, crews reported at **2318** hours the control line from the Needle Mountain access track across to the control line below Beloungery Gap had been completed and back burning was undertaken to join the burnt edge back into the Tanabah control line.

Thursday 17 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was Very High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 10 situation reports and 2 Incident Action Plans were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

Overnight strategies implemented by crews saw the Wambelong fire stayed within containment lines overnight with the IMT confident the Needle Mountain Communications Tower was no longer at risk. At **0942** hours, the fire was downgraded to Advice (A6) status.

Aircraft were engaged to water bomb in the vicinity of Bingle Grumble Road and Carrington Lane throughout the day with the focus still being to protect assets and back burning in the Southern Division.

Back burning south from Needle Mountain to the south east corner of the Warrumbungle National Park had been delayed due to erratic fire behaviour and was suspended at the Tower Access Road. Back burning proceeded along the containment line completed between Warkton Valley and Needle Mountain Road when conditions allowed and aerial incendiary operations had been completed.

At **1141** hours, the fire was upgraded to Watch & Act (WA6) level.

Around **1200** hours, the fire was upgraded to Watch & Act alert level as fire activity began to increase. Crews at **1319** hours reported Bingle Grumble Road and Carrington Lane were not under immediate threat. Good containment had been established in these areas and containment lines continued to be strengthened. Aircraft continued to be deployed for water bombing along a number of roads when flare ups occurred.

A small outbreak of fire occurred along at the Baradine Road at property number 3841 at **1245** hours. However, units were on scene very quickly and reported the fire to be under control. An additional flare up was reported at **1630** hours west of Bingle Grumble.

At **1659** hours, crews commenced back burning in the Tooraweenah Sector west of Needle Mountain.

Aground survey of containment lines in the Summit Sector was undertaken by aircraft at **1330** hours. Of particular note were two

properties which were identified as being within the predicted fire area and inside containment lines.

One property had a trail graded around it and was considered potentially defensible however a second property nearby was surrounded by dense scrub and was considered to be undefendable. At **2326** hours, the fire was downgraded to Watch & Act (WA7) status.

During the day, the Prime Minister visited the ICC for a briefing and viewed the fire affected areas with the Incident Controller. A Disaster Recovery Centre was also established by the Ministry for Police & Emergency Services (MPES) at the Coonabarabran Town Hall to ensure timely assistance was provided to land owners affected by the fires. A community meeting was again held attended by 150-200 residents.

The BIA teams updated the number of losses to be 51 houses and 113 other structures. The decision to allow affected residents to return to their homes continued to be regularly reviewed by NSW RFS and NSWPF. The majority of residents had been provided escorted access into affected areas yesterday.

Friday 18 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was Very High. A Total Fire Ban was in force for the North Western fire weather district between 00:01 hours and 23:59 hours. A total of 11 situation reports and 1 Incident Action Plan were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

Overnight NSWPF advised that the Newell Highway was closed at **0300** hours due to smoke and fire operations encroaching on the road north of the Tooraweenah area. The highway was closed with Police staffing traffic control points at various locations. Transport Services Functional Area was requested to implement a diversion plan to re-route traffic away from the area.

At **0426** hours, the fire was upgraded to Watch & Act (WA6) status and again at **0616** hours to Watch & Act (WA3).

Traffic was ultimately re-routed off the Newell Highway at Gilgandra along the Castlereagh Highway to Mendooran; then Mendooran-Coonabarabran Road into Coonabarabran. Police remained at established traffic control points along the Newell Highway.

At **0800** hours, containment lines were confirmed as being breached overnight in a number of sectors. Fire activity increased early in the morning which resulted in the Incident Controller reviewing the Emergency Warning at **0900** hours (in consultation with the Region North MIC), requesting it include an area south of the Newell Highway between Mendooran Road and Tooraweenah Road. Strike Teams from FRNSW were also positioned to assist with protecting assets within the Coonabarabran township.

An urgent request for aircraft assistance was made for the Balmerah Homestead at approximately **1020** hours. Ground crews were in place for property protection and it was noted the fire had the potential to impact the homestead however this did not eventuate due to the efforts of fire fighters. At **1042** hours, the fire was placed at Watch & Act (WA5) status.

At **1117** hours, Tannabar Station was reported as being under direct threat with additional resources deployed who subsequently

assisted in protecting the property.

At **1213** hours, the Linebacker Machine was deployed to the vicinity of Cenncruaich Road to lay a four kilometre retardant line along the southern side of the Newell Highway at the expected point of impact.

In light of planning discussions, the Coonamble IMT noted it did not support conducting a back burn in Summit Sector during the evening for following reasons:

- Due to the time required getting resources to the fire ground, insufficient resources would be available to complete the burn. It would take in excess of 20 tankers to successfully complete. Only five local tankers were available with all other resources required to travel excessive distances to the burn, which would give a very narrow window of opportunity.
- The predicted change in wind direction to the south east on Saturday would potentially cause the burn to break containment as it will not have had enough time to create a sufficient break. Resources were not available to patrol the 24 kilometre control line and hold any outbreaks into Saturday and Sunday.
- Due to resources and weather, the last opportunity to successfully burn this area had passed until the weather changes and a north to westerly influence was experienced for several days.

At **1336** hours, Engineering Services Functional Area was tasked to source 20 graders for deployment. Contractors from around the Ulan/Mudgee area plus adjoining Local Government Area assets were engaged.

Essential Energy advised a 66kv line parallel with Gilgandra Road was key to electricity supply for Coonabarabran. Essential Energy personnel continued to liaise with the IMT on protection strategy and alternate emergency supply strategy for key assets in the township if line was to be compromised.

The Linebacker Machine deployed earlier in the day successfully completed operations along the Newell Highway at **1551** hours before assisting with the widening of a dozed containment line near this area. At **1718** hours, the fire was downgraded to Advice (A6) status however regraded to Watch & Act (WA6) at **1734** hours.

A Special Fire Ground Warning was broadcast at **1812** hours for severe weather including lightning and possible wind gusts over fire ground over the next two hours. All crews were advised to be prepared to move out of dangerous positions. Throughout the evening, additional fires were ignited due to lightning strikes in the area.

During the day, the State Minister for the Environment visited the ICC for a briefing and a community meeting held attended by over 60 persons.

Saturday 19 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was Very High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 5 situation reports and 2 Incident Action Plans were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was

Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

Throughout the evening, the IMT continued to monitor the fire ground and surrounding districts which were impacted by a large electrical storm. This storm resulted in a significant number of lightning strikes outside the fire ground which were addressed by crews. Some light rain occurred across most areas of the fire ground which slightly reduced the level of activity.

Fire activity remained active in the Tannabar Sector where crews continued to monitor any breaches of the containment lines.

There was also the potential for properties to come under threat in the Wallumburrawang, Cenncruiach and Wandiallabah Creek areas. At **1024** hours, the fire was downgraded to Advice (A10) level.

In light of concerns held for electricity supply in the area, a specialist technician was sourced from Brisbane and a number of power generators placed in situ ready for energising should supply to Coonabarabran be compromised. Additional poles were also strategically placed with connection crews rested for potential deployment at short notice.

The Newell Highway was opened during the morning between Gilgandra and Warkton, south of Coonabarabran.

The objective for today's operations was to contain fire within identified control lines by 2000 hours on 21 January 2013 in order to protect assets, rural resources and biodiversity in the Coonabarabran area.

To achieve this, the Warkton Division was tasked to undertake property protection and direct attack on active fire fronts in grasslands. Additionally, crews were requested to identify fall forward containments and implement with heavy plant.

The West Division were tasked to undertake direct attack as the fire approaches containment whilst the North Division monitored the backing fire. Crews were also requested to undertake direct attack and extinguish fire if and when it approached containment lines. Crews in the East Division continued to patrol and mop up while there were no operations in the South Newell Division.

About **1400** hours, some showers and storms affected the Western Division and moved east across the fire ground. A Safety Warning was issued to crews for regarding the weather and working conditions. All FRNSW strike teams were stood down from operations at **1404** hours due to favourable conditions at which time the IMT reviewed other resource requirements.

A small area between Baradine Road and Kurrajong Road flared up near the containment line at approximately 1650 hours. About an hour later, very strong southerly winds impacted the fire ground in East Division. Three fixed wing bombers were tasked to assist in addition to further ground crews. In the West Division, three fixed wing bombers were also deployed to O'Connell's Road to assist in holding the fire on the correct side of the containment line.

Lighting strikes continued to be recorded across the region throughout the evening.

During the day, the Acting Ambulance Service Commissioner visited the ICC for a briefing. A community meeting was also held attended by 80-100 persons.

Sunday 20 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 2 situation reports and 2 Incident Action Plans were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

Crews continued to patrol the fire ground and monitor activity. At **0503** hours, the Division West reported conditions on the fire ground were 19.3 degrees, 79% humidity; westerly winds 12-20 km/hr with no cloud cover. Embers were reported to be blowing across control lines into the grass however crews continue to monitor any issues.

Light rain over past days reportedly reduced fire behaviour and extinguished some edges with 5-15 millimetres across parts of fireground and up to 30 millimetres locally during the past 24 hours).

Backburn was completed approximately two kilometres from O'Connell's Road around the north side of Black Mountain to Wandiallabah. The dozer also upgraded containment near Warrawong and tied into burnt area. Some dams were replenished due to the water being utilised by fire fighting helicopters.

The IMT also identified an issue with land holders lighting up personal back burns to mitigate the progression of the main fire impacting on their land. Representatives of the IMT spoke with a number of local land holders regarding the risk posed with the lighting of these back burns which has the potential to compromise the overall strategy.

The Regional Emergency Operations Controller (REOCON) approved the LEOC to scale back operations to minimal staffing given most emergency management issues had been addressed.

The Coonabarabran Mayor and General Manager were provided with a briefing by the Incident Controller and inspected the fire ground.

Monday 21 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was Low-Moderate. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 2 situation reports and 2 Incident Action Plans were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

A number of new fires were detected as a result of lightning storms across the area. IMT personnel attended Recovery Committee meetings due to the identification of asbestos at destroyed properties.

At **1338** hours Warkton Division reported that the containment line appears cold north of the Staging Area at Tannabar Station. Remote Area Fire fighting Teams (RAFT) and bucketing helicopters were also being used to contain the fire. The Division were confident that this strategy should be successful.

At **1532** hours, the fire was downgraded to Advice (A11) status. A short time later the West Division advised they had drive around

line, preparing to conduct test burns for the back burning in the area of Mount Terrace. Back burning in the West Division commenced at **1541** hours with Firebird 239 assisting ground crews. Further back burning was approved in the East Division at **1548** hours for a narrow area between Guinema Road and a containment line to the south.

Western Division advised at **1720** hours that back burning operations had progressed very well with average flame heights under one metre. The dozer also being used had completed tasks and returned to the staging area.

At **1735** hours East Division advised back burn lighting was finished with the burn in well to a depth of 50 to 800 metres. At **1804** hours, it was reported this back burn was complete and mopping up was occurring.

Back burning operations in the Western Division continued with approximately 2.5kms remaining at **1939** hours albeit progressing well. Night crews would continue to back burn during the evening until conditions were no longer suitable.

Tuesday 22 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 2 situation reports and 2 Incident Action Plans were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was John Whittall (NPWS).

Reports from the fire ground at 0930 hours confirmed moderate conditions with temperature 25 degrees, relative humidity 64.4, wind 6.0 km/hr gusting to 19km/hr from the north west and cloud cover 6-8.

West Division reported at **1047** hours a dozer was being used to remove fallen trees and standing smokers. Crews continued to undertake mopping up and patrolling before continuing the remainder of the back burn. It was also reported the proposed close containment line for back burning along the Namen trail area would not be suitable later that afternoon, so the original containment line is still to be used.

Mopping up and patrolling continued in the East Division at **1400** hours with no major issues reported. At **1432** hours the North Division reported that an area around GR 955524 had flared up however was still well within containment lines. Ground crews and aviation assets were deployed to investigate.

Back burning in the Mount Terrace Sector was scheduled to start at **1700** hours. This back burn was to be implemented to remove the high grass fuel loads when the weather is more benign.

This also meant that the burn proposed for the following day would be less challenging with the higher temperature and lower humidity forecast.

Back burning in the Tooraweenah Sector at **1657** hours due to unfavourable weather conditions. Crews continued to blackening out areas with a number of crews redeployed to the Mount Terrace Sector to assist with the back burning.

At **2120** hours, the IMT recommended fire crews withdraw from fire ground in Western Division (based on advice from Safety Officer)

due to intense storm activity approaching the fire ground from south west. High erratic winds, lightning and possible rains were likely to affect crew safety. Fire crews were advised to immediately cease back burning operations and return to the Staging Area where they were to await the passing of the storm activity.

A number of NSW RFS Strike Teams reported experiencing difficulty in exiting the Western Division fire ground due to increasing rain however no adverse issues were recorded.

Wednesday 23 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 2 situation reports and 1 Incident Action Plan were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Stuart Watts (NSW RFS). At **0953** hours, the fire was downgraded to Advice (A12) status.

A community Meeting was held at the Coonabarabran Bowling Club at **1230** hours to update on the fire situation. Questions were raised by the residents in relation to the use of retardant and potable water. A further meeting was scheduled for Friday 25 January 2013.

RAFT crews were inserted in the Summit Sector (North Division) at **1156** hours to work on hot spots throughout the day, with all extracted at **1903** hours.

Thursday 24 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was Very High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 2 situation reports and 1 Incident Action Plan were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift today was Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

A number of small fires were identified throughout the day however quickly contained. Weather conditions at **1036** hours were reported as temperature 25.8, relative humidity 49% and Wind 7-14 km/hr from the north east. At **1130** hours, the fire was upgraded to Advice (A8).

An inspection was conducting along Timor Road to determine the safety of trees which had the potential to fall.

Given the decrease in fire activity and favourable weather conditions, the Incident Controller made a deliberate decision to commence scaling back the IMT.

Strike Teams were briefed at **1000** hrs and deployed to their area of operation arriving at **1144** hours. RAFT personnel commencing commenced duties at **1040** hours with a third team inserted at **1311** hours. All RAFT personnel were safely extracted from the fire ground at **1841** hours. At **1703** hours, the fire was downgraded to Advice (A12) status where it remained.

Friday 25 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 2 situation reports and 1 Incident Action Plans were submitted throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

Fire fighting duties continued throughout the day with Critical Incident Support Services (CISS) organised for local residents and fire fighters to ensure welfare needs were addressed.

Ground Crews were in position at Chalk Mountain at 0945 hours working on the hot spots. Additional fire fighters were also deployed to Mount Terrace. RAFT personnel began deployments at **0954** hours having been inserted into Bullaway and Mount Terrace Sectors.

A test burn was conducted at **1300** hours in Tooraweenah Sector which was reported as going well. Temperature at the time was reported to be 30 degrees; relative humidity 42% and little wind. The weather forecast was for favourable burning conditions to continue into the afternoon with rainfall and/or high humidity predicted for the weekend. Given the favourable conditions, the Incident Controller approved back burning operations to commence from this time.

Aviation resources were tasked to monitor back burn operations and aerial incendiary programmed to deepen the burn from approximately 1500 hours. At **1440** hours, the back burn in the Tooraweenah Sector saw one kilometre of the 2.5 kilometre burn completed and reported as going well. No adverse issues reported by ground crews.

The back burn was completed **1631** hours with active mopping up in progress. It was noted aerial incendiary was to commence when conditions were deemed suitable. A small area of active fire adjacent to the containment line near Timor Road was identified at **1720** hours and a helicopter was used to assist in extinguishment.

Aerial incendiary operations on Tooraweenah Sector commenced at approximately **1818** hours.

Saturday 26 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 3 situation reports and 1 Incident Action Plan were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

Fire fighting operations continued with mopping up as a main focus. A back burn along the Utber Trail was reported as complete at **0848** hours and deepened to 700 metres – 1 kilometre with aerial incendiary works last night. Fire fighters continued to black out areas throughout the morning.

At 0858 hours, the Incident Controller advised a briefing the objective was to contain the fire by the end of the day and consider

changing the status to 'Contained' later in the evening. A decision was made to retain all Divisions and Sectors. Back burning operations in the Tooraweenah Sector were reported as being completed and appeared to be holding by crews working in area. Aerial incendiaries were used to the north of Tooraweenah Sector were also reported as being successful.

Night crews reported a lot of tree falling throughout the night so safety warnings were been issued. The Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) aircraft commenced to identify hot spots and better task grounds where areas of concern were noted. The Incident Controller also approved the release of the three Strike Teams as adequate resources were available.

All RAFT crews were inserted safely on fire ground at **1033** hours.

Sunday 27 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 2 situation reports and 2 Incident Action Plans were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

Variable rain was received right across the fire ground late last night and continuing to fall during the morning. As a result, Out of Area crews were stood down and aviation operations suspended due to low cloud. Ground reconnaissance also ceased due to slippery trails which posed a safety risk.

Strike teams from Northern Tableland/New England, Clarence Valley and Mid North Coast were released at **0939** hours with the Tamworth Strike Team to remain at Tamworth as their assistance was no longer required. A decision was made to commence closing down the base camp. All incoming IMT personnel requests were cancelled with the exception of Logistics and CISS.

All heavy plant were also stood down and their return verified by operational personnel. Aviation assets allocated to the Wambelong fire were released with the exception of the FLIR aircraft and one helicopter.

Sporadic light rain continued to fall over the fire ground at **1523** hours with slightly heavier falls on the eastern side. The fire entire perimeter was reported as benign however the Tooraweenah Sector had a few smoking trees and logs well within the burn area.

No crews were deployed on the fire ground over night due to the continued rain and slippery/dangerous conditions.

Monday 28 January 2013

The forecast Fire Danger Rating for the North Western fire weather district was High. There was no Total Fire Ban in force. A total of 2 situation reports were lodged in ICON throughout the day. The Incident Controller on shift was Superintendent Allyn Purkiss (NSW RFS).

Light rain continued on the fire ground with all ground and aviation operations suspended due to the weather conditions.

The Incident Controller submitted a request for the Section 44 declaration to be revoked from **1700** hours today due to the fires being considered as contained and favourable weather conditions. This request was subsequently approved by the NSW RFS Commissioner.

INCIDENT CONTROLLER'S RECOMMENDATIONS				
	Lesson Learned That Worked	What Worked Well Recommendation	Lesson Learned That Didn't Work	What Didn't Work Well Recommendation
Description	<p><i>What worked well?</i></p> <p>Please indicate if recommendation applies to State/Region/Local level.</p> <p><i>Add/delete numbers as needed.</i></p>	<p><i>Provide a recommendation for continued use for each issue that worked well.</i></p> <p><i>Add/delete numbers as needed.</i></p>	<p><i>What areas can we improve?</i></p> <p>Please indicate if recommendation applies to State/Region/Local level.</p> <p><i>Add/delete numbers as needed.</i></p>	<p><i>Provide a recommendation for improvement for each issue that didn't work well.</i></p> <p><i>Add/delete numbers as needed.</i></p>
Operations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establishment and use of a Base Camp. 2. Engagement of Commercial Catering. 3. Appointment of Response Team Co-ordinators. 4. Appointment of Strike Team Co-ordinators. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That base camp managers (& assistants) be deployed with base camp infrastructure to oversee the daily operation. 2. Professional caterers bring a level of food quality and professionalism. 3. Response Team Coordinators are the link between the crews at the base camp & Incident Management Team. These are vital and must continue. 4. Strike Team Coordinators are vital for the smooth running of the crews. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A preformed Incident Management team that are used to working together in training situations would have been more efficient. 2. Due to the rapid development of this fire, obtaining accurate information as to where the fire front was extremely difficult. 3. Existing Incident Control Centre facilities hampered the effective operations and communication of the IMT. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Region & State Operations investigates this option. 2. Access to live satellite intelligence and the use of drone aircraft. 3. Funding to allow for new and larger Incident Control Centre facilities.

Aviation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Appointment of Air Operations Managers. 2. Use of Coonabarabran Airport. 3. Pre planning of having fixed wing aircraft available for first attack on lightning strikes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Air Operations Managers by the whole were great but need to have a bit more input into planning. 2. Coonabarabran Council were great and allowed us to use the airport and supported us well. 3. Ensure preplanning occurs to maintain aircraft availability and readiness. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Air Operations Managers need to have more input into Planning & Operations processes. 2. Existing Incident Control Centre facilities hampered the effective operations and communication of the IMT. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the role and training of Air Operation Managers. 2. Building an improved Incident Control Centre to accommodate current practices. 3. Funding to allow for new and larger Incident Control Centre facilities.
Logistics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Logistics personnel performed very well under very difficult conditions. 2. The provision of an Administrative/Records officer to oversee and assist in these processes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue training Logistics Officers. 2. Consider the provision of an Administrative/ Records Officer during the establishment of an Incident Management Team. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Additional Logistics Officers were required for this function. 2. Existing Incident Control Centre facilities hampered the effective operations and communication of the IMT. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Region and State Operations continue training additional Logistics Officers. 2. Building an improved Incident Control Centre to accommodate current practices 3. Funding to allow for new and larger Incident Control Centre facilities.
Planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning personnel performed very well under difficult 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue training Planning Officers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agency personnel were unfamiliar with using the Incident 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Need to ensure additional ICON operators are trained

	<p>conditions.</p> <p>2. Local input into the planning process was invaluable</p>	<p>2. Ensure local expertise and input into planning processes is standard practice.</p>	<p>Control Online system.</p> <p>2. Existing Incident Control Centre facilities hampered the effective operations and communication of the IMT.</p> <p>3. The establishment of an Intelligence section was delayed.</p> <p>4. There was an imbalance of agency personnel represented within the Planning section.</p>	<p>for all agencies.</p> <p>2. Funding to allow for new and larger Incident Control Centre facilities.</p> <p>3. Consider the establishment of an Intelligence section during the establishment of an Incident Management Team.</p> <p>4. Ensure cross agency representation within the Planning section to capitalise on experience and knowledge.</p> <p>5. Consider multi agency planning training is provided.</p> <p>6. Region & State investigates this option.</p>
Public Information	<p>1. Public Information personnel performed very well under difficult circumstances.</p> <p>2. Public Information worked from a separate area within the Incident Control</p>	<p>1. Continue Public Information training to ensure media liaison/briefings and community meetings occur.</p>	<p>1. The Incident Control Centre did not allow for a dedicated area to be set up for media briefings & interviews.</p>	<p>1. Building an improved Incident Control Centre to accommodate current practices</p> <p>2. Funding to allow for new and larger Incident Control</p>

	Centre which did not interfere with Operations.			Centre facilities. 3. Region and State Operations investigates this option.
Safety	1. The Safety Officer was crucial and provided much needed advice.	1. Continue Safety Officer training and early appointment during an incident.	1. The workload of the Safety Officer was significant and need greater assistance. 2. Safety function needed an investigative assistance to examine accidents/near miss during the incident.	1. Consider appointment multiple Safety Officers to an incident. 2. Consider the process for accidents/near miss during the incident. 3. Region and State Operations investigates this option.
Communications	1. Communications personnel performed admirably during this fire. 2. Communication Bus/Vehicles helped greatly assisted.	1. Continue Communication training for personnel. 2. Consider the use of Communications buses and other supporting equipment.	1. The Incident Control Centre was noisy which made work for Communication operators difficult. 2. Some Communication operators did not know how to set up a fireground network.	1. Building an improved Incident Control Centre to accommodate current practices. 2. Funding to allow for new and larger Incident Control Centre. 3. Continue training for Communication personnel, particularly in area of fireground

				network.
Emergency Management	<p>1. The co-location of the Local Emergency Operations Centre with the Incident Control Centre worked well although it was in a temporary structure.</p> <p>2. Joint briefings between Local Emergency Operations Centre and Incident Control Centre worked well.</p> <p>3. Personnel within the Local Emergency Operations Centre provided great support to this event.</p>	<p>1. Building an improved Incident Control Centre to allow for co-location of the Local Emergency Operations Centre.</p> <p>3. Continue multi agency emergency management training to ensure understanding of roles etc and foster positive relationships.</p>	<p>1. Due to size limitations, the Local Emergency Operations Centre temporarily moved off site which created communication difficulties.</p>	<p>1. Building an improved Incident Control Centre to accommodate current practices.</p> <p>2. Funding to allow for new and large Incident Control Centre.</p>
Other	Nil.	Nil.	Nil.	Nil.

Signed: _____

Date : 8/4/14

Please email this report to StateOperations@rfs.nsw.gov.au
and provide a copy to the relevant Region Operations Manager within thirty (30) days of revocation.

SAFETY STATISTICS

Number of:	Number	
NSW RFS accidents	28	Fire Fighter injuries (minor in nature)
	1	Civilian injury (minor in nature)
Other Agency accidents	1	Forests NSW Bulldozer on the Redbank North fire rolled into a shallow ditch at night. No injuries to operator. Machine retrieved with minimal damage. Safety Officer report attached to Accident File.
If above occurred Incident Management Procedures - 6.04.03 – Vehicle Accident Checklist and 6.04.01 – Report of Injury/Accident Form completed		Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Number of:	Number	
RFS Firefighters lives lost (fire related)	Nil	
RFS Firefighters lives lost (not fire related)	Nil	
If above occurred Incident Management Procedures - 6.04.02 – Notification of Fatality of Firefighter completed		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Other Agency Firefighters lives lost (fire related)	Nil	
Other Agency Firefighters lives lost (not fire related)	Nil	

Firefighters seriously injured (fire related) (with the potential for medium to long term impact on lifestyle and/or employment)	Nil	
Civilian lives lost or seriously injured (fire related)	Nil	

DAMAGE & LOSSES STATISTICS

Number of:	Number	
Residential homes destroyed	53	As per Bushfire Impact Assessment Team report
Residential homes damaged (<i>medium or heavy damage to one or more rooms but structure still standing</i>)		As per Bushfire Impact Assessment Team report
Other structures destroyed (<i>Please specify - primary production, industrial, retail, public or community buildings, etc.</i>)	131	As per Bushfire Impact Assessment Team report
Other structures damaged (<i>medium or heavy damage to one or more rooms but structure still standing</i>)		As per Bushfire Impact Assessment Team report
Outbuildings destroyed (<i>Please specify - garages, garden sheds, farm sheds, etc.</i>)		As per Bushfire Impact Assessment Team report
Property saved (<i>Please specify</i>)		As per Bushfire Impact Assessment Team report
Vehicles destroyed (<i>please specify – cars, trucks, boats, caravans, farm machinery, etc.</i>)		As per Bushfire Impact Assessment Team report
Stock lost – Sheep	847	As per Agricultural Damage & Impact Assessment Report
Stock lost – Cattle	318	As per Agricultural Damage & Impact Assessment Report
Stock lost – Other	Est. \$50,000.00	As per Agricultural Damage & Impact Assessment Report
Losses - Crop	Est. \$260,450.00	As per Agricultural Damage & Impact Assessment Report
Losses – Other (ha)	56,280	Refer to Incident Control Online (ICON)
Losses – Other (km)	Est. at 1,697kms	As per Agricultural Damage & Impact Assessment Report