



# MALUA BAY RURAL FIRE BRIGADE

## Bushfire Season 2019 – 2020

**A report on the brigade's bushfire activities and suggestions on preparing for the upcoming fire season.**

### Captain's Message

The 2019-20 bushfire season was as severe and as devastating as it can get. Almost all of you in the Malua Bay Fire Brigade area (Surf Beach to Tomakin and west to Dunns Creek Road) would have been affected this year, particularly from the New Year's Eve firestorm. A brief report of events, and our Brigade's involvement, is told over the page.

Whether you suffered loss of house and/or possessions, were traumatized by the event, or you have family members who were badly affected, it is understandable that even months later you will have difficulty reconciling what happened. More so, the isolating consequences of the current Covid 19 restrictions have made it even more difficult for many of us to return to normality. Our Brigade wishes you well in your ongoing recovery.

The local community support for our brigade, both before, and especially after, this past season has simply been remarkable. Your emotional reactions to our efforts have been tremendously positive.

Because of your generous monetary contributions, this year we have refrained from asking for further donations\*. We are now financially secure and consequently embarking on a number of important purchases to improve our resilience to future disasters. On behalf of all Brigade members, thank you, thank you. Your kindness is overwhelming.

But back to the disastrous event of New Year's Eve. We have heard some of your remarkable stories of both achievement and loss, but we also know that many are yet untold. So that we may hear of them, we are planning an open community day at the Malua Bay Beach Reserve, in conjunction with the Surf Life Saving Club who also were an important part of that day. The details are within this newsletter.

We will have a small visual display of the past fire season and what it may mean to you. It will be a chance to reconnect. It will also be a cathartic opportunity for you to tell your story and hear those of others.

\* However, if you still feel obliged to donate to the Brigade, our banking details are on the back page. If you require a receipt, please email our Secretary at the time of donating.

Currowan Fire Crosses Princes Highway 1 December 2019



Mogo Ablaze 31 December 2019



## The 2019-20 Bushfire Season – Malua Bay Brigade’s Involvement

Residents within the Malua Bay Rural Fire Brigade area will certainly remember the 2019-20 bushfire season as a single day of frenetic activity, drama and mixed emotions.

In the early morning of 31<sup>st</sup> December, New Year’s Eve, a fast moving and intense bushfire swept from west of Nelligen, through Runnyford and Mogo, and engulfed the coastal communities from Batemans Bay to Broulee. In places, it reached the Pacific Ocean.

Approximately 85% of the Malua Bay Brigade area burnt in a few hours. Only the main Lilli Pilli/ Malua Bay residential area and Guerilla Bay/Barlings Beach area survived. About 100 houses, and numerous other buildings were lost. North Rosedale and parts of Malua Bay around Sylvan Street were hit very hard. Rural residential properties on Dunns Creek Road, Ridge Road and Burri Road suffered heavy losses. The Malua Bay Bowling Club was destroyed.

Remarkably, there was no loss of life. Although shocked, the community did not panic, effectively evacuating where necessary. There are many heroic stories and gutsy efforts from property owners still not generally known.

The cost to the community is enormous and cannot be detailed here. The recovery will take years, and it may never eventuate for some.

For members of the Malua Bay Fire Brigade, the prolonged drought and heavy forest fuel loads in spring were ominous signs of a bad fire season in the making. As uncontrollable fires spread southward down the east coast of Australia, following the normal climatic shift, our Brigade began to prepare.

We explored the possibilities and our options with a workshop “Fire from the West – Our Biggest Threat”. We followed up with truck explorations into the labyrinth of forest roads and fire trails to our west to familiarize ourselves with the landscape in which we would expect to operate.

The worst of our bushfire season began in late November and didn’t ease until heavy rains in early February.

During December, our Brigade, with other Eurobodalla units, assisted control of the developing Currowan fire to our north. We supplied a truck crew of fire fighters almost every night of December, working in many locations - Shallow Crossing, East Lynne, Termeil, Bawley Point, Milton, South Durras and Kings Highway. Late in December our crews operated at Nelligen, Bolaro, Buckenbowra, and McGregors Creek.

Although we expected a large fire to approach our Brigade area on New Year’s Eve, it came to us 6 hours early, catching everyone by surprise by its speed and intensity. We encountered a rolling fire front of leapfrogging spotfires and mass ember attack. As residents would have experienced, the smoke and heat generated by the powerful NW wind were intense. The meagre firefighting resources available could do nothing but assist with saving life and property.

At the time, our Brigade’s large truck, Malua Bay 1 with a crew of four, on night shift, was west of Runnyford saving property in the Nelligen area. They were not able to return to Malua Bay until late morning, already having worked an 18 hour shift. On arrival in our area Malua Bay 1 protected properties on Ridge Road, Wattlebird Way and Bowerbird Place before returning to our station for crew change over. Malua Bay 1 then undertook property protection in the Sylvan Street Area for the remainder of the day. Our mid sized truck, Malua Bay 7 with two firefighters was committed all day from early morning in Mogo defending the northern end of the village. Their heroic story was published in both the Bay Post and the Canberra Times.

Until outside help arrived mid morning, our remaining 6 Brigade firefighters had only a mid size truck (with a crippled main pump) and a small truck with limited fire fighting capacity. It was frustrating for us to be confronted by so large a threat with so few resources. Nevertheless, over some exhausting hours, and with significant help from other firefighting units, we were still able to save many houses. In the following week, we labored to extinguish the remaining southern flank of the fire in the Guerilla Bay/Barlings Beach area. Over the rest of January, we were attending to residual fires within the Brigade area almost every day.



11 am New Years Eve 2019

We had two truck crews involved in the significant defense of Moruya on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, again saving houses.

Throughout the month, our members assisted other Brigades in establishing control lines between Moruya and Bermagui, supplying crews for both day and night shifts.

In this past bushfire season, all our Brigade members were involved, and affected, in some way. Unfortunately two lost their house and others lost vehicles. 15 of our 30 members suffered property loss/ damage. We nearly lost our fire station at Reservoir Road.

It was a horrendous two months. Like everyone in the community, it is a bushfire season we will never forget.

# TIME TO GET READY FOR NEXT BUSH FIRE SEASON

## Prepare Your Property

- Clean your gutters of leaves and twigs
- Install metal gutter guards
- Repair damaged or missing tiles on the roof
- Install fine metal mesh screens on windows and doors
- Fit seals around doors and windows to eliminate gaps
- Enclose the areas under the house
- Repair or cover gaps in external walls
- Attach a fire sprinkler system to gutters
- Keep lawns short and gardens well maintained
- Cut back trees and shrubs overhanging buildings
- Clean up fallen leaves, twigs and debris
- Have hoses long enough to reach around your house
- You may be eligible for the Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents (AIDER) service, call 02 8741 4955

<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/plan-and-prepare/prepare-your-property>

## Make a Plan

- **Leave early** is the best option:
  - ◇ When to leave
  - ◇ What to take
  - ◇ Where to go and how to get there
  - ◇ How to communicate
- **Stay** but only if well prepared:
  - ◇ The right equipment
  - ◇ Where to shelter when the fire arrives
  - ◇ Everyone knows what to do
  - ◇ Emergency back up plan
- **Know**
  - ◇ Fire Danger Ratings
  - ◇ Alert Levels
  - ◇ Neighbourhood Safer Place
  - ◇ Numbers, local radio and links to key websites

<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/plan-and-prepare/bush-fire-survival-plan>



## Bush Fire Alert Levels



### Advice

A fire has started. There is no immediate danger. Stay up to date in case the situation changes



### Watch and Act

There is a heightened level of threat. Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect you and your family.



### Emergency Warning

An Emergency Warning is the highest level of Bush Fire Alert. You may be in danger and need to take action immediately. Any delay now puts your life at risk.



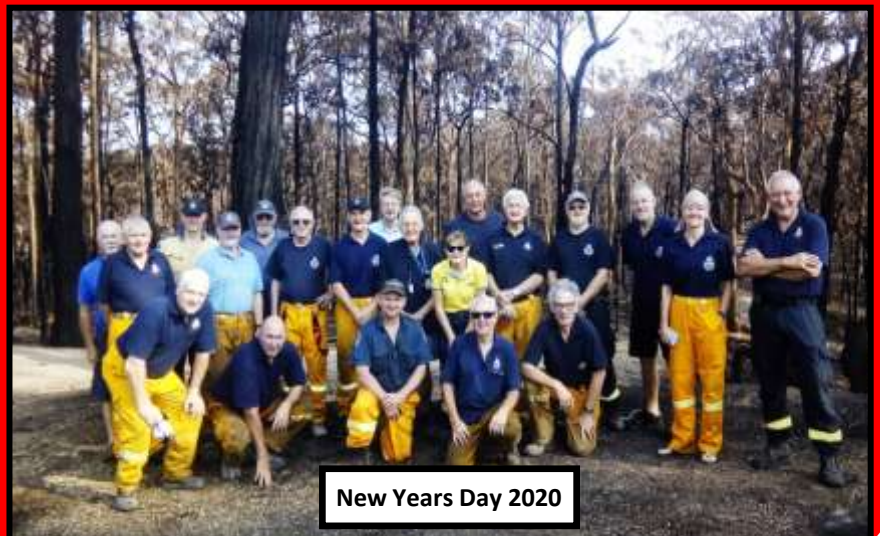
**Malua Bay Beach Reserve**  
Your Neighbourhood Safer Place



**Durras Drive Backburn**  
7 December 2019. This burn stopped the Currowan Fire from moving South towards Long Beach



**Malua Bay 1 Negotiates**  
Some Rough Terrain



**New Years Day 2020**

# FIREFIGHTER VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Here's what you need to know:

## APPLICATION:

- Complete the Application Form obtained from the Brigade Secretary
- Attend an interview with the Brigade Captain
- Undertake a routine Police Check organised by RFS
- Initially you will become a Probationary Member usually for 6 months and then an Ordinary Member

## COMMITMENT:

- As a Volunteer you determine your level of involvement
- However, to be an operational member you will need to train and qualify as a Bush Firefighter within 6 months but volunteers can also undertake supporting roles such as communications and catering.
- Attend training and meetings when you can:
  - ◊ Training is held on 2nd and 4th Tuesday evenings of the month and on occasional weekend days
  - ◊ Meetings are on the first Tuesday of the month at 5pm
- You should be prepared to respond to emergency call-outs with reasonable regularity

If you're interested in joining or have any questions please don't hesitate to contact Malua Bay Rural Fire Brigade Secretary **Tony Preston-Stanley** on **0419 991 052**



As the Currowan Fire approaches, our crew is set up for property protection at Bawley Point 8pm 2 December 2019

## COMMUNITY OPEN DAY

on **Saturday**  
**26 September**  
**10am to 1pm**  
at **MALUA BAY BEACH RESERVE**

To reconnect after the firestorm

Our chance to thank you

Your chance to tell us your story

Visit our trucks, displays and fire related information

Free sausage sizzle

All welcome!

## Contact us:

**Station Location:** Top of Reservoir Road, Malua Bay

**Email:** [maluabayrfsbrigade@gmail.com](mailto:maluabayrfsbrigade@gmail.com)

**Mailing Address:** PO Box 2040, Malua Bay NSW 2536

**Captain:** Ian Barnes 0415 774 810

**Secretary:** Tony Preston-Stanley 0419 991 052

**Website:** <http://www.maluabay.rfsa.org.au/>

## Thank You for Supporting us:

Our Brigade has been generously supported leading up to and following our disastrous summer leaving us in a solid financial position. Therefore we are not actively canvassing for donations this year. We are in the process of using these funds to improve our facilities and equipment in preparation for next fire season.

**Your support is always highly valued and if you wish to continue donating this can be made via cheque or EFT to:**  
**BSB 062650 Account Number 00900077.**