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Community Matters

VICTORIA STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE



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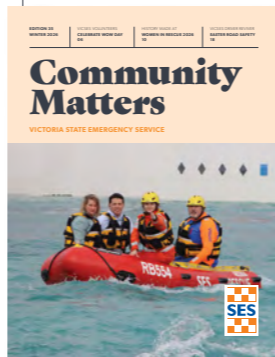
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Front cover:

WOW Day media launch at URBNSURF



Welcome

Hello everyone, and welcome to the winter edition of *Community Matters*.

It's been a jam-packed few months here at VICSES, with many exciting events taking place across the state.

On 20 May during National Volunteer Week, we proudly celebrated Wear Orange Wednesday (WOW Day) - the national day to say thank you to our amazing SES volunteers. Our volunteers are a fundamental and deeply valued part of our organisation, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to preparing and protecting the safety of our communities when emergencies strike. It was extremely moving to see the support from our partner agencies and community members, in addition to widespread coverage across state and local media. I extend my sincere thanks to every volunteer for the generosity, professionalism and care you bring to your roles. You can read more about this year's WOW Day celebrations on pages 06-09.

I want to congratulate everyone involved in delivering another outstanding Women in Rescue (WIR) event in late March. I am hugely supportive of WIR as a meaningful opportunity for women and gender diverse members to connect, hone their skill set and bolster their leadership capability in a tailored and supportive environment. This annual event continues to grow in scale and impact, with over 300 volunteers participating in 2026. I was particularly proud to see our partner

agencies actively involved this year. I'm already excited about next year's event and keen to support the organising committee make the 10th WIR in 2027 even better. You can read more about WIR on pages 10-11.

Congratulations to all members recognised in this year's Regional Awards ceremonies, which are currently underway. Awards season is a special time for us to come together, reflect and celebrate the achievements and milestones of our members. You can read more on these awards ceremonies across Victoria on pages 22-25.

As I reach the one-year milestone as Chief Executive Officer here at VICSES, I am reminded of how privileged I am for the opportunity to lead and support such an exceptional group of volunteers and staff and serve our community. Personally, I'm looking forward to working on our next VICSES strategy across 2026/27 which will set our path for the years ahead.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *Community Matters* and stay safe.

Kind regards,
Rob Purcell
CEO Victoria State Emergency Service

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

As winter sets in, we know amongst the grey skies, wind and rain, orange is a reassuring colour that brightens our landscape: VICSES volunteers out helping communities, often in tough conditions, and always with care and commitment.

I am grateful for the VICSES volunteers who have received more than 33,000 calls for help over the last year. Always there, lending a hand with kindness, compassion and skill.

As natural disasters become more frequent and severe, we know our volunteers need to have the facilities, equipment and support they require to help keep communities safe.

With the 2026/27 Victorian Budget there is new investment in VICSES services and local units across the state, including:

- \$17.4 million for two new VICSES facilities at Port Phillip and Corio, as well as to buy land for a new Whitehorse Unit
- \$3.6 million to open new units at Kalkallo and Devon Meadows, supporting growing communities
- \$2.4 million to strengthen flood preparedness through updated Local Flood Guides and Municipal Flood and Storm Emergency Plans

These investments will strengthen emergency services' capacity to support communities through disasters and challenges.

I very much enjoyed joining volunteers to launch Wear Orange Wednesday - or WOW Day - highlighting a day to recognise the enormous contribution VICSES volunteers make right across Victoria. It's a day for all of us to say thank you.

It's been great to see so many volunteers supporting Driver Reviver sites over the recent long weekends and school holidays. We know through giving tired drivers a place to stop for a free tea, coffee or snack, volunteers are helping people rest, recharge and get home safely. It's a simple act of care that makes a real difference on our roads.

To every VICSES volunteer: thank you for what you do for our state and for each other. And thank you to the families, friends and loved ones who support volunteers to answer the call when their communities need help.

Stay warm and take care this winter.

Vicki Ward
Minister for Emergency Services
Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery



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The Victoria State Emergency Service respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional owners of the land throughout Victoria and acknowledges their ancestors and elders, past and present.

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REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

1 JANUARY - 31 MARCH



STATEWIDE

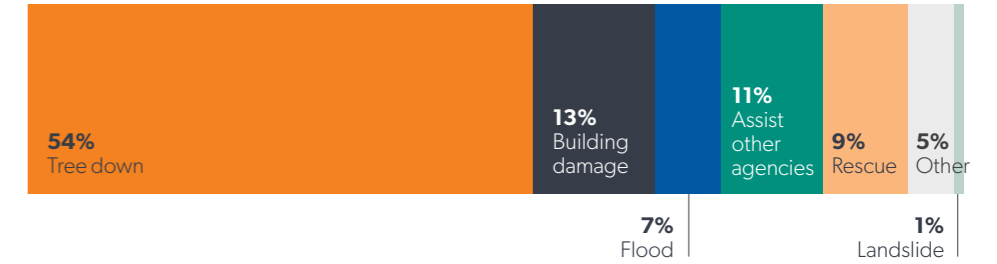
10,576

TOTAL RFAS

5,086

TOTAL VOLUNTEERS

BREAKDOWN



WESTERN REGION

4,635

TOTAL RFAS

2,485

TOTAL VOLUNTEERS

Tree down	2,210
Building damage	766
Assist other agency	538

BUSIEST UNITS + TOTAL RFAs

271 243 219

Mildura Unit Heidelberg Unit Bendigo Unit

EASTERN REGION

5,718

TOTAL RFAS

2,620

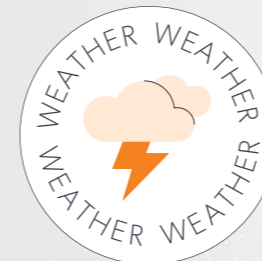
TOTAL VOLUNTEERS

Tree down	3,512
Building damage	557
Assist other agency	513

BUSIEST UNITS + TOTAL RFAs

273 249 248

Whitehorse Unit Frankston Unit Emerald Unit



DECLARED OPERATIONS

- 27 March: severe weather, statewide
- 1 June: severe weather, statewide





06 FEATURE



WEAR ORANGE WEDNESDAY

*shines a spotlight on
VICSES volunteers*



By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor and Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

On Wednesday 20 May, people right across Australia wore a pop of orange in recognition of Wear Orange Wednesday (WOW Day) - the national day of appreciation for SES volunteers held annually during National Volunteer Week.



WOW Day recognises the extraordinary contribution VICSES volunteers make to communities across the state, supporting people during storms, floods, rescues and other emergencies 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

In the lead up to this special day, banner flags and billboards thanking volunteers and promoting WOW Day went up at 48 sites across Melbourne and regional Victoria, thanks to our partner AAMI.

Celebrations officially began on 19 May with the WOW Day media launch held at URBNSURF, where volunteers showcased their in-water capability, even welcoming Minister for Emergency Services Vicki Ward on board.

On WOW Day itself, weather presenter Jayde Cotic (10 News) held a live cross with our volunteers at the VICSES Chelsea Unit as part of the state bulletin. Meanwhile, public figures including Jane Bunn, Shane Jacobson, and even Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese shared videos with messages of thanks on social media.

VICSES members were also treated to a free small hot drink from McDonald's® as a token of appreciation.

We are so grateful to our communities and partner agencies for getting into the WOW Day spirit by wearing a splash of orange, hosting themed events

and sharing messages of thanks on social media platforms with the hashtag #ThankYouSES.

VICSES volunteers are among the state's most relied upon emergency responders, working alongside Ambulance Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue Victoria and Victoria Police, every single day.

In the past 12 months alone, VICSES volunteers have responded to more than 33,000 requests for assistance across the state, including:

- Approximately 17,000 downed tree incidents.
- About 7,000 flood and building damage callouts.
- Almost 2,300 road crash rescues.
- Almost 600 technical rescues.
- And about 3,500 incidents supporting partner agencies.

This demand highlights the increasing reliance on VICSES volunteers and the critical role they play in keeping Victorian communities safe.

Thank you to everyone who helped make WOW Day 2026 special, and of course to our amazing VICSES volunteers. Your bravery, selflessness and commitment to keeping our communities safe make you true heroes in orange. We can't thank you enough for everything you do. ■





George Haitidis awarded for Excellence in Learning and Development

By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

At this year's WOW Day media launch, VICSES Monash Unit Controller George Haitidis was awarded VICSES' Excellence in Learning and Development award in recognition of his role in organising a large-scale boat rescue training session on the Maribyrnong River in 2025. Minister for Emergency Services Vicki Ward, Southern Metropolitan MP Ryan Batchelor and VICSES Chief Officer Operations Alistair Drayton were on hand to confer the award.

Recipient of the VICSES 2026 Excellence in Learning and Development Award, George Haitidis, formally received his award at this year's WOW Day launch, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to improving training outcomes across VICSES.

George was recognised for his leadership in planning and delivering a large-scale boating skills maintenance exercise on the Maribyrnong River, helping strengthen operational capability, inter-agency cooperation and volunteer preparedness.

The exercise provided valuable hands-on training opportunities for VICSES members, enhancing practical rescue skills, operational readiness and teamwork in realistic water-based emergency scenarios.

George also demonstrated exceptional safety leadership throughout the planning and execution of the activity, ensuring a strong focus on safe training and skills maintenance practices within VICSES. ■



EMBER



GIXER & CHAPPY



ALBY



Paw Patrol SES 'Alby' on the beat!



Once again, our WOW Day pet photo 'comPETition' proved a crowd favourite, with volunteers submitting photos of their pets dressed up in their best orange outfits. Congratulations to our winners – the dogs came out on top this year!



THOR & LOKI



KOBE

HELICOPTERS, HIGH-SKILL TRAINING AND HISTORY MADE AT VICSES' *Women in Rescue 2026*



ECHUCA



BALLAN



BALLAN



ECHUCA

By Dharni Giri, Senior Media Advisor, VHO

More than 300 female and gender diverse VICSES volunteers came together across seven locations in Victoria during March for Women in Rescue 2026.

Participants from across the state took part in hands on training designed to build skills, confidence and collaboration as part of VICSES' flagship initiative empowering women in emergency response.

Now in its ninth year, Women in Rescue was founded in 2018 by female volunteers for female volunteers and continues to grow in scale, impact and ambition.

role air support plays during major incidents, highlighting the wide range of career and operational pathways available to women across the emergency services sector.

The involvement of the Mounted Branch also provided a unique perspective on how mounted units support search operations and incident management, further expanding the training beyond traditional land-based rescue.

For the first time in Women in Rescue history, Victoria Police joined the event held in Ballan with Aviation Command and members of the Mounted Branch taking part in the training. A helicopter crewed by a female pilot and two female Tactical Flight Officers supported the exercise, while Mounted Branch officers and their horses were also involved on the ground.

Volunteers trained alongside the aviation crew and mounted officers, observing real time flight operations, practising tactical coordination and experiencing how air support integrates with ground rescue teams during complex emergency responses.

The presence of the female pilot and Tactical Flight Officers was a landmark moment, showcasing women in highly specialised frontline aviation roles. Participants learned about flight planning, rescue coordination and the critical

Women currently make up nearly 34% of VICSES' volunteer base, and the organisation remains committed to increasing participation to better reflect the communities it serves.

Meanwhile at the Echuca event, attendees took part in an innovative overnight land search exercise. Crews responded to a scenario involving an aircraft incident nearby, providing search and rescue assistance on the ground. "I really enjoyed the camaraderie and sense of family - you've got somebody always to rely on" said VICSES Wedderburn Unit volunteer Holly, who attended the Echuca event.

Women in Rescue is a hands on, practical training day designed to build confidence, capability and connection. Volunteers refine their technical rescue skills, operate tools and equipment in realistic scenarios, and strengthen teamwork in a supportive and inclusive environment.

Women currently make up nearly 34% of VICSES' volunteer base, and the organisation remains committed to increasing participation to better reflect the communities it serves. ■



GET INVOLVED

Feeling inspired to join up as a VICSES volunteer? Apply today.



VICSES Phillip Island Unit shows why they're the bee's knees

By Athol Hill, volunteer, VICSES Phillip Island Unit

On Sunday 3 May, the VICSES Phillip Island Unit responded to a tree down across a road in Silverleaves, with the job made more complicated by a large beehive inside the hollow trunk.

The incident was first identified by a VICSES volunteer who noticed the tree had fallen directly outside his home. While checking for common hazards such as powerlines, he discovered thousands of bees swarming from inside the tree.

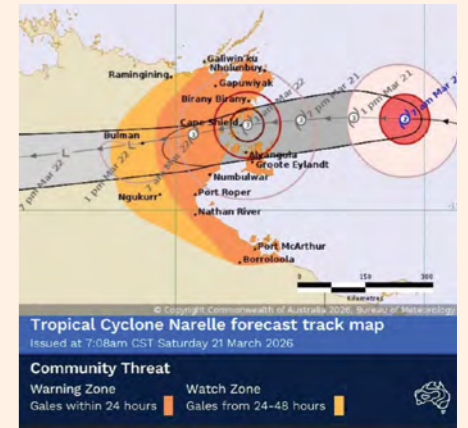
The member contacted VICSES to report the fallen tree and warn responding crews about the hive,

before remaining on scene to direct traffic and keep pedestrians away from the area.

On arrival, VICSES volunteers assessed the scene and set up a safety perimeter using traffic cones and barrier tape while determining the safest way to manage the incident. With no specific procedures in place for bee removal, the incident was referred to council, with a VICSES member remaining on scene until further support arrived.

A local apiarist later attended in full protective gear and safely relocated the hive to his property under the supervision of VICSES volunteers and council staff.

Once the hive had been removed, council crews were able to clear the tree from the roadway and reopen the area safely. ■



Deploying to Darwin to support with flooding and Cyclone Narelle

By John Newlands, Operations Officer Emergency Management, Benalla Office

In March I was lucky enough to be selected for deployment to Darwin in the Northern Territory, to support the flood response. As we departed Melbourne airport there were emerging reports of Cyclone Narelle forming in the Coral Sea.

I was part of a Victorian contingent deployed for day shift consisting of two SES and two Country Fire Authority (CFA) personnel. We were tasked with supporting the team in dealing with flood operations across the Northern Territory, and preparation for Cyclone Narelle.

The Incident Control Centre (ICC), which is situated in Darwin, coordinated the evacuation of 580 people from Numbulwar and the surrounding Homelands to Darwin, some 600 kilometres by air. A DACC 2 request (Defence Assistance to the Civil Community Initiative for significant crisis response or relief assistance), was enacted and successfully completed with C130 and C27 Royal Australian Air Force aircrafts.

The next challenge was making the Numbulwar community and surrounds safe and ready for their return. This required the ICC, government and non-government agencies to work as one under the direction of the Incident Controller from Northern Territory Police. The crew returned

the Numbulwar community as quickly and safely as possible.

We were able to rise to the challenge, and the final stage of repatriation occurred on the day we departed. Something that stays with me is that when a large emergency is occurring, we can support each other across the nation when a local response agency is overwhelmed and requires support.

Well done and thank you to the Northern Territory community for having me on board.

It was a great experience to see preparation for a cyclone, warnings, mass evacuation and then the repatriation of the evacuees. I also was able to sit in on the remote community's Local Emergency Committee meetings and see the Northern Territory's passion and dedication to their communities. These

teams are led and chaired by local police, which was carried out in a compassionate and professional manner.

Well done and thank you to the Northern Territory community for having me on board. ■



International Women's Day

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

International Women's Day is an opportunity for us to recognise the incredible women in our service and the contributions they make to the emergency services sector and our communities. Meet some of the women doing amazing work at VICSES:



MORE INFORMATION

You can read about more women in our service on our website:



Natalie

ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER, OPERATIONAL TRAINING READINESS AND RESPONSE

What do you like about working in the emergency services sector?

What drew me to the sector was the opportunity to serve and support the community, and to work

with and support volunteers in their efforts to assist communities. What I like about being part of VICSES is that no two days are the same, and there is so much variety.

What opportunities are there for women to grow their skillset and leadership capability at VICSES?

Some of the fantastic opportunities out there are being part of the annual Women in Rescue events, including as part of the organising committees for each region. It's a great way to connect with fantastic women across the state. Another one is Life Saving Victoria's Ready2Lead program, where you get to meet other women from across other emergency services, learn about yourself and grow your leadership skills.

Do you have any advice for women thinking about joining the emergency services sector?

Say 'YES' more! There are so many opportunities to learn new skills, be part of every part of emergency response and Incident Management Team you want to be part of and move into leadership roles. Back yourself, find your supporters and go for it!



Jen

VICSES MONASH UNIT VOLUNTEER

What do you enjoy most about being a VICSES volunteer?

Being able to support the wider community - not just within the area, but on deployments across the state. With an aging population, there are those

that can't do it themselves. When they say, "thank you" it makes helping out rewarding.

Can you tell us about the leadership roles you've taken on at your unit?

I took on a Deputy Team Leader role assisting with mentoring, training and duty crew rostering for a small team. It was a great role as you get to engage more with the members. Then an opportunity came up to apply as Section Leader - Training with a focus for setting up the Minimum Fitness for Role Program within my unit and helping other units. I'm also filling in for another Unit Management Team member with recruitment.

Last year you won an award for most jobs attended, an amazing effort! What motivates you to go above and beyond to support your unit and community?

Thank you! The members within the Monash Unit have a very inclusive culture (especially with Unit Controller George Haitidis's leadership) - we all get along really well. It's also motivating to help new members grow and going on call outs with them is a way to see that in action. When you hear people in the community talk about specific examples of how VICSES has helped them with their property, that's motivational. They remember and they are grateful.

Libby

VICSES HOBSONS BAY VOLUNTEER

Can you tell us about your proudest moment during your time at VICSES?

My proudest moment was participating in the 2025 International Women's Day Emergency

Services event at the Victorian Parliament House. It was an inspiring forum that recognised and celebrated the contribution of women across the emergency services. The event also coincided with VICSES' 50-year anniversary, and the Women in Rescue program received the Equality Initiative Award from the Emergency Services Foundation. I felt incredibly honoured to be part of such a powerful and inspiring group. Reflecting on the event still gives me a strong sense of pride and fulfilment.

My advice to women thinking about getting involved in emergency services is to take at least one step towards exploring your interest. Often the things that can seem intimidating at first become much clearer once you start learning more. There is a wealth of information available online, and many people working or volunteering in emergency services are very open to sharing their experiences. You may even find some of your own assumptions challenged, particularly around the physical or knowledge requirements needed to join. My experience has been that emergency services offer a supportive environment where you can learn a great deal and be part of something very meaningful.

What does International Women's Day mean to you?

International Women's Day is an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the achievements of women, and the progress that has been made in advancing women's rights and opportunities. At the same time, it is an important moment to refocus on the work still ahead and the collective effort needed to continue balancing the scales toward greater equality. For me, it is both a celebration and a reminder of the importance of continuing to support and create opportunities for women now and into the future. ■

What advice would you give to women thinking about getting involved in the emergency services sector?





VICSES MOTHER AND SON DUO

Giving back to Wangaratta community

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO



As families across Victoria enjoyed Mother's Day in May, VICSES acknowledged and celebrated its cohort of mothers who go above and beyond, every day, to support their communities in times of need.

Wangaratta mum Megan Earl has an intimate understanding of the joys of volunteering as a mother, having turned out to local incidents alongside son Ethan since joining the VICSES Wangaratta Unit in 2023.

After returning to Megan's home state of Victoria following an extended period across the Bass Strait, she and Ethan, then in his late teens, were seeking ways to involve themselves in their new community after experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, finding their way to a VICSES open day and being welcomed immediately by the local unit.

Donning the trademark orange overalls, the pair's emergency response capability quickly progressed through targeted training in chainsaw response, first aid, truck driving, land-based swift water res-

cue, safe work at heights and road crash rescue, with both Megan and Ethan developing the vital skills they'd need to respond to critical local emergencies and save lives in the process.

Soon enough, Ethan could be found driving the unit's rescue truck to incidents with Megan proudly taking photos from the rear seats as the two set off to support their communities in a crisis, the former fulfilling a childhood dream and his mother enjoying every step of the journey alongside him.

Both Ethan and Megan are now familiar faces around the unit, with Megan taking on the role of Deputy Controller responsible for community engagement, leading the unit's presence at local events and exhibitions in an effort to improve emergency awareness in Wangaratta and the surrounding townships.

A respected operational member in his own right, Megan said Ethan was a calming presence in the team who had showcased

Boasting a female volunteer-base of 33%, Megan is one of hundreds of VICSES mothers across the state set to celebrate today.

his leadership qualities at a range of emergency call-outs, a development Megan said brought her plenty of joy and pride.

Megan noted every call-out the pair attended together was a special one for her, with both family members playing their role as part of the wider team to achieve positive outcomes in their community.

VICSES Wangaratta Unit is among the Hume Region's busiest, with local volunteers called to more than 350 incidents in the 2024/25 financial year.

Boasting a female volunteer-base of 33%, Megan is one of hundreds of VICSES mothers across the state set to celebrate today. VICSES thanks each and every one for their tireless support of their communities and their undying commitment to emergency response and preparedness across Victoria. ■





STOPPING TO SAVE LIVES:

VICSES Driver Reviver continues Easter road safety

By Ashley Pittard, National Manager Driver Reviver, VHO

As thousands of Victorians took to the roads over the Easter period, school holidays, long weekends and during the AFL Gather Round event, VICSES volunteers once again stepped up to help keep communities safe through the annual Driver Reviver campaign.



Operating at around 30 locations statewide, VICSES volunteers - alongside partners such as Lions Club members - provided free tea, coffee and snacks to encourage drivers to take a break, recharge and refocus before continuing their journey. These simple roadside stops play a vital role in reducing fatigue-related incidents, which remain a significant contributor to road trauma in Victoria.

Fatigue is estimated to be a factor in 16-20% of crashes, particularly during peak holiday periods when traffic volumes increased and trips were longer. Research also showed that drivers who had fewer than five hours of sleep were four times more likely to be involved in a crash. These sobering statistics highlighted why the message 'Stop, Rest, Revive, Survive' remains so important.

This year's effort was further strengthened by collaboration with the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) at several locations. The TAC's 'Pause Stop' road safety messaging reinforced the importance of taking regular breaks and recognising the signs

of fatigue. The collaboration amplified a consistent message to drivers: stopping isn't a delay - it's a critical safety decision.

Driver Reviver had been supporting safer journeys for more than 35 years, with volunteers serving millions of travellers across Australia. The program encourages motorists to take at least a 15-minute break every two hours - time that could make a life-saving difference.

Behind every cuppa offered was a dedicated VICSES volunteer who would rather help prevent an incident than respond to one. In the past year alone, VICSES crews attended more than 2,500 road crash rescues, reinforcing the real and ongoing impact of road trauma on Victorian communities.

During the Easter period, Driver Reviver sites operated across key regional routes, including locations such as Balmattum, Cann River, Kerang and Marong ensuring drivers had safe and welcoming places to pause along their journey.

Fatigue is estimated to be a factor in 16-20% of crashes, particularly during peak holiday periods when traffic volumes increased and trips were longer.

The message to all road users was clear: plan ahead, rest before driving, and take regular breaks. A short stop could save lives.

As VICSES volunteers continued their work supporting road safety initiatives, their commitment served as a reminder that community care could be as simple as a friendly smile, a warm drink, and a timely reminder to slow down. ■



Tony's Trek

By Glenn Mercer, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

In April 2026, Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) Board Director Tony Pearce commenced Tony's Trek 2026 - Paddle for Awareness, a 2,400-kilometre solo unsupported paddle down the Murray River, from Bringenbrong in New South Wales to the river's mouth at Goolwa in South Australia.

The goal is to shine a light on mental health challenges faced by emergency services workers and the families who support them, and to raise \$50,000 to fund an additional ESF Residential Wellbeing Program for emergency workers in the early stages of their mental health journey.

"This solo journey down the mighty Murray River will be both a physical and mental challenge for me, and this is my way of acknowledging the daily challenges faced by our emergency workers," said Tony.

"Along the way, I will connect with local communities, share stories of lived experience and resilience, which will undoubtedly highlight the need for robust mental health resources and support systems. In 2026 I hope to raise funds to help maintain the momentum of the highly effective Residential Wellbeing Program, so even more people can benefit," continued Tony.

Tony's Trek made a splash in Walwa during mid-April, continuing his powerful solo paddle down

the Murray River to raise awareness and funds for the mental health of Victoria's emergency service workers and their families. A community get-together for lunch was also held - Towong Shire Council provided coordination support, while Forest Fire Management Victoria was responsible for the BBQ. Various community members and services from Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police and VICSES members including Operations Manager Charlie Sexton and myself were also there to support Tony on his journey.

Emergency service work - paid or volunteer, can at times carry significant mental health impacts. Victoria's 139,000 emergency workers regularly step forward for their communities in moments of crisis. While the pressures are often visible, the psychological toll can be less obvious, affecting not only the individuals but also their families. It's

terrific to see a leader in our sector raising awareness and funds for such an important cause. ■

"This solo journey down the mighty Murray River will be both a physical and mental challenge for me, and this is my way of acknowledging the daily challenges faced by our emergency workers."

TONY PEARCE, EMERGENCY SERVICES FOUNDATION BOARD DIRECTOR



Pako Festa 2026

By Steve Cunneen, Community Resilience Coordinator, Western Region

Pako Festa is the largest multicultural event hosted in the Geelong area.

The event was cancelled last year due to extreme heat, however thankfully the weather behaved this year and what a success it was! With 100,000 people in attendance, VICSES volunteers had over 3,000 people attend our display and 650+ meaningful conversations focused on our 'Do 1 thing' and local recruitment campaigns.

Members educated the public on positive steps they can take to prepare and respond in an emergency. 18 amazing members from four units sup-

ported the event to provide the scale of interaction that we were able to achieve. This effort was noted by other agencies in attendance, creating strong interagency collaboration. The VICSES Geelong Unit was supported by members from Barwon Regional Unit, Corio, and South Barwon Units. Thank you to those who volunteered their time - it took great team work to provide quality community engagement while other members were still able to provide response capabilities in their areas. These are the things that make you proud to be part of VICSES. ■



COMMUNITY CONNECTION DAY with Blue Light Victoria

By Skye Powell, Deputy Controller, Mark Heaysman, Unit Controller, VICSES Geelong Unit and Jasmine Lewkowicz, Senior Community Engagement Advisor, VHO

Volunteers from the VICSES Geelong Unit recently participated in the CoRE (Connected, Resilient, Engaged) program delivered in partnership with Blue Light Victoria.

The eight-week program supports Year 10-11 students who may be facing academic, social, or personal challenges, helping them reconnect with school, peers, and their community. Throughout the program, students worked alongside emergency services and youth organisations, aiming to build confidence, empathy, and learn practical life skills. Each session focuses on practical activities, self-reflection, and respectful conversations, leading up to a Community Connection Day where students put their learning into action.

One of the sessions brought together a range of emergency services including Fire Rescue Victoria, Victoria Police, and youth workers from the Greater Geelong City Council. Students had the chance to ask questions about each role, learning more about what emergency services do day-to-day. A fun interactive activity had students guessing which service each volunteer belonged to, which helped break the ice and sparked plenty of discussion.

The Community Connection Day saw students visit the Geelong Unit, where they were given a tour of the facility including rescue trucks, equipment, and uniforms. The hands-on activities were a highlight, starting with a mock casualty scenario where students learned basic patient handling skills, how to safely manage a casualty, and how to use a stretcher. This gave them a practical look at how emergency services respond in real life situations.

The second activity focused on teamwork, with students filling sandbags and working together to build a makeshift levy. It was a great way to demonstrate how VICSES supports communities during flood events while also encouraging collaboration and problem-solving.

The day was a huge effort from the volunteers, with plenty of planning and preparation behind the scenes - and it paid off, with a very satisfying and rewarding event for everyone involved. ■





VICSES VOLUNTEERS

Honoured for incredible devotion to Barwon Region

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

Volunteers from VICSES' Barwon area have been recognised for their outstanding commitment and ongoing support of local communities as part of the organisation's yearly awards initiative.

Convening at the Little Percy Lecture Theatre at Deakin University's Geelong Waterfront Campus, guests of honour were celebrated for more than 100 years of combined VICSES service to Geelong and surrounding towns.

VICSES Colac Unit volunteer Daniel Zappeli was the longest-tenured volunteer celebrated on the day as he marked two decades of consistent emergency response, while Colac colleague and Unit Controller Steve Tevelein was acknowledged for 15 years of devoted service to his community.

Volunteers Jack Daniels and Jacob Mahoney were also part of a strong VICSES Colac Unit contingent on the day, acknowledged with a medal signifying 10 years of service alongside VICSES Winchelsea Unit counterparts Angela Hooper and outgoing Unit Controller Kris Jeffrey, whose decade of service includes six years at the helm of his local unit.

A trio of VICSES Bellarine Unit volunteers were honoured for five years of committed service, with Unit Controller Nicole Shortis, Crystal Sturgess-Myers and Peter Schilder presented a lapel badge in recognition of their work on the peninsula and beyond.

VICSES Colac Unit volunteer Jayden Tevelein and Barwon South West Regional Unit Controller Melissa Petrisevac were also awarded pins denoting five years of committed service.

The event saw several National Medals awarded to celebrate members who have given 15 years of exceptional service to VICSES and other partner emergency services, with Kris Jeffrey and VICSES Corio Unit volunteer Nigel Cunningham each honoured.

Peter Schilder also received a 1st Clasp for his existing National Medal, denoting at least 25 years of diligent service as a volunteer.

A total of 47 awards are set to be presented to local VICSES volunteers and staff for service to their communities, with additional members to be honoured at unit ceremonies later this year. ■

VICSES NORTH WEST METRO

Volunteers honoured for outstanding service

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

VICSES volunteers from Melbourne's northern and western metropolitan suburbs have been honoured for excellent and extensive service to Victorian communities, with more than 350 years' worth of long service awards presented.

Held at Melbourne Zoo, VICSES' North West Metro area awards ceremony acknowledged a cohort of volunteers

boasting between five and 40 years of service with VICSES, continuing the organisation's annual awards initiative.

VICSES stalwarts David Edwards (VICSES North West Metro Regional Unit (NWMRU)) and Raymond Brown (VICSES Brimbank and NWMRU) were each presented their 40 year clasps on the day, adding to a pair of storied careers which have seen both awarded Unit Life Memberships and David inducted as VICSES Life Member previously.

Both former Unit Controllers of their respective units, David and Raymond each hold a National Medal 2nd clasp for exceptional service in their communities and are among VICSES' most experienced campaigners.

VICSES Footscray Unit volunteer and boating expert Darren Williams was presented his 30-year clasp at the ceremony, acknowledging his decades of work supporting boat rescue capability locally, while Simon Hetherington (Hobsons Bay), Gary Mackinnon (Nillumbik) and David Di Scipio (NWMRU) celebrated 25 years of service.

VICSES Fawkner Unit pair Connie Lapworth and Shane Taylor were honoured for two decades of continued service as was VICSES Whittlesea Unit volunteer David Bradley, while Ken Mudie (Fawkner) and Kristian Heteyey (Nillumbik) marked 15 years with VICSES.

A further 12 members were acknowledged for either 10 or five years of dedicated service to their communities.

Boasting a female volunteer-base of 33%, Megan is one of hundreds of VICSES mothers across the state set to celebrate today.

Several National Medals were also awarded in recognition of 15 years of diligent service, with David Culshaw (Craigieburn), Jennifer Chivilo (Footscray) and David Brien (Heidelberg) awarded an initial medal, while George Katris (Heidelberg) and Sean Tiller (Hobsons Bay) were awarded a clasp in acknowledgement of 25 years of outstanding service.

The event was rounded out with the awarding of local excellence awards celebrating the work of volunteers behind the scenes to strengthen the VICSES organisation and its membership.



Acknowledged with the Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion award, VICSES NWMRU Deputy Controller Kat Barrett was celebrated for her continued efforts to increase cultural, gender and ability diversity within her unit,

while representing VICSES at inclusive community events such as the Melbourne Deaf Festival to increase awareness of VICSES as an inclusive volunteer organisation.

VICSES Nillumbik Unit volunteer Lacey Martin received VICSES' Excellence in Health and Safety award, denoting her contributions as a trusted workplace health and safety delegate and health and safety leader within her unit, always representing the interests of her fellow volunteers with passion and care.

The event was rounded out with VICSES Heidelberg Unit volunteer George Katris being awarded the Excellence in Learning and Development award, acknowledging his outstanding planning and execution of a large-scale boating exercise along the Maribyrnong River in 2025.

The award highlighted George's ability to bring multiple units and partner agencies together to boost collaboration and skills development while maintaining a safe but realistic environment for all involved. ■



Incredible commitment of VICSES Loddon region volunteers celebrated

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

VICSES Loddon region volunteers and staff have been acknowledged for their unwavering support of their communities in times of need, as part of the organisation’s annual service awards initiative.

At a ceremony held at the Bendigo District RSL, almost 300 years of collective service by local VICSES members was celebrated through the presentation of long service awards, while a collection of National Medals, organisational excellence awards and rare commendations of service were also conferred.

The Commendation of Service, awarded for exceptional bravery and outstanding emergency response, highlighted the incredible efforts of VICSES Bendigo Unit members Trent Ross, Matt Pittcock and Matthew Nadin who, on 9 June 2021, battled arduous conditions to reach and provide vital care to isolated patients in the Trentham-Tylden area.

With a severe storm toppling trees across the region and aware of one isolated patient in active labour and another relying on a depleting supply of bottled oxygen, the trio carved a path for a midwife and Ambulance Victoria paramedics to access each of the respective patients, working through the night and showcasing extreme courage in highly adverse and dangerous winds as trees came down around them.

Both patients and the former’s newborn were subsequently able to be stabilised and receive the care they needed, a credit to the crew’s extraordinary persistence in the most trying of circumstances.

Other volunteers were acknowledged for their extensive service to their communities throughout the day, with VICSES Heathcote Unit volunteer

Stephen Johnson (40 years) the longest-tenured celebrated.

VICSES Kyabram Unit volunteer Bill Murray (35 years), VICSES Maryborough Unit volunteer Bob Brooke (25 years) and VICSES Kerang Unit and long-time staff member Jamie Macri (20 years) were also honoured for multiple decades of persistent VICSES service and commitment to their community.

A total of six volunteers were awarded clasps for 15 years of service, including VICSES Heathcote Unit pair Peter Duncan and Melodie Thompson, VICSES Marong Unit pair Trent Knight and Ian Shelton, VICSES Bendigo Unit’s Michael Fisher and VICSES Loddon Mallee Regional Unit stalwart Noela Halacas.

A further 10 volunteers were awarded pins or medals signifying either five or 10 years of service respectively.

Volunteers were also presented National Medals throughout the day, signifying diligent and outstanding service to their communities over a period of at least 15 years.

VICSES Castlemaine Unit volunteer Evelyn Satterly and Robert Deavin, VICSES Heathcote Unit’s Clynton Robinson and Desmond Hogan, VICSES Marong Unit’s Greg Cheyne and Ian Shelton, VICSES Kyabram Unit volunteer Robert Kerr and



VICSES Bendigo Office Operations Manager Jodie Griffin each received an initial National Medal for their incredible commitment to communities.

Awarded a second clasp to their existing National Medal signifying at least 35 years of service were VICSES

Heathcote Unit volunteer George Dimech and VICSES Kyabram Unit pair Paul Octigan and Bill Murray, while VICSES Maryborough mainstay Jesse Wright received a third clasp (45 years).

Rounding out the day was a celebration of VICSES Wedderburn Unit, which was awarded VICSES’ Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion award acknowledging the efforts of volunteers to learn Auslan in support of fellow volunteers with a hearing impairment.

The initiative, which has created a more inclusive, connected and representative team locally, has also spread beyond their own membership and contributed to a broader cultural shift across VICSES units in the state’s northwest.

Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan MP and VICSES Deputy Chief Officer Greg Swindells were in attendance to honour each award recipient, paying tribute throughout to the incredible work of VICSES Loddon area volunteers over the last 12 months. ■



VICSES southwest region volunteers credited for remarkable service

By Ryan Malcolm, Media Advisor, VHO

Staff and volunteers from across the VICSES southwest region have been honoured for their incredible support of communities both local and interstate in times of emergency, recognised at an event in Warrnambool.

More than 150 years of VICSES commitment was acknowledged during the ceremony at Deakin University, part of VICSES’ annual long service awards initiative recognising the efforts of VICSES members statewide.

VICSES Port Campbell Unit stalwart Peter Younis was the longest-tenured volunteer celebrated

on the day, having joined VICSES in 1990 and subsequently provided incredible emergency response and support to his community over ensuing decades.

Peter was awarded a clasp in recognition of 35 years of VICSES service, while his VICSES Port Campbell Unit colleague Ian Harris joined VICSES Warrnambool Unit volunteers Adam Jones and Che Wellens in celebrating a quarter century of dedicated service.

VICSES Lismore Unit volunteer Anthony Butcher and VICSES Warrnambool Unit volunteer Adam Borthwick were each conferred clasps acknowledging 15 years of VICSES service in their local communities, while David Smith (VICSES Hamilton Unit), Karen Currell (VICSES Port Campbell Unit) and Jackson Bell (Geelong Office) were each presented pins signifying five years of involvement.

A pair of National Medals were subsequently awarded in recognition of members who have given 15 years of diligent and remarkable service to VICSES and other volunteer emergency response organisations, with VICSES Assistant Chief Officer Jackson Bell and VICSES Heywood Unit volunteer John Stirling honoured for distinguished involvement in their communities.

The event also saw the formal presentation of the New South Wales Premier’s Flood Emergency Citation, which celebrates the remarkable efforts of emergency responders deployed to NSW during devastating flooding in 2022.

As part of the award, VICSES volunteers Colin Malin (Portland) and Maxine Kelly (Port Fairy) received a letter of appreciation signed by the NSW Premier, Minister for Emergency Services and NSW SES Commissioner, a pin and a commemorative certificate in acknowledgement of their vital role supporting communities across the Northern Rivers region in early 2022 as part of a VICSES taskforce. ■





VICSES HEIDELBERG UNIT

Strengthening local flood risk knowledge

By the VICSES Heidelberg Unit

Thanks to our local community partner Ventura Bus Ivanhoe, the VICSES Heidelberg Unit recently embarked on a flood tour of our local area.

Our crews were transported in comfort and style as we visited flood prone locations across Yarra, Darebin and Banyule, and learnt from speakers how to better understand, plan and prepare for future flood situations in our local area.

The session also covered preparedness for Unit Duty Officer and Regional Duty Officer scenarios, with insights from our Municipal Emergency Response Co-ordinators and Municipal Emergency Resource Officer, alongside a Metropolitan Flood Risk Engagement specialist. This provided valuable operational and local context. ■



VICSES MALLACOOTA UNIT leads multi-agency marine search and rescue training

By Anthony Matters, Operations Officer – Lead Trainer, Eastern Region

Earlier this year the VICSES MALLACOOTA Unit proudly hosted a dynamic multi-agency exercise weekend at the picturesque location of the MALLACOOTA Lake system, including Karbeethong and the Wallaharaugh River.



40 members from organisations including Ambulance Victoria, Coast Guard, the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Emergency Management Victoria, Marine Search and Rescue, Paynesville Water Police, Surf Life Saving Victoria, and Victoria Police participated in a weekend of immersive, technical and highly anticipated training scenarios.

On day one, crews started with vessel inductions and some critical emergency drills called Man Overboard, Mayday, Abandon Ship and Fire on Board. These created confidence and reinforced lifesaving procedures. Meanwhile Ambulance Victoria provided a marine first aid session. Emergency Management Victoria used a fire simulator to create

a realistic marine fire management session. CFA members were shown the effectiveness of travelling by boat when responding to the east side of the lakes, cutting down arrival time from one hour by vehicle to 15 minutes by boat. Paynesville Water Police then put theory in action, leading a coordinated search and rescue exercise which explored the use of analogue search techniques on the lakes.

The next day crews built on the momentum, participating in a demonstration and real-time search and rescue scenario using the Furuno System. The



activity showcased how marine search units can enhance their search efforts by producing search patterns which combine critical data such as last known position, tides, winds and weather conditions.

MALLACOOTA Unit Controller Leo op den Brouw, with support from myself provided an engaging training exercise that demonstrated the shared partnership and ongoing commitment of our Victorian emergency services to be skilled, ready and resourced to work as one, when responding to marine or coastal emergency. ■

AURORA EVENT

VICSES Wonthaggi Unit

