



2016 Tasmania Deployment (update 1)

News and information for families

02 February 2016

Welcome

The following update has been provided by Tim Mitchell. Tim is the New Zealand Liaison for the National Rural Fire Authority during this deployment to Tasmania.

During the deployment, Tim will provide regular updates on what the team gets up to during their time in Tasmania.

Background

2016 Tasmania Deployment

New Zealand has sent 43 firefighters to take part in a three week deployment to help combat fires burning in Tasmania.

The firefighters will initially concentrate on containing fires in World Heritage sites in the west and southwest of Tasmania where the fire risk was extreme.

Nearly 80 fires are burning throughout Tasmania, most started by lightning strikes and fuelled by drought conditions and strong winds.

The eight groups consist of five member teams, plus three liaison staff. The teams come from Rural Fire Authorities in Whangarei, Auckland, Rotorua, Nelson and Invercargill. A Defence Force team and Department of Conservation team will also join the deployment – the eleventh to Australia since 2001.

Deployment

Friday, 29 January

The deployment to Tasmania, Australia started with the team assembling at various airports around New Zealand for flights to Melbourne and then onto Hobart.

Most flights to Hobart were delayed for an hour or two due to thunderstorms.

The storms brought some welcome rain to parts of Tasmania. Unfortunately, the rain did not reach the areas that needed it the most, being the North West. The storms also started an additional 14 new fires from lightning strikes.

Accommodation for the night was at the Tasmania Police College. Everyone was on their best behaviour due to a Police recruit course being on at the same time (the recruits looking for any opportunity to practice their skills).



Photo: Team deployed to Tasmania, Australia - taken at the Police College before departure.

Briefing

Saturday, 30 January

The team received a briefing from Tony Blanks (ex-Tasmania Fire Service). The briefing covered a range of issues including the local hazards to be aware of (it is currently snake breeding season in Tasmania, so taking extra care was encouraged).

Once briefed crews departed, by bus, for the fires they had been assigned; Strathgordon complex and Zeehan complex.

Strathgordon is a small village established when they built the hydro station - there is not a lot of infrastructure there, and certainly no cell phone coverage. Crews will be staying at the Pedders Wilderness Lodge.

For those going to Zeehan, there is even less infrastructure, with accommodation to be provided in Queenstown - many looked forward to this experience given their knowledge of Queenstown, NZ.

Queenstown, Tasmania however is quite different to our own back home. Once a mining town, years of tree removal, fumes from the smelter, and a high annual rainfall have left the surround hills stark of any vegetation. Many of the buildings are of an older style, with few new developments and building projects occurring.



Photo: Queenstown Tasmania Australia.

Fire Situation

Currently there are 71 fires burning across Tasmania, with most incidents located in the west. The bulk of the fires were started by lightning when a series of storms passed over the state on 13 January.

To date the fires have burnt an area of approximately 100,000 hectares, of which 23,000 hectares fall within the World Heritage area.

Weather patterns in Tasmania have been particularly unusual this season with significant rain in the east (some areas receiving 400% of their normal rainfall) and very little in the west (a complete swap of normal weather patterns).

This occurrence has meant areas in west Tasmania are extremely dry and susceptible to fire.

Current conditions onsite are relatively benign with temperatures in the low 20s, high relative humidity, and light winds - the resulting low fire behaviour meaning the area burnt has not changed significantly.

Fire Situation 31/01/2016 1150



New Zealand Crews

Hobart – State Fire Centre

Tim Mitchell	NZ Liaison	NRFA
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Zeehan Complex

Dave Newton	Task Force Leader	Waimea RFA
Mike Donovan	Crew Leader	Auckland RFA
Billy Torpey	Fire Fighter	Auckland RFA
Saxon Ross	Fire Fighter	Auckland RFA
Kierin Oppatt	Fire Fighter	Auckland RFA
Simon Stoddart	Fire Fighter	Auckland NZFS
Brent Ruruku	Crew Leader	NZDF
Joshua Nahi	Fire Fighter	NZDF
Thomas Grant	Fire Fighter	NZDF
Jonathan McGovern	Fire Fighter	NZDF
Lance Harris	Fire Fighter	NZDF
Rodger Nelson	Crew Leader	Pumicelands RFA
James Werahiko	Fire Fighter	Pumicelands RFA
Stuart Lyall	Fire Fighter	Pumicelands RFA
Alan Keeber	Fire Fighter	Pumicelands RFA
Mark Cleghorn	Fire Fighter	Pumicelands RFA
Jeremy Cox	Crew Leader	Timberlands
Stephen Gatenby	Fire Fighter	Timberlands
Kahmen Jones	Fire Fighter	Timberlands
Hayden Pearson	Fire Fighter	Timberlands
Darren Melville	Fire Fighter	Timberlands

Strathgordon Complex

John Rasmussen	Task Force Leader	Department of Conservation
Ashton Oliver	Crew Leader	NELMAC
Sam Speight	Fire Fighter	NELMAC
Brendan Jones	Fire Fighter	Waimea RFA
Nathan Palmer	Fire Fighter	Waimea RFA
Lee Beloe	Fire Fighter	Waimea RFA
Stephen Robson	Crew Leader	Department of Conservation
Nathan Jones	Fire Fighter	Department of Conservation
Patrik Eschenmoser	Fire Fighter	Department of Conservation
Steve Packer	Fire Fighter	West Coast RFA
Ken Keenan	Crew Leader	Southern RFA
David Coveney	Fire Fighter	Southern RFA
Rewa Mahai	Fire Fighter	Southern RFA
Vuniyani Qoro	Fire Fighter	Southern RFA
Naipolioni Qasevkatini	Fire Fighter	Southern RFA
Garrett Ugray	Crew Leader	Forest Protection Services
Joseph Cowen	Fire Fighter	Forest Protection Services
Taylor Snelgar	Fire Fighter	Forest Protection Services
Nathan Sullivan	Fire Fighter	Forest Protection Services
Martin White	Fire Fighter	Forest Protection Services
Nicky Robinson	Fire Fighter	Forest Protection Services